Jože Krašovec

Reward, Punishment, & Forgiveness

The Thinking & Beliefs of Ancient Israel in the Light of Greek & Modern Views



BRILL

REWARD, PUNISHMENT, AND FORGIVENESS

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The Thinking and Beliefs of Ancient Israel in the Light of Greek and Modern Views

BY

JOŽE KRAŠOVEC



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PREFACE

All people at all times have been preoccupied with ethical questions. The issues of innocence or guilt and sin, obedience as opposed to disobedience, obstinacy (stubbornness), reward or punishment (retribution), as well as repentance, atonement, leniency, mercy, pardon, forgiveness, reconciliation, and renewal (restoration) have been widely studied in all cultures. But these themes have not yet been explored in their natural interrelationship. This applies particularly to the question of the link between reward, punishment, and forgiveness. All these themes are interwoven with the totality of basic tenets underlying any cultural and religious tradition. Consequently, such a study would presuppose a very complex approach: many elements would have to be considered simultaneously when analyzing historical, literary and cognate documents.

Originally, this study was limited to the question of retribution within the Hebrew Bible. But it soon became apparent that this topic was so complex that it could not be considered in isolation, implying as it does a whole series of interconnected ideological tenets and corresponding conditions. To discuss any one theme without considering the others would destroy the organic texture of the texts and distort the results. It also became clear that the Hebrew Bible as a totality should not be analyzed in isolation. Three reasons seem to justify a comparative approach, drawing on texts from other major cultures. Firstly, the problem of terminology. Secondly, the importance of Greek culture for the European tradition. Thirdly, the fusion of the Greek and Jewish-Christian cultures in the modern philosophical and theological systems. For reasons of length only selected biblical and ancient Greek literary texts on the one hand, and modern philosophical and legal topics on the other, were examined in the study.

Certain questions often intuitively arise when we read biblical texts, for example, concerning punishment: does an offence necessarily entail punishment? What are God's reasons for showing leniency to those who offend him? What is the relation between divine mercy and forgiveness and the apparently contradictory demands of justice and equality? Which modern theory of punishment can make sense of mercy and forgiveness?

In contrast to the question of punishment, little attention has been paid to the themes of mercy and forgiveness in recent times. But the past three decades have seen a revival of interest in these particular issues as well as in human attitudes and feelings in general. Scholars have considered aspects of these questions in fields as diverse as literature, philosophy, law and theology. Philosophers, theologians, and others have provided terminology, a series of definitions and theories, which reflect a particular culture or tradition,

as well as specific views held by individual scholars. They have often resorted to the use of analogy with human feelings and attitudes to describe the transcendental nature and actions of God.

The relationship between innocence or virtue, guilt or sin, reward or punishment, and mercy or forgiveness has been discussed in different horizons which reflect the particular views and the corresponding understanding of the concept of justice. Authors who limit the question of justice to reason and to social institutions come to the conclusion that social institutions, bound to the principle of equality, are obliged to punish offenders. Consequently, there is no room for leniency, mercy, pardon or forgiveness. Where justice is understood in a broader and profounder sense as *ius naturale* or *ius divinum,* which transcends and limits the scope of *ius civile,* then concepts such as "social justice" are seen as existing alongside concepts such as "cosmic justice" or/and "divine justice," and the operation of "intrinsic justice" and "personal justice."[1] Cosmic and divine justice imposes indispensable obligations and limits to any human action and to any institution. A wide reading of historical, literary, philosophical and theological documents from various cultures and periods reveals that "cosmic justice" was always considered to be a fundamental criterion of human perception and behaviour. The conception of "cosmic justice" is especially characteristic of non-biblical ancient cultures and modern naturalistic ideologies. Within this framework the awareness or the tenet arose: *what is done cannot be undone.* This way of perceiving events in the world leaves little room for forgiveness.

The history of humankind recognizes three basic arbiters of reward, punishment, and forgiveness: human authority (individual or institutional), natural law, and the authority of the gods or a God. Forgiveness, however, is a function solely of interpersonal relations. The Hebrew Bible recognises two criteria for human conduct: natural law and the divine law based on revelation. This involves external regulations as well as an intimate personal relationship to God. Wisdom literature, certain historical narratives and prophetic statements throughout the Bible testify to the belief that human beings must adjust their conduct to the natural order of the world and to historical facts. According to this view rewards and punishments automatically follow obedience or disobedience when the law of right as perceived by conscience, reason, and experience is regarded or trespassed.[2] Because the

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[1] For a comprehensive presentation of the concept of justice, see my previous study *La justice (ṣdq) de Dieu dans la Bible hébraïque et l'interprétation juive et chrétienne* (OBO 76; Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988). Amongst the recent studies, see especially J. Assmann, B. Janowski, and M. Welker (eds.), *Gerechtigkeit: Richten und Retten in der abendländishen Tradition und ihren altorientalischen Ursprüngen* (Munich: W. Fink, 1998).

[2] See, for instance, K. Koch, "Gibt es ein Vergetlungsdogma im Alten Testament?," *ZThK* 52 (1955), 1–42 = *Um das Prinzip der Vergeltung in Religion und Recht des Alten Testaments*

world was created, it is not autonomous but subject to its Creator's providence. This implies that everything happens only with the explicit or implicit will of God.

For all the subtle Hebrew perception of universal cosmic and historical determinants, the focus of the Hebrew Bible is on the covenant between God and his people as based on the revelation of divine law. The foremost requirement here is that the covenant people should stand in the right relationship to God and other members of the community. Marital union and the father/son relationship are the most popular symbols of the personal dimensions of this covenant. Consequently, Israel's conduct is measured not only against the background of a higher (and the highest) authority but also against a greater (and the greatest) justice, fidelity, and love. Obedience implies profound knowledge of the covenant Initiator and total fidelity to him. This explains why the Hebrew Bible presents disobedience and infidelity as the greatest misfortune to befall a people, as well as why repentance, as a precondition of forgiveness and reconciliation, is so urgent.

The characteristic biblical belief in creation and the historical revelation of a personal God implies that "cosmic justice" and "personal justice" form a harmonious complementary relationship. The concept of justice within the Jewish-Christian tradition is not based on the principle of equality, but on the polarity of the organic relationship between the Creator and his creation on the one hand, and between the Redeemer and his covenant people on the other. The divine foundation of the world itself forms the basis for the imperative of total obedience of all created beings to the Lawgiver. Ancient Israel did not recognize from the beginning a pure form of monotheism, and the God of Israel's charismatic writers was not fixed in form and content, so that history was open to surprises. The limits in human knowledge may mean that God condemns where humans condone, and vice versa.

This point provides a vital key to the interpretation of biblical texts. The underlying concepts of "cosmic justice" and "personal justice" complicate the discussion, because they call into question every kind of human absolutism or empty rationalism and open perspectives into the infinite depths and heights of the Kingdom of God. Biblical texts are concerned not only with moral principles and actions, but also of what kind of person a member of the covenant people should be. In contrast to our modern society, in which justice is frequently discussed only as a virtue of social institutions, biblical

(WdF 125; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972), 130–181; English translation, "Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?," *Theodicy in the Old Testament* (ed. J. L. Crenshaw; IRTh 4; Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press; Lodnon: SPCK, 1983), 57–87; J. Barton, "Natural Law and Poetic Justice in the Old Testament," *JThS*.NS 30 (1979), 1–14; idem, "Ethics in Isaiah of Jerusalem," *JThS*.NS 32 (1981), 1–18. For a broader discussion on natural law, see especially J. Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980, 1996).

writers perceived justice as a virtue of human beings, and of the people of Israel in the covenant relationship with God. The idea that "God created man in his own image" (Gen 1:27) found its true fulfilment in individual personalities and in Israel as a whole. For this reason it was believed that however much his people offended him, God would not abandon them. And that they had enough natural decency or intrinsic value to justify a renewal of the relationship with God, despite their constant infidelity. Divine punishment is conceived primarily as means of educating the people, and implies one important goal: the experience of submission, i.e., the defeat of the wrongdoer and of his false claim to domination or superiority.[3]

From the personalist background of the Hebrew conception of God and human beings, it follows that the notion of justice is associated not only with the idea of deserved punishment and equality, but also with benevolence. In the light of "cosmic justice" and "personal justice" there is no absolute obligation to punish offenders. The right to punish, and especially the positive aim of punishment, also includes the right, even the obligation, to be lenient with offenders. While social justice involves an absolute obligation to punish, the concept of "personal justice" encompasses the sentiment of benevolence, mercy, and forgiveness. Mercy and forgiveness, however, have a clear pre-condition. Writers of the Jewish-Christian tradition generally agree that genuine repentance is an important reason for being lenient with an offender and for forgiving. To forgive someone in the absence of repentance would mean to betray a lack of self-respect or/and to condone wrongdoing.[4] There are, however, other reasons for forgiveness, as for instance the universality of sin, solidarity in suffering, and the remedial effect of forgiveness.

The complexity of the concept of justice in all its ramifications implies a correspondingly complex method of analysis. Within the Hebrew Bible, reward, punishment, and forgiveness are expressed in various genres, and in a

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[3] See especially the excellent essay by J. Hampton, "The Retributive Idea," in: J. G. Murphy and J. Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 111–161.

[4] This pre-condition may press people to a very narrow understanding of the duty to forgive. As when D. Prager appealed in *Reader's Digest* (July 1998), 131–132, in the article entitled "When Forgiveness Is a Sin": "... Though I am a Jew, I believe that a vibrant Christianity is essential if society's moral decline is to be reversed. And I am appalled and frightened by this feel-good doctrine of automatic forgiveness. ... This doctrine advances the amoral notion that no matter how much you hurt others, millions of your fellow citizens will forgive you. It destroys Christianity's central moral tenets about forgiveness. Even by God, forgiveness is contingent on the sinner repenting, and it can be given only by the one sinned against. ... These days one often hears that 'it is the Christian's duty to forgive, just as Jesus forgave those who crucified Him.' Of course, Jesus asked God to forgive those who crucified Him. But Jesus never asked God to forgive those who had crucified thousands of other innocent people. Presumably he recognized that no one has the moral right to forgive evil done to others. ... If we are automatically forgiven no matter what we do, why repent? In fact, if we forgive everybody for all the evil they do, God and His forgiveness are unnecessary. We have substituted ourselves for God."

great variety of literary modes. To acquire an adequate understanding of these themes all the relevant major texts have to be investigated. Of primary importance is the examination of authority, justification, and the purposes of punishment and forgiveness in individual books or passages. Hebrew theological universalism and life's dynamism present a challenge to all other views on these themes. It seems, therefore, appropriate to compare the findings which come from an analysis of the Hebrew Bible with the highly influential culture and religion of ancient Greece on the one hand, and with contemporary philosophical and theological interpretations of the issue on the other. Because of the predominantly cosmological background of the ancient Greeks' beliefs and values, there was little room for the operation of divine forgiveness in its true sense in the ancient Greek world. Forgiveness was simply a matter of common sense in elementary human relations. In recent times, however, philosophers have increasingly taken the issue of forgiveness into account, although punishment remains the main object of rational inquiry. Reward, on the other hand, is normally considered within the framework of the general concept of justice or in discussions on punishment.

No individual words in Hebrew correspond entirely to the modern concepts of justice, reward, retribution, punishment, and forgiveness as they are generally used. The words derived from the root *ṣdq,* for instance, only partially cover the range of meaning involved in the modern concept of "righteousness, justice." A predominantly lexicographical or conceptual approach is, therefore, problematic.[5] A discussion based on "conceptual schemes" which are shared by speakers of different languages would be more helpful, provided that these conceptual schemes include "stylistic," "rhetorical," and "literary" schemes within an unlimited horizon.[6] The basic principle of semantics is that the meaning of words is determined not only by concepts (etymology), but more importantly by the structure of sentences. Semantics cannot, however, cope with all dimensions of a literary work, which is composed of symbols, metaphors, rhetorical and stylistic features, as well as larger structural components such as literary genres. Biblical and cognate religious texts are particularly complex, offering as they do profound psychological insight into characters and into the transcendental acts, and the promises and demands of God. Analogy or mimesis, therefore, plays an essential role in these texts. But a metaphorical interpretation of these analogies is needed to unlock the deeper and truer meanings.

The variety of literary and rhetorical forms of individual biblical texts,

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[5] See especially the discussion by J. Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), and its various echoes.

[6] See, for instance, D. Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," *PAAPhA* 47 (1973–1974), 5–20; J. M. Rist, "On the Very Idea of Translating Sacred Scripture," *Interpretation of the Bible* (ed. J. Krašovec; Ljubljana: Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti; JSOT.S 289; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 1499–1512.

the background perspectives of their message, and the frequent gaps necessitate a "holistic" approach. A source-oriented inquiry, however, remains important. This study includes philological analysis, semantics, literary criticism, form criticism, structural analysis, and rhetorical criticism, and other methods currently in use: source criticism, redactional criticism, and the historical-critical method. It is clear that any poetic valuation of the text must take into account external evidence, such as the common ancient Near Eastern literary tradition, textual prehistory, the genesis of the text, the development of Israel's monotheistic theology, the dating of the canon, etc.

Major works related to the literary and rhetorical aspects of this study are grouped together in a separate section at the beginning of the bibliography. The main part of the bibliography contains several studies on the concept of reward, punishment, and forgiveness, as well as major cognate and interrelated topics to be found in literary documents from different times and cultures. These works are important not only for their content but also for their methodology. In order to avoid a partial, one-sided or even flawed approach to these documents, an attempt was made to draw on as wide a bibliography as possible. This was compiled mainly in the libraries of Cambridge (England), Cambridge (Mass.), Jerusalem, Leuven, Ljubljana, London, Munich, Oxford, and Toronto over a period of 15 years. Seen against this broad perspective, certain texts stood out as more significant than others. These texts were selected for a more detailed analysis and compared and contrasted with similar texts or views within the Hebrew Bible, as well as within the great tradition of Jewish and Christian exegeses as a whole. Finally, these texts were compared with the views of other cultures.

This "holistic" literary method, by its very nature, influenced the selection of texts, which were then subjected to a more detailed analysis. Particular attention was paid to those sections or units which constituted a unified structure, provided they also contained content matter crucial to the topic. Whole books were rarely considered: these books include Jeremiah, part of Isaiah and Ezekiel, Jonah, Job, Proverbs, Lamentations, Qohelet. To do justice to the relationship between the canonical shape of the books and their individual relevant units proved to be difficult. The so-called "Deuteronomistic" books have undergone an especially complex process of development. The successive stages of people's guilt, of God's anger, and of consequent disaster at the hand of enemies form the framework of the historical narratives. Different themes dominate the book of Judges: the prayer of the people for help, God's willingness to listen, and deliverance through a charismatic judge, the recurrence of infidelity, etc. There is a widespread agreement that the highly individual theological stamp of the narratives indicates authorship or editing from the Deuteronomistic perspective.

This study attempted to organize the chief structural features of the documents examined into a comprehensive framework or scheme. An at-

tempt was then made to work out a coherent view of the interrelated themes of reward, punishment, and forgiveness in order to portray the richness of the Hebrew conception of living justice. For reasons of length the original plan to treat books such as Amos, Judges, Kings, and Chronicles within this framework was abandoned. These books, moreover, did not seem to contain matter which was essential to the presentation of the ancient Hebrew concepts of reward, punishment, and forgiveness.

My original aim was to publish this study simultaneously in my native Slovenian language and in English. My thanks are due to Mrs. Anne Čeh for translating the first draft of chapters I–VI, XV–XVIII, and XXIV–XXVII into English. Many thanks also to Prof. Joseph Plevnik, Toronto, for improving the English style of the first draft of several chapters. I was fortunate enough to find an exceptionally generous, patient, and reliable editor of the English style for nearly the entirety of the work in the person of Mr. James Kerr, Ayrshire. My thanks also to Mrs. Alice Rist, London, for giving advice on the English style of chapter XIII. I am also grateful to Jane Bürgermeister, London, for helping me with the revision of the Preface, the General Introduction and the General Conclusions. I would like to express my sincere thanks to everyone concerned for their invaluable contributions in the preparation of the manuscript. A debt of particular gratitude is owed to Mrs. Evita Lukež and Mrs. Janja Rebolj for their expert help in organizing the technical procedures of typesetting, to the typesetting company MEDIT for the production of camera-ready copy, and to Mr. Matjaž Rebolj for preparing the book's indexes, as well as to Dr. Margaret Davis and Dr. Peter Weiss for their help in proofreading.

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The contents of most chapters have been presented in various academic meetings and congresses in Slovenia and elsewhere in the world: Vienna (1988), Regensburg (1987, 1988, 1994), Leuven (IOSOT 1989, SBL 1994), Paris (IOSOT 1992), Cambridge (IOSOT 1995), Jerusalem (1995, 1996, 1997), Oslo (IOSOT 1998), Helsinki / Lahti (SBL 1999). Among the many lectures on the themes of the present study which were held in Slovenia mention may be made of a series of public lectures held at the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts on 10 January 1994, 16 November 1994, and 20 April 1998. Especially memorable is the cooperative work with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. During my research leave in Jerusalem from

February to June 1995, Professor Sarah Groll Israelit from the Department of Egyptology at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem invited me to deliver a lecture on punishment and forgiveness in Isaiah 18–19 in the Symposium "Isaiah 18–19: A Meeting of Cultures: Israelite, Egyptian, Assyrian," which was held at the Hebrew University on 4th and 5th April 1995. We had many conversations, and subsequently Professor Sarah Groll organized research on the concepts of sin, punishment and forgiveness in the ancient Egyptian culture. As the result of help from the German-Israeli Foundation, Professor Groll was able to hold a Symposium in cooperation with the Department of Egyptology at the Hebrew University, the Universities of Heidelberg and Leipzig, of the École Biblique in Jerusalem and of the University of Ljubljana, which was held at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem on 28th and 29th May 1996. The papers were published in the Proceedings *Jerusalem Studies in Egyptology* (ed. I. Shirun-Grumach; ÄAT 40; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998), 211–378. On 24 July 1997 I presented the paper "The Confessional Prayer in 1QS 1.24–26 and CD 20.28–30" at the world congress "The Dead Sea Scrolls—Fifty Years After Their Discovery: Major Issues and New Approaches" organized by the Israel Museum, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Israel Exploration Society. I would like to take this occasion to express my especial thanks to all my many colleagues for their cooperation in these many fruitful joint ventures.

The section of the bibliography which appears under my name shows that earlier versions of most of the material of the book have appeared—in various languages—in journals or proceedings over the past dozen years or so. I would like to thank the journals for granting permission to reprint the copyrighted material in this final version, where an attempt has been made to unite the disparate ideas into one coherent view.

My thanks too, of course, to the members of the Editorial Board of the periodical *Vetus Testamentum,* and especially Professor André Lemaire, the Editor of the *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum,* for accepting this lengthy manuscript. Professor Lemaire, Mr. Hans van der Meij, the Acquisitions Editor of the Brill Academic Publishers, and Mrs. Mattie Kuiper, the Desk Editor for Religious Studies, all gave kind and unfailing assistance for which I am very grateful.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AASF	Annales Academiae scientiarum Fennicae
ÄAT	Ägypten und Altes Testament
AB	The Anchor Bible
ABR	*Australian Biblical Review*
ACl	*Acta classica*
ACrac	*Analecta Cracoviensia*
ADPV	Abhandlungen des Deutschen Palästinavereins
AE	*American Ethnologist*
AGPH	Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie
AHGHIR	Abhandlungen der Herder-Gesellschaft und des Herder-Instituts zu Riga
AION	*Annali (dell')Istituto Orientale di Napoli*
AJPh	*Australian Journal of Philosophy*
AJSL	*American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*
ALS	American Lecture Series
ALBO	Analecta Lovaniensia biblica et orientalia
AnBib	Analecta biblica
ANET	*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (ed. J. B. Pritchard; 3rd ed. with Supplement; Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969)
AnOr	Analecta orientalia
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
APhQ	*American Philosophical Quarterly*
AramB	*The Aramaic Bible* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark)
ARSP	*Archiv für Rechts- und Sozialphilosophie*
ARW	*Archiv für Religionswissenschaft*
ASS	Aristotelian Society Series
BOH	Bibliotheca orientalis Hungarica
AnStEs	Annali di storia dell'esegesi
AS	Arthurian Studies
ASTI	*Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute*
ATA	Alttestamentliche Abhandlungen
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
AThANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
AuA	*Antike und Abendland*
AugSt	*Augustinian Studies*
AUMSR	Amdrews University Monographs Studies in Religion
AUS	American University Studies

AUSS	*Andrews University Seminary Studies*
AUS.SSPh	Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis: Stockholm Studies in Philosophy
AUSt	American University Studies
AUU	Acta universitatis Upsaliensis
BA	*Biblical Archaeologist*
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
BBS	Bible Biography Series
BC	Biblischer Commentar über das Alte Testament
BBC	The Broadman Bible Commentary
BBETh	Beiträge zur bibliscen Exegese und Theologie
BBS	Bible Biography Series
BEATAJ	Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des antiken Judentums
BeO	Bibbia e oriente
BEThL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum Lovaniensium
BetM	Beth Mikra
BEvTh	Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie
BFCThL	Bibliothèque de la Faculté catholique de théologie de Lyon
BFI	Biblioteka Filozofska istraživanja
BHPh	Bibliothèque d'histoire de la philosophie
BHTh	Beiträge zur historischen Theologie
BiLe	Bibel und Leben
BibOr	Biblica et orientalia
BibRe	Biblical Research
BibSem	Biblical Seminar
BibTod	Bible Today
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BJ	La Bible de Jérusalem
BK.AT	Biblischer Kommentar: Altes Testament
BLS	Bible and Literature Series
BN	Bliblische Notizen
BMTheor	Beiträge zur mimetischen Theorie
BogSt	Boghazköi-Studien
BS	Bogoslovska smotra
BSAF.SAIUH	Beiträge zur Südasienforschung: Südasien-Institut Universität Heidelberg
BSPhG	Berner Studien zur Philosophie und ihrer Geschichte
BSR	Biblioteca di scienze religiose
BSt	Biblische Studien
BTh	Bibliothèque théologique
BThS	*Bamberger theologische Studien*

BThZ	*Berliner theologische Zeitschrift*
BV	*Bogoslovni vestnik*
BWAT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten Testament
BZ	*Biblische Zeitschrift*
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CAT	Commentaire de l'Ancien Testament
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBETh	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CB.NT	Coniectanea biblica: New Testament Series
CB.OT	Coniectanea biblica: Old Testament Series
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CBSC	Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges
CC	Communicator's Commentary
CCP	Contributions in Criminology and Penology
CD	The Dead Sea Scroll: *The Damascus Document*
CE	Collection Exchanges
CeB	Century Bible
CFi	Cogitatio fidei
CFThL	Clark's Foreign Theological Library
CJE	*Criminal Justice Ethics*
CJPh	*Canadian Journal of Philosophy*
CJud	*Conservative Judaism*
C.IKT	*Communio: Internationaal katholiek tijdschrift*
C.KO	*Communio: Kristjanova obzorja*
CLS	Contributions in Legal Studies
ColP	Collection prémices
ConC	A Continental Commentary
CP	*Classical Philology*
CPh	Contributions in Philosophy
CQ	*Classical Quarterly*
C.RCI	*Communio: Revue catholique internationale*
C.RIC	*Communio: Revista internacional católica*
CSPh	Cambridge Studies in Philosophy
CSPhL	Cambridge Studies in Philosophy and Law
CSR	Contributons to the Study of Religion
CSRT	*Cambridge Studies in Religious Traditions*
CThJ	*Calvin Theological Journal*
CThM	Calwer theologische Monographien
CThM.B	Calwer theologische Monographien, Reihe A: Bibelwissenschaft

CTom	*Ciencia tomista*
CV	*Communio viatorum*
DM	Documenta missionalia
DUW	Dissertationen der Universität Wien
DZPh	*Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*
EAI.SS	Early American Imprints, Second Series
EB	Enzyklopädische Bibliothek
EF	Erträge der Forschung
EHS.Th	Europäische Hochschulschriften, Reihe 23: Theologie
EPRO	Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'empire romain
ErIs	*Eretz-Israel*
ESemHM	European Seminar in Historical Methodology
ESt	Eichstätter Studien
EStECh	Emory Studies in Early Christianity
EstAg	*Estudio agustiniano*
ET	*Expository Times*
EtB	Études bibliques
EThL	*Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses*
EThR	*Étude théologiques et religieuses*
EThS	Erfurter theologische Schriften
EUS	European University Studies
EvQ	*Evangelical Quarterly*
EvTh	*Evangelische Theologie*
FaithPh	Faith and Philosophy
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FBH	Foundations of Bible History
FCI	Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation
FI	*Filozofska istraživanja*
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GöOF	Göttinger Orientforschungen
GöThA	Göttinger theologische Arbeiten
GöUR	Göttinger Universitätsreden
GR	*Greece & Rome*
GuF	*Glaube und Forschung*
GuL	*Geist und Leben*
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HBIS	History of Biblical Interpretation Series
HBS	Herders biblische Studien
HBTh	*Horizons of Biblical Theology*
HCB	Harper Colophon Books

HCCOT	Historical and Critical Commentary on the Old Testament
HK	Handkommentar (Göttinger) zum Alten Testament
HRWA	Heidelberger rechtswissenschaftliche Abhandlungen
HS	*Hegel-Studien*
HSMS	Harvard Semitic Monograph Series
HThR	*Harvard Theological Review*
HTIBS	Historic Texts and Interpreters in Biblical Scholarship
HW	*The Human World*
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IJPhR	International Journal for Philosophy of Religion
IKZ	*Internationale katholische Zeitschrift*
ILBS	Indiana Literary Biblical Series
ILR	*Israel Law Review*
ILSSR	International Library of Sociology and Social Reconstruction
IntB	Interpreter's Bible
IRTh	Issues in Religion and Theology
ISBL	Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature
IThC	International Theological Commentary
IThQ	*Irish Theological Quarterly*
IThS.S	Indian Theological Studies: Supplements
JANESCU	*Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JAOS.S	Supplement to the Journal of the American Oriental Society
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JBL.M	Journal of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
JBR	*Journal of Bible and Religion*
JBTh	*Jahrbuch für biblische Theologie*
JCP	Jews' College Publications
JEA	*Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*
JES	*Journal of Ecumenical Studies*
JHPh	*Journal of the History of Philosophy*
JEThS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
JHI	*Journal of the History of Ideas*
JHNES	Johns Hopkins Near Eastern Studies
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JL	Jordan Lectures
JMEOS	*Journal of the Manchester University Egyptian and Oriental Society*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JNWSL	*Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages*

JPh	*Journal of Philosophy*
JPhVSt	*Jenaer philosophische Vorträge und Studien*
JPOS	*Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society*
JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review*
JRE	*Journal of Religious Ethics*
JSJ	*Journal for the Study of Judaism*
JSJ.S	Journal for the Study of Judaism: Supplements
JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JSNT.S	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
JSOT.S	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
JSPE.S	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha: Supplement Series
JThC	*Journal of Theology and the Church*
JThS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
KAI	*Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften,* 3 vols. (ed. H. Donner and W. Röllig; Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1969–1973)
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
KAF	*Kleinasiatische Forschungen*
KantSt	*Kant-Studien: Philosophische Zeitschrift der Kant-Gesellschaft*
KHC	Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament
KPhB	Kirchmann's philosophische Bibliothek
KSBTh	Kohlhammer Studienbücher Theologie
KW	Kierkegaard's Writings
LAPO	Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient
LBS	Library of Biblical Studies
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LebZeug	*Lebendiges Zeugnis*
LexThQ	*Lexington Theological Quarterly*
LMPPh	Lund Monographs in Practical Philosophy
LPhThR	Linzer philosophisch-theologische Reihe
LRPh	Library of Religions Philosophy
MB	Le monde de la Bible
MBPS	Mellen Biblical Press Series
MDOG	*Mitteilungen der deutschen Orientgesellschaft*
sMW	*Man and World: An International Philosophical Review*
MRS	Mission de Ras Shamra
MS	*Modern Schoolman*
MT	Masoretic Text
MThS	Münchener theologische Studien

Mus	*Le Muséon: Revue d'Études Orientales*
MVAG	*Mitteilungen der Vorderasiatisch-Aegyptischen Gesellschaft*
NAC	New American Commentary
NBE	Nueva Biblia Española
NCB	New Century Bible
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NEB	Die neue Echter Bibel
NEnglB	New English Bible
NF	Neue Folge
NIC	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIV	New International Version
NKRWA	Neue Kölner rechtswissenschaftliche Abhandlungen
NKZ	*Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift*
NR	*Naši razgledi*
NRTh	*Nouvelle revue théologique*
NS	New Series, Neue Serie
NSK.AT	Neuer Stuttgarter Kommentar: Altes Testament
NStB	Neukirchener Studienbücher
NTL	New Testament Library
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
NVBS	New Voices in Biblical Studies
NVAO.HF	Norske Videnskaps-Akademi i Oslo: Historisk-filosofisk Klasse
NZSTh	*Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*
ÖBFZPhTh	Ökumenische Beihefte zur Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
OTE	*Old Testament Essays: Journal of the Old Testament Society of South Africa*
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTS	*Oudtestamentische Studiën*
PAAPhA	*Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*
PACPhA	Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association
PAPhS	*Proceeding of the American Philosophical Society*
PAS	*Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*
PCL	*Paul Carus Lectures*
PCPh	Problem in Contemporary Philosophy
PhA	Philosophische Abhandlungen
PhAct	Philosophia Activa

PhEW	*Philosophy East and West*
PhJ	*Philosophisches Jahrbuch der Görres-Gesellschaft*
PhPA	*Philosophy of Public Affairs*
PhPR	Philosophy and Phenomenological Research
PhQ	*Philosophical Quarterly*
PhRev	*Philosophical Review*
PhS	*Philosophical Studies*
PhSSPh	Philosophical Studies Series in Philosophy
PhTop	Philosophical Topics
PL	Patrologiae cursus completus: Accurante Jacques-Paul Migne: Series Latina
PPF	Prize Publication Fund
PPFBR	Publications of the Perry Foundation for Biblical Research in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem
PRF	Publications romanes et françaises
PriPh	Prima Philosophia
P.S	Philologus: Supplementband
PThMS	Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series
PThSt	Paderborner theologische Studien
PTIU	*Publications of the Thomas Instituut te Utrecht*
QD	Quaestiones disputatae
QE	Quaderni esegetici
RB	*Revue biblique*
RBib	Rhétorique biblique
RCI.C	*Revista católica internacional: Communio*
RdQ	*Revue de Qumran*
RelSt	*Religious Studies*
RestQ	*Restoration Quarterly*
RevBib	*Revista bíblica*
RevPhL	Revue philosophique de Louvain
RevSR	*Revue des sciences religieuses*
RevThL	*Revue théologique de Louvain*
RGRW	Religions in the Graeco-Roman World
RHPhR	*Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses*
RHR	*Revue de l'histoire des religions*
RIDA	*Revue internationale des droits de l'antiquité*
RITC.C	*Rivista internationale di teologia e cultura: Communio*
RivBib	*Rivista biblica*
RivBib.S	Supplementi alla Rivista biblica
RM	Review of Metaphysics
RMPhS	Rare Masterpieces of Philosophy and Science
RP	Religious Perspectives
RSLR	*Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa*

RSPhTh	*Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*
RSR	*Recherches de science religieuse*
RSSCW	Research Studies of the State College of Washington
RSV	Revised Standard Version
RThL	*Revue théologique de Louvain*
RThom	*Revue thomiste*
RThPh	*Revue de théologie et de philosophie*
RV	Religionsgeschichtliche Volksbücher für die deutsche chrictliche Gegenwart
RVV	Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SAPh	Studies in Applied Philosophy
SAS	Studien des apologetischen Seminars
SB	La Sacra Bibbia: Volgata latina e traduzione italiana dei testi originali con note critiche e commenti
SBA	Studi sulla Bibbia e il suo ambiente
SBAB	Stuttgarter biblische Aufsatzbände
SBB	Stuttgarter biblische Beiträge
SBFLA	*Studii biblici franciscani: Liber annuus*
SBi	Sources bibliques
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBL.DS	Society of Biblical Literature: Dissertation Series
SBL.MS	Society of Biblical Literature: Monograph Series
SBL.RBS	Society of Biblical Literature: Resources for Biblical Study
SBL.SS	Society of Biblical Literature: Semeia Studies
SBTh	Studies in Biblical Theology
SBThS	Sources for Biblical and Theological Study
SCL	Sather Classical Lectures
ScR	*Science religieuse: Traveaux et recherches*
ScrHie	*Scripta Hierosolymitana*
ScrinTheol	*Scrinium theologicum*
SEÅ	*Svensk exegetisk årsbok*
SeptCogSt	Septuagint and Cognate Studies
SFEG	Schriften der Finnischen Exegetischen Gesellschaft
SF.NF	Studia Friburgensia: Neue Folge
SGKIO	Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des islamishen Orients
SGKMTh	Studien zur Geschichte der atholischen Moraltheologie
SH.NF	Sammlung Horizonte: Neue Folge
SJ	Studia Judaica
SJLA	Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
SJOT	*Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*
SJTh	*Scottish Journal of Theology*
SKG	Schriften der Königsberger Gelehrten Gesellschaft

SML	Studies in Modern Literature
SMPLPh	Studies in Moral, Political, and Legal Philosophy
SNVAO	Skrifter utgit av Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi i Oslo
SOTI	Studies in Old Testament Interpretation
SP	Serie Piper
SPhP	*Social Philosophy and Policy*
SP.S	Studia philosophica: Supplementum
SS	Semeia Supplements
SSG	*Schriften der Spinoza-Gesellschaft*
SStEL.JDSt	Salzburg Studies in English Literature: Jacobean Drama Studies
SStEL.PD	Salzburg Studies in English Literature: Poetic Drama
ST	Studi Tomistici
StBib	Studi biblici
StGen	*Studium generale*
STh	Scrinium theologicum
StHANE	Studies in the History of the Ancient Near East
StIKGCh	Studien zur interkulturellen Geschichte des Christentums
StMor	*Studia moralia*
StOR	Studies in Oriental Religions
StorRel	Storia delle religioni
StPB	Studia post-biblica
StPh	Studies in Philosophy
StP.SM	Studia Pohl: Series maior
StSN	Studia semitica Neerlandica
StTDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
STTAASF	Suomalaisen Tiedeakatemian Toimituksia Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae
StTh	*Studia Theologica: Scandinavian Journal of Theology*
SubBib	Subsidia biblica
SVFR	Studien zum Verstehen fremder Religionen
SWJTh	*Southwestern Journal of Theology*
SynPh	*Synthesis philosophica*
TDL	Theory and Decision Library
TE	Textos y estudios
ThB	Theologische Bücherei
ThBT	Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann
ThE	Theologie & Empirie
ThG	*Theologie der Gegenwart*
ThGl	*Theologie und Glaube: Zeitschrift für den katholischen Klerus*
ThLit	Theologie und Literatur
ThLZ	*Theologische Literaturzeitung*

ThPh	*Theologie und Philosophie*
ThR	*Theologische Revue*
ThSt	Theologische Studien
ThV	*Theologische Versuche*
ThZ	*Theologische Zeitschrift*
TICP	Travaux de l'Institut Catholique de Paris
TL	Teologija za laike
TOB	Traduction oecuménique de la Bible
TOTC	The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
TPS	*Transactions of the Philological Society*
TRS	Test Reader Series
TStAJ	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum
TSTh	Toronto Studies in Theology
TT	Topos Taschenbücher
TThSt	Trierer theologische Studien
TThZ	*Trierer theologische Zeitschrift*
TynB	*Tyndale Bulletin*
UBL	Ugaritisch-biblische Literatur
UF	*Ugarit-Forschungen*
UNT	Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
USQR	*Union Seminary Quarterly Review*
UUÅ	Uppsala Universitets Årsskrift
VD	*Verbum Domini*
BIBS	Value Inquiry Book Series
VS.HF	Videnskapsselskapets Skrifter: Historisk-filosofisk Klasse
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VT.S	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
VWGTh	Veröffentlichungen der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WBTh	Wiener Beiträge zur Theologie
WC	Westminster Commentaries
WdF	Wege der Forschung
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WPP	Win the Peace Pamphlet
WThJ	*Westminster Theological Journal*
WuD	*Wort und Dienst: Jahrbuch der theologischen Schule Bethel*
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
YSR	Yale Studies in Religion
ZA	Zeitschrift für Assyriologie

ZABR	Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte
ZÄS	Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde
ZAW	Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
ZB	Zürcher Bibel
ZBK.AT	Zürcher Bibelkommentar: Altes Testament
ZDMG	Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft
ZPhF	Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung
ZSS	Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung
ZSTh	Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie
ZThK	Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche
ŽA	Živa antika

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

In order to investigate the principal themes in the Bible, we must first of all confront second-order problems concerning methods, concepts, and form. This is especially true if we want to undertake a systematic examination of the themes of reward, punishment, and forgiveness, precisely because these are so deeply embedded in the fundamental meaning of the Bible and so closely linked with related themes; they can be understood in many different ways, which are all justifiable in relation to their several contexts.

Consequently, a semantic examination of the words used to denote the concepts is therefore of limited value for discerning their essential character. Non-conceptual—that is, literary and rhetorical—modes of expressing ideas and feelings also have to be taken into account. It is clear that all great works of literature contain several layers. Hidden behind the explicit framework of statements can be other more enigmatic levels of meaning. The aim of any analysis of individual texts is to allow the subject-matter to speak for itself. A thematic investigation should for this reason be complemented by an analysis of the inner-textual background.

Further difficulties arise from the very nature of the Hebrew Bible which is the sum of many discrete parts. How far is it justified to assume that the separate books which together constitute the Bible share the same theological presuppositions? How far is it possible for human beings to enter into a personal relationship with God and gain an especially deep insight into the nature of existence—a Divine Revelation—which transcends all the apparent contradictions and difficulties of our usual mode of knowledge? And if it is possible, to what extent can such an experience—a personal, inner, perhaps even mystical experience—be subjected to any rational inquiry? When we come to examine the biblical narratives to look for the answers, we encounter all kinds of problems, especially due to the frequent gaps. It is tempting for us to fill in these gaps and to explain the forces that motivate various biblical characters in a way which is logical—at least to ourselves. But what could possibly be the basis for such an apparently arbitrary and subjective element in any interpretation? How are the many apparent contradictions found in the biblical texts to be resolved? What is the basis of the authority of an exegesis which purports to reveal the word of God?

1. *Inner-biblical Exegesis*

The Hebrew Bible is a composition and compilation drawing on traditions with very different roots. These range from the ancient Israel of the Patri-

archs to the Graeco-Roman period. As the teachers tried to articulate, make explicit and defend the revelation of the divine will in the history of world, they adapted the fragmentary oral and written traditions, both native and foreign, which they had inherited. By integrating smaller fragments into larger units they aimed to create unified wholes which shed light on the particular problems of their own day and the specific theological concerns of their own communities. The Hebrew Bible provides evidence of a sustained effort to reinterpret the nature and will of God, the essence of human life and of inter-personal relationships. This process of adaptation and actualization, or of transmutational interpretation, took place within living communities of believers who each brought their own intellectual faculties and experiences to bear on an examination of the received traditions.

Many examples of the kind of synthetic transmutation of tradition can be found in the Hebrew Bible. The Pentateuch is perhaps the most striking example of inner-biblical exegesis, since it is composed of a whole range of diverse, sometimes even contradictory, elements. The book of Deuteronomy too contains modifications of Exodus-Numbers. The prophetic literature was re-worked following a similar pattern. The book of Isaiah contains a series of smaller oracles and larger sequences such as the "Great Apocalypse" (chaps. 24–27) and the "Little Apocalypse" (chaps. 34–35). An examination of the oracles of Deutero-Isaiah (chaps. 40–55) and of Trito-Isaiah (chaps. 56–66) show linguistic and ideological similarities to Isaiah. The Chronicles reveal a homiletical reworking of Samuel-Kings.[1] The attitudes of major translators to the original biblical text also show the dynamism of inner-biblical exegesis. The Septuagint, Targums, and Samaritan recensions are not translations in the normal sense; all of them reveal changes designed to make the Bible's content more comprehensible to their contemporaries.[2]

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[1] For various views on the genesis of the Hebrew Bible and its interpretation, in addition to introductions and commentaries, see especially G. Fohrer, "Tradition und Interpretation im Alten Testament," *ZAW* 73 (1961), 1–30; B. S. Childs, *Memory and Tradition in Israel* (SBTh 37; London: SCM Press, 1962); W. Richter, *Exegese als Literaturwissenschaft* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971); T. Willi, *Die Chronik als Auslegung: Untersuchungen zur literarischen Gestaltung der historischen Überlieferung Israels* (FRLANT 106; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972); D. A. Knight, *Rediscovering the Traditions of Israel* (SBLDS 9; Missoula, Mont.: University of Montana, 1973, 1975); idem (ed.), *Tradition and Theology in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1977; London: SPCK, 1977); E. Krentz, *The Historical-Critical Method* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1975); M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985, 1991). This last study is the first systematic and comprehensive analysis of various exegetical traditions within the Hebrew Bible.

[2] See S. Lowy, *The Principles of Samaritan Bible Exegesis* (StPB; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977); E. Levine, *The Aramaic Version of the Bible: Contents and Context* (BZAW 174; Berlin / New York: W. de Gruyter, 1988); C. Cox, "Vocabulary for Wrongdoing and Forgiveness in the Greek Translations of Job," *Textus: Studies of the Hebrew University Bible Project*, vol. 15 (ed. E. Tov; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1990), 119–130; W. Barnstone, *The Poetics of Translation: History, Theory, Practice* (New Haven / London: Yale University Press, 1993); A. Aejmelaeus, *On the Trail of the Septuagint Translators: Collected Essays* (Kampen:

It is striking that the basic theological maxims did not change with the transmutation of traditions. As a variety of material ranging from ancient myths, folk tales, legends, history, prophetic oracles to hymns and laments,—to mention just a few genres—was incorporated into biblical documents, the theological maxims became even more unified. It is true, however, that textual formulations often remained ambiguous, problematic or incomplete. As a result of being incorporated into biblical texts, ancient material became depolytheized and monotheized and underwent a radical change of meaning. In spite of the varied exegetical traditions, the themes and forms of the Hebrew Bible therefore show a clear tendency to universalism. The central axis of the Hebrew Bible is the personal relationship with God. It is this relationship which allows the Bible's universalism to transcend all other cosmological kinds of universalism. The central focus of the Bible became personalist experience and the general domain of human ethical relationship to God was extended to include all the basic theological questions concerning guilt, punishment, and forgiveness—extended in fact, to cover all the concerns of life itself.

The way the Bible reached its final shape, the way it was formed much like a puzzle out of various pieces, confronts us with the question of its authority. How is this apparently haphazard accumulation of biblical documents to be reconciled with the Bible's claim to reveal the final truth? To answer this problem, we must consider the role of charismatic prophets and other authorities whose statements were considered intrinsically compelling and wise. Evidence suggests that these central figures altered and adapted

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Kok, 1993); N. Fernández-Marcos, "The Septuagint Reading of the Book of Job," *The Book of Job* (ed. W. A. M. Beuken; BEThL 114; Leuven: University Press / Peeters, 1994), 251–266; C. Mangan, "The Interpretation of Job in the Targums," *The Book of Job* (ed. W. A. M. Beuken), 267–280; U. Gleßmer, *Einleitung in die Targume zum Pentateuch* (TStAJ 48; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1995); A. Minissale, *La versione greca del Siracide: Confronto con il testo ebraico alla luce dell'attività midrascica e de metodo targumico* (AnBib 133; Rome: Ed. Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1995); M. Cimosa, *Guida allo studio della Bibbia greca (LXX): Storia, lingua, testi* (Rome: Società Biblica Britannica & Forestiera, 1995); J. W. Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Deuteronomy* (SeptCogSt 39; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1995); T. J. Meadowcroft, *Aramaic Daniel and Greek Daniel: A Literary Comparison* (JSOT.S 198; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); S. Brock, *The Recensions of the Septuagint Version of I Samuel* (with a foreword by N. F. Marcos; Henoch: Quaderni 9; Torino: Zamorani, 1996); T. MacLay, *The OG and Th Versions of Daniel* (SeptCogSt 43; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1996); M. Müller, *The First Bible of the Church: A Plea for the Septuagint* (JSOT.S 206; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); S. Olofsson, "The Septuagint and Earlier Jewish Interpretative Tradition—Especially As Reflected in the Targums," *SJOT* 10 (1996), 197–216; K. Jeppesen, "Biblica Hebraica—et Septuaginta: A Response to Mogens Müller," *SJOT* 10 (1996), 271–281; C. E. Cox, *Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion in Armenia* (SeptCogSt 42; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1996); J. Cook, *The Septuagint of Proverbs: Jewish and/or Hellenistic Proverbs? Concerning the Hellenistic Colouring of LXX Proverbs* (VT.S 69; Leiden / New York / Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1997); H. Graf Reventlow, *Theologische Probleme der Septuaginta und der hellenistischen Hermeneutik* (VWGTh 11; Gütersloh: Kaiser, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1997); M. Weitzman, "Hebrew and Syriac Texts of the Book of Job," *Congress Volume: Cambridge 1995* (VT.S 66; Leiden / New York / Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1997), 381–399.

the received traditions in the light of their own knowledge and experience. The writers/editors chose to remain anonymous, or else they attributed their exegesis to authoritative names such as Moses, David, Solomon, Isaiah. It may seem strange to us today that these writers preferred to remain unknown, but in fact such writers considered anonymity to be a value in itself: the important thing was the message.

The guarantee of moral reliability throughout the whole process of transmission is obedience. Obedience, generated by an understanding of the nature of God, is the key to understanding how the products of exegesis could be incorporated into the Bible in the sense of transformative revelations. The incentive for studying the implicit and explicit meanings of the received traditions was the belief that all that exists depends on God, who created every single thing. This belief ensured that all the ambiguities, conflicts and apparent contradictions in the biblical documents were not overlooked. On the contrary, sensitivity to these contradictions, and to the great variety of literary forms and styles in which the divine message was expressed, increased as people attempted to recognize and realize the will of God as perfectly as they could. Human exegetical activity was thus subordinated to the word of God and the Bible could therefore become a symbol of life *par excellence*.[3]

The prophets' attitude to obedience resulted from God's direct intervention in their lives. But the inner conditions needed to be receptive to such intervention can be assumed to have been promoted by private prayer. Their knowledge of God was clearly derived not so much from an analysis of the phenomena in the external world or of history but from an existential experience of personal communication. The personalist theology and the religion of the Hebrew Bible, therefore, culminates in the call to worship God and in the prayer-book of the Psalms. Prayer is the powerful force which unifies human beings inwardly with God. This unity also constitutes the compelling reason for monotheism. While the observation of events in the world and in history may have confronted the Israelites with insoluble antinomies and pressured

[3] Of relevance to this spiritual disposition is the statement by E. A. Speiser, "The Biblical Idea of History in Its Common Near Eastern Setting," *IEJ* 7 (1957), 216: "... Such a spirit of sacrifice and self-denial cannot long be sustained unless it has become deeply ingrained in the sponsoring society. We thus come back to our earlier assertion that the canonical tradition among the people of the Book must be older than the age of the pentateuchal writers, older indeed than the time of Moses himself. The foregoing discussion has advanced the argument that certain significant elements in that tradition have to be traced back to the period of the patriarchs. If this were not so, the patriarchal narratives could not have been recorded with such startling accuracy, although the writers lacked full knowledge of their social implications. If this were not so, the tradition of God's covenant with Abraham would not have been one of the two principal refrains in all the Scriptures. And if this were not so, the historic experience of Israel could not have become a decisive experience of mankind. Indeed, if it were otherwise, there could never have been the unique phenomenon of Israel."

them to abandon their beliefs, the experience of prayer propelled them to convergence with God, to an experience of oneness with him and other people. History was consequently not perceived primarily as a unity in an external sense but in an internal, prophetic, hymnic and mystical sense. The activity of actualization took place in the liturgy. Joe D. Levenson remarks: "Israel did not assert the oneness of her God with the dispassion of a philosopher. She praised God for being unique, incomparable, a source of embarrassment to his rivals, their master. Something precious is lost when we convert this language of hymnody into a matter of doctrine. That there comes a moment in the history of religion when philosophical reflection is necessary cannot be gainsaid. But we generate grave misunderstandings when we read that moment back into an era when it had not yet occurred."[4]

The hymnic nature of the Hebrew religion explains why Israel abandoned polytheism.[5] Other nations marked time in this respect, because their prophetic traditions and development of prayer was not strong enough to counteract the powerful influence of human forces and interests. While it is true that other religions also had universal traits indicative of monotheism, they remained in essence cosmological and societal-collective. In Israel, however, the personal encounter with God became central. The prohibition to worship other gods has a parallel in the exclusive claim to authority found in the suzerain-vassal relationship common to all major ancient Near Eastern cultures. But the compulsion to worship God exclusively is not an external one, reinforced by laws. It is an essentially internal one of awe and respect, of dignified humility, and even of love. The greatest paradox of the non-formal, personal covenant is this very possibility that God, the infinite, the absolute, the creator, should stand in an interpersonal relationship on the same level as his people. In Ezekiel we have an account of how a foundling child became a queen (cf. Ezek 16:1–14). The response which was expected of her was com-

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[4] See *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (NVBS; Minneapolis / Chicago / New York: Winston Press, 1985), 63.

[5] For the discussion about the origin and genesis of monotheism in ancient Israel, see especially M. Rose, *Der Ausschliesslichkeitsanspruch Jahwes: Deuteronomische Schultheologie und die Volksfrömmigkeit in der späteren Königszeit* (BWANT 6/6; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1975); J. C. de Moor, *The Rise of Yahwism: The Roots of Israelite Monotheism* (BEThL 91; Leuven: University Press / Peeters, 1990); M. Lind, *Monotheism, Power, Justice: Collected Old Testament Essays* (TRS 3; Elkhart, Ind.: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1990); T. Krapf, "Biblischer Monotheismus und vorexilischer JHWH-Glaube: Anmerkungen zur neueren Monotheismusdiskussion im Lichte von Yehezkel Kaufmanns Polytheismus-Monotheismus Begriff," *BThZ* 11 (1994), 42–64; D. V. Edelman (ed.), *The Triumph of Elohim: From Yahwisms to Judaisms* (CBETh 13; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 1996); F. Stolz, *Einführung in den biblischen Monotheismus* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1996); R. K. Gnuse, *No Other Gods: Emergent Monotheism in Israel* (JSOT.S 241; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997); M. Weippert, *Jahwe und die anderen Götter: Studien zur Religionsgeschichte des antiken Israel in ihrem syrisch-palästinischen Kontext* (FAT 18; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1997).

plete love—implying gratitude—rather than subjugation. The claim, therefore, seems correct that "Israel's belief in the incomparability / lordship / exclusive reality of YHWH does not derive from her theology of history; her theology of history follows from her 'monotheism.'"[6] Inner-biblical exegesis reveals a constant tension between what human beings believe and the reasons for which they believe between the "irrational" knowledge of the heart, when human beings feel themselves to be dependent on the mysterious spirit of God, and "rational" knowledge more narrowly conceived, which involves subjecting the reasons for obedience to a critical analysis. This tension runs throughout biblical exegesis. The interaction between the reasons of the heart and the reasons of the head create the conditions for grace which overcome negative emotions such as self-righteousness, anger and vengeance. It is possible, however, only to believe in grace if it has been experienced in the innermost core of one's being. A profound personal encounter in prayer is the basis for rejecting polytheism, for "there is, in the act of prayer and worship, an inherent tendency towards what may be called concentration ... We may surmise that at moments of living prayer and worship there is in primitive man a turning to *a* god as if he were in fact the one and only God, though without any expressly formulated denial of the existence of others; for the time being, the god worshipped fills the whole sphere of the divine."[7]

The intrinsic, i.e., moral authority of inner-biblical exegesis was not, however, compelling enough to provide clear criteria to determine the biblical canon once and for all. The decision over which books to include in the canon and which to leave out was made by local, regional and super-regional communities, which were presided over by teachers and religious leaders. Because no agreement was universally accepted, marked inconsistences in the canon arose. So, for example, some communities retained the apocryphal and pseudoepigraphic works, while the highest Jewish authorities eliminated them. Similar controversies surrounded the formation of the New Testament canon. The Apocrypha of the New Testament were considered to be sacred—and therefore survived—only in certain parts of the Church.

The status of certain documents was, in fact, questioned long before the debate on the canon ever began. The initial reception of some of the prophets was positive and this only changed when other evidence began to accumulate. The true prophets, on the other hand, were usually rejected by their contemporaries, but accepted by later generations. Once the canon of the Hebrew Bible had been defined by the highest Jewish authorities, it became normative for both Jewish and Christian communities, although some communities de-

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[6] See J. D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 69.

[7] See H. Farmer, *Revelation and Religion* (London: Nisbet, 1954), 105. I am grateful to J. D. Levenson for citing this statement in *Sinai and Zion*, 63, since I too have believed for many years that genuine prayer counters any theory of polytheism.

parted from the strict canon by including one or another book. But such a practice was not widespread. Once the canon of Scripture was established, the previous latitude in adapting traditional material disappeared.

The new emphasis on preserving the canon went hand in hand with a greater flexibility in its interpretation. The richness and variety of exegetical literature testify to the widespread recognition that the Holy Scriptures had to be constantly reinterpreted in the light of the concerns prevailing at a particular time or place, in order to bring the word of God closer to the people. The richness and importance of the exegetical literature show that scriptural ideas and literary forms were never considered to be theoretical and closed constructs, but rather contained the possibility of meeting readers' differing expectations. The interest in communication is reflected in the sophisticated conceptual framework developed in patristic and medieval hermeneutics for analyzing the language and concepts of a text. Four levels of meaning were distinguished. The first and most important level of meaning was the literal or historical meaning. Other levels were the mystical or allegorical, tropological or moral as well as the anagogical or spiritual-eschatological. Medieval Jewish exegesis recognized the same hermeneutical principles but used Hebrew instead of Latin terminology to name the four levels of meaning: *peshat, remez, derash, sod.*

It is, therefore, clear that biblical and post-biblical exegesis was a dynamic—and regenerative—process. In view of its characteristics, it is possible as Thomas Stearns Eliot did, to compare it to a river. Eliot commented: "... The River is never wholly chartable; it changes its pace, it shifts its channel, unaccountably; it may suddenly efface a sandbar, and throw up another bar where before was navigable water ... Like Huckleberry Finn, the River itself has no beginning or end. In its beginning, it is not yet the River; in its end, it is no longer the River. What we call its headwaters is only a selection from among the innumerable sources which flow together to compose it. At what point in its course does the Mississippi become what the Mississippi *means*? It is both one and many; it is the Mississippi of this book only after its union with the Big Muddy—the Missouri; it derives some of its character from the Ohio, the Tennessee and other confluents. And at the end it merely disappears among its deltas: it is no longer there, but it is still where it was, hundreds of miles to the North. The River cannot tolerate any design, to a story which is its story that might interfere with its dominance. Things must merely happen, here and there, to the people who live along its shores or who commit themselves to its current. And it is as impossible for Huck as for the River to have a beginning or end—a *career.* So the book has the right, the only possible concluding sentence. I do not think that any book ever written ends more certainly with the right words: *But I reckon I got to light out for*

the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and civilize me, and I can't stand it. I been there before."[8]

2. *Canonical Approach*

With the appearance of "canonical" and especially "literary" criticism in the late 1970s, the focus shifted from an examination of the historical (diachronic) context of biblical texts to the structure of the texts themselves.

The canonical programme is explicitly connected with the name of Brevard S. Childs.[9] The overall aim of the programme is to shed light on the crucial dilemma whether major biblical sections should be analyzed into underlying sources or whether they should be interpreted in their final, canonical form. Questions of the historical referentiality, which are characteristic of historical-critical approach, continue to play an important role. But they are subordinated to the search for the final, canonical meaning of the text. As Childs explains at one point: "Canonical analysis focuses its attention on the final form of the text itself. ... It treats the literature with its own integrity."[10] Childs' intention is to resolve various tensions which critical studies have discovered in the biblical writings and to demonstrate that canonical texts are not primarily products of political and sociological forces but of theological reflection. By investigating the canonical form, it can be shown how the various stages in the prehistory and history of Israel's religion contributed to the meaning of the text in its canonical form. The final form and the *purpose* of sacred scripture is theologically normative, and this determines the task of its interpreters. The proponents of canonical criticism consider the original context as the starting point for exegesis, but approach historical-critical and literary questions with a heightened awareness that the original meaning might have been very different from that in the final form. As Childs explains:

> The reason for insisting on the final form of scripture lies in the peculiar relationship between the text and people of God which is constitutive of the canon.

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[8] See the "Introduction" by T. S. Eliot to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Samuel L. Clemens—Mark Twain (London: Cresset Press, 1950), XIII–XVI. See also the findings on the views of Clement of Alexandria by C. Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1968), 47–48: "The Gospel in his view is not a fresh departure, but the meeting-point of two converging lines of progress, of Hellenism and Judaism. To him all history is one, because all truth is one. 'There is one river of Truth,' he says, 'but many streams fall into it on this side and on that.'"

[9] See especially Childs' publications: "The Canonical Shape of the Prophetic Literature," *Interpretation* 32 (1978), 46–55; "The Exegetical Significance of Canon for the Study of the Old Testament," *Congress Volume: Göttingen 1977* (ed. J. A. Emerton; VT.S 29; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), 66–80; *Introduction to the Old Testament As Scripture* (London: SCM Press, 1979, 1983); *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (London: SCM Press, 1985).

[10] See *Introduction to the Old Testament As Scripture*, 73.

> The shape of the biblical text reflects a history of encounter between God and Israel. The canon serves to describe this peculiar relationship and to define the scope of this history by establishing a beginning and an end to the process. ... The significance of the final form of the biblical text is that it alone bears witness to the full history of revelation.[11]

Insistence on a definite purpose for the final form of individual texts implies an assumption of canonical unity within the whole of the sacred scripture. Interpreters understand that biblical texts are inter-related to form a coherent and cogent whole. This manifests an overall inner-biblical congruence. Many Wisdom and prophetic statements clearly express timeless propositional truths. On the other hand, accounts of specific historical occurrences look beyond their own time and temporally conditioned circumstances. Interpretation brings about a "fusion" of partial truths within the whole of canonical and religious traditions. In the light of this fact, the canonical programme can be defined as follows:

> The formal model ... is that the biblical canon be construed as analogous to the 'collected works' of a single author. This (divine) author wrote them (over a considerable period of time) by assuming a variety of authorial *personae,* each with its own distinctive character, historical situation, etc. As one moves, therefore, from one book to another one encounters a diversity of 'implied authors,' each of whom must be understood on their own terms; yet behind them all is a single, controlling intelligence, working to an overall plan. Because of this, these diverse works therefore can—and for a full understanding, must—be read together as a unified canon.[12]

Childs and his followers believed that biblical texts derived their value from the sacred nature of their underlying authority. They were interested primarily in the religious message which those texts communicated.[13] A variety of

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[11] See *Introduction to the Old Testament As Scripture,* 75–76; see also "Canonical Shape," 47; "Exegetical Significance," 69.

[12] See P. R. Noble, *The Canonical Approach: A Critical Reconstruction of the Hermeneutics of Brevard S. Childs* (BIS 16; Leiden / New York / Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1995), 341.

[13] See J. A. Sanders, *Torah and Canon* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1972); idem, "Adaptable for Life: The Nature and Function of Canon," *Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God* (ed. F. M. Cross, W. E. Lemke, and P. D. Miller; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976), 531–560; idem, "Biblical Criticism and the Bible As Canon," *USQR* 32 (1977), 157–165; J. L. Mays, "Historical and Canonical: Recent Discussion about the Old Testament and Christian Faith," *Magnalia Dei ...,* 510–528; J. Blenkinsopp, *Prophecy and Canon: A Contribution to the Study of Jewish Origins* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977); G. W. Coats and B. Long (eds.), *Canon and Authority* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1977); B. S. Childs, (see note 9); J. C. MacCann, *Psalm 73: An Interpretation Emphasizing Rhetorical and Canonical Criticism* (Duke University, Diss., 1985); C. J. Scalise, *Canonical Hermeneutics: The Theological Basis and Implications of the Thought of Brevard S. Childs* (Louisville, Ky., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Diss., 1987); D. D. Pettus, *A Canonical-Critical Study of Selected Traditions in the Book of Joel* (Baylor University, Diss., 1992); P. R. Noble, *The Canonical Approach: A Critical Reconstruction of the Hermeneutics of Brevard S. Childs;* D. Jasper, *Readings in the Canon of Scripture: Written for Our Learning* (Houndmills et al.: Macmillan, 1995).

methods—form and redaction criticism, and literary, rhetorical criticism—were used to illuminate the structure of the texts in their final form. The importance of historical and sociological data receded with the new emphasis on the normative status of biblical texts as well their role in the community of believers in ancient Israel. Important to canonical analysis is a critical consideration of the process by which a particular text became part of the biblical canon. No canonical authority is, however, attributed to the earlier versions because of the unreliability of historical reconstructions. The adherents of canonical criticism also questioned whether the element of revelation resides in the text itself, in the forms, metaphors, images, independently of their source.[14]

Although canonical criticism has many positive features, serious reservations remain. James Barr, for example, observed: "Canonical criticism as it now stands, far from being the genuinely theological approach, lies in an uneasy balance between the historical, the literary and the theological, unable to accept any one of them completely and unwilling to cut loose completely from any of them either."[15] On the other hand, Paul R. Noble has an answer for Barr's criticism of other aspects of Childs' hermeneutics: "Barr's article helpfully reminds us that there are important questions here that need to be addressed if canonical hermeneutics is to qualify as a genuine theology. There seems little reason to doubt, however, that Childs' programme is methodologically equipped to do this."[16]

3. *Literary Approach*

The literary approach has some advantages over canonical criticism, because contemporary literary criticism generally takes into greater account the historical and depth dimensions of the constituent elements of a text—historical setting, terminology, symbols, metaphors, literary and rhetorical forms.[17]

Erich Auerbach and Meir Sternberg have made two of the most important contributions to the discussion on the relationship between form and ideology in the Hebrew Bible. Auerbach's *Mimesis,* in particular, has had an extraordinary impact on contemporary methods of biblical literary criticism. Auerbach compared the way the Homeric poems and the narratives of the Hebrew Bible represent reality. He concluded that the speeches of Homer and the whole presentation of the material tends to express everything,

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[14] See the criticism of the philosophical hermeneutics of P. Ricoeur and his followers by B. S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament As Scripture,* 77.

[15] See *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism* (London: SCM Press, 1983), 104.

[16] See *The Canonical Approach,* 368–369.

[17] See *Bibliography,* 1: *Hermeneutics, Literary Criticism, and Semantics.*

leaving no gaps and no hinterland. The Homeric style was only "of the foreground," that is, of a uniformly illuminated present without perspective, "... the Homeric poems conceal nothing, they contain no teaching and no secret second meaning. Homer can be analyzed, as we have essayed to do here, but he cannot be interpreted ..."[18]

To illustrate the characteristics of the Old Testament on the other hand, Erich Auerbach highlighted the contrasting elements to be found in the story of the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22:1–19).[19] He asserts that the content of biblical narratives can only be interpreted in the light of absolute divine authority. Auerbach observed:

> The Bible's claim to truth is not only far more urgent than Homer's, it is tyrannical—it excludes all other claims. The world of the Scripture stories is not satisfied with claiming to be a historically true reality—it insists that it is the only real world, is destined for autocracy. All other scenes, issues and ordinances have no right to appear independently of it, and it is promised that all of them, the history of all mankind, will be given their due place within its frame, will be subordinated to it. The Scripture stories do not, like Homer's, court our favor, they do not flatter us that they may please us and enchant us—they seek to subject us, and if we refuse to be subjected we are rebels.[20]

Auerbach identifies the main characteristics of biblical narratives as being, firstly, an extension into the depths, i.e., an orientation to the background as opposed to the foreground perspective. A second feature is concealed meaning, which requires interpretation on many different levels. Frequent gaps can also be found. Characteristic too of biblical narrators is that they suggest the psychological processes of characters rather than describing them explicitly. They also claim to possess absolute authority and are orientated first and foremost to the truth. The complex nature of their accounts, incorporating doctrine, promises and demands, requires a subtle investigation and interpretation.[21]

Auerbach's views on the special characteristics of biblical narratives influenced Meir Sternberg, who expanded and elaborated them in his close reading of several familiar narratives.[22] In the preface to his book *The Poet-*

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[18] See *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1953, 1991), 13.

[19] It is true, however, that Auerbach's characterization applies only to some biblical narratives. J. D. Levenson, "I Samuel 25 As Literature and As History," *CBQ* 40 (1978), 21–22, states: "One could retort that Genesis 22 is a distillation of the quintessential Hebraic spirit, and this is quite arguable. But it is not therefore representative of Israelite story-telling. In stories with a different theme, we expect a different narrative technique."

[20] See *Mimesis*, 14–15.

[21] See *Mimesis*, esp. chap. 1 (pp. 3–23): "Odysseus' Scar."

[22] See the series of articles on the subject which appeared in the Hebrew quarterly *Ha-Sifrut* and elsewhere from 1968 to 1983. Most articles are now incorporated in the massive English book entitled *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (ISBL; Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1985).

ics of Biblical Narrative he remarks: "Contrary to what some recent attempts at 'literary' analysis seem to assume, form has no value or meaning apart from communicative (historical, ideological, aesthetic) function." Sternberg outlines the basic principles of his form of literary criticism in his first chapter.

Meir Sternberg questions the approach of literary critics who consider the author's intention to be the most important but who also take an anti-historical line. In his view, an interpretation must be concerned with "embodied" or "objectified intention." An examination of the interrelation between text and context must therefore take extrinsic historico-linguistic data and textual prehistory into account. Sternberg also criticizes proponents of the Bible's fictionality: "As so often, the historical approach is not nearly historical enough and the literary not literary enough, for one sees fiction only when one loses sight of history and convention."[23] History and fiction as modes of discourse can only be distinguished from one another by their overall purposes. Historians are committed to factuality while writers of fiction are not. It is exactly this commitment that made Hebrew historiography what it is: religious historical memory.[24] Sternberg explains:

> By incorporating the definition and command and observance, the narrative not only illegitimates all thought of fictionality on pain of excommunication. It also uniquely internalizes its own rules of communication, whereby the remembrance of the past devolves on the present and determines the future ... Were the narrative written or read as fiction, then God would turn from the lord of history into a creature of the imagination, with the most disastrous results ... It claims not just the status of history but, as Erich Auerbach rightly maintains, of *the* history—the one and only truth that, like God himself, brooks no rival.[25]

Meir Sternberg also examines the three principles which he sees as regulating the multifunctional composition of biblical narratives: ideological, historiographic, and aesthetic. He identifies several important features of such narratives: the way the cognitive antithesis between God and humanity is built into the very structure of the narrative; the omniscient perspective of the biblical writer to whom the thoughts and feelings of all the characters are transparent; the unity of basic narrative portraits in spite of the variety of subject matter; the system of gaps which need to be completed in a literary

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[23] See *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 24.

[24] See the conclusive findings about the importance of history in ancient Israel by H. Butterfield, *The Origins of History* (New York: Basic Books; London: Eure Methuen, 1981), 80–95.

[25] See *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 31–32. On pp. 34–35 Sternberg concludes: "The product is neither fiction nor historicized fiction nor fictionalized history, but historiography pure and uncompromising." This is obviously an allusion to the terminology of R. Alter used especially in the second chapter of *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 23–46, entitled "Sacred History and the Beginnings of Prose Fiction." On p. 24 Alter contends that "prose fiction is the best general rubric for describing biblical narrative."

work; the distance between truth and the whole truth as a correlation of the distance between minimal and implied reading; surface and depth and the movement between the two levels. Sternberg explains: "This whole book is exactly a study in the principles of biblical coherence, emphatically including the coherence of deliberate and systematic incoherences ... My immediate concern, however, is with a set of underlying norms whose violation operates to establish informational gapping throughout biblical narrative."[26]

According to Meir Sternberg, the justification for gap-filling has to be found in the norms and indicators contained within the text itself. Sternberg stresses, however, that the importance of considering "basic assumptions or general canons of probability derived from 'everyday life' and prevalent cultural conventions."[27] Should the historical and sociological context, however, be included in this definition? What role does human consciousness and perceptivity play? Surely there would be no point to exegesis at all unless the human mind and heart were responsive to the words, metaphors, symbols, and textual structures of narratives and poems. Is it not the case after all that the Scripture itself states that God made humankind in his own image (Gen 1:27)? Does this not imply that human beings have the capacity to grasp transcendental truths and values which lie, in their essence, outside historical, sociological and literary categories?

John M. Rist observed: "The claim of any sacred tradition must be that it is pointing not merely in a better direction, but in the direction of the best: another example of Aristotle's dictum that one must stop somewhere. Yet that somewhere, for Aristotle as well as for ourselves, is not with us. If there is a somewhere, if there is after all the possibility of a single conceptual scheme, it can only exist in the mind of God."[28] The biblical and the sacred traditions of Judaism and Christianity are based on the belief that the principal purpose of God's mind and activity in the history of the world and of Israel is to preserve the harmonious divine order and to establish a perfect covenant community. By intervening in the activities of nations and in Israel, God aims to heal the effects of sin and so create the conditions for a reconciliation. The goal of humankind, and especially Israel, is to imitate the divine mind so perfectly that union with God himself is possible.

This goal does not necessarily imply the creation of one ultimate, universal, and all-embracing unified conceptual scheme, but rather a harmonious association of many schemes coordinated by a common system. The harmo-

[26] See *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 250.

[27] See *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 189.

[28] See "On the Very Idea of Translating Sacred Scripture," *Interpretation of the Bible* (ed. J. Krašovec; Ljubljana: Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti; JSOT.S 289; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 1509. J. M. Rist in his article questions the view of D. Davidson that speakers of different languages may share one conceptual scheme. See Davidson's article "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," *PAAPhA* 47 (1974), 5–20.

nious interlocking of individual schemes provides an internal consistency to the organic structure of the prophetic speeches, poems, and narratives. These documents testify to a growth of understanding as the authors attempt to attain ever more perfect insights. It is therefore possible to imagine a hierarchy of conceptual, literary, and cultural schemes within this basic orientation of the human mind to the highest and most perfect understanding. The greatness of the biblical poets arises from the fact that their subject is the divine mind and they reveal a depth of true understanding which most people, possibly everyone, aims to achieve. In spite of our limitations as human beings which prevent us from achieving an awareness of ultimate realities, the *imitatio Dei* marks our fundamental orientation. The words, sentences, literary and rhetorical features of the sacred tradition are mirrors which reveal this ultimate reality. They reveal truths which may even be greater than the ones which the authors intended to reveal.

Understanding God's mind became the greatest challenge presented to the human mind and human culture and the writers and editors of sacred texts believed that it was their task first and foremost to preserve God's word as authentically as possible. Translators and interpreters were also concerned with accuracy. The surest way of presenting the linguistic and literary features of biblical texts is the "philological method." But the contextual principle of semantics proves that the meaning of individual components within the totality of a given literary structure is much greater than an examination of their etymology in isolation—based on the assumption of an underlying objective truth or ontology—would suggest. The more accurately individual linguistic and literary components are preserved, the greater their expressiveness within a given literary structure or a new cultural scheme.

But how does this apply to the essential question, whether the biblical view of justice is correct or not? The biblical texts challenge the reader to decide, although it is true that this decision in turn depends on the reader's fundamental horizon of understanding, on his theistic or atheistic attitudes. This study pays particular attention to the perception of the operation of intrinsic justice as reflected in proverbial and other Wisdom statements—statements which, however, rarely touch on the theme of forgiveness. An attempt is made to explore the psychological depths of those prophetic speeches and narratives which treat a central aspect of justice. Characteristic of these texts is the dramatic tension between the reasons for punishing the unfaithful individuals or covenant people and the even profounder reason for mercy and forgiveness. The biblical writers' orientation to the highest spiritual dimension results in gaps appearing in their narratives or speeches, which need to be interpreted from a wider perspective.

Erich Auerbach explains how the universal biblical scheme permits a synthesis of the divergent individual elements:

> The claim of the Old Testament stories to represent universal history, their insistent relation—a relation constantly redefined by conflicts—to a single and hidden God, who yet shows himself and who guides universal history by promise and exaction, gives these stories an entirely different perspective from any the Homeric poems can possess. As a composition, the Old Testament is incomparably less unified than the Homeric poems, it is more obviously pieced together—but the various components all belong to one concept of universal history and its interpretation. If certain elements survived which did not immediately fit in, interpretation took care of them; and so the reader is at every moment aware of the universal religio-historical perspective which gives the individual stories their general meaning and purpose. The greater the separateness and horizontal disconnection of the stories and groups of stories in relation to one another, compared with the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the stronger is their general vertical connection, which holds them all together and which is entirely lacking in Homer.[29]

4. *The Drama of Reading Within a Living Tradition*

In Meir Sternberg's opinion, readers of biblical narratives ask themselves questions. They ask for example: "What is happening or has happened, and why? What connects the present event or situation to what went before, and how do both relate to what will probably come after? What are the features, motives, or designs of this or that character? How does he view his fellow characters? And what norms govern the existence and conduct of all?"[30] Answering these questions involves the exercise of reason. Especially in cases where the text is ambiguous or obscure, an exegetical method must consider the general canons of probability in order to fill in the gaps.

This is even more true of inner-textual interpretations, since texts often make conflicting claims. Contradictions and paradoxes surround even central issues. So, while some biblical books or passages contain explicit statements in favour of monotheism, others are ambiguous. Others still even seem to favour the exact opposite: polytheism. Some narratives reflect the view that human beings have an active role in shaping the causal succession of events, others seem to assume that God's actions in the world and in history are completely independent of humankind and have no connection with human conduct at all. The reason for punishment is explicitly stated in some passages, but in others it is not mentioned at all. Conditions are generally placed upon God's promise, but this is not always the case. The resolution of such antimonies involves dangers. For how can we avoid a subjective interpretation based on preconceived opinions? What authority should fill in the gaps in narratives and in our understanding? How far does epistemological agreement exist

[29] See *Mimesis*, 16–17.
[30] See *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 189.

between the different texts which deal with the same subject?

Some academics dispute that the distinction between knowledge of god(s) derived from nature is crucial to understanding the differences between ancient oriental peoples and Israel. It is now recognized that a belief in divine rule in history and in divine revelation through historical events was known to other nations.[31] Moreover, it is accepted that in all ancient cultures the perception of justice was based on the recognition of an unalterable divine authority or of cosmic justice and equity.[32] The consciousness of retribution as the primary law operating in the cosmic realm and in historical events seems to be especially universal. This does not, however, preclude an awareness that certain events or happenings are outside the law of retribution.[33] What then is distinct and unique in the Hebrew religion?

The characteristic beliefs of Israel on history, divine authority, justice and retribution derive from Israel's specific concept of God. As Bertil Albrektson commented:

> It goes without saying that the idea of a divine purpose in history must be rather

[31] See J. Barr, "Revelation Through History in the Old Testament and in Modern Theology," *Interpretation* 17 (1963), 193–205; idem, *Old and New in Interpretation: A Study of the Two Testaments* (London: SCM Press; New York: Harper & Row, 1966, 1982); B. Albrektson, *History and the Gods: An Essay on the Idea of Historical Events as Divine Manifestations in the Ancient Near East and in Israel* (CB.OT 1; Lund: Gleerup, 1967); J. J. M. Roberts, "Myth *Versus* History: Relaying the Comparative Foundations," *CBQ* 38 (1976), 1–13; H. W. F. Saggs, *The Encounter with the Divine in Mesopotamia and Israel* (JL; London: University of London / Athlone Press, 1978); H. Butterfield, *The Origins of History;* J. D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Biblie.* See also T. Longman, *Fictional Akkadian Autobiography: A Generic and Comparative Study* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1991); J. Assmann, *Stein und Zeit: Mensch und Gesellschaft im alten Ägypten* (Munich: W. Fink, 1991); idem, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1992). For evaluation of the relationship between Judaism and Hellenistic culture, see J. J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora* (New York: Crossroad, 1986).

[32] See J. A. Wilson, E. A. Speiser, H. G. Güterbock, I. Mendelsohn, D. H. H. Ingalls, and D. Bodde, *Authority and Law in the Ancient Orient* (JAOS.S 17; Baltimore, Md.: American Oriental Society, 1954); H. H. Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung: Hintergrund und Geschichte des alttestamentlichen Gerechtigkeitsbegriffes* (BHTh 40; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1968); H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus* (SCL 41; Berkeley / Los Angeles / London: University of California Press, 1971, 1983); E. A. Havelock, *The Greek Concept of Justice: From Its Shadow in Homer to Its Substance in Plato* (Cambridge, Mass. / London: Harvard University Press, 1978); F. M. Cornford, *From Religion to Philosophy: A Study in the Origins of Western Speculation* (2nd ed.; Sussex: Harvester Press, 1980); J. Assmann, *Ma'at: Gerechtigkeit und Unsterblichkeit im Alten Ägypten* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1990); J. Assmann, B. Janowski, and M. Welker (eds.), *Gerechtigkeit: Richten und Retten in der abendländischen Tradition und ihren altorientalischen Ursprüngen* (Munich: W. Fink, 1998).

[33] See the noteworthy remark by J. J. M. Roberts, *CBQ* 38 (1976), 6: "... the refusal of the Mesopotamians to attribute every alteration in the prosperity of a community to human freedom may be seen as evidence of a profoundly empirical view. Human folly is not the only cause for the decline of a community, and sometimes a community is powerless to control its own fate. The willingness to admit as much should not be taken as a less historical viewpoint than a dogmatism which attempts to explain the unexplainable in terms of sin and punishment."

> differently conceived in a polytheistic religion and in the Old Testament. Hebrew monotheism naturally does not allow of any ideas of rival plans and conflicting divine aims, but strongly enhances the tendency to a unitary perspective of history. But this is ultimately not so much a different understanding of history as a different conception of the deity; the basic difference concerns the idea of God and the possible difference in the view of the divine purpose in history is only a corollary. Perhaps it is also possible to assert that Old Testament historiography has sometimes a longer perspective and so a conception of a more distant aim for the divine activity, but this is certainly a difference in degree and not a basically different conception.[34]

The essential unity of the spheres of history and of the divine law derives from the Hebrew concept of God. This concept also explains why law and wisdom are so harmoniously integrated in the historical and prophetic literature, as well as within the Hebrew canon as a whole. The created world and the history of humankind are not two opposed but correlated spheres of God's activity. An essential unity too, therefore, exists in the knowledge derived from nature and historical interpretation. Historical events illustrate basic beliefs and moral principles.[35] To view the two spheres as being so directly and absolutely linked was only possible after the cosmic and collective-social religions of the great cultures had been superseded by a religion of absolute personalism. The overwhelming historical, literary and theological arch of the Hebrew Bible is, therefore, a perpetual challenge and inspiration for interpretation in all directions.[36]

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[34] See *History and the Gods*, 96.

[35] See R. Rendtorff, "Geschichtliches und weisheitliches Denken im Alten Testament," *Beiträge zur alttestamentlichen Theologie: Festschrift für Walther Zimmerli zum 70. Geburtstag* (ed. H. Donner, R. Hanhart, and R. Smend; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 344–353; J. Barton, "Natural Law and Poetic Justice in the Old Testament," *JThS*.NS 30 (1979), 1–14; idem, "Ethics in Isaiah of Jerusalem," *JThS*.NS 32 (1981), 1–18.

[36] The very nature of biblical documents focuses the interpreters on the relationship between history, literature and theology. See, for instance, recent publications on this issue in general and in relation to ancient Israel in particular: R. H. Canary and H. Kozicki (eds.), *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978); W. Zimmerli, "Wahrheit und Geschichte in der alttestamentlichen Schriftprophetie," *Congress Volume: Göttingen 1977* (ed. J. A. Emerton; VT.S 29; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978); J. van Seters, *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (New Haven / London: Yale University Press, 1983); R. E. Friedman (ed.), *The Poet and the Historian: Essays in Literary and Historical Biblical Criticism* (Chico, Cal.: Scholars Press, 1983); H. Tadmor and M. Weinfeld (eds.), *History, Historiography and Interpretation: Studies in Biblical and Cuneiform Literatures* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1983); G. Garbini, *Storia e ideologia nell'Israele Antico* (Brescia: Paideia, 1986); English translation by J. Bowden, *History and Ideology in Ancient Israel* (London: SCM Press, 1988); A. Cameron (ed.), *History As Text: The Writing of Ancient History* (London: Duckworth, 1989); N. P. Lemche, *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelite Society* (BibSem 5; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988); A. Rigney, *The Rhetoric of Historical Representation: Three Narrative Histories of the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); J. Clive, *Not By Fact Alone: Essays on the Writing and Reading of History* (London: Collins Harvill, 1990); K. L. Youner, Jr., *Ancient Conquest Accounts: A Study in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical History Writing* (JSOT.S 98; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990); N. P. Lemche, *The Ca-*

The view that history possesses an inner unity, and that there is a purposeful development of the world from its original creation to some undefined messianic or eschatological moment, is characteristic of biblical history. Characteristic too is the view that God's election and covenant forms the basis of the meaning of history. Furthermore, human beings can receive grace which is greater than they deserve. God's law must be consistently obeyed. Repentance must be shown. God's mercy and forgiveness is supreme. The Hebrew religion is therefore teleological and not archetypal in nature. The interlocking of these features explains why it is by definition a religion of a "testament." The law of recompense with the connected bless/ /curse alternative as well as the possibility of repentance after disobedience and apostasy and subsequent forgiveness and restoration (cf. Lev 26 and Deut 28 + 30:1–10) can be found only in the Hebrew religion.[37] The promi-

naanites and Their Land: The Tradition of the Canaanites (JSOT.S 110; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991); P. R. Davies, *In Search of 'Ancient Israel'* (JSOT.S 148; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992); G. W. Ahlström, *The Early History of Ancient Palestine from the Paleolithic Period to Alexander's Conquest* (ed. D. V. Edelman; JSOT.S 146; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993); T. L. Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People: From the Written and Archaeological Sources* (StHANE 6; Leiden / New York / Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1992, 1994); V. P. Long, *The Art of Biblical History* (FCI 5; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994); C. Westermann, *Die Geschichtsbücher des Alten Testaments: Gab es ein deuteronomistisches Geschichtswerk?* (ThB 87; Gütersloh: Kaiser, 1994); L. G. Perdue, *The Collapse of History: Reconstructing Old Testament Theology* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1994); C. Schäfer-Lichtenberger, *Josua und Salomo: Eine Studie zu Autorität und Legitimität des Nachfolgers im Alten Testament* (VT.S 58; Leiden / New York / Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1995); L. W. Provan, "Ideologies, Literary and Critical: Reflections on Recent Writing on the History of Israel," *JBL* 114 (1995), 585–606; W. Fields, *Old Testament History: An Overview of Sacred History & Truth* (Joplin, Mo.: College Press Publ., 1996); R. Albertz, *Israël construit son histoire: L'historiographie deuteronomiste à la lumière des recherches récentes* (ed. A. de Pury; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1996); F. Rapp, "Histoire et théologie," *RevSR* 70 (1996), 363–374; G. Essen, "Geschichte als Sinnproblem: Zum Verhältnis von Theologie und Historik," *ThPh* 71 (1996), 321–333; K. W. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (Lodnon: Routledge, 1996); N. A. Silberman and D. Small (eds.), *The Archaeology of Israel: Constructing the Past, Interpreting the Present* (JSOT.S 237; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997); L. L. Grabbe (ed.), *Can a 'History of Israel' Be Written?* (ESemHM 1; JSOT.S 245; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997); M. P. Graham, K. G. Hoglund, and S. L. McKenzie (eds.), *The Chronicler As Historian* (JSOT.S 238; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

[37] There is a number of studies devoted to the relationship between blessing and cursing in the Hebrew Bible and in other cultures of the ancient Near East: E. J. Pedersen, *Der Eid bei den Semiten in seinem Verhältnis zu verwandten Erscheinungen sowie die Stellung des Eides im Islam* (SGKIO 3; Strassburg: K. J. Trübner, 1914); idem, *Israel: Its Life and Culture,* 2 vols. (London: H. Milford; Copenhagen: V. Pio Branner, 1926), 411–452: "Sin and Curse"; S. Mowinckel, *Psalmenstudien, V: Segen und Fluch in Israels Kult und Psalmdichtung* (Kristiania: J. Dybwad, 1924; Amsterdam: P. Schippers, 1966); T. Canaan, "The Curse in Palestinian Folklore," *JPOS* 15 (1935), 235–279; J. Scharbert, *Solidarität im Segen und Fluch im Alten Testament und in seiner Umwelt* (BBB 14; Bonn: P. Hanstein, 1958); idem, "Fluchen und Segen im Alten Testament," *Biblica* 39 (1958), 1–26; F. C. Fensham, "Malediction and Benediction in Ancient Near Eastern Vassal-Treaties and the Old Testament," *ZAW* 74 (1962), 1–9; idem, "Common Trends in Curses of Near Eastern Treaties and Kudurru-Inscriptions Compared with Maledictions of Amos and Isaiah," *ZAW* 75 (1963), 155–175; H. C. Brichto, *The Problem of "Curse" in the Hebrew Bible* (SBLMS 13; Philadelphia, Pa.: Society of Biblical

nence of the law of retribution can be explained by the fact that its operation has the strongest affinity with the natural law of causality.[38]

The great surprise of the Bible, however, is the revelation of the divine law of mercy and reconciliation. This is the law of God's innermost thoughts, of his elemental love for his creation. The more universal and unitary the historical perspective, the more mysterious God's ways to humankind seem. It is only against this background that the validity of God's promise to Israel can be assessed. How are the law's penalties and the warnings of the prophets, which seem to suggest that Israel could be completely destroyed, to be reconciled with the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants, which promise continuity in the special relationship between God and his people whatever the vicissitudes of history may be (cf. Gen 15; 2 Sam 7:13b–16; Pss 89:29–38; 110:4; Jer 33:17–26, etc.)? Do God's promise and God's law contradict each other?[39]

Literature and Exegesis, 1963); D. R. Hillers, *Treaty-Curse and the Old Testament Prophets* (BibOr 16; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1964); C. Westermann, *Der Segen in der Bibel und im Handeln der Kirche* (Munich: C. Kaiser, 1968); W. Schottroff, *Der altisraelitische Fluchspruch* (WNANT 30; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969); G. Wehmeier, *Der Segen im Alten Testament: Eine semasiologische Untersuchung der Wurzel* brk (Basel: F. Reinhardt, 1970); D. Vetter, *Jahwes Mit-Sein: Ein Ausdruck des Segens* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1971); D. J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant* (AnBib 21A; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978); L. Mazor, "The Origin and Evaluation of the Curse upon the Rebuilder of Jericho: A Contribution of Textual Criticism to Biblical Historiography," *Textus* 14 (1988), 1–26; J. D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*; T. Longman, *Fictional Akkadian Autobiography: A Generic and Comparative Study* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1991), 53–77: "Fictional Akkadian Autobiography with a Blessing and/or a Curse Ending." In spite of the abundance of this type of bibliography the fact that the possibility of reform and restoration comes to the fore only in the Bible (cf. esp. Lev 26:40–45; Deut 30:1–10) is rarely or never noticed and evaluated.

[38] See H. Kelsen, *Vergeltung und Kausalität: Eine soziologische Untersuchung* (The Hague: W. P. van Stockum & Zoon; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941); idem, *Society and Nature: A Sociological Inquiry* (ILSSR; London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1946, 1974), 49–185: "The Interpretation of Nature according to the Principle of Retribution"; 186–232: "The Idea of Retribution in Greek Religion"; 233–248: "The Law of Causality and the Principle of Retribution in the Greek Philosophy of Nature"; idem, *What is Justice? Justice, Law, and Politics in the Mirror of Science* (Berkeley / Los Angeles / London: University of California Press, 1957, 1971), 303–323: "Causality and Retribution"; L. L. Weinred, *Natural Law and Justice* (Cambridge / London: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[39] For related discussion, see especially M. Tsevat, "Studies in the Book of Samuel: III. The Steadfast House: What Was David Promised in II Sam. 7:11b–16?," *HUCA* 34 (1963), 71–82; D. McCarthy, "II Samuel 7 and the Structure of the Deuteronomic History," *JBL* 84 (1965), 131–38; M. Weinfeld, "The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East," *JAOS* 90 (1970), 184–203; F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Mass. / London: Harvard University Press, 1973), 217–289: "IV. Kings and Prophets"; J. D. Levenson, "Who inserted the Book of the Torah?," *HThR* 68 (1975), 203–233; idem, "On the Promise to the Rechabites," *CBQ* 38 (1976), 508–514; idem, *Theology of the Program of Restoration of Ezekiel 40–48* (HSMS 10; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press for Harvard Semitic Museum, 1976), 129–158; idem, "The Davidic Covenant and Its Modern Interpreters," *CBQ* 41 (1979), 205–219; idem, *Sinai and Zion*, 97–101; J. Bright, *Covenant and Promise* (London: SCM Press, 1977); R. Youngblood, "The Abrahamic Covenant: Conditional or Unconditional?," *The Living and Active Word of God: Studies in Honor of Samuel J. Schultz* (ed. M. Inch and R. Youngblood; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 31–46; A. P. Stauderman, *Words of Warning and Forgiveness: A Study in*

The key to understanding this antimony is the recognition that it is God's grace which motivates all his actions, including punishment. A saying of Rabbi Akiba illuminates this point: "In divine goodness the world is judged, yet all is according to the amount of man's deeds" (*Babylonian Talmud, Aboth* 3:15). The ultimate destruction of individuals but not of whole nations is envisaged. This interpretation must, in the final analysis, be anchored in the text of the relevant passages. Any examination of this kind must take into account the genre, the multiple layers of the texts, changes of emphasis, as well as literary-rhetorical devices, the operation of double—i.e., divine and human—causality in historical events,[40] the plurality of moments in an individual's moral life,[41] and the survival of a righteous minority.

The acceptance of the unitary teleological perspective of history is crucial to an interpretation of those biblical passages which are obscure or ambiguous. Seen in isolation, quite a number of narratives, oracles and psalms and other genres could be interpreted equally easily in a polytheistic or monotheistic manner. It is the canonical framework which indicates that they form part of a monotheistic living tradition and may, therefore, possess multiple foreground and background meaning. In this framework, even the Song of Songs with its "naturalistic" figurative foreground can be seen as an allegory of the love between God and his people. Only from the entire perspective of universal sacred history do the most important issues in the Bible become apparent: God's absolute authority and human absolute obedience.

Exegesis can therefore be seen to be determined by the dynamic interaction and interdependence of three factors. These are, the text with its literary features, the state of the interpreter's mind and emotions, as well as epistemological factors. A reader/interpreter confronted with a text spontaneously displays all his knowledge of the basic meaning. A further inner-textual examination may help to resolve some problems, even though it might also reveal textual and inner-textual conflicts of a much greater magnitude. These include problems concerning the variety of authors, periods, circumstances, socio-historical modes, and generic or thematic requirements; a variety of genres and a corresponding range in styles of presentation; evidence of extra-biblical material incorporated within biblical passages and the presence of mixed genres *(Mischgattungen).* Although no reader, confronted with biblical texts, can fail to respond, the response may range from irrational sympathy or even antipathy to the characters, to awe or despair; creative artists may even draw inspiration from the depths of life—humankind's and God's—which are revealed in the Bible.

Five Old Testament Prophets (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1993).

[40] See I. L. Seeligmann, "Menschliches Heldentum und göttliche Hilfe: Die doppelte Kausalität im alttestamentlichen Geschichtsdenken," *ThZ* 19 (1963), 385–411.

[41] See J. D. Levenson, "Who Inserted the Book of the Torah?," esp. p. 233.

To answer the question of how the epistemological gaps are to be filled in and how obscure passages are to be clarified, we can draw on modern academic studies as well as the whole exegetical tradition of Jews and Christians. The presentation of biblical themes in classical literature should also be taken into account, since these also shed light on the depths of the Bible's dimensions. Research into the fundamental themes within the whole panorama of interpretation down the vistas of history leads to surprising conclusions: the more massive the heritage, the clearer the inner unity of the Jewish-Christian religious tradition emerges and the more compelling the evidence in its favour. No one method alone can, therefore, be considered normative, and no results of any exegesis can ever be seen as definitive. Exegesis can never be a pure science, but is more like art because of its mixed sources of knowledge.

PART ONE

THE PENTATEUCH (TORAH)

The narratives of the Pentateuch reflect the conviction that God is the Lord of history who created the world, and who has given his blessing to all nations while entering into a special relationship with the people of Israel. The themes of human sin and of divine punishment are prominent, but forgiveness nevertheless emerges as the most important mark of God's attitude to the humankind. The dialogue in Gen 18:16–33 forms a special mode of reflection on God's justice, as exemplified in God's impending judgment on Sodom.

The clash between God and the Pharaoh, which results in the punishment of the plagues, unfolds the theological background of the liberation of Israel from Egyptian slavery. The apostasy and reconciliation at Sinai (Exod 32–34) mark the moment when Hebrew monotheism became final and supreme. The complex issue of collective punishment is introduced in the credo formula (Exod 20:5–6 and parallels). Declaration on rewards for obedience, penalties for disobedience, and on restoration and renewal for submitting to reform in Lev 26 and Deut 28 + 30:1–10, clarify the nature of reward, punishment, and forgiveness in the framework of the Covenant and the Law. Deuteronomy serves as a commentary for future generations on how to approach the law and envisages the greatest reward and the truest renewal in the shape of the Promised Land.

The narratives and declarations contain many epistemological gaps which raise serious questions about the issues of reward, punishment, and forgiveness: Why is the actual punishment inflicted sometimes not in accordance with the original threat of punishment, but even milder? For what reasons did God reject Cain's offering? (Gen 4:5). Is God's promise after the Flood, "I will never again curse the ground because of man," conditional or not? Why did Abraham cease to plead to God that Sodom should be saved when the number of the hypothetically righteous inhabitants had been whittled down to ten? Why not one? And what is the cause of disobedience? How, for example, is the claim that the Pharaoh "hardened his heart" to be reconciled with the apparently contradictory claim that God "hardened Pharaoh's heart"? How is the credo formula concerning collective recompense in Exod 20:5–6; 34:5–6 to be understood? Is the complete destruction of a disobedient people implied in the warnings in Lev 26:14–39 and Deut 28:15–68?

CHAPTER I

PUNISHMENT AND MERCY IN THE PRIMEVAL HISTORY (Gen 1–11)

The narratives of Gen 1–11 are of immense theological importance. In them we see presented, in dramatic form, scenes from the story of humankind's original aberration and God's punishment, a story which, however, does not lead inexorably to a final condemnation. Naturally we cannot hope to present a detailed or comprehensive treatment of all the individual texts. Instead, our research will be limited to an examination of the relationship between human guilt on the one hand and divine response on the other.

A number of fundamental questions arise immediately: Must we interpret the passages that deal with this relationship literally? From what standpoint or on what basis can we approach these chapters if we are to uncover their deepest theological meaning? And can we, without any hesitation, take on board certain presumptions that are evident from the broader biblical context, or even such as follow from basic common sense?

Concerning the development of these biblical narratives a great variety of exegetical opinions can be invoked from past scholarship.[1] Nevertheless, it

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[1] Among commentaries and studies, see especially F. Delitzsch, *Commentar über die Genesis* (Leipzig: Dörflin & Franke, 1872); A. Dillmann, *Die Genesis* (KEH; 4th ed.; Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1886); E. König, *Die Genesis* (3rd ed.; Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1925); P. Heinisch, *Das Buch Genesis* (HSAT I/1; Bonn: P. Hanstein, 1930); J. Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (ICC; 2nd ed.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930); B. Jacob, *Das erste Buch der Tora: Genesis* (Berlin: Schocken, 1934); C. A. Simpson, *The Book of Genesis* (IntB 1; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1952), 439–829; U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1961); H. Gunkel, *Genesis* (HK 1/1; 8th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969); G. H. Davis, *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, vol. 1 (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1970); G. von Rad, *Das erste Buch Mose: Genesis* (ATD 2/4; 11th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981); English translation by J. H. Marks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (OTL; 4th impr.; London: SCM Press, 1979); C. Westermann, *Genesis*, vol. 1 (BK.AT I/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1974); English translation by J. J. Scullion, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary* (London: SPCK, 1984); E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (AB 1; 3th ed.; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1982); J. G. Murphy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Genesis, with a New Translation* (repr. of 1873 ed.; Buffalo, N.Y.: Hein, 1986); R. S. Hess and D. R. Tsumura (eds.), *"I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood": Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11* (SBThS 4; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1994); A. G. Zornberg, *Genesis: The Beginning of Desire* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Jewish Publication Society, 1995); B. J. Stratton, *Out of Eden: Reading, Rhetoric and Ideology in Genesis 2–3* (JSOT.S 208; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26* (NAC 1A; Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 1995); R. Alter, *Genesis* (New York / London: Norton, 1996); D. U. Rottzoll, "Die Schöpfungs- und Fallerzählung in Gen 2f.: Teil 1: Die Fallerzählung (Gen 3)," *ZAW* 109 (1997), 481–499; J. A. Soggin, *Das Buch Genesis: Kommentar* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1997); H. Lütten, *Mein Herz schlägt für Kain: Genesis 1–11 für Menschen unserer Zeit* (Stuttgart: Radius, 1997).

is by now generally held that, although Genesis comprises Yahwistic, Elohistic, and Priestly sources, the definitive text for purposes of a theological interpretation is that of the present synthesis which is the work of an editor of a comparatively late period.[2] Moreover, many exegetes are agreed that the primeval history must be assessed in two directions: looking towards the future in the direction of the history of Israel, and looking back to the past in the direction of prehistory.[3] The etiological method of searching for links or causes leading back even to creation produces far-reaching consequences in both directions.[4] And it is here, we believe, that the polarity between punishment and mercy can most fruitfully be investigated.

1. *Punishment Proves Milder Than Was Threatened Before the Fall (2:4b–3:24)*

Criteria of theme and style testify that the passage 2:4b–3:24 must have had a long history of growth from smaller, individual narrative units to its final shape. What is immediately evident is that it contains two separate narratives: A (2:4b–25) and B (3:1–24). In narrative A the subject is almost exclusively God; in narrative B it is God and humans. Proper comprehension of these sections depends on understanding the work of the Yahwist, who combined the separate units into a single whole with a thematic sequence: the creation of Adam and Eve, their sin, and their punishment. Here the communal nature of creation and sin must not be overlooked: man was not created alone but together with his wife; sin is not the action of one person but of both.

The Yahwist not only united the narratives, but combined them into a fresh unit determined by the relationship between God and humans: God provides suitable conditions for life and creates human beings; he sets the first generation in a special garden where special trees grow; he forbids man to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; he creates man's companion, woman; under the influence of the serpent, man and woman sin; God calls them to account and pronounces punishment on the serpent, the woman, and the man; the human pair is driven out of the Garden of Eden. The basic scheme of prohibition / trespass / punishment is reminiscent of

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[2] See C. Westermann, *Genesis,* vol. 1, and D. J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (JSOT.S 10; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978, 1989), esp. pp. 61–79; idem, "Theme in Genesis 1–11," R. S. Hess and D. R. Tsumura (eds.), *"I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood,"* 285–309.

[3] See C. Westermann, *Genesis,* vol. 1, 1–103: "Einleitung zur Urgeschichte Genesis 1–11"; 752–806: "Entstehung und theologische Bedeutung der Urgeschichte."

[4] G. von Rad is particularly noted for emphasizing the amount of etiology in Hebrew historical writing. On the basis of such facts as catastrophes, suffering, etc., authors ask about causes, most frequently arriving at the conclusion that the end state is the result of God's punishment for human iniquity. See F. Golka, "Zur Erforschung der Ätiologien im Alten Testament," *VT* 20 (1970), 90–98; 26 (1976), 410–428.

standard judicial procedure, but the passage contains theology as well as law. The sequence of prohibition / trespass / punishment does not occur in vacuo, nor in accordance with the principles of universal law, but within the direct relationship between God and man: God declares his prohibition in direct dialogue with man; he himself discovers the guilt and in direct confrontation he interrogates and punishes man.

The starting point for the dialectics of the relationship between God and humans is the divine prohibition in 2:16–17:

> You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall certainly die.

What does the tree of the knowledge of good and evil signify? The history of exegesis offers us a spectrum of opinions, with the moral explanation dominant. A knowledge of good and evil could, for example, signify the ability to differentiate between good and bad. But such explanations do not explain why the prohibition is associated with the risk of death. Intentionally or otherwise they lead to the conclusion that God demands obedience of humans without an appropriate reason,[5] and the forbidden tree assumes the character of a taboo.[6]

Is not all this, however, contrary to the fundamental postulates of belief in the Hebrew Bible? Hebrew theologians are always searching for the profoundest of rational explanations of their belief in, and obedience to, God. Admitting the incomprehensibility of divine activity does not mean the negation of human rationality. On the contrary, it implies recognizing a higher rationality that has ceased to be entirely accessible to human comprehension and expression, limited as they are. Biblical representatives are prepared to accept the demand for undivided obedience only after they have clarified the basic question about God. God, to them, must mean the incontestable Lord of the world and of their own personal life. This presumption is more than evident in the passage under consideration. Hence the prohibition backed with the threat of death must be concerned with the very essence of the relationship between God and human beings.

Numerous examples of the pair *ṭwb* and *r'*, 'good' and 'evil,' elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible offer us sufficient basis for the surmise that the words are an example of the stylistic device of merism and mean "everything."[7]

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[5] See H. Gunkel, *Genesis,* 10: "Jedenfalls werden dem Menschen die Gründe nicht mitgeteilt: er soll ohne Grund gehorchen; ebenso Abraham beim Auszug und bei Isaaqs Opferung: kindlicher Gehorsam."

[6] See C. Westermann, *Genesis,* vol. 1, 305, with the comment: "Dem tabu entspricht es auch, daß es rational nicht zu begründen ist."

[7] Cf. Gen 3:5, 22; 2 Sam 14:17; Qoh 12:14. In Gen 31:24, 29 the same pair designates "nothing," while in Num 24:13 and Jer 42:6 "anything"; and in Gen 24:50 and 2 Sam 13:22 (in the reverse order) "nothing."

"Knowledge of good and evil means, therefore, omniscience in the widest sense of the word."[8] This is the only interpretation of these paired concepts that explains the sense of the prohibition and the fatal consequences of transgression, as well as supplying a background for the explanation by the serpent in 3:5: "When you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." The "omniscience" explanation is also hinted at in 6:1–4 and 11:1–9. Human fatal sin is a tendency to overreach the boundaries defined for him by God the Creator. It is thus quite proper that God should warn humans of the danger attending their freedom whilst creating them. Humans are allowed to exist only within the framework of their own limitations. If they do not acknowledge these, they are bound to undermine the foundations of life and to accept the option of death. In the event, however, Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, but God did not act as he had threatened, preferring a more lenient punishment. How can we explain this inconsistency?[9]

A solution to the puzzle is only possible if, in interpreting the divine threat and the actual punishment, we take into consideration not only the relationship between threat and punishment, but also the conditions on the human side. And this is the fundamental reason why the prohibition of eating from a certain tree should not be seen as a taboo. The fundamental postulates of Hebrew monotheism indicate that the threat of death in this context must be relative rather than absolute: Humans will die only if they consciously and wickedly resist God, because, if they apostatize completely, the conditions for mercy no longer exist and the threat of death becomes a reality.

It is obvious that the fall of Adam and Eve is not something that deserves death, for its cause is human weakness rather than obdurate wickedness. The account of the sin provides sufficient grounds for this supposition. The instigation for the sin comes from elsewhere: the woman is the victim of the serpent's guile;[10] the man follows her example. When the sin has been commit-

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[8] See G. von Rad, *Genesis,* 81. H. S. Stern, "'The Knowledge of Good and Evil,'" *VT* 8 (1958), 405–418, does not see the pair as meristic. W. M. Clark, "A Legal Background to the Yahwist's Use of 'Good and Evil' in Genesis 2–3," *JBL* 88 (1969), 266–278, raises objections to the meristic interpretation of G. von Rad.

[9] C. Westermann, *Genesis,* vol. 1, 306, uses the expression "Inkonsequenz" with the comment that God's activity cannot be determined even by his own earlier word. If his commands are disobeyed, a new situation arises in which God proceeds differently. H. Gunkel, *Genesis,* 10, considers that our writer assumes God's remorse at the threat he had expressed and his special mercy.

[10] See H. Gunkel, *Genesis,* 16: "In kindlicher, gutgläubiger Harmlosigkeit steht das junge, unerfahrene Weib vor ihr; es ahnt nicht, wie verderblich die Worte der bösen Schlange sind: das Symbol kindlich-dumpfer Unschuld und schlauer Verführung neben einander." It is surprising that R. W. L. Moberly does not take into account this fact as a mitigating circumstance in his study "Did the Serpent Get Right," *JThS* 39 (1988), 1–27, even though he convincingly states on p. 18: "The serpent's words to the woman are a brilliant portrayal of the psychology of temptation. The woman's trust in the goodness of God's prohibition is subtly undermined until the way of life and fulfilment appears to lie in disobedience." He asserts "that human disobedi-

ted, Adam and Eve realize their guilt, become aware of their nakedness, and hide from God. Nowhere is there anything to contradict the supposition that they repented of their deed. The man's reply: "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate" (3:12), and the woman's: "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate" (3:13) are not necessarily an expression of the self-justification of completely alienated human beings. Is it not rather an example of the way human beings tend to act after major aberrations: a recognition of guilt, an experience of shame, and an inclination to hide? The narrative is consistent with the psychology of the human soul.

The gravity of the offence is reflected in the gravity of the punishment, and the sequence of the punishment matches the sequence of the sin. It is important to note that Adam and Eve are not directly condemned, as are the serpent and the earth. God first curses the serpent:

> Because you have done this, cursed are you above all cattle, and above all wild animals; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel (3:14–15).

And the penalty for the woman reads:

> I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you (3:16).

The sin of Adam leads to his sentence:

> Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, "You shall not eat of it," cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return (3:17–19).[11]

The punishment meted out to wife and man is severe but not catastrophic. Even banishment from the Garden of Eden is not tragic, although it signifies separation from friendship with God. There is some promise of future victory, linked to the woman; God makes both of them garments of skins and clothes them (3:21); and upon banishment from the Garden of Eden, man is given the divine command to till the ground (3:23). Thus God does not

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ence to God's explicit prohibition, as in Gen. 3, is not the kind of human response that could ever modify a word of judgment or lead God to repent of what he had said ..." (p. 12); "... it is difficult to see what the mitigating circumstances might be" (p. 13, n. 30).

[11] As H. Gunkel points out convincingly in *Genesis*, 20: "Die Sünde geht von der Schlange aus, über das Weib, zum Manne; die Untersuchung vom Mann über das Weib zur Schlange; die Verfluchung setzt bei dem Hauptschuldigen ein, der Schlange, und geht dann zum Weib und zum Manne ..."

merely spare the two from instant death, but also points to the purpose of life and to the future. This is an expression of God's mercy towards frail man, who has fallen heavily but still counts on him, hoping for his forbearance. God remains the absolute master of human history—the sign of hope for the human race. His promise of victory over the offspring of the serpent therefore found the strongest echo in the souls of later generations, particularly within the framework of Christianity, growing as it did from the Easter experience of Christ's victory over death.

2. *Why Does God Protect Cain despite His Fratricide? (4:1–16)*

This is not an isolated passage but a constituent part of the whole of the primeval history in which the Yahwist continues the Adam and Eve narrative. The framework is provided by the Yahwist family tree in 4:1–2 and 4:17–26, so that in 2:4b–4:26 we find an outline of history from the creation of Adam and Eve to Enosh. The Priestly source follows a similar pattern: 1:1–2:4a contains the story of creation and continues with a genealogy in 5:1–32, thus covering history from the creation to Noah and his sons.

The story of Cain and Abel is in fact the story of Cain and amounts to an exceptional enlargement of one element in the family tree (vv. 3–16). In its thematic and structural aspects the narrative is similar to that of chapter 3: the crime (v. 8), face to face interrogation (vv. 9–10), the curse pronounced (vv. 11–12), alleviation of punishment (vv. 13–15), and banishment (vv. 14 and 16). The starting point of the passage is the story of the offerings:

> In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell (vv. 3–5).

Here the reader inevitably comes up against the question of why God rejected Cain's offerings, whilst accepting those of Abel. At least three reasons can be adduced: the divine prerogative; the discrepant quality of the offerings; and the evil or good intentions of the offerers. Throughout the history of exegesis, commentators have come to differing conclusions. Those favouring the first or second explanation tend to emphasize that the passage is not concerned with the intentions or qualities of the offerers.[12] It is not surprising that a re-

[12] See H. Gunkel, *Genesis*, 43: "Die gewöhnliche Meinung, Gott habe auf die Gesinnung der Opfernden gesehen (so schon Hbr 11,4), wird von der Sage nicht geteilt, die von Abels größerer Frömmigkeit bisher kein Wort gesagt hat ... Jahve liebt den Schafhirten und das Fleischopfer, aber er will nichts wissen von dem Bauern und dem Opfer von Früchten." See G. von Rad, *Das erste Buch Mose*, 76–77; English translation, *Genesis*, 104–105. On p. 104 we read: "Writers have looked diligently for the basis of this preference, but it lies neither in the ritual nor in Cain's attitude. Nothing of that kind is indicated. The only clue one can find in the

jection of the third explanation (the nature of the offerers' intentions) is coupled with a tendency to excuse Cain's reaction. Some exegetes think that Cain's wrath was normal and justified, since he was disregarded without any apparent reason; he is merely insisting on his rights.[13]

When the problem is assessed at a human level, such conclusions may be fairly convincing. But the question is whether humans can judge God on the basis of their own beliefs. Given the postulates of Hebrew monotheism, how could God reject human beings without a reason? The answer is that humans often cannot comprehend God's reasons, but this does not mean they are free to vent their wrath whenever God fails to match their expectations. On the contrary, as humans are aware that the absolute, supreme ruler of the world cannot err, the explanation must surely be that the problem lies within himself, and his own possible guilt—a fact that calls for patient acceptance. The classical example of such restraint is to be found in Lamentations: amidst the ruins of Jerusalem the people accuse themselves, not God, who is merciful when the covenant people humbly bow before the severity of their punishment and are content to wait.[14]

Thus Cain's wrath casts doubt on the purity of his intentions in making an offering. God's admonition is relevant:

> Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it (vv. 6–7).

Verse 7 is textually very problematic, but the basic meaning of the admonition is clear enough: it is a criticism of Cain's anger, which is unjustified.[15]

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narrative is that the sacrifice of blood was more pleasing to Yahweh. Obviously the narrator wants to remove the acceptance of the sacrifice from man and place it completely within God's free will. He refrains from making the decision for Abel and against Cain logically comprehensible ..." See also C. Westermann, *Genesis*, vol. 1, 403.

[13] See C. Westermann, *Genesis*, vol. 1, 405: "In der Erzählung ist die Reaktion Kains normal und berechtigt; er ist der ohne Grund Benachteiligte, Zurückgesetzte. Das Entbrennen und das Sich-Verschließen ist die dementsprechende Reaktion." On p. 406 Westermann claims: "Es ist also nicht der eigentlich schon immer böse Kain, in dem es entbrennt und dessen Gesicht sich senkt, es ist der zurückgesetzte, der benachteiligte Bruder, dem es um Gerechtigkeit geht."

[14] Cf. Lam 3:22–33.

[15] Targum Onqelos translates the admonition very freely, seeing it as a call to reform for the iniquity to be forgiven. See English translation in M. Aberbach and B. Grossfeld, *Targum Onkelos to Genesis* (Denver: Ktav, 1982), 40: "Surely if you will improve your deeds, you will be forgiven; but if you will not improve your deeds, (your) sin will be kept for the day of judgement when punishment will be exacted of you, if you will not repent; but if you will repent, you will be forgiven." See also English translation of Palestinian Targum in M. L. Klein, *Genizah Manuscripts of Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch*, vol. 1 (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1986), [6]: "Why, if you improve your deeds in this world, it will be pardoned and remitted for you in the world to come; but if you do not improve your deeds in this world, your sin will be preserved for the Day of Judgement. Indeed sin crouches at the gate of your heart; but I have placed in your hand control over the evil inclination, and you shall rule over it, whether for better or for worse."

Because the admonition comes from the highest divine authority, Cain should take heed "in fear and trembling." Yet he does the exact opposite:

> Cain said to Abel his brother, "Let us go out to the field." And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him (v. 8).

After the storm of anger, the divine warning, the cold-blooded fratricide, can Cain's cause really be defended?[16] How can a righteous man turn into his brother's murderer in the twinkling of an eye? After all this, does not the view that Cain was justifiably angry because God rejected his offering amount to arguing that he was justified in killing his brother?

Exegetes have tended to assume Abel's righteousness and Cain's wickedness even before any offering was made. In this respect Palestinian Targums and Toseftot are especially noteworthy. The Genizah manuscript of the Palestinian Targum contains the following expansion of v. 8:

> And Cain said to his brother Abel: Come let us both go out to the open field; and when they had both gone out to the open field, [Cain] spoke up and said to Abel: I have observed that the world was created with partiality, and it is conducted with partiality; for what reason was your offering received from you with favor, and mine was not received with favor. Abel then began and said to Cain. How can it be that the world was created with partiality, and is conducted with partiality? Rather, it is conducted according to the fruits of good deeds. Because my deeds were better than yours, my offering was received from me with favor, and yours was not received with favor. And they were both arguing in the open field; and Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.[17]

In the New Testament Abel is seen as the exemplar of the righteous man and Cain as the typical evil-doer. Their offerings are judged in the same way (Matt 23:35; 1 John 3:12; Heb 11:4; 12:24). The antithesis righteous // wicked is also characteristic of late Jewish exegesis[18] and dominates in patristic and later Christian explanations. More recent commentators often suppose that the reason for the rejection of Cain's offerings must lie in his motives. As proof of this they point to Cain's reactions to reproof which end in fratricide.[19]

After the crime has been perpetrated God immediately confronts Cain

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[16] See J. Skinner, *Genesis,* 106: "This does not imply that his previous state of mind had been bad."

[17] See M. L. Klein, *Genizah Manuscripts of Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch,* vol. 1, [6].

[18] See V. Aptowitzer, *Kain und Abel in der Agada, den Apokryphen, der hellenistischen, christlichen und muhammedanischen Literatur* (Vienna: R. Löwit, 1922).

[19] See A. Dillmann, *Die Genesis,* 93: "... Die Hauptsache ist, daß der Mensch, wenn er sich von Gott verschmäht oder zurückgesetzt findet, darum noch nicht grollen darf, auch nicht auf den Menschen ... Er beweist eben dadurch, daß sein Geist schon vorher nicht in der richtigen Verfassung war." See also E. König, *Die Genesis,* 282–283. P. Heinisch, *Das Buch Genesis,* 144, states: "Daß Jahwe das Opfer Abels mit Wohlgefallen annahm, nicht aber das Opfer Kains, lag nicht an dem Wert der Gabe, sondern an der Gesinnung der Opfernden." U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis,* vol. 1, 207, argues: "... Our passage reflects the view that sacrifices are acceptable only if an acceptable spirit inspires them."

with a demand: "Where is Abel your brother?" Cain answers with an outright lie: "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" (v. 9). God then emphasizes the gravity of the crime and prescribes the penalty:

> What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground *(mīn-hā'ădāmāh).* And now you are cursed from the ground *(mīn--hā'ădāmāh),* which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the ground *('et-hā'ădāmāh),* it shall no longer yield to you its strength; you shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth (vv. 10–12).

The word 'ground' appears three times in the text. Something unprecedented has happened. The ground has drunk human blood shed by the victim's brother and the blood cries out from the ground to God. The killer is therefore placed under a curse and his doom is evident in that he must leave the land which will no longer yield him crops.

The punishment is severe and the curse affects Cain himself, in contrast to the Adam and Eve story. It demonstrates the profound truth confirmed by basic human sentiment and experience throughout history. The cry of the ground that has drunk innocent human blood cannot be suppressed; the murderer can find no place of rest; and his work is destined to fail utterly. Bloody revolutions clearly demonstrate this inexorable condemnation by the righteousness of God. Their first effects are perhaps enviable, but the curse that passed on all such upheavals is thus rendered even more harsh. Murder, for which the basic motive and driving force is falsehood, must inevitably end in agony.

Why does the curse laid on Cain not result in an instant sentence of death? This is the greatest puzzle in the whole story. However, some speculation is possible. First of all, there are reasons of principle. Divine punishment is hardly ever fatal, for its aim is not death but penitence. There seems to be room in Cain's case for the grace of penitence, the aim of which is life. His response to the divine sentence runs:

> My punishment is greater than I can bear *(gādôl 'ăwônî minnĕśō').* Behold, thou hast driven me this day away from the ground; and from thy face I shall be hidden; and I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will slay me (vv. 13–14).

How is the first sentence of his complaint to be understood? Commentators are divided. Many think that Cain links his complaint to the judgment passed on him, protesting that the divine punishment is too much for him to bear. The word *'āwôn* thus means 'punishment' and Cain's complaint is a plea that it be more lenient. Others think *'āwôn* signifies 'sin, guilt' and consequently Cain's cry means: "My guilt is too great to be forgiven." The Targum Onqelos, the Septuagint, and the Vulgate[20] all translate the text in this

[20] See U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis,* vol. 1, 222: "Nahmanides gives the correct interpretation: 'My iniquity is too great to be forgiven.' Cain's heart is now filled

manner. Another explanation sees the word *'āwôn* as encapsulating both concepts, that of guilt and that of punishment.[21]

The very existence of these differing opinions suggests that extremes should be avoided here. The context shows that they do not differ essentially in their assessment of the consequences of sparing Cain's life or of his destruction. In each case Cain admits his guilt and the justice of punishment, in that God is recognized as the Highest Judge. When Cain becomes aware of the gravity of his offence, and realizes that he no longer has any protection for his own life, it is to that Judge that he looks for his only possible protection. Thus God's reply: "Not so! If any one slays Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold" (v. 15a) is no longer unexpected, nor is what follows: "And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest any who came upon him should kill him" (v. 15b). God therefore confirms his decision to leave Cain alive. In addition, the reply shows clearly enough that God reserves to himself the right of judgment over murderers.[22] Finally, God's protection can also be seen as a response to Cain's complaint, which is perhaps in essence an expression of his sorrow and guilt. Hence, despite its terribleness, the story of Cain is at the same time an assurance that God will protect even evil-doers if they acknowledge their guilt and turn to him for assistance. What is most clearly shown by the story of Cain is that for humankind, living between guilt and punishment, life and death, the divine mercy is inexhaustible, and that penance and punishment are God's method of preparing the way for forgiveness.

3. *The Unrepeatable Punishment of the Flood (6:1–4 + 6:5–8:22)*

The first four verses of chapter 6 are a Yahwistic report of what might be

with remorse; he realizes the enormity of his crime, and accepts the judgment."

[21] See C. Westermann, *Genesis*, vol. 1, 420–421.

[22] In this connection it is worth drawing attention to Lamech's saying in 4:23–24:

> Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;
> You wives of Lamech's, hearken to what I say:
> I have slain a man for wounding me,
> a young man for striking me.
> If Cain is avenged sevenfold,
> truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold.

In 4:15 "sevenfold" evidently symbolizes a large number. Thus, in 4:24 "seventy-sevenfold" represents an unlimited number. Lamech is proclaiming that his revenge is boundless even for a simple wound. His threat of revenge applies to anyone, for the pair man/boy are very probably a merism for the designation of the abstract notions of "each, anyone." See J. Krašovec, *Der Merismus im Biblisch-Hebräischen und Nordwestsemitischen* (BibOr 33; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1977), 57–58. Thus it is even more understandable why God sets up and strongly emphasizes limits to human revenge.

called a curious aberration and are not part of the Flood narrative. As the editor placed it immediately before the Yahwist and Priestly report on the Flood (6:5–8:22), it casts its shadow—whether we like it or not—over the sentence:

> The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually (6:5).

God's decision to wipe out human life finds its reasons here.

The main point of section 6:1–4 is the guilt of the "sons of God" when they saw "that the daughters of men were fair; and they took to wife such of them as they chose" (v. 2). The "sons of God," not given any more detailed description, are burdened by a threefold guilt: of reaching into domains beyond their proper limits (i.e., the degradation of their kind); of exploiting their superior position in order to indulge their lust; and of doing violence (cf. *ḥāmās* in 6:11, 13).[23] This uncontrolled mixing of human and superhuman creatures leads to the destruction of the order designed by God the Creator. The Yahwist sees in this miscegenation the origin of giants (v. 4). He thus faces a phenomenon whose very existence contradicts the methods by which God rules the world.[24]

God responds by passing his own judgment, though the sentence does not affect the "sons of God," the prime offenders, but only humankind: "My spirit shall not abide in man for ever, for he is flesh, but his days shall be a hundred and twenty years" (v. 3).[25] The passage remains an enigma. In particular, why is the judgment of punishment thought appropriate only for man? Despite this puzzle the fundamental sense of the punishment is clear: creatures that have gone beyond their own limits, thereby committing the greater sin, find God inexorably defining appropriate bounds for them. At the same time, God removes his spirit from man, defining his period of existence. One hundred and twenty years is a number that should probably be

[23] The triple guilt is clear even if the designation the "sons of God" does not mean superhuman creatures, but human beings in power. Some interpreters think that the "sons of God" are dynastic rulers or demigods. See M. G. Kline, "Divine Kingship and Genesis 6:1–4," *WThJ* 24 (1962), 187–204; F. Dexinger, *Sturz der Göttersöhne oder Engel vor der Sintflut?* (Vienna: Herder, 1966); P. D. Hanson, "Rebellion in Heaven, Azazel, and Euhemeristic Heroes in 1 Enoch 6–11," *JBL* 96 (1977), 195–233; R. S. Hendel, "Of Demigods and the Deluge: Toward an Interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4," *JBL* 106 (1987), 13–26.

[24] The expression *nĕpilîm* for "giants" is only encountered elsewhere in Num 13:33 and possibly Ezek 32:27. See also the expression *rĕpā'îm* in Deut 2:20; 3:11 and *'ănāqîm* in Deut 2:21. Cf. also Ezek 32:21, 27; Amos 2:9.

[25] The translation draws on the text in the Septuagint, Vulgate, etc. In the Hebrew text the words *yādôn* and *bĕšaggam* are inexplicable. For the textual-critical question here, see above all J. Skinner, *Genesis*, 143–144, and C. Westermann, *Genesis*, vol. 1, 493, 506–508. Targum Onqelos uses a fairly original paraphrase: "This wicked generation shall not endure before me forever, because they are flesh, and their deeds are evil; let (therefore) an extension be granted to them for (a period of) 120 years, (to see) if they will repent." See M. Aberbach and B. Grossfeld, *Targum Onkelos to Genesis*, 52.

taken as a limit rather than a precise period of time. It also signifies a call to a correct relationship to God and his order. There is therefore no bar to the established Jewish exegetical supposition that one hundred and twenty years stands for the period of grace for penitence.[26]

The narrative of the Flood (6:5–8:22) consists of Yahwist and Priestly sources[27] structured like a circle. It begins with God's decision to destroy mankind, together with all living creatures, and ends with his statement that he will never again curse the earth because of humankind, or ever again smite every living creature (6:5–8 + 9–12 // 8:20–22). This clash of beginning and end gives the entire narrative an expressly theological nature and opens up some fundamental questions about divine and human righteousness and justice.

The narrative starts with the Yahwist's account of the reasons for the Flood:

> The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground, man and beast and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.' But Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord (6:5–8).

The Priestly source speaks in much the same vein in 6:9–12:

> These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God. And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.

These two statements show the twin aims of the Flood narrative and are essentially concerned with the question of divine justice from the start: both state the reasons for the disaster of the Flood and those for saving Noah. Their declarations about the universal corruption of the people of the earth are made in general terms, yet they indicate fairly clearly that this is not a matter of man's natural, ontological incompleteness but of conscious and culpable wrongdoing in its fullest sense. The Hebrew writers drew from the Flood the conclusion that it was caused by human guilt, and the magnitude of the disaster led to an assessment of that guilt. The belief in the general corruption of mankind as a whole was arrived at on the basis of the tradition of the universal Flood. In the biblical context, the Flood ultimately implies that even creation itself cannot guarantee humanity unconditional security. The obligation of obedience to God is so categorical that it seems as if the Creator may destroy

[26] Targum Onqelos explains it in this sense as does rabbinical exegesis in general. See M. Aberbach and B. Grossfeld, *Targum Onkelos to Genesis*, 42–53. See also F. Delitzsch, *Commentar über die Genesis*, 196.

[27] See table in C. Westermann, *Genesis*, vol. 1, 532–533.

the whole world on account of man's iniquity. As universal corruption climbs to its zenith, God regrets having made man. The Hebrew assumption that God does not rule the world solely according to his own inclinations but takes man's response into account is made clear within this classically anthropomorphic expression.[28]

There is a perceptible difference between the Yahwist and the Priestly sources when they refer to Noah's deliverance. The Yahwist does not discuss Noah's qualities but only asserts that Noah has "found favour in the eyes of the Lord" (6:8), whereas the Priestly source speaks of Noah's integrity:

> Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation *(nōaḥ 'îš ṣaddîq tāmîm hāyāh bĕdōrōtâw);* Noah walked with God (6:9).

This difference cannot imply a difference of opinion on the reasons for Noah's deliverance. If the Yahwist contents himself with declaring that Noah found favour with the Lord, this does not mean he is speaking of a divine decision to save Noah regardless of his virtue. It is self-evident that Noah must be "righteous" and no explicit statement to this effect is required.

And yet the Yahwist does speak of this righteousness in 7:1, at the start of the Flood narrative itself:

> Then the Lord said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation *(kî 'ōtkā rā'îtî ṣaddîq lĕpānay baddôr hazzeh).*"

As in the Priestly source (6:9), there is no direct indication of what constitutes Noah's righteousness, so the context must be taken fully into account. Both sources assert Noah's complete obedience in responding to the divine command: "Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him" (6:22); "And Noah did all that the Lord had commanded him" (7:5). This is plainly indisputable confirmation of Noah's righteousness. The divine commands are given at a moment when there is as yet no sign of the Flood. In such a situation only a person who regards God as his or her absolute Lord can accept the wisdom of the command. He trusts God because he is aware that the ruler of the world alone knows the reasons for his own way of acting and demands. A single instance of obedience cannot be a complete test of righteousness, but when a person survives many trials of his or her righteousness

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[28] For the expression "repent," "remorse," see J. Jeremias, *Die Reue Gottes: Aspekte alttestamentlicher Gottesvorstellung* (BSt 65; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1975). The verse in question is very similar to the declaration in 1 Sam 15:11: "I repent that I have made Saul king; for he has turned back from following me, and has not performed my commandments." In the Hebrew Bible, examples of God's regret are more significant than threats of punishment, if the will to reform is visible: Exod 32:14; Jer 18:8 (but the opposite in v. 10); 26:3, 13; 42:10; Joel 2:13; Jonah 3:10. However, God does not regret his resolve to punish if human wickedness is too great: 1 Sam 15:29; Zech 8:14. He does not regret his decision if it is unconditional: Num 23:19.

or faith in his or her most critical moments, we can safely assume that he or she has a habit of righteousness. The Lord's statement "for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation" (7:1) is evidently based on Noah's righteousness in the past and the present;[29] consequently, God can rely on him in the future.

Biblical tradition about Noah clearly demonstrates that the narrative of the Flood assumes a reason for the destruction of the majority as well as for the deliverance of the minority or the individual. Ezek 14, for example, asserts that God destroys the whole land on account of wickedness, saving only the righteous. Had Noah, Daniel and Job dwelt there, they would have escaped with their own lives on account of their righteousness (vv. 14 and 20). In Sir 44:17–18 we read:

> Noah was found perfect and righteous; in the time of wrath he was taken in exchange; therefore a remnant was left to the earth when the flood came. Everlasting covenants were made with him that all flesh should not be blotted out by a flood.

The Letter to the Hebrews sees in Noah's exemplary trial of faith, borne in an exemplary way, the reason for his sharing in the eschatological benefits of the righteousness of God:

> By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, took heed and constructed an ark for the saving of his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness which comes by faith (11:7).

The end of the Flood story implies a confirmation of Noah's righteousness. When the ark lands safely, Noah in accordance with divine command (8:15–19) disembarks his household and the animals and sets up an altar to sacrifice to God. At the end of the Flood narrative we read the Yahwist's words:

> Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And when the Lord smelled the pleasing odour, the Lord said in his heart, "I will never again curse the

[29] See Abraham's case in 22:12. The adjective *ṣaddîq* in both sources is understood in this sense by H. Gunkel, *Genesis,* 61–62. See G. F. Hasel, *The Remnant: The History and Theology of the Remnant Idea from Genesis to Isaiah* (AUMSR 5; 2nd ed.; Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1974), 144: "By believing and trusting in God, Noah stands in the right relationship and thus finds favor in God's eyes." In contrast, W. M. Clark, "The Righteousness of Noah," *VT* 21 (1971), 261–280, holds that only the Priestly source assumes Noah's previous righteousness, whilst the Yahwist speaks in terms of a free God's determination to choose Noah to save the human race, irrespective of his qualities. The statement *rā'îtî ṣaddîq lĕpānay* in 7:1 accordingly means that Noah is chosen as a righteous man in connection with the implementation of God's plan to save the human race. Clark's conclusions result from assessing the passages in a very narrow context, and are therefore unconvincing. Within the framework of Hebrew theological postulates, it seems self-evident that the choice of a man for a certain role always assumes a fundamental openness, i.e., the "righteousness" of the person elected. See C. Westermann, *Genesis,* vol. 1, 572–574.

> ground because of man, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease" (8:20–22).

Commentators are divided on the role of Noah's offering. Many think he is attempting to compensate for human wickedness and to appease the divine wrath.[30] But it is much more probable that the offering was an expression of his gratitude to God. To him who has just encountered the sovereign Lord of the Universe and the Redeemer of his own life, it is self-evident that thanksgiving should follow deliverance.[31] Such an attitude is the clearest mark of righteousness and we must not overlook the fact that Noah sacrificed only clean animals and birds, i.e., the best available. Ultimately, this explains the Lord's contentment with Noah's offering and the promise never again to curse the earth on account of man, or destroy living creatures in such a manner. It is scarcely by chance that this promise is causally linked with the declaration that the Lord enjoyed the "pleasing odour." We may correctly conclude that Noah's righteousness, finally attested by his sacrifice, is of key significance in the Flood narrative. The suspicion is well-founded here that God is prepared to judge a whole people more leniently because of one truly righteous man. If in the past he has cursed the earth because of Adam's iniquity, and ordained the Flood on account of the universal corruption of mankind, he will be more lenient in future with all because of the splendour of the righteousness of one.

This does not, of course, solve the riddle of why leniency is to be shown in future. It is difficult for interpreters to come to terms with the contradiction between God's decision to inundate the world and his subsequent decision to spare it in future. God, it seems, acts differently even though man's condition remains unchanged.[32] A conclusion of this kind is extremely contestable from the theological point of view, however, and it appears that the narrative offers sufficient evidence to support a more acceptable explanation.

Both the Yahwist and the Priestly sources see the cause of the Flood in the universal iniquity of mankind. The Yahwist states:

> The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually (6:5).

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[30] See H. Gunkel, *Genesis*, 65–66; G. von Rad, *Das erste Buch Mose*, 90; English translation, *Genesis*, 121: "The usual distinctly noncultic theology of the Yahwist attributes great importance to this sacrifice, as the following verses show. It has the character of a sacrifice of reconciliation."

[31] See U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, vol. 2, 117: "When a person has been saved from a terrible danger, or has escaped from a general catastrophe, his first reaction is to give thanks to him who saved him or helped him to escape. And there could be no greater thanksgiving than these sacrifices."

[32] See C. Westermann, *Genesis*, vol. 1, 612.

The Priestly source observes:

> Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth (6:11–12).

Both passages repeatedly underline the universal corruption that by itself calls for the Flood. This is not a matter of passive failing but of active wickedness. In 8:21, on the other hand, the corruption of mankind is not viewed from this aspect, as is presumed by nearly all commentators. Here we have only a short statement to account for God's forbearance: *kî yeṣēr lēb hā'ādām ra' minnĕ'urâw,* "for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." Is not the emphasis here more on humanity's fundamental, natural, existential (ontological) incompleteness than on its corrupt action in a specific period? The distinction seems to justify God's forbearance. In both the Old and the New Testaments existential incompleteness is a decisive reason for God's forbearance towards humankind. The iron rule of collective retribution is broken and the principle of individual retribution takes over. And it is precisely here that we can find the essence of the Lord's statement: "... neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done" (8:21c).[33]

In this context, God's resolution in 8:22 also becomes comprehensible. The words "While the earth remains ..." suggest that the earth will not exist for ever. Yet, for as long as it may continue, everything will run according to the natural, accepted order of things. The pairs "seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night," are classical examples of merism. Separately and collectively they mean 'all' the ordered activities that obey nature's rhythm. The Flood means the end of cosmic disarray, although this does not imply that every kind of disturbance within the natural order will be abolished.[34]

These conclusions may be considered in the light of the etiology that evidently inspired the account of the Flood. The narrative is the result of a search for the reason behind two facts: the Flood itself, and its uniqueness, i.e., its unrepeatability. God must be justified on both counts. Of itself the Flood does not cause problems, since biblical theologians simply assume that the Flood was a punishment for the general corruption of mankind upon earth. The apologetics of God's righteousness demanded that the corruption of mankind should be quite unmistakably emphasized. Problems, however,

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[33] See H. Gunkel, *Genesis,* 66: "Der Verfasser meint nicht etwa, daß Jahve fortan gegen die Sünde der Menschheit gleichgültig sein wolle; aber er meint, ein allgemeines Weltgericht sei nicht wieder zu erwarten, und läßt dies durch Jahve selbst in der feierlichsten Weise aussprechen."

[34] See U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis,* vol. 2, 123: "The reference, of course, is to total and universal cessation, for it is obvious that a partial interruption of the normal order may occur in many instances."

are encountered as soon as it is asked why the Flood only occurred once. Was mankind—with the exception of a single person—so universally corrupt only on one occasion? The Flood story suggests a dual answer: on the one hand it mitigates mankind's culpability by emphasizing man's corruption "from his youth"; on the other hand, the role of the righteous Noah is stressed. As a result, it shows quite clearly that the righteousness of the minority has much greater weight with God than the guilt of the majority.

4. *The Blessing and Sign of the Eternal Covenant (9:1–7)*

The Yahwist's conclusion of his account of the Flood (8:20–22) is a brilliant counter-weight to his introduction (6:5–8). The antithesis is extremely appropriate both in the extent and the content of the statement. The Priestly source does not offer such a brief conclusion but a broader narrative; the verses form a unit with two sections: 9:1–7 and 9:8–17. The first deals with the blessing and the second with the covenant. The different extent and two-part structure of the text cannot hide the fundamental similarity between the twin conclusions of the Flood narrative: 8:21 agrees in content with 9:8–17, while 8:22 agrees with 9:1–7. This means that both conclusions are linked by the stylistic form of inclusion: A – B – B' – A': never again will there be a Flood (8:21) – the rhythm of life will not be halted (8:22) – the command to multiply and the promise of lordship over the world (9:1–7) – never again will there be a Flood (9:8–17).

There are certain valuable details to be discerned in 9:1–17. The beginning of the passage vv. 1–7 is linked to the blessing of Noah and his family and the end of it to a divine command to multiply and fill the earth (vv. 1–3, 7), while two prohibitions in the central part impose a limitation on the command to rule the world (vv. 4–6). The uniqueness of vv. 8–17 lies in the fact that by making the covenant *(bĕrît)*, God excludes the possibility of a Flood in the future (vv. 9–11) and with this in mind he sets up a special sign, the rainbow, which will reaffirm his promise (vv. 12–16). The role of the concluding verses in both sections is very similar. Verse 7 reads: "And you, be fruitful and multiply, bring forth abundantly on the earth and multiply on it!" This declaration repeats the command of v. 1 and summarizes the contents of vv. 2–3. On the same principle v. 17 repeats and emphasizes "the sign of the covenant" mentioned in vv. 12–16. Verse 17 states: "God said to Noah, 'This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth.'"[35]

The outline of the structure and the basic content show the theological

[35] On the structure and stylistic features in the text, see C. Westermann, *Genesis*, vol. 1, 617–618.

aim of 9:1–17. The conviction that sin, and the Flood that punished that sin, mean the end of the marvelous order established by God through creation (1:1–2:4a) is kept in the background. Life on earth after the Flood exists because God has blessed the new human race, repeating anew his words to man at the time of creation: multiply and fill the earth (cf. 1:28–30; 9:1–3, 7). This new beginning after the awful judgment of the Flood is the work of God the Creator, as was the first creation.

What is the role of the prohibition in vv. 4–6, which is not paralleled by anything found in the Creation story? The text reads:

> Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning; of every beast I will require it and of man; of every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image.

The prohibition imposed on shedding human blood is the key to the answer. It reflects God's unfortunate earlier experience with mankind, characterized as it was by grave wrongdoing, including fratricide. Humankind abused outrageously God's trust, reflected in his blessing and in the command to multiply and rule the world. Hence there are good reasons for God to impose limits when he renews life and once more bestows upon humankind lordship over the world. The entire emphasis is on the prohibition of shedding human blood. To make this interdiction as effective as possible, the passage first mentions the ban on the consumption of animal blood. The structure of the text demonstrates that v. 4 must be read together with v. 3:

> Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. Only *('ak)* you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.

Verses 4–6 are therefore a restraint upon the general authorization in v. 3.

What is the reason for prohibiting the consumption of blood? In attempting to answer this question, the texts of Lev 17:10–14 and Deut 12:23–25 must be taken into consideration. Here the consumption of blood is strictly prohibited because blood is life. Before animal flesh is consumed, the blood must be let out at slaughter and covered with earth (Lev 17:13).[36] No matter how all these passages are understood, their essence remains the same: blood must be shown exceptional respect. God alone has authority over blood, and it must be accorded to him.[37]

After all this, the interdiction in vv. 5–6 in respect of human blood acquires even greater significance. Here consumption of blood is not the issue.

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[36] C. Westermann, *Genesis,* vol. 1, 622–623, following some other exegetes does not see here a prohibition which on principle forbids the consumption of flesh containing blood, but only in cases where the blood is still fresh because it still contains life.

[37] See J. Skinner, *Genesis,* 170: "The blood is the life, and the life is sacred, and must be restored to God before the flesh can be eaten."

In contrast to animals, human life as such is inviolable, and the shedding of human blood is therefore totally ruled out. The reason for this is not biological but theological. Humankind's godlikeness, noted in 1:27, is reiterated in 9:6b. The principle of retaliation in 9:6a is of special interest, since in its present form it is unique in the Hebrew Bible: *šōpēk dam hā'ādām bā'ādām dāmô yiššāpēk,* "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed." The declaration is a perfect chiasmus, indicating that it is a deliberately contrived formation. It most probably served the poet as the basis for his simple apodictic sentence. The declaration is reminiscent of the Yahwistic apodictic sentence in 4:15: "If anyone slays Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold."[38] The declaration in Matt 26:52: "For all who take the sword will perish by the sword" most closely resembles it in content and form.

The law of retaliation is based on two presumptions: that excessive vengeance (cf. Gen 4:23–24) and monetary ransom (cf. Num 35:31) are forbidden. The poetical, chiastic form of v. 6a justifies the supposition that no special emphasis need be discerned in the statement that the blood of a murderer shall be shed "by man," as if the passage was explicitly concerned with the authority of the human race.[39] The true emphasis is shown in vv. 5 and 6b. In v. 5 God is three times the subject of the verb *dāraš,* 'to demand, to claim.' God himself will demand the reckoning for the shedding of human blood, and v. 6b provides the reason: God applies the law of retaliation because he has created humankind in his own image. He created it for a special purpose. In the light of this, any shedding of human blood amounts to a direct encroachment upon God's plan and sovereignty.[40]

After all this, the content of 9:8–17 seems extremely appropriate. God solemnly declares to Noah and his sons:

> Behold, I establish my covenant *('et-bĕrîtî)* with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth (9:9–11).

The repetition of some phrases and sentences is characteristic, and this becomes even more noticeable when reading God's declaration on the sign of the covenant in 9:12–17:

> And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant *('ôt-habbĕrît)* which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future

[38] Regarding the form, see also Exod 19:12: "Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death."

[39] See the translation by Targum Onqelos in M. Aberbach and B. Grossfeld, *Targum Onkelos to Genesis,* 64: "He who sheds the blood of man before witnesses, by sentence of the judges shall his blood be shed."

[40] See C. Westermann, *Genesis,* vol. 1, 626–628.

> generations: I set my bow *(qešet)* in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant *(bĕrît 'ôlām)* between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth." God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth."

In the present form of the text, the repetitions give the impression that the editor wishes to emphasise some of its points in a special way: the actual making of the covenant, the fact that the covenant is made with all living creatures, the sign of the covenant, and in particular the assurance that destruction by flood will never occur again (vv. 11 and 15). At the same time, the state of the text demonstrates that the editor relied on various sources: he was evidently more concerned with preserving their fundamental emphases than with precisely harmonizing them. The sequence of the entire Flood narrative, particularly in comparison with the Yahwistic conclusion in 8:20–22, indicates that the basic aim of this passage is the assurance that there will never again be a flood of this kind. The manner in which God makes this affirmation, however, differs sharply between the Yahwist and the Priestly source. In 8:21 we read: "... the Lord said in his heart, 'I will never again curse the ground because of man ...'" In chapter 9, on the other hand, God solemnly gives his assurance in the form of the covenant with Noah's family and all other living creatures. To show that the covenant is irrevocable, i.e., an "everlasting covenant,"[41] he selects a special sign. *Qešet* in Hebrew means 'bow,' and ever since Wellhausen the sign has usually been linked with God's wrath and warning, its essence being that God the Warrior, after the end of the Flood (and thus the termination of his wrath), would lay down his fighting bow. But a common natural phenomenon seems a much more convincing explanation. After the storm, the bow—the rainbow—appears.[42] In the context of the Flood narrative, this means that the rainbow heralds the end of the inundation; on the appearance of the rainbow, God remembers his covenant that the Flood will never recur.[43]

Here it must be noted that the use of the term "covenant" or "the sign of the covenant" in this passage is unique in the entire Flood tradition in the ancient Near East. We may therefore conclude that at this point the editor introduced the motif of the covenant from other sources. This fact, and the

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[41] For the expression "everlasting covenant," cf. Gen 17:7, 13, 19; Exod 31:16; Lev 24:8; Num 18:19; 25:13.

[42] See C. Westermann, *Genesis,* vol. 1, 634.

[43] For a specific discussion of 9:11, see U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis,* vol. 2, 132–133.

way in which the covenant is concluded, demonstrate that the term is not used in its classical sense, which presupposes a contract and acceptance of obligation by both parties.[44] Yet emphasis on the onesidedness of the covenant can lead to a grave error. Does the promise that God solemnly proclaims by the sign of his "everlasting covenant" mean that no conditions whatever are to be imposed upon humankind? Taking a long view of the entire biblical narrative of the Flood, the inner logic and the basic postulates of Hebrew belief bring up several factors that affect the understanding of this covenant: (1) the Flood signifies the end of the ancient creation that had become utterly corrupt; (2) Noah was saved on account of his righteousness and is the mark of a new human race, a sign of the hope that no Flood will in future be required; (3) the covenant answers the question why the Flood never recurred (the etiological method of historical interpretation).

In view of this it is understandable that the covenant is not a one-sided undertaking on the part of God and cannot possess an unconditional, absolute validity. It is indeed the work of a faithful and righteous God, an expression of his trust in humankind; but this only binds humans more firmly to their own obligation of righteousness. Consequently the covenant does not mean that the Flood has lost its role as a threat. Finally, the decisive hallmark of the biblical Flood narrative, in contrast to the non-biblical accounts, lies in its ethical-religious interpretation: the Flood occurred as a result of human iniquity; Noah was saved on account of his righteousness.[45] The covenant is a renewed call to faithfulness to God. Here we see the essence of a God who does not desire the death of a sinner, but wishes that humans should enjoy the fullness of God's creation. Thus remorse about the threat of punishment is more characteristic of him than remorse that he had created the world. It is in this sense that the text Isa 54:7–10 speaks to a people who have survived the punishment of Babylonian exile and show their desire for a greater faithfulness.

5. *Why Are There Many Languages and Many Nations? (11:1–9)*

This is a Yahwist passage that contrasts two conditions and gives the reason for the outcome of the clash between them. Its two sections are vv. 1–4 and 5–9. The starting point is the statement that the whole earth had only one language (v. 1). This is followed by the resolution of the people not to scatter over the whole earth and their action to prevent this (vv. 2–4). Their plan to construct a tower with its top touching the heavens and to make a name for themselves clearly shows an upthrust against God, which provokes him

[44] See C. Westermann, *Genesis*, vol. 1, 633.

[45] See especially G. Lambert, "Il n'y aura plus jamais de déluge (Genèse XI,11)," *NRTh* 77 (1955), 581–601, 693–724.

to act. He decides that the project would eventually lead the people to do what they wished and he therefore confuses their languages (vv. 5–9). The antithesis is most marked in the contrast between the first and last verses (1 and 9): one language has become many.

The structure of the passage indicates that the starting point of the narrative is the existing multiplicity of languages. The writer seeks reasons for this, concluding that mankind must have made wrongful use of the organization and cohesion resulting from one single language. Thus the text is an etiological narrative drawing on three different ancient traditions: building the tower, confusion of languages, and scattering abroad over the whole earth.[46] The conflation of the various traditions is the reason why some of the elements in the passage do not fit together. The opening verse says that the whole earth had one language, and the closing verse could therefore be expected to state that the languages of all the peoples were confused after God's intervention. But owing to erroneous folk etymology, the writer links the confusion of tongues with Babylon, because he places the construction of a tower with its top reaching to the skies in that city (v. 4). A similar discord is evident in vv. 7 and 8: v. 7 speaks of God's resolution to confuse the languages, whereas v. 8 reads: "So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city."

The basic theological question is the nature of the people's guilt and the meaning or weight of God's response. The part played by editing and merging the various different traditions into a whole becomes clear. The climax of the first section is v. 4:

> Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name *(šēm)* for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth."

The summons is of an etiological nature. It reflects the impression made upon the people by the highly developed ancient Babylonian culture, particularly manifest in the construction of the ziggurats. The building of towns and towers demonstrates human creativity and clinging to life, and also the ability of the people to unite into a community. The biblical postulates of belief at any rate permit a positive evaluation of these endeavours.

But the Yahwist turns to consider the other side of the story. In the field of human culture he notes man's inclination to use his works as proof of his own wisdom and power. The conscription of people for great ventures is not rooted in humanitarian motives, and instead of creating brotherhood among

[46] For the extent of individual traditions in the ancient Near East and elsewhere, see C. Westermann, *Genesis*, vol. 1, 715–719. For stylistic devices of the passage, see especially J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (SSN 17; Assen / Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1975; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 11–45: "Genesis 11.1–9: The Tower of Babel."

peoples and individuals, it leads to enslavement. Behind the brilliant facade lies the blackness of human darkest instincts. Building a tower with its top reaching to the heavens may amount to activity against God on the part of humans. The aim of the building is to make a "name" for them, which reminds us of the texts that speak of God making a name for himself by his redemptive actions,[47] and of humans doing likewise with their own deeds.[48] When it concerns God, this "name" is unchallengeable, but when it concerns humans, everything is relative to their intentions. Humans may use the "name" they have achieved to honour the divine name or to exalt themselves.

Evidently the Yahwist has in mind human inordinate striving for self-affirmation, although the clause "lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" suggests a positive intention. Although the Yahwist speaks of humankind as such, he is also making use of memories of the history and culture of Babylon. Combining prehistorical and historical elements is characteristic of his work and thus deserves our attention. Why precisely does the experience of Babylon serve the Yahwist as an illustration of the characteristics of human nature? The entire Hebrew tradition in this sphere provides us with an unambiguous answer to the question: Babylon represents a power that enslaved other nations, elevating itself above everything, even the gods. It is therefore also a symbol of that which provokes the wrath of the absolute God (cf. Isa 14:4–21).

In our narrative, the response of God to events in the land of Shinar is the clearest evidence that the people's intention is in opposition to his will. In vv. 5–9 we find a classical example of God's judgment following characteristic lines: God perceives the situation and ponders the reasons for such activities; he then decides to intervene and implements his judgment. The climax is God's declaration in v. 6b: *wē'attāh lō'-yibbāṣēr mēhem kōl 'ăšer yāzĕmû la'ăśôt,* "And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them." The verb *bṣr* appears in Niph'al elsewhere only in Job 42:2.[49] This example is thus all the more significant for a comparison with our passage, particularly as the two roots *bṣr* and *zmm* are used in both places. Job 42:2 is the beginning of Job's second reply to God's statement and runs: *yāda'tî kî-kôl tûkāl wĕlō'-yibbāṣēr mimmĕkā mĕzimmāh,* "I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of thine can be thwarted."

A comparison between Gen 11:6 and Job 42:2 demonstrates that the same thought is expressed in very similar terms, with the difference that in Job 42:2 the subject is God, while in Gen 11:6 it is humankind. Job bows to

[47] Cf. Isa 63:12, 14; Jer 32:20; Dan 9:15; Neh 9:10. In 2 Sam 7:23 we read how God gained the name Israel. Cf. Josh 7:9; 2 Sam 7:9.

[48] Cf. 2 Sam 8:13: David made a name for himself in the Valley of Salt when he slew 18,000 men.

[49] We find him in Pi'el in Isa 22:10 and Jer 51:53.

his God and abandons the claims of self once he comes to know his almightiness. In contrast, primeval humanity tries to overstep all limitations. The Yahwist attributes this arrogance to the organization of the people in one nation and to the existence of a common tongue (v. 6). Punishment therefore consists in God confusing the language and scattering the people over the whole earth.

The etiological explanation presents the multiplicity of nations and languages as a punishment, but not as a merciless retribution.[50] God's intervention in human affairs may be seen above all as protection of the individual, and his aim in setting limits to the audacity of a great people is positive, not negative. He wants to demonstrate that only he is one, while a people are many. Thus the division and scattering of the people over all the earth is not to be viewed solely as a penalty. Indeed, in the eyes of the Yahwist it is essentially a benefit; this is especially clear if one examines the connection between primeval history and the history of salvation. Biblical history follows organically from the narratives of primeval history, starting in the 12th chapter of Genesis. Its starting point is the multitude of nations and out of this multitude God summons Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees, from the land of the Tower of Babel. The sons of men at one time had united to make themselves a name; now God chooses Abraham to magnify his (Abraham's) name (12:1–2). The declaration of the Lord, which is of exceptional significance, states: "I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves" (12:3). Only work that is the fruit of divine choice and blessing deserves a "name."

In the light of all this, it is possible to agree with the view that the primeval history does not end with chapter 11 but in 12:1–3. In fact, 12:1–3 must be considered as the key to its theological understanding.[51]

6. *Synthesis: Unifying Themes in the Primeval History*

Analysis of various passages has indicated that their basic structure is similar. In every case there occurs the sequence of sin / God's sentence / mitigation / punishment. Such similarity encourages a systematic comparison between these passages within the narrative of the primeval history as a whole (Gen 1–11), and an assessment of the relationship between the Yahwist and Priestly sources and of the relation of the primeval story to the history of the patriarchs (from chap. 12 on). In recent decades these ques-

[50] G. von Rad is probably exaggerating when he says in *Genesis*, 153: "The story about the Tower of Babel concludes with God's judgment on mankind; there is no word of grace."

[51] See the concluding deliberation on primeval history in G. von Rad, *Das erste Buch Mose*, 127–129; English translation, *Genesis*, 152–155.

tions have roused the interest of many exegetes, who can be divided into two groups. The first group are interested only in the Yahwistic texts; the second are concerned with the synthesis of the Yahwist and Priestly sources in the final shaping of the entire primeval history, and with its relation to the history of the patriarchs.

The first group comprises those who see the Yahwistic conclusion of the Flood narrative (8:21–22) as being also the conclusion of biblical primeval history. Their point of departure is the statement of the Lord in 8:21: *lō'-'ōsīp lĕqallēl 'ôd 'et-hā'ădāmāh ba'ăbûr hā'ādām.* This sentence permits two somewhat different interpretations: (a) *I will not continue* to curse the ground because of man, and (b) I will *never again* curse the ground because of man. The first interpretation views the sentence as recalling the curse uttered after Adam's sin in 3:17: ... *'ărûrāh hā'ădāmāh ba'ăbûrekā* ..., "... cursed is the ground because of you ..." Some recent exegetes consider that 8:21 refers to this sentence and therefore means that the curse uttered after the first sin is no longer in force. Accordingly, they understand the concluding verses of the Yahwistic Flood narrative (8:21–22) as the conclusion of the primeval history which runs from 2:4b to 8:22. The subsequent chsapters 9–11 are, in their view, the prehistory of the history of salvation which commences with the story of the patriarchs in chapter 12.[52] This minority interpretation is, in spite of certain apparent advantages, rather problematic. First of all, 8:21 taken as a whole gives rise to doubts, for the verse ends with the words: ... *wĕlō'-'ōsīp 'ôd lĕhakkôt 'et-kōl ḥay ka'ăšer 'āśîtî,* "... and I will not again destroy every living creature as I have done." This conclusion of the promise in 8:21 confirms the traditional view above that the statements *lō'-'ōsīp lĕqallēl* ... and *wĕlō'-'ōsīp 'ôd lĕhakkôt* ... belong together; they complement each other and do not refer to 3:17.[53]

The impression of the structural unity of the primeval history can be blurred by the structural similarity of the succession narrative of 2 Sam 9–20 and 1 Kgs 1–2, to whose four major episodes, i.e, David and Bathsheba, Amnon and Absalom, Absalom and David, Solomon and David—the stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, the Flood, and the Tower of Babel apparently correspond.[54] A mere structural correspondence does not, however, mean that the stories of the primeval history are dependent on the succession

[52] See R. Rendtorff, "Genesis 8,21 und die Urgeschichte des Jahwisten," *KuD* 7 (1961), 69–78; W. M. Clark, "The Flood and the Structure of the Pre-patriarchal History," *ZAW* 83 (1971), 184–211. Clark denies the unity of the basic structure in Gen 1–11 and speaks of "Multiple Structures in the Primeval History" (pp. 204–211).

[53] See D. J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch,* 70–72.

[54] See W. Brueggemann, "David and His Theologian," *CBQ* 30 (1968), 156–181. In this connection mention may also be made of W. Richter, "Urgeschichte und Hoftheologie," *BZ*.NF 10 (1966), 96–105, who more generally in Yahwistic texts of the primeval history sees the influence of the court traditions of Jerusalem.

narrative; the reverse could be true, or the two narratives could be independent of one another.[55]

The second group of exegetes take seriously the findings of research on individual sources, their prehistory and their forms, but are equally or even more interested in the question of the place and meaning of different sources within the final structure of the primeval history. Their basic conviction is that the meaning of individual passages can be adequately determined only in the context of the final form of the book as a whole. The writer or compiler responsible for this end-product accepts and considers ancient traditions in the light of his own beliefs and feelings. By including them in larger syntheses he adapts the meaning of individual sources to his viewpoints and emphases. The Yahwistic texts are hence no longer isolated islands within Gen 1–11; they are interwoven with the texts of the Priestly source into an organic whole. In understanding the basic perspective of the whole section Gen 1–11, the Priestly creation account (1:1–2:4a) and the genealogies are very important. In the opening verses of the book of Genesis the extreme contrast between God's activity in the world, which is always positive, and the negative tendencies of human behaviour becomes starkly evident. The genealogies evidently serve as a frame for the whole section that deals with the primeval history, thus facilitating the transition to the salvation history suggested by the blessing of Abraham by God in 12:1–3.[56]

The synthesis of sources allows a sharp contrast to appear between the ways of God and those of man. The Priestly creation account lays particular stress on order and goodness in the created world: the Creator establishes a proper place for everything, and sets boundaries that facilitate the orderly development of the world. After each of the main stages of creation the writer states: "And God saw that it was good" (1:10, 12, 18, 25), and as creation reaches completion he says: "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (1:31). In the Yahwistic creation narrative (2:4b–25), on the other hand, God's measures and commands include the wellknown prohibition: "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall certainly die" (2:16–17).

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[55] See J. Blenkinsopp, "Theme and Motif in the Succession History (2 Sam. XI 2ff) and the Yahwist Corpus," *Volume du Congrès: Genève 1965* (VT.S 15; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), 44–57; D. M. Gunn, "Traditional Composition in the 'Succession Narrative,'" *VT* 26 (1976), 214–229; D. J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 72–73.

[56] See J. Scharbert, "Der Sinn der Toledot-Formel in der Priesterschrift," *Wort-Gebet-Glaube: Beiträge zur Theologie des Alten Testaments: Walther Eichrodt zum 80. Geburtstag* (ed. H. J. Stoebe; AThANT 59; Zurich: Zwingli Verlag, 1970), 45–56; F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 293–325: "The Priestly Work"; D. J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, esp. pp. 61–79; B. W. Anderson, "From Analysis to Synthesis: The Interpretation of Genesis 1–11," *JBL* 97 (1978), 23–39.

And so the drama of human history begins. No sooner are human beings created but they reach for the prohibited fruit, and in so doing release an avalanche of falsehood and violence that cannot be halted. Cain, seized by blind envy, kills his brother Abel (4:8), Lamech threatens unlimited revenge (4:23–24), the "sons of God" succumb to lust and lay violent hands on the daughters of men (6:2); finally the whole earth becomes corrupted, and is filled with violence (6:11–13). God responds as a judge and provides a suitable punishment in each case. The intensification of evil brings him to a catastrophic decision: "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground, man and beast and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry *(kî nîḥamtî)* that I have made them" (6:7). God's regret that he has made living creatures leads to the decision that "all flesh" should be destroyed; the created world should again fall into chaos and all its boundaries be demolished. "And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, birds, cattle, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm upon the earth, and every man" (7:21). "Only Noah was left *(wayiššā'er 'ak-nōaḥ),* and those that were with him in the ark" (7:23c).

From Noah springs a new human race, but this turns out to be no better than its predecessor. His youngest son commits an offence that brings down a terrible curse upon his descendants (9:25–27). In that great cultural land, Mesopotamia, the people hatch a plot against God: "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (11:4). Since linguistic and economic unity inspire the people to a perverse affirmation of their own power and value, God has to confuse their language and scatter them abroad over the face of the earth (11:9). This step is much more sweeping than might at first appear: the nations live side by side, but are utterly unable to reach true understanding.

Nevertheless, punishment in general and the curse in particular are not the dominant characteristics of the relationship between the Creator and mankind. The Flood is more than an expression of God's judgment that utterly destroys the wonderful order of the created world and returns it to primordial chaos. The most important aspect of the narrative is God's measures of mitigation. God saves Noah and his family together with representatives of all living creatures. He utters the important promise that he will never again curse the ground because of men, that he will never again destroy every living creature (8:21), that he will never again cause a flood to destroy the earth and all flesh (9:11, 15). "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease" (8:22). Noah and his sons are subject to the same command concerning multiplication and to the same blessing as were Adam and Eve before their sin (8:16–17; 9:1–3, 7). Nor is that all: the representatives of the new creation receive an assurance that the Lord is establishing his covenant with

them and their descendants, setting his bow in the cloud as a sign of the covenant made for all future generations (9:8–17). This covenant will be the guarantee that never again shall a flood destroy the earth, for God will look upon the bow and remember his "everlasting covenant" (9:16). All this in spite of the fact that "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (8:21), with the inevitable consequence that the new race springing from Noah cannot be essentially better than its forerunners.

The determination to preserve the world and mankind in continued existence and to make an everlasting covenant with humans discloses the innermost essence of the absolute Creator and Ruler of the world. The reasons for God's decisions and actions are invariably positive, and the purpose of creation can only be existence. The creation of the heavens and the earth can hold no promise other than a new heaven and a new earth. The stronger the human tendency to destroy creation, the more God's actions of recreating the world and mankind are necessary. The final form of the primeval history manifests the basic theme of the dialectics of God's activity in the world: creation / un-creation / re-creation.[57] Consequently, the primeval history calls directly for a history of salvation, which begins with the call of Abraham from the land of the Tower of Babel in order to become a blessing for all nations (12:1–3).

7. *Conclusion*

When one considers the relationship between God and man after creation had been completed, it becomes plain that the polarity spread of sin / spread of grace represents the fundamental theme of the primeval history. "There is a movement from disobedience to murder, to reckless killing, to titanic lust, to total corruption and violence, to the full disruption of humanity."[58] In every case God elects severe punishment in accordance with his absoluteness and perfection, but never without mercy. Adam and Eve are not punished by death in spite of the threat in 2:17; God keeps them alive, even providing them with garments (3:21). Cain is not delivered to death in compliance with the law of retaliation (cf. 9:6); God marks him with a special sign to deter blood avengers (4:15). To the challenge of general corruption God answers with the desolation of the Flood, grieving that he had made humankind (6:6); nevertheless, he saves Noah and his family in order to create a new mankind. He reacts to the perverse tendencies of the people of Babel by

[57] See J. Blenkinsopp, "Genesis 1–11," *Pentateuch* (SDC 1; London / Sydney: Sheed & Ward, 1971), 1–64; D. J. A. Clines, "Noah's Flood, I: The Theology of the Flood Narrative," *FaT* 100 (1972–1973), 128–142; idem, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 73–76.

[58] See D. J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 65.

confusing their language and by scattering them abroad over the face of the earth (11:9). But even this is more than punishment: it is also a means of saving humankind from the unification that can easily mislead him into arbitrary behaviour (cf. 11:6) that would ultimately destroy him. In this complex the genealogies play an important part. On the one hand they serve as a frame for all the narratives in due succession, on the other they bear silent witness to God's blessing. In spite of continuous and dramatic examples of aberration, mankind multiplies, providing living evidence of God's blessing bestowed upon Adam after creation (1:28–30) and upon Noah after the Flood (9:1–3, 7).[59]

This summing up underlines the deep and difficult question: why does divine forbearance prevail over punishment so that sinful mankind is never in the end completely destroyed but actually increases in number. Few commentators tackle this most important question.[60] A comparison of the primeval history with other parts of the Scriptures shows that the predominance of God's mercy over threat of punishment permeates the whole of the Bible. Consequently, it must always have the same fundamental reasons throughout. The point of departure is the positive nature of a God who is absolute. The one and only God can only have a positive purpose for his creation. When the world and mankind as a whole are under consideration, the idea of complete destruction seems untenable. There are at least three reasons that forbid such an outcome: first, God's educational measures, with their exclusively positive aims; secondly, the ability of human beings to recognize their faults and to correct their errors; thirdly, the righteous minority. The first reason is absolutely constant, the second and third naturally not. In the primeval history the second reason operates with greater or lesser effect in the accounts of the first sin and Cain's fratricide; while the third comes into play in the example of Noah who "found favour in the eyes of the Lord" because he was righteous (6:8–9; 7:1–5). God created the world without the help of man, and it is obvious that he does not act in the world without his own reasons. He punishes humans when they are guilty. He has mercy on them when they show signs of contrition. Destruction comes into question

[59] See D. J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 64–69.

[60] G. von Rad, *Das erste Buch Mose*, 116–118: "Nachwort zu der jahwistischen Urgeschichte" = English translation, *Genesis*, 152–155: "Epilogue to the Yahwistic Primeval History," states the facts; he does not, however, try to answer this question. He says in *Genesis*, 153: "... We see, therefore (already in primeval history!), that each time, in and after the judgment, God's preserving, forgiving will to save is revealed, and 'where sin increased, grace abounded all the more' (Rom. 5.20). None of that, of course, is theologically formulated in so many words; we look in vain for terms like 'salvation, grace, forgiveness.' The narrator tells only facts that, because of words of divine forbearance, did occur." D. J. A. Clines presents in *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 61–79, very convincing observations concerning the unifying theme in the primeval history. Unfortunately, he does not try to explain why in all narratives of the primeval history mitigation plays such an important role.

only where there is complete obduracy. Since the whole of mankind is never completely obdurate at the same time, only individuals and groups, great or small, are actually liable to the ultimate penalty.

CHAPTER II

THE DIALOGUE ON JUST PUNISHMENT (Gen 18:16–33)

Gen 18:16–33 provides a unique example of the dialogue between Abraham and the Lord. The passage cannot, apparently, be ascribed to the original Yahwistic account of the destruction of Sodom, whose basic framework is preserved in chapters 18 and 19. The view generally prevalent amongst recent commentators is that the text in its present form emerged after the fall of Jerusalem in 587, and it does in fact have the character of a theological reflection on the problems of righteousness and justice, characteristic of the Exilic and post-Exilic periods.[1]

But recognition of the uniqueness of these verses does not imply adequate comprehension of their message. Many exegetes become so involved with questions of literary criticism that they fail to consider the distinctive features of the passage. Equally, they are excessively attracted to other passages dealing with the same, or some similar, theme.[2] Unfortunately, such comparisons are usually inorganic and superficial, and often obfuscate the text instead of clarifying it.[3]

Examination of existing work makes it clear that attention must be concentrated on the immediate context and the verses under consideration. Only by so doing is it possible to ascertain their theological starting point and the origin of the thinking they enshrine. It is the present structure of the text that gives us an understanding of its content.

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[1] See above all J. Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (ICC; 2nd ed.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930); B. Jacob, *Das erste Buch der Tora: Genesis* (Berlin: Schocken, 1934); H. Gunkel, *Genesis* (HK 1/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1901, 1969); G. von Rad, *Das erste Buch Mose: Genesis* (ATD 2/4; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972, 1981); English translation by J. H. Marks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1961, 1991); L. Schmidt, *"De Deo": Studien zur Literarkritik und Theologie des Buches Jona, des Gesprächs zwischen Abraham und Jahwe in Gen 18,22ff. und von Hi 1* (BZAW 143; Berlin / New York: W. de Gruyter, 1976), 131–164: "Kapitel V. Das Gespräch zwischen Abraham und Jahwe in Gen 18,22–33"; C. Westermann, *Genesis*, vol. 2 (BK.AT I/2; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981); E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (AB 1; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1962, 1982); J. Blenkinsopp, "Abraham and the Righteous of Sodom," *JJS* 33 (1982), 119–132; H. Schweizer, "Das seltsame Gespräch von Abraham und Jahwe (Gen 18,22–33)," *ThQ* 164 (1984), 121–133; J. Scharbert, *Genesis 12–50* (NEB.AT; Würzburg: Echter, 1986); R. I. Letellier, *Day in Mamre Night in Sodom: Abraham and Lot in Genesis 18 and 19* (BIS 10; Leiden / New York / Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1995); W. W. Fields, *Sodom and Gomorrah: History and Motif in Biblical Narrative* (JSOT.S 231; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

[2] The similarity of theological questions is found chiefly in the book of Proverbs, Job, Ezek 14:12–20, Jer 18:7–10, and the book of Jonah.

[3] See J. Blenkinsopp, *JJS* 33 (1982), 119–132.

1. *Structure and Setting of Abraham's Plea*

In searching for the deeper meaning of the dialogue between Abraham and the Lord, we must consider its setting: Gen 18:1–19:29, something that is especially necessary because the text evolved over a lengthy period. Its current state indicates that all the events took place within the relationship of the three men that appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre (18:1). The three men appeared as guests and as the bearers of the Lord's message and the executors of his will. The nature of the local inhabitants emerges as a result of the visit of this mysterious trio, which is also linked to the reason for the destruction of Sodom and Lot's deliverance. Abraham and Lot show exemplary respect and offer a generous welcome, whereas the people of Sodom abused outrageously the sacred law of hospitality. So we have here on the one hand an affirmation of the righteousness of Abraham and Lot, and on the other a portrayal of the extreme iniquity of the city-dwellers.

It is clear, from the declaration in 18:17, 20–21 and from the carrying out of the punishment of the people of Sodom directly after their transgression (19:4–9), that this final test was decisive. The destruction of the city had already been virtually decided on because of "the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah," but God wanted to be sure beyond all question that the sin was in fact so great that destruction had become inevitable. As he puts it: "I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry which has come to me." Only after the final outrage is perpetrated, does he decide to execute his judgment. This episode is of crucial importance because, in the context of the whole, it demonstrates clearly that no one who had witnessed such events could defend Sodom or doubt the divine righteousness. Equally clearly, there emerges the rightness of the miraculous deliverance of Lot and his family.

What is the role in this context of 18:16–33, in which Abraham comes into prominence in so curious a fashion?

In 18:16 we read that the men (from 18:2 number three is inferred) set out from Abraham's encampment near the oaks of Mamre in the direction of Sodom, yet 19:1 states that two angels came to Sodom. Plainly, 18:17–33 was a later insertion into the original framework of the story of the divine decision regarding the destruction of Sodom and its execution. This enlargement of the text brought about the differences in number and designation. In 18:2 and, by implication, 16 there are three men, in 18:22 two men and the Lord, and in 19:1 two angels, so v. 22 must indicate that the three "men" consisted of the Lord and two angels and that ultimately only the latter went on to Sodom, while the Lord remained with Abraham. This verse divides vv. 17–33 into two sections: in vv. 17–21 the Lord is speaking, in vv. 23–33 the initiative passes to Abraham, who pleads that Sodom should be spared.

The important questions are three: the reasons that led the editor to incorporate the older tradition into his narrative; the fundamental thought underlying the individual sections; and the relation between the first and second parts.

The first section starts with an account of the Lord's deliberations and conclusion: "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by him? No, for I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice *(ṣĕdāqāh ûmišpāṭ);* so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him" (vv. 17–19). This text sounds like a reworking of the Lord's statement in the Yahwistic version 12:3.[4] The emphasis is on the choice of Abraham to accomplish an exceptional task, an election that explains why the Lord trusts Abraham to such a degree that he even reveals to him his decision about the destruction of Sodom.[5]

The choice is not, of course, unconditional. The Lord explicitly says that the condition for the fulfilment of his promise is that Abraham shall behave with righteousness and justice. But what if this condition is not fulfilled? It appears that this very question is the pivot of the whole story. The Lord is not entrusting Abraham with his intentions regarding the destruction of Sodom for routine reasons of friendship; rather he is effectively warning him through the example of Sodom. If Abraham's descendants do not fulfil the conditions of "righteousness and justice," not only must they reckon that God's promises will be unfulfilled, but they must even face the possibility that they may suffer the fate of Sodom: destruction, instead of proliferation into a great nation.[6]

In all probability vv. 20–21 are a part of the original account of the sentence on Sodom and Gomorrah. The Lord is a righteous judge, and wishes to examine for himself the behaviour of the people. One would expect the report in chapter 19 to follow immediately, but instead the editor inserts the discussion between Abraham and the Lord. Abraham takes the part of Sodom, and the Lord responds. In vv. 23–26 we read:

> Then Abraham drew near, and said, "Wilt thou indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; wilt thou

[4] The choice of the word *gôy* rather than *mišpāḥāh* is one of the usages that testifies that the text is of more recent date. See L. Schmidt, "De Deo," 136–139.

[5] See Amos 3:7: "Surely the Lord God does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets."

[6] The fate of Sodom must serve as a warning to everyone, not just to those who have been entrusted with important tasks. Commentators mention only the positive reason for God's decision to disclose his plans for Sodom to Abraham. One would have expected the link between this decision and God's commandment "to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice" (v. 19) to have stimulated reflection in the negative direction as well.

> then destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from thee to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from thee! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right *(hăšōpēṭ kol-hā'āreṣ lō' ya'ăśeh mišpāṭ)?*" And the Lord said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake."

Abraham presumes that the divine resolve regarding the destruction of Sodom is final, but, because he is convinced that there are some righteous people in the city, the decision seems to him to contradict the principle of righteousness. God's acceptance of Abraham's demand validates two doctrines of divine righteousness: first, the righteous should not suffer the fate of the wicked; secondly, God is prepared to bear with the wicked on account of the righteous.[7] The first doctrine seems self-evident, but the second can cause great problems, for the basic human sense of justice demands that humans should enjoy good or suffer evil according to their conduct. Why then should God have to bear with the iniquity of the majority on account of the righteousness of the minority? Does not righteousness require the creation of a division between the righteous and the wicked, so that the wicked suffer their deserved punishment? Why does not Abraham plead only for the deliverance of the righteous?

Abraham persists until the Lord indicates by his reply that there are not as many good people in Sodom as Abraham had supposed. In reducing the minimum acceptable quota of the righteous from fifty to forty-five, forty, thirty, twenty, and finally to ten, Abraham loses ground and in the end bargains no more. After each reduction the Lord repeats his assurance that for the sake of *(ba'ăbûr)* fifty, forty, twenty, ten (vv. 26, 29, 31, 32) he is prepared to spare the whole region,[8] so the question presents itself: why does not Abraham risk going down to one in order to achieve his aim?[9] Abraham himself indicates the answer by his action in ceasing to ask questions that

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[7] The word "forbear" *(nāśā')* does not mean forgiveness but simply leniency. True forgiveness inexorably requires the desire for conversion. See C. Westermann, *Genesis,* vol. 2, 355: "Was heißt hier vergeben? ... Es bedeutet hier nicht mehr als (den Vernichtungsbeschluß) aufheben: Die Stadt soll nicht vernichtet werden. Es ist also hier nicht die Rede davon, daß die Stadt, deren Vernichtung beschlossen ist, umkehrt oder sich bekehrt wie in Jer 18,7–10 und Jon 3.4. Was diese Aufhebung der Strafe über Sodom begründet, wird hier ausgeklammert." That God is in principle prepared to "forgive" the whole region on account of the righteous minority is most clearly stated in Jer 5:1: "Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, look and take note! Search her squares to see if you can find a man, one who does justice *('ōśeh mišpāṭ)* and seeks truth; that I may pardon her *(wĕ'eslaḥ lāh).*"

[8] In principle God's forbearance is based on certain postulates. The decisive point is that the dialogue is a theological reflection. This means that the writer is using the antithetic pair *ṣaddîq // rāšā'* in a general sense. The iniquity is not always so great as to require punishment. Here of course we must not overlook the fact that the unforgivable wickedness of the people of Sodom occurred only after the dialogue between Abraham and the Lord.

[9] Commentators give all kinds of different answers to this question, but do not seem to reach the essence of the problem.

amount to an expression of mistrust in the divine righteousness. That Abraham felt he had to fall silent suggests that there may have been something wrong with his starting point. What exactly was his mistake?

An answer to this question is only possible if we consider the relationship between the partners in the dialogue. The initiative did not come from the Lord, but from Abraham, and his miscalculation was made clear by the simple device of assent, given immediately and repeated without comment. The reader readily ascertains that Abraham was mistaken in his estimate of the number of righteous persons to be found in Sodom. When Abraham realizes his error he falls silent, yet it must have been clear to him that God might continue his concessions until the number one was reached, or even go down to zero. Why then does Abraham not find some other means of continuing his parley with the Lord?

This question goes to the heart of the concept of God's righteousness, yet it is much neglected by exegesis. The reason appears to be that Abraham's error lies not in the rejection of certain principles but in the biased and exclusive use of one particular principle. Consequently, his transgression is not immediately obvious. It is difficult to get to the root of the misunderstanding if one is solely concerned with the literal exegesis of the text. All possible aspects of the righteousness of God, based on fundamental theological postulates, must be taken into account. The magnitude of Abraham's misunderstanding becomes clear in this broader perspective: he sees the righteousness of God as consisting in only one variety among the many that are in principle possible, and he uses only one yardstick for measuring the realization of that righteousness.

The variation chosen by Abraham reflects the ultimate degree of God's righteousness—the forgiveness of the wicked. It is a free gift and cannot therefore be demanded by human beings. Precisely on this account the amazing vista of salvation beyond all human desert opens up in the Bible, producing mediators such as the suffering servant in the Old Testament and the only righteous Redeemer of the world in the New Testament. Abraham is unaware of this at the moment of the threat to Sodom, or he would not link the forgiving nature of divine righteousness with mere human justice and make a demand upon the Lord. Abraham starts from the position that God, if he wants to demonstrate his righteousness, must forgive the whole region because of the virtue of the few. The supposition about the existence of these few leads him to the notion that God somehow depends on humankind's attitude to him.

At the start of the dialogue it appears as if Abraham is in the right, but its outcome shows that in fact only God is right, both at the beginning and at the end. Initially his righteousness shines out, as he accepts in principle Abraham's suggestion that he should bear with Sodom if enough righteous people can be found therein. This is extremely important, demonstrating as it does that the decision to destroy the city is not unconditional and is not yet

final. At the end of the dialogue the Lord is again shown to have been in the right, because Abraham's presumption about the required number of righteous was incorrect. Thus it is made clear that the Lord is justified in persisting in his decision.

The outcome of the dialogue appears chiefly to be that Abraham should not transgress on God's complete freedom to decide how to deal with the people of Sodom. His plea that the righteous should not suffer with the wicked is in principle justified, but he should not attempt to prescribe the manner in which the Lord should prove his righteousness in his relationship to both. This must become clear as soon as it is recognized that there are various ways in which the righteousness of God can be established. A familiar example is consistent action in accordance with the law of retribution, and the Lord does in fact behave in conformity with this law when he destroys Sodom, rescuing Lot by direct intervention. Those who were witnesses of the behaviour of its inhabitants could only be convinced that their punishment was justified.

The end result shows that the role of the dialogue is to allow the Lord to instruct Abraham. A challenge is issued and God responds like a tutor. This leads to a conflict between principle and historical truth, or between the one-sidedness of human demands and the spread of possibilities open to God as ruler of the world. Such a conflict can end only in the victory of divine righteousness over human short-sightedness. Before the "ruler of the universe" humans must fall silent, for the Lord of all things surely knows which principle to apply in any given situation.

From all this it is clear that the message of the dialogue is much more complex than many commentators suggest. Its central question cannot be whether the righteous minority can save the evil majority: that point is theologically indiscussable as long as the debate remains theoretical. It is equally myopic to view the dialogue as an apology for the judgment on Sodom:[10] the justification for that judgment is more than adequately demonstrated in chapter 19. Not only does the dialogue provide a positive answer to certain questions about the expression of divine righteousness in historical events, but the negative resonance of some very definite expectations calls for a better substantiated verification of viewpoints in the light of the undefined limits of fundamental theological postulates. The obvious contradictions can only be resolved if a verification of viewpoints takes into account not only the factors inherent in events but also the doctrinal possibilities of divine activity.

The narrative in chapter 19 is quite different from the dialogue that pre-

[10] See L. Schmidt, "De Deo," 143: "In v. 32 geht es also nicht um die Frage, ob eine gerechte Minderheit eine verderbte Stadt retten kann, sondern um die Rechtfertigung des Gerichts Jahwes über eine ganze Stadt."

cedes it, and shows no trace of theological reflection upon the fundamental questions of righteousness. Here we are translated to the world of hard and horrible experience, and Sodom's corruption is so obvious that forgiveness is not in question. It seems self-evidently proper that God should save the righteous Lot and destroy the corrupt city, but for this very reason we must pay careful consideration to the basic features of the story that are very similar to those of the Flood narrative. In both cases, the reason for the destruction is the corruption of "all" people, with only one righteous man, together with his family, being saved. But there is also an essential difference between the two: the Sodom narrative does not involve the destruction of "all" mankind, but only that of "all" the inhabitants of a limited region. This point is extremely important, for it explains why the later story does not breach God's earlier promise to Noah that never again will he destroy all living creatures by flood (cf. 8:20–9:17). This does not, of course, imply that the Flood narrative loses its validity as a threat: the radicalism of the judgment on Sodom shows convincingly that God cannot forgive the corruption of mankind, and the whole world must always exist, as do its individual regions, under the threat of divine judgment. Consequently we may once again draw attention to the statement in 18:17–19: the forecast of judgment goes hand-in-hand with the obligation to act with righteousness and justice.

2. *The Concept of Righteousness in Verses 19 and 25*

Our findings so far completely confirm first impressions that the deeper meaning of the dialogue between Abraham and God can only be properly understood within the framework of the entire narrative about Sodom in chapters 18 and 19. This principle is reinforced when we examine the concept of righteousness in vv. 19 and 25.

God's conclusion that the city must be destroyed flows from its people's failure to carry out their obligation to act with righteousness. The severity of God's response to their wickedness shows how serious is the requirement to display righteousness and justice laid upon Abraham's line by the Lord as a condition for the fulfilment of his promises. The question arises here what kind of righteousness the Lord expects as he places his obligation upon Abraham's descendants when he requires them: ... *wĕšāmĕrû derek yhwh la'ăśôt ṣĕdāqāh ûmišpāṭ,* "... to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice." This question is rendered even more important because of the very general nature of the statement.

It is probably not by chance that Abraham uses very similar words when in v. 25 he utters his expectations regarding God's righteousness in the cry: *hāšōpēṭ kol-hā'āreṣ lō' ya'ăśeh mišpāṭ,* "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Virtually the same words are used to designate human righteous-

ness in v. 19 and the righteousness of God in v. 25. Both verses use the verb *'āśāh* in the sense 'to do something'; the object of this verb is the pair *ṣĕdāqāh // mišpāṭ* in the first case, and *mišpāṭ* alone in the second. In v. 25 the same root *špṭ* serves as the subject *šōpēṭ* and the object *mišpāṭ*. What are the possibilities of ascertaining the meaning in both verses from the basic meaning of the root *špṭ*, taking both the context and fundamental theological postulates into consideration?

Research into the root *špṭ* and its derivatives has characteristically been concerned with establishing the basic meaning *(Grundbedeutung)*.[11] More recently B. Johnson has dealt with this concept fairly exhaustively and considers that the basic meaning must be sought in the sphere of jurisprudence.[12] Johnson does not provide a deeper interpretation of meaning but confines himself to a general account of aspects of meaning. Consequently, the older, more extensive study by H. W. Hertzberg remains useful although its theological conclusions are not always convincing.[13]

Hertzberg asserts that the verb *šāpaṭ* sometimes means 'to rule' *(regieren)*, sometimes 'deciding' *(Entscheiden)*. The meaning 'to decide' comes into consideration when the ruler's authority is exercising judicial power.[14] A ruler then exerts his will in relation to some object.[15] In the Bible ruling-judicial power is always of an ethical-religious nature, hence it is understandable that the "wretched" became the characteristic object of a ruler's *mišpāṭ*. It is a ruler's duty to protect the meek from the violence of unjust potentates. He must intercede in the judicial conflict in order to help the oppressed to obtain justice and condemn the wicked. When God takes the part of his "wretched," his *mišpāṭ* achieves the nature of compassion.[16] Looked at from God's side, *mišpāṭ* is an expression of his righteousness; from man's side *mišpāṭ* is grace.[17]

These findings are a good starting point in the search for the meaning of righteousness in verses 19 and 25. But a significant difference must be taken

[11] See G. Liedke, "שפט *špṭ* richten," *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, vol. 2 (ed. E. Jenni and C. Westermann; Munich: C. Kaiser; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1976), 999–1009.

[12] See "משפט *mišpāṭ*," *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, vol. 5 (ed. G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren; Stuttgart: W. Hohlhammer, 1984), 93–107.

[13] See "Die Entwicklung des Begriffes משפט im AT.," *ZAW* 40 (1922), 256–287; 41 (1923), 16–76.

[14] See part 2, p. 258: "Wenn sonach als wahrscheinlich hingestellt werden kann, daß das 'Regieren' die ursprüngliche Bedeutung des Stammes darstellt und daß das 'Richten' erst daraus hervorgegangen ist, so erklärt sich diese Doppelheit natürlich praktisch daraus, daß die Rechtsentscheidung eine Hauptaufgabe des Regenten war." J. van der Ploeg, "*šāpaṭ* et *mišpāṭ*," *OTS* 2 (1943), 144–155, responds with the assertion that the basic meaning of the root *špṭ* is, however, 'to judge,' but cannot prove his assertion, perhaps because he generally over-simplifies.

[15] See part 2, p. 259.

[16] See part 2, pp. 21, 33–39.

[17] See part 2, p. 39.

into account: the same words cannot have the same meaning if the subject of righteousness is in one instance humankind and in the other God. Verse 19 is speaking of human righteousness and thus the meaning of the words can only be assessed within the a priori possibilities of human relationship to God and to other people. Not only is *mišpāṭ* used here, but also the synonym *ṣĕdāqāh,* and many instances in the Hebrew Bible indicate that this is a fixed pair that can, in very different circumstances, designate divine or human righteousness, either in their present or the reverse order.[18]

When the two words signify human righteousness, the subject is frequently a king. The pair can be used in many senses: criticism, incentive, ideal, promise; and it is curiously difficult to be certain which sense is intended in any particular instance. Nor is the difference in meaning between *ṣĕdāqāh* and *mišpāṭ* clear. The statements in which they occur are always of a general nature: on one occasion the sentence contains an accusation that the people are not displaying righteousness and justice; on another it expresses the hope or the promise that a king will appear in the future who will rule with righteousness and justice, etc. Such examples suggest that the two words represent the sum of all positive qualities.

Verse 19 is no exception to these general rules. Here, too, the pair has no precise denotation. What kind of righteousness does it indicate in this context? Abraham has been promised that a great and mighty nation will originate from him and that in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed (v. 18). This promise lays an exceptional responsibility upon Abraham's posterity, (firstly) because they are the elect and (secondly) because of the greatness of the promise. The context thus provides a sufficient basis for the conclusion that the Lord (and the promise he makes) lays upon Abraham's descendants an obligation to manifest qualities of righteousness and justice to the highest degree. The expression *ṣĕdāqāh ûmišpāṭ* embodies the entire religious and moral law of the Hebrew revelation. It deals with God's demand for the ideal righteousness that begins with complete trust in his guidance. The text does not provide any basis for a more precise definition of the meaning of the two words.

What, however, of v. 25? The first thing we must take into account is that Abraham's cry "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" is not derived

[18] Cf. 1 Kgs 10:9; Isa 5:7, 16; 9:6; 28:17; 32:16; 33:5; 54:17; 56:1; 58:2; 59:9; Jer 4:2; 9:23: 22:3, 15; 33:15; Ezek 18:19, 21, 27; 33:14, 16, 19; 45:9; Amos 5:7, 24; 6:12; Pss 33:5; 36:7; 72:1; 99:4; 103:6; 106:3; Job 37:23; Prov 8:20; 16:8; 21:3; 2 Chr 9:8. The pair *ṣedeq // mišpāṭ* appears as well (also in the reverse order): Isa 1:21; 16:5; 26:9; 32:1; 51:4–5; Hos 2:21; Zeph 2:3; Pss 37:6; 72:2; 89:15; 97:2; 119:121; Job 8:3; 29:14; 35:2; Prov 1:3: 2:9; Qoh 5:7. The use of the syntagma *'āśāh mišpāṭ ûṣĕdāqāh* is frequent: 2 Sam 8:15 (= 1 Chr 18:14); 1 Kgs 10:9 (= 2 Chr 9:8); Jer 9:23; 22:3,15; 23:5; 33:15; Ezek 18:5, 19, 21, 27; 33:14, 16, 19; 45:9; Pss 99:4; 103:6. The succession *ṣĕdāqāh // mišpāṭ* appears only in the example given, in Ps 103:6 (where the subject is God), and in Prov 21:3.

from any generally accepted Hebrew doctrine of divine righteousness. He is only expressing his own reaction to a specific situation. His rhetorical question gives the impression that the Lord's decision to destroy the whole region of Sodom is wrong, not to mention unjustified. Consequently, the cry of itself scarcely possesses any theological meaning worth considering. Its significance lies in bringing out how readily human ideas and expectations come into conflict with the true meaning of divine righteousness. The Lord's replies show that the divine horizon is in its very nature broader than that of human righteousness.

A study of Abraham's point of view and God's responses shows that it is possible to compare the Genesis dialogue with those of the book of Job. The dialogues between Job and his friends are unsatisfactory because they are onesided. The divine reply does not offer clear or immediate solutions, but it does show that humans can solve their conflicts in relation to God only if they rise to the level of the divine eternity and boundlessness.

When Abraham cries "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" he has in mind only a single aspect of the divine righteousness.[19] In his response, the Lord reveals directly only one other mode of bringing his righteousness into play: the punishment of the wicked and the deliverance of the righteous. But he opens up more possibilities to him indirectly, for Abraham's cry is a challenge to God over the entire range of divine activity. When Hebrew monotheism reached its zenith, God was seen in the full sense of the word as Judge of all the world, with unlimited opportunities for expressing his righteousness in action. Absolute monotheism assumes from the start that God always, and in accordance with the situation, deals correctly with man. Only God knows when there is a need for promises, benefits, threats, or punishments. Thus it seems self-evident that God is utterly free in all his activities.

This conclusion makes it necessary to touch upon the question of exegetical methods. If we wish to comprehend the basis and breadth of the concept of divine righteousness, then a literal explanation of certain biblical texts will not suffice. An evaluation of divine righteousness in the a priori and synthetic sense is more a matter of the inner logic of the axioms of belief than evidence derived from individual words and situations reflected by

[19] The Hebrew Bible contains fairly frequent examples of the syntagma *'śh mišpāṭ:* Deut 10:18; 1 Kgs 3:28; 8:45, 49, 59 (= 2 Chr 6:35, 39); Jer 5:1; 7:5; Ezek 18:8; 39:21; Mic 6:8; 7:9; Pss 9:5, 17; 119:84; 140:13; 146:7; Prov 21:7, 15. In Zeph 2:3 we find the verb *pā'al.* All these examples indicate that the syntagma has a broad span of meaning. It is understandable that the span is much broader whenever the subject is God. Such examples also clearly indicate the affinity between the concepts *mišpāṭ* and *ṣedeq/ṣĕdāqāh.* When the subject of the word *ṣedeq/ṣĕdāqāh* is God it designates the goodness of God, his fidelity and mercy, the correctness of God's actions. See J. Krašovec, *La justice (ṣdq) de Dieu dans la Bible hébraïque et l'interprétation juive et chrétienne* (OBO 76; Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988).

the texts.[20] An in-depth understanding of the divine righteousness naturally involves the renunciation of the one-sided human measurement of righteousness. Conflicts are unavoidable when we are assessing the relation between the eternal and the temporal, but humans can bridge them satisfactorily if they are prepared to admit their own limitations and bow before the ruler of the universe. A limited human creature cannot litigate with his Creator;[21] the ways of divine righteousness are necessarily enveloped in a mystery that created beings cannot penetrate.

The traditional account of Abraham shows that he eventually achieved this comprehension, as emerges most clearly from the classical narrative on the trial of his faith in 22:1–19. God tells Abraham: "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you" (v. 2). Now if ever he had reason to cry: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Yet he reacted very differently and set off without hesitation, without in any way demanding a reason for this "senseless" requirement. Such obedience is possible only when a person possesses the theoretical knowledge that God is the "Judge of all the earth" and lives in the full consciousness that God is the sole ruler of his life and death, and one who acts in accordance with his own concept of righteousness. Only then can he renounce completely any judgment of the divine righteousness and only then can he hope against hope that God will not carry through his decision, which clashes so discordantly with the ways and wishes of humankind's understanding and heart.

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[20] M. Weiss, "Some Problems of the Biblical 'Doctrine of Retribution,'" *Tarbiz* 31 (1961–1962), 236–263, esp. pp. 250–252, rejects the implications of the Wellhausen school that the text is an expression of the collective concept of retribution, with the emphasis that this is not a matter of judicial testifying but an expression of a living faith, a prayer uttered in a special situation and under unique circumstances. In doing so he also rejects the possibility that the biblical text could be valid as "a doctrine of retribution." The emphasis on the individuality and uniqueness of individual texts is characteristic of Weiss in general. However, this standpoint may lead nowhere if the uniqueness of the situation is emphasized too onesidedly, thus neglecting the possibility of deriving conclusions from the placing of questions arising from the given text within the framework of postulated belief.

[21] C. S. Rodd says in his article entitled "Shall not the Judge of All the Earth Do What Is Just? (Gen 18,25)," *ET* 83 (1971–1972), 137–139, on p. 138: "What seems to me to be inescapable is that Abraham sets some standard over against God by which he dares to judge God's actions ..." At the end he invokes the "total world view," saying: "The important thing, for our morality as well as for Abraham's is that we should dare to ask the question, 'Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is just?'" This conclusion is the expression of Rodd's conviction that Abraham's call to the righteousness of God signifies a deeper comprehension of morality in the Old Testament. He proves his viewpoint only superficially with a independent understanding of the relation between divine commandment and objective moral norms. Therefore he could overlook the fact that Abraham had courage enough to fall completely silent before the argument of the Lord of all the world despite his own moral standards, when it became clear to him that God's thinking differed from his.

CHAPTER III

PUNISHMENT FOR PHARAOH'S STUBBORNNESS
(Exod 7:8–11:10)

Modern interpreters of the biblical story of the plagues in Egypt generally devote much attention to literary, form-critical, and traditio-historical problems. The recognized view is that the Exodus text is constructed from three sources: Yahwist, Elohist, and Priestly.[1] There are, however, cogent arguments against a monopoly of the exegetical field by source criticism, and some scholars prefer to concentrate on the final form of the text so as to focus more sharply on its theological meaning.[2]

What do the content and the stylistic devices of the narrative indicate in this context? The first point to note is that the introduction (7:8–13) and the conclusion (11:1–10) balance one another. The introduction shows Moses and Aaron, as God's deputies, performing a wonder *(môpēt)* before Pharaoh: Aaron's rod turns into a snake. The court magicians match the performance, but Aaron's rod swallows theirs. Pharaoh's heart then hardens and he refuses to comply with Moses' demand that the Israelites be released from

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[1] See, however, F. Kohata, *Jahwist und Priesterschrift in Exodus 3–14* (BZAW 166; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1986), who concludes that the Jahwist, Elohist, and Priestly sources are represented in chaps. 3–7 and 12–14, but only the Jahwist and Priestly sources in 7:8–11:10. See especially tables on pp. 126 and 128. See also M. Noth, *Das zweite Buch Mose: Exodus* (ATD 5; 2nd ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961), 52–53; English translation, *Exodus: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1962), 69–71.

[2] See especially C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Genesis und Exodus* (BC; 3rd ed.; Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1878; 4th ed.; Gießen / Basel: Brunnen-Verlag, 1983), 398–423; English translation, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1: *The Pentateuch* (CFThL III/22; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1964), 472–501; E. Galbiati, *La struttura letteraria dell'Esodo* (STh 3; Roma: Edizione Paoline, 1956), esp. pp. 111–163; U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967), 92–135; D. J. McCarthy, "Moses' Dealings with Pharaoh: Ex 7,8–10,27," *CBQ* 27 (1965), 336–347; idem, "Plagues and the Sea of Reeds: Exodus 5–14," *JBL* 85 (1966), 137–158; M. Greenberg, "The Thematic Unity of Exodus III–XI," *Fourth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1967), 151–154; idem, *Understanding Exodus* (New York: Behrman House, 1969), esp. pp. 151–92; idem, "The Redaction of the Plague Narrative in Exodus," *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of W. E. Albright* (ed. H. Goedicke; Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), 234–252; J. van Seters, *The Life of Moses: The Yahwist As Historian in Exodus–Numbers* (Kampen: Kok, 1994); F. Ahuis, *Exodus 11,1–13,16 und die Bedeutung der Trägergruppen für das Verständnis des Passa* (FRLANT 168; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996); M. Vervenne, *Studies in the Book of Exodus: Redaction—Reception—Interpretation* (BEThL 126; Leuven: University Press / Peeters, 1996); J. G. Janzen, *Exodus* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997); G. Ravasi, *Esodo* (5th ed.; Brescia: Ed. Queriniana, 1997); M. S. Smith, *The Pilgrimage Pattern in Exodus* (with contributions by E. M. Boch-Smith; JSOT.S 239; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997); B. Jacob, *Das Buch Exodus* (ed. S. Mayer; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1997).

Egypt. A similar hardening of heart is reported in the last two verses of the narrative (11:9–10).

The consequence of Pharaoh's resistance to God results in Egypt being stricken with ten plagues, of which nine are grouped together in chapters 7–10, while the tenth stands apart in chapters 11–12. The description given indicates that the nine plagues can be divided into three groups of three plagues each. In each group, the first and second plagues occur only after Moses has served notice on Pharaoh, whereas the third plague follows without warning. In the case of the first, fourth and seventh plagues, Moses receives the divine command to appear before Pharaoh "in the morning." It should also be noted that the first three plagues affect all the inhabitants, Egyptians and Israelites alike, while the other six strike only the Egyptians—thus emphasizing the difference between the two groups. A point of special importance is that the plagues become more terrible as the hardness of Pharaoh's heart increases. Their effects persuade him several times to confess his guilt and to plead for God's forbearance, but the change is transient: in the end, repeated signs and wonders do not persuade Pharaoh to release the Israelites. It follows that God, for his part, has to set limits to his readiness to pardon Pharaoh's guilt and to save him from perdition.

God's repeated demands and Pharaoh's failure to submit to them—even though he recognizes his fault—are the main (though not the only) unifying elements of the narrative. The inner unity of its themes is evidently the result of theological elaboration on original historical material as part of a systematic process of revision. An investigation of the text must, therefore, take account of continuing interaction between historical and theological truth; and this means that the literary-rhetorical devices of the biblical narrative have to be carefully considered.[3]

[3] We find strong support for such an approach in some recent publications: J. Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," *JBL* 88 (1969), 1–18; J. J. Jackson and M. Kessler (eds.), *Rhetorical Criticism: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg* (PThMS 1; Pittsburgh, Pa.: Pickwick Press, 1974); D. J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (JSOT.S 10; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1974); D. Patte, *What is Structural Exegesis?* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1976); R. M. Polzin, *Biblical Structuralism: Method and Subjectivity in the Study of Ancient Texts* (SS 6; Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977); R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); N. Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982); R. M. Polzin and E. Rothman (eds.), *The Biblical Mosaic: Changing Perspectives* (SBL.SS; Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982); R. Alter and F. Kermode (eds.), *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (London: Collins, 1987); M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington; Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1987); A. Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1994); D. F. Watson and A. J. Hauser, *Rhetorical Criticism of the Bible: A Comprehensive Bibliography with Notes on History and Method* (BIS 4; Leiden / New York / Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1994); R. H. O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges* (VT.S 63; Leiden / New York / Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1996).

1. *The Thematic Unity of Exodus 3–14*

Some of the statements characteristic of Exod 7:8–11:10 appear, with variations, from chapter 3 onwards, for the revelation of God's name has already met with human resistance and disbelief. The active agent is God, while Moses and Aaron consistently follow his orders. Hence Pharaoh's resistance to God's demands is of neither a political nor social, but rather of a theological nature. God's repeated demands and Pharaoh's failure to submit to them constitute a framework for the entire section that deals with the exodus, while giving rise to other themes that occur with greater or less frequency in the narrative.[4]

1.1 *God's Demand That Pharaoh Release His People*

God's commission to Moses to lead the exodus first appears in 3:7–22, which contains Yahwist and Elohist material: Yahwist in vv. 7, 8, 16–22, Elohist in vv. 9–15.[5] God reveals directly to Moses that he intends to deliver the Israelites from the hands of the Egyptians, to give them a new land "flowing with milk and honey" (3:8, 17), but the plan to be presented to Pharaoh has an expressly religious motivation. He instructs Moses:

> And they will hearken to your voice; and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, "The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; and now, we pray you, let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God" (3:18).

In 4:22–23 the demand turns becomes a threat:

> And you shall say to Pharaoh, "Thus says the Lord, Israel is my first-born son, and I say to you, 'Let my son go that he may serve me'; if you refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay your first-born son."

Moses and Aaron duly went to Pharaoh with the demand: "Thus says the

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[4] See E. Galbiati, *La struttura letteraria dell'Esodo,* 299–305: "Struttura unitaria dell'Esodo"; M. Greenberg, *Fourth World Congress of Jewish Studies,* vol. 1, 151–154; idem, *Understanding Exodus.* We must, however, bear in mind that the whole section Exod 1:1–5:21 displays a basic thematic unity. The first chapter reports how Pharaoh oppressed the Hebrew population by imposing hard labour on them and by ordering the massacre of their male children. Such activities by a human ruler were contrary to God's measures and plans, and a divine riposte was therefore necessary. Pharaoh's decision to massacre the Hebrew new-born is evidently the explanatory background to the slaying of the Egyptian firstborn (chap. 13). Pharaoh's challenge also explains why the same root *qšh* is used for designating the 'hard service' *('ābōdāh qāšāh)* imposed on the Hebrews by Pharaoh (1:14) and the hardening of his heart (7:3; 13:15). Equally, it seems most appropriate that the whole section dealing with the exodus from Egypt concludes with the song of thanksgiving sung by Moses and the people of Israel after their Lord had saved them (15:1–21).

[5] See M. Noth, *Das zweite Buch Mose: Exodus,* 22; B. S. Childs, *Exodus* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1974), 52–53; F. Kohata, *Jahwist und Priesterschrift in Exodus 3–14,* 15–27, 372.

Lord, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness'" (5:1). Pharaoh replies, "Who is the Lord, that I should heed his voice and let Israel go?" (5:2), and they continue: "The God of the Hebrews has met with us; let us go, we pray, a three days' journey into the wilderness, and sacrifice to the Lord our God, lest he fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword" (5:3). When Pharaoh, instead of granting the request, tightens the bands of oppression, Moses complains: "O Lord, why hast thou done evil to this people? Why didst thou ever send me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he has done evil to this people, and thou hast not delivered thy people at all" (5:22–23). God's reply, however, is decisive: "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for with a strong hand he will send them out, yea, with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land" (6:1).

In 6:2–7:7 we find the Priestly source's account of Moses' calling.[6] The revelation of God's name here is an affirmation of his past promises to the Fathers concerning Canaan. When he hears the "groaning" of his people in Egypt, God remembers his earlier covenant and promises to deliver his people from slavery and give them the land he had promised their ancestors (6:2–8). The exodus theme echoes throughout the passage (6:6–8, 11, 13, 26–27; 7:2, 4–5), and is the sole theme of the address to Pharaoh. No mention is made of the Promised Land or of worshipping God in the desert.

In the description of the plagues, God's demand appears only in the Yahwist source, often accompanied by threat of fresh plagues: 7:16, 26–27; 8:16–17; 9:1–3, 13; 10:3–4.[7] With minor variations, this demand is repeated everywhere with the religious motivation already noted in 4:23 and 5:1, 3. The formulation of the order to Moses to present God's demand to Pharaoh is also very similar (except in 10:3–4). The passage in 9:1–4 is typical. In 11:1(8); 12:51; 13:14–16 the theme of the exodus surfaces once again in its own unique formulation. In 11:1(8) God affirms that after the crucial plague of the death of all the first-born, Pharaoh will release the people of Israel (cf. 6:1), and 12:51 is states that God led them out of the land of Egypt on the Passover. In 13:14–16 we find an explanation to be offered to later generations that, in remembrance of the day upon which God led the people of Israel from Egypt, all first-born males—other than human beings—must be sacrificed to God.

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[6] See M. Noth, *Das zweite Buch Mose: Exodus*, 42; B. S. Childs, *Exodus*, 111; F. Kohata, *Jahwist und Priesterschrift in Exodus* 3–14, 28–41, 372.

[7] See especially M. Noth, *Das zweite Buch Mose: Exodus*, 53; B. S. Childs, *Exodus*, 131; F. Kohata, *Jahwist und Priesterschrift in Exodus 3–14*, esp. pp. 93–172.

1.2 *Pharaoh's Resistance and Hardness of Heart*

God declares in 3:19–20: "I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. So I will stretch out my hand and smite Egypt with all the wonders which I will do in it; after that he will let you go." Pharaoh's argument in support of his resistance is characteristic: "Who is the Lord, that I should heed his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and moreover I will not let Israel go" (5:2). In the Priestly source Moses, reflecting upon his commission, expresses his conviction that Pharaoh will not listen to him (6:12, 30).

Pharaoh's stubbornness is so adamantine that the theme of hardening (the heart) occurs in no fewer than twenty places, by using three verbs: *ḥzq, kbd, qšh.* In ten of them Pharaoh is said to have hardened his heart (7:13, 14, 22; 8:11, 15, 28; 9:7, 34, 35; 13:15), and in ten God declares that he will harden (or has hardened) Pharaoh's heart (4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17) or is said to have hardened Pharaoh's heart. The main reasons for the variations in the formula used must undoubtedly lie in the variety of sources and a desire to ring the changes.[8] The effect upon Pharaoh of the signs and wonders performed by Moses and Aaron under God's orders is the opposite to what could have been expected. After the first of them 7:13 says: "Pharaoh's heart was hardened and he would not listen to them; as the Lord had said," and when the first plague follows, 7:22 states: "But the magicians of Egypt did the same by their secret arts; so Pharaoh's heart remained hardened, and he would not listen to them; as the Lord had said." The second plague causes him at first to entreat God to end it, promising to let the Israelites go. "But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart, and would not listen to them; as the Lord had said" (8:11). We find a similar formulation in 8:15, while 8:28 says that yet again Pharaoh hardened his heart, refusing to release the people. A similar statement appears in 9:7. In 9:34–35 we read: "But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned yet again, and hardened his heart, he and his servants. So the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people of Israel go; as the Lord had spoken through Moses."

What does the coda, repeated in almost every instance, "as the Lord had said (spoken)" refer to? Evidently to the statement made before the plagues began, i.e., 4:21, where God says to Moses: "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles which I have put in your

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[8] F. Hesse, *Das Verstockungsproblem im Alten Testament* (BZAW 74; Berlin: A. Töpelmann, 1955), 18–19, ascribes 7:14; 8:11, 28; 9:7, 34 to the Yahwist, 9:35; 10:20, 27 to the Elohist, 7:3, 12, 22; 8:15; 9:12; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17 to the Priestly source, and 13:15 to the Deuteronomist. 4:21 and 10:1 are in his opinion editor's insertions. For the function of Pharaoh's hardening of heart, see H. Liss, "Die Funktion der 'Verstockung' Pharaos in der Erzählung vom Auszug aus Ägypten (Ex 7–14)," *BN* 93 (1998), 56–76.

power; but I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go."[9] This forecast is fulfilled by the statement in 9:12: "But the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not listen to them; as the Lord had spoken to Moses." In 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10 the second part of the statement is different: the Lord has hardened Pharaoh's heart in order to show his signs to the Egyptians (10:1), or so that Pharaoh would not let the people of Israel go (10:20, 27; 11:10). Finally 14:4, 8, 17 state that God hardened (or will harden) Pharaoh's heart and the hearts of the Egyptians so that they pursued (or will pursue) the Israelites.

1.3 *Signs, Wonders, and Judgments*

Both central themes, God's plan for the exodus from Egypt and Pharaoh's resistance to it, are closely linked to the divine display of signs and wonders. God is not the direct worker of these miracles, but functions through Moses and Aaron, and it is therefore clearly evident that they serve a dual purpose. First, they are a recognisable symbol of God's power and uniqueness; secondly, they legitimate the divine commission of Moses and Aaron to carry through the exodus. This duality is also obvious in relation to the people of Israel and the Egyptians: to the former they are proof that Moses has indeed been called by God; to the latter they serve as a manifestation of God's power before Pharaoh. What are the responses from the two sides?

The first significant passage in this connection is 4:1–9, where Moses expresses to God his fear that, when he addresses them, the people will not believe that God had in fact appeared to him. In reply Moses is ordered to perform two actions that lead to miracles (vv. 1–7)—primarily to convince himself that there is good reason for this divine intervention in his life. Moses is then told to repeat what he has just done in front of the people:

> If they will not believe you or heed the first sign *(hā'ōt hārī'šôn),* they may believe the latter sign *(hā'ōt hā'aḥărôn).* If they will not believe even these two signs *(lišnê hā'ōtôt hā'ēlleh)* or heed your voice, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it upon the dry ground; and the water which you shall take from the Nile will become blood upon the dry ground (4:8–9).

And when God designates Aaron to assist him, he orders Moses: "And you shall take in your hand this rod, with which you shall do the signs *('et-hā'ōtôt)*" (4:17). Moses sets about his task, and the radically different attitude of his compatriots and Pharaoh to belief and obedience immediately emerge. Thus in 4:21 God instructs Moses how to deal with Pharaoh: "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the mira-

[9] In the Priestly source dealing with Moses' calling (6:2–7:7) the context of the forecast that God will harden Pharaoh's heart is rather different. Here the talk is of God's redeeming the sons of Israel and giving them for their possession the land of Canaan (6:2–8; 7:5).

cles *(kol-hammōpĕtîm)* which I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go." In contrast, 4:29–31, which concerns Moses' handling of the people of Israel, states:

> Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the people of Israel. And Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken to Moses, and did the signs *(hā'ōtōt)* in the sight of the people. And the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshipped.

In the Priestly source's account of the calling of Moses (6:2–7:7), we find not only the words for signs and miracles noted above but also the expression *šepeṭ,* 'judgment.' Thus in 6:6 God states: "Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment *(bišpāṭîm gĕdōlîm).*'" And in 7:3–5 he declares:

> But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders *('et-'ōtōtay wĕ'et-môpĕtay)* in the land of Egypt, Pharaoh will not listen to you; then I will lay my hand upon Egypt and bring forth my hosts, my people the sons of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment *(bišpāṭîm gĕdōlîm).* And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch forth my hand upon Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them.

In passages dealing with the plagues, the terms used for signs and miracles appear in 7:9; 10:1, 2; 11:9, 10. The first of these deals with God's command to Moses and Aaron:

> When Pharaoh says to you, "Prove yourselves by working a miracle *(môpēt),*" then you shall say to Aaron, "Take your rod and cast it down before Pharaoh, that it may become a serpent."

In 10:1–2 God addresses Moses alone, saying:

> Go in to Pharaoh; for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may show these signs of mine *('ōtōtay 'ēlleh)* among them, and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your son's son how I have made sport of the Egyptians and what signs *(wĕ'et-'ōtōtay)* I have done among them; that you may know that I am the Lord.

The last two verses of the report on the plagues (11:9–10) are also characteristic; they contain God's declaration to Moses:

> Pharaoh will not listen to you; that my wonders *(môpĕtay)* may be multiplied in the land of Egypt. Moses and Aaron did all these wonders *('et-kol-hammōpĕtîm hā'ēlleh)* before Pharaoh; and the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the people of Israel go out of his land.

Finally, part of the miracle vocabulary also appears in God's decision concerning the Passover. In 12:12–13 we read:

> For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments *(šĕpāṭîm):* I am the Lord. The blood shall be a sign for you *(lākem lĕ'ōt),* upon the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall fall upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.

1.4 *The Purpose of the Signs Is to Ensure Recognition of God*

The thematic unity of chapters 3–14 is also clearly apparent in the overall view of the purpose of the exodus from Egypt, i.e., the knowledge of God. The verb *yāda'* appears eleven times in formulations that are more or less the same. References to the Egyptians always sound like an antithesis of Pharaoh's declaration in 5:2. When Moses and Aaron come to Pharaoh for the first time with God's demand to "Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness" (5:1), Pharaoh responds: "Who is the Lord, that I should heed his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord *(lō' yāda'tî 'et yhwh),* and moreover I will not let Israel go" (5:2). The Egyptians' recognition of God is forecast in 7:5: "And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch forth my hand upon Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them." When the first plague is imminent, God's tells Pharaoh: "By this you shall know that I am the Lord" (7:17). After the second plague, when Pharaoh begs Moses to entreat God to end the plague "tomorrow," Moses responds: "Be it as you say, that you may know that there is no one like the Lord our God" (8:6). Again, at the start of the fourth plague, when God excludes the land of Goshen in order to underline the distinction between the Israelites and the Egyptians, he tells Pharaoh: "... that you may know I am the Lord in the midst of the earth" (8:18). He heralds the sixth plague with the words: "For this time I will send all my plagues upon your heart, and upon your servants and your people, that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth" (9:14). After the sixth plague and Pharaoh's plea, Moses (as in 8:6) promises that the plagues will cease: "As soon as I have gone out of the city, I will stretch out my hands to the Lord; the thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, that you may know that the earth is the Lord's" (9:29). And his prediction of the deaths of the first-born concludes: "... that you may know that the Lord makes a distinction between the Egyptians and Israel" (11:7). In the context of the march towards the Red Sea God predicts: "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host; and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord " (14:4; very similarly in 14:18). Twice, however, the aim of the miracles is that the people of Israel should recognize God. In 6:7 they are told: "... I will take you for my people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the

Egyptians." And 10:1–2, cited above in 1.3, ends with the same refrain: "... that you (Israel) may know that I am the Lord."

2. *Significance of the Correlation of Key Statements*

All this provides sufficient testimony to the thematic unity of chapters 3–14. But there is a further unity—that of consistent correlation, of a causal linkage between the terms occurring sequentially throughout.

The initiative comes from God in a specific historical situation. When the Israelites are in bondage under the hard hand of the mighty Pharaoh, God appears as liberator, thereby demonstrating that the deliverance of his oppressed people is an essential part of his world rule. Like any tyrant who is challenged, Pharaoh predictably opposes his own authority to God's, and the conflict between the two authorities is so inexorable and radical that a complete subjection of one to the other becomes inevitable. It is logical that the human tyrant should retreat before God. He has only two choices in such a situation: recognition of his own iniquity and a subsequent change of heart, or stubborn resistance leading to destruction.

God does not provoke conflict as a result of any desire to exercise power as such but by his very nature. These chapters form an expression of mature Hebrew monotheism. God unites in himself all the qualities of universal master and stands in radical opposition to everything negative. Only he possesses justified authority over the world, over nations and individuals, and because this authority is completely positive, one of his essential roles lies in defending the oppressed and toppling the tyrant. Manifestation of his power implies deliverance for the oppressed. As liberation from Egyptian slavery is a singularity, the Israelites recognise who is their Saviour as a direct result of God's miraculous activity, not only for their own particular era but for all time to come, and will tell subsequent generations what God did to Pharaoh and his people. For the Egyptians, God's signs and wonders are of course the mark of punishment and perdition, and compel Pharaoh to recognize against his will that God is the sole master in the land. Because he has wrongfully appropriated authority, however, he can be brought to his knees only by force.

The narrative is not primarily concerned with who will win the duel, but with who is right and will therefore, in accordance with the fundamental laws of the world, gain the victory. The miracles are evidence of internal rather than external strength and consequently possess a moral character. In them, both the power of the supreme authority and punishment for Pharaoh's stubbornness are made manifest and become valid.

2.1 *Recognition of God's Righteousness and a Plea for Mercy*

The most interesting feature of the exodus narrative is Pharaoh's response to God's signs and wonders. These manifestations of divine power lead Pharaoh to certain insights' recognitions that are of key theological significance: God is righteous, but Pharaoh is wicked; the plagues are punishment for this iniquity; entreating God leads to a cessation of the plagues. Nonetheless, Pharaoh refuses to bow to the divine demand and increasingly acts in defiance of all he has learnt about the nature of God.

This first becomes apparent in the context of the second plague (7:26–8:11). When Egypt is covered in frogs, Pharaoh begs Moses and Aaron: "Entreat the Lord *(ha'tîrû 'el-yhwh)* to take away the frogs from me and from my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the Lord" (8:4). When Pharaoh asks that this plea be made "tomorrow," Moses replies: "Be it as you say, that you may know that there is no one like the Lord our God" ((8:6), and after his intercession the frogs duly die away. "But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart, and would not listen to them; as the Lord had said" (8:10).

The next two plagues lead to similar retractions. After the third plague, the magicians admit: "This is the finger of God," but "Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them" (8:15). Following the fourth plague, Pharaoh says he is willing to let the Israelites go, adding: "Make entreaty for me *(ha'tîrû ba'ădî)*" (8:24). Moses agrees, saying: "Behold, I am going out from you and I will pray to the Lord *(wĕha'tartî 'el-yhwh)* that the swarms of flies may depart from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people, tomorrow; only let not Pharaoh deal falsely again by not letting the people go to sacrifice to the Lord." (8:25). In 8:26 we read: "So Moses went out from Pharaoh and prayed to the Lord *(wayye'tar 'el-yhwh).*" God again acts upon Moses' words "But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and did not let the people go" (8:27–28).

Renegation reaches its climax after the seventh plague. In 9:27–35 we read:

> Then Pharaoh sent, and called Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "I have sinned this time; the Lord is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong *(ḥāṭā'tî happā'am yhwh haṣṣaddîq wa'ănî wĕ'ammî hārĕšā'îm).* Entreat the Lord *(ha'tîrû 'el-yhwh)* ..." But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned yet again *(wayyōsep laḥăṭō'),* and hardened his heart, he and his servants. So the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people of Israel go; as the Lord had spoken through Moses.

In face of the threat of an eighth plague, Pharaoh's servants advise him to let the Israelites go: "How long shall this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the Lord their God; do you not yet understand that Egypt is ruined?" (10:7). But Pharaoh will have none of it and God ordains a

plague of locusts, whereupon Pharaoh yet again demonstrates his duplicity. In 10:16–20 we read:

> Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron in haste, and said, "I have sinned against the Lord *(ḥāṭā'tî layhwh)* your God, and against you. Now therefore, forgive my sin *(śā' nā' ḥaṭṭā'tî)*, I pray you, only this once, and entreat *(wĕha'tîrû)* the Lord your God only to remove this death from me." So he went out from Pharaoh, and entreated *(wayye'tar)* the Lord. And the Lord turned a very strong west wind, which lifted the locusts and drove them into the Red Sea; not a single locust was left in all the country of Egypt. But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the children of Israel go.

Following the ninth plague Pharaoh seems yet again prepared to relent—but attaches a condition: "Go, serve the Lord; your children also may go with you; only let your flocks and your herds remain behind" (10:24). When Moses rejects this condition, Pharaoh dismisses him with a threat of death (10:27–28). After the tenth plague, the "smiting" of the first-born, Pharaoh nonetheless summons Moses and Aaron and says:

> Rise up, go forth from among my people, both you and the people of Israel; and go, serve the Lord, as you have said. Take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone; and bless *(ûbēraktem)* me also! (12:31–32).

In 12:39 it is even stated that the Egyptians thrust the people of Israel out of Egypt. Even as they went, however, Pharaoh changed his mind yet again, and sent his army after them, which then perished in the waters of the Red Sea (14:5–31).

What is the theological significance of these excerpts in the exodus narrative as a whole? Directly or indirectly Pharaoh admits his guilt and the justice of the punishment. It follows that he is aware that punishment can cease only if he bows to God's demands. Moses consistently acts in accordance with his conviction that God is lenient as soon as a sinner demonstrates his readiness to submit to the divine will. Not only the call for punishment but also its revocation is the hallmark of God's authority (8:6; 9:29).

Pharaoh's readiness to yield is always short-lived. Does this mean that God's signs and wonders are not sufficiently powerful to demonstrate the wrongness of Pharaoh's behaviour? The whole sequence of events and declarations indicates exactly the opposite. The plagues intensify because Pharaoh acts more and more clearly in a manner that is wilfully inconsistent with knowledge of God. His confession of guilt and recognition of the justice of the punishment do not arise from repentance but from his fear of ever more severe punishment. Whatever happens, Pharaoh rejects the possibility of relinquishing his own position of power. Hence the intensification of the miraculous happenings not only offers clearer proof that God is Lord of the earth, but also augments the evidence that Pharaoh's stubbornness is truly culpable. Because his behaviour flouts clearly evident facts, his insubordi-

nation is blameworthy in the extreme, and is the secret of an obduracy that finally leads to perdition. Moses' conclusion: "But as for you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear the Lord God" (9:30) is thus valid in the fullest sense of the words he uses.

In this context Pharaoh's confession in 9:27: "I have sinned this time; the Lord is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong," deserves special attention. Explanations of a legalistic nature have been offered for this sentence.[10] Which ideological presupposition should be the basis for interpreting this declaration: the Egyptian or the Hebrew? Does the confession express a superficial, one-sided, or even erroneous understanding of God's righteousness and of personal iniquity?

The thematic unity of chapters 3–14, i.e., the intensity of the struggle between God and Pharaoh, indicates that the declaration is put into the mouth of Pharaoh by the Hebrew writer, who of course understands it in the usual Hebrew fashion. The antithesis *ṣaddîq // rĕšā'îm* must therefore possess, in this context, the broadest and most profound meaning permitted by Hebrew monotheism. The writer perceives in God the embodiment of the highest possible degree of righteousness. If the aim of the signs and wonders was to enforce the realization that the God of Moses is a God beyond comparison, then it is evident that he is indisputably righteous in every respect: in taking the initiative to deliver the Israelites from Pharaoh's yoke, in persisting in his policy, in punishing Pharaoh. Whatever contradicts this is erroneous or iniquitous. Acknowledgment of God's righteousness is causally linked to a recognition of his superior might. This is not a clash between two human forces in which the question of primacy remains open. Here the divine power is opposing merely human force, and there are therefore a priori reasons for believing that a manifestation of God's power implies an expression of the highest possible righteousness. This conclusion is not dictated by this or that system of belief but by the universal canons of the human mind. The declaration is both fundamental and universal in character.

The words "this time" do not contradict this view. When Pharaoh states that he has sinned "this time," he is unlikely to be implying that he is otherwise innocent.[11] A recognition of God brought about by the manifestation of his power has "this time" shaken the very essence of his existence, based as it is upon a mistaken view and exercise of power. Pharaoh's sin lies in resisting God's absolute authority, in doggedly clinging to his own human authority —which is what makes him incapable of ultimate submission. Were

[10] See the observation by U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus,* 120: "He also adds a few words of a legalistic nature, as though to stress that, in the final analysis, it is only an issue between plaintiff and defendant, and it is only a question of deciding which of the two is in the right ..." Most Jewish and Christian exegetes do not attempt to explain this passage.

[11] U. Cassuto fails to convince when he interprets Pharaoh's declaration in this sense. See *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus,* 120.

this merely a marginal matter of justice (righteousness) or injustice, Pharaoh would probably have compromised with ease. But he is well aware that this is a question of to be or not to be. The authenticity of God's power does not permit any possibility of a compromise with Pharaoh's merely nominal authority. Submission must be unconditional.[12]

2.2 *The Secret of Pharaoh's Stubbornness*

The principal features of the plague narrative are that the horrors of the plagues increase successively, that the worst of them fall only on the Egyptians, and that Moses' and Aaron's superiority over the indigenous magicians becomes increasingly evident. The miraculous happenings are such an obvious mark of God's superiority to all merely human forces that Pharaoh's stubbornness seems irrational and incomprehensible. His behaviour is quite different from what one would expect, and his self-deception is manifest.[13]

Yet in biblical terms Pharaoh is not uniquely stubborn. Both the Old and the New Testament are replete with accounts of the disobedience and obstinacy of a covenanted people, which are designated by these and other terms.[14] Chronic disobedience and stubbornness are an enigma of human nature as such, and a grey obduracy of the heart is the ultimate disobedience. Its characteristic is that he who disobeys reacts to a warning or to punishment in direct opposition to the intention behind them.[15] It even seems that the more positive the call or the challenge, the more negative the response. It is thus hardly surprising that since primeval times the question of whether the cause of such stubbornness lies outside human beings and is the work of demoniac forces—or of the deity himself—has forced itself upon mankind. Is this what was in the mind of biblical writers when they declared that God had hardened the heart of Pharaoh, of this or that representative of the Israelites, or even of the people as a whole?[16]

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[12] See G. Bush, *Notes, Critical and Practical on the Book of Exodus,* vol. 1 (New York: Ivison, Phinney ..., 1841), 119: "As it can hardly be supposed that Pharaoh intended to limit this confession of his sin to the present instance of his unbelief, we are no doubt authorized to extend the import of the phrase 'this time' to the whole course of his disobedience during the occurrence of the preceding plagues."

[13] See F. Hesse, *Das Verstockungsproblem im Alten Testament,* 40–41.

[14] See F. Hesse, *Das Verstockungsproblem im Alten Testament,* 7–21.

[15] See C. F. Keil, *Genesis und Exodus,* 382–386. Keil's interpretation as a whole is the most exhaustive and convincing. See also the rare and important article on this issue by E. Stump, "Sanctification, Hardening of the Heart, and Frankfurt's Concept of Free Will," *JPh* 85 (1988), 395–420.

[16] See F. Hesse, *Das Verstockungsproblem im Alten Testament,* 40–79: "Jahwe als Urheber der Verstockung." Hesse draws on the viewpoints of various other exegetes and theologians and concludes that God directly "hardens" a human in the true sense of the word. See, however, the view by S. Menssen and T. D. Sullivan, "God Does not Harden Hearts," *PACPhA* 67 (1993), 119–134.

Not infrequently exegetes understand such passages literally, conscious as they are of the disastrous consequences of "hardening." God is cast as an incalculable despot who penalizes the very error he wishes to bring about.[17] They substantiate their point of view by appealing to God's absoluteness, which makes it impossible for anything to occur without his permission. Because they postulate the direct dependency of all terrestrial happenings on God's will, they reject the explanation that he himself does not cause the stubbornness, but merely permits it.[18]

A thorough critical assessment of the relevant biblical passages suggests convincingly that any such interpretation suffers from bias. In particular, exegetes focusing on traditio-historical problems and source criticism do not, on the one hand, take into account the rhetorical and symbolical character of biblical literature, and on the other tend to place a one-sided emphasis upon particular theological maxims. The character of biblical literature presumes that certain statements will not be taken literally. This demands a correlation between fundamental theological presuppositions. A theological principle should not, of course, be evaluated in isolation but within the context of everything else to which, by its very nature, it has relevance. So, when one considers divine absoluteness, the assumption that human beings have free will and are therefore responsible for their actions must not be overlooked. The Bible has much to say about divine punishment precisely because it starts from a deep consciousness of humankind's personal responsibility for their actions. Moreover, it normally expresses fundamental theological principles very clearly and directly, and we have therefore every right to point to this impressive mass of material when attempting to explain

[17] F. Hesse, *Das Verstockungsproblem im Alten Testament,* 51, for instance explains the Yahwist thus: "Jahwe bestraft den Pharao für eine Gesinnung, die er selbst in ihm bewirkt hat." M. Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary,* 68, takes the following view: "... It is improbable that by this most inconspicuous change of formula the narrator had meant to express that what was at first human resistance was eventually followed by stubbornness caused by God as a punishment which brought about destruction. Rather does he still mean that from the beginning the divine demands and wonders stand opposed by the unwillingness of Pharaoh which is also caused by God. Pharaoh is thus as much a tool of the divine action on the one side, by acting with it without realizing this while following the dictates of his will (cf. Rom. 9.17), as is Moses on the other; all this happens so that many wonderful signs may take place in Egypt (10.1f.; 11.9)."

[18] Doubt about the supposition that God does not directly cause the hardening, but merely permits it, is expressed by J. Calvin, among others, but the permissive presumption is strongly defended by some. Cf. G. Bush, *Notes, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Exodus,* vol. 1, 64–66, esp. p. 65: "This God is said to have *done* because he *permitted it to be done*"; M. M. Kalisch, *Exodus* (HCCOT; London: Longman ..., 1855), 77–79, interprets 4:21. On p. 78 he states: "... The phrase, 'I shall harden the heart of Pharaoh' means: I know that I shall be *the cause* of Pharaoh's obstinacy; my commandments and wonders will be an *occasion*, an *inducement* to an increasing obduration of his heart." On p. 79 he asserts: "The whole spirit of the Pentateuch utterly excludes the idea, that God infatuated Pharaoh, merely in order to punish him ..." See also J. G. Murphy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Andover: W. F. Draper; Boston: W. H. Halliday, 1868), 52–53; J. Weiss, *Das Buch Exodus* (Graz / Vienna: Verlagsbuchhandlung "Styria," 1911), 34–35.

passages that are rendered absurd if interpreted literally.

The statement that God hardened Pharaoh's heart cannot be taken literally, since it would contradict some essential presuppositions about God, such as his righteousness, benevolence and love, and would open wide the door to the ideology of predestination. What possibilities are there of non-literal interpretation? The literary-rhetorical nature of biblical writing in fact opens up several alternatives, and the solution seems simple. The declaration that God hardened the heart of Pharaoh encapsulates the secret of the chain reaction of iniquity from start to finish. This involves two paradoxes, one psychological and moral, the other theological. On the one hand, humans, who have succumbed to evil, do not respond to punishment by desiring reform, but become even more self-centred and harden their heart; they end up slaves to their own arbitrariness. On the other hand, God, even in a situation that promises no success, does not cease to admonish them, using as his instrument signs of his power that have totally positive aims.

Interpreting the narrative in a radically theological manner shows that historical circumstances are merely a framework for the depiction of the theological conflict between the two powers. The account of Pharaoh's stubbornness is derived not merely from the particular chronicle of his response to God's challenge but also from the general record of the behaviour of the powerful. Throughout history human rulers have clung to power so desperately that even the most ridiculous methods of self-defence have been invoked when they felt endangered, and the biblical writers were consequently able to predict fairly clearly what Pharaoh's answer to God's demand would be. Because human power is essentially rooted in pride, a personality of broad and profound theological vision is able to predict Pharaoh's hardness of heart before the plagues begin. Herein lies the secret of God's declaration to Moses in 4:21: "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles which I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go." This forecast possesses the stamp of certainty and is a reflection of past experience of the response of human potentates to higher righteousness and loftier powers. Moses, who is not a naive youth but an experienced leader, is well aware of the ways of human conceit, and his reflection on God's authorization in the Priestly source version is therefore extremely realistic: "Behold, the people of Israel have not listened to me; how then shall Pharaoh listen to me, who am a man of uncircumcised lips?" (6:12).

It is obvious that Pharaoh's pride signposts the route to perdition right from the beginning. The plagues cannot shake him, but only reveal his blindness ever more clearly. After the sixth plague, God says: "For by now I could have put forth my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth; but for this purpose have I let you live, to show you my power, so that my name may be declared throughout all

the earth" (9:15–16). Instant destruction would not have been as convincing as the long procession of signs of God's power, which both confirmed the justification of his demand and gave Pharaoh more than enough opportunities to open his eyes and save himself. Finally no doubt remains that Pharaoh's resistance is utterly culpable and the destruction of his army inevitable. The magnificence of God's righteousness is demonstrated in all its entirety only at the very end. God does not permit any compromise with the human will that is not in accord with his plan, and he therefore demands unconditional submission to his authority. The aim of God's rule is salvation, but the salvation of a stubborn person is conditional on his or her reform and submission to God's measures. That is why God's admonition takes the form of punishment, even though he knows that his invitation will not be accepted. God cannot remain neutral in the face of a stubborn potentate, but must challenge him until he finally chooses either salvation or perdition. The divine drama of God's treatment of Pharaoh that culminates in the destruction of his army is not simply a way of delivering an enslaved people but, rather, a method of demonstrating and asserting sovereignty. Pharaoh's forces are undermining the orderly structure of the world, so God must abandon them to the destruction they themselves have devised and set in motion.

The need for the rhetoric of the statement that God hardened Pharaoh's heart is evident in this stressful context. Had not God intervened, Pharaoh would not have needed to confirm his stubbornness again and again. The divine intrusion into Pharaoh's hardened heart signifies that not only does God permit his obduracy but is actually the cause of it, albeit indirectly.[19] To questions of guilt and perdition, the most important answer is that God only hardens the heart of the human being who has himself created the conditions for its hardening. He makes use of an obstinacy that already exists and that cannot be broken down in order to exercise his authority and to demonstrate unambiguously the justice of his punishment. He proves his sovereignty not only to Pharaoh but to all future generations of the people of salvation. All must recognize that God alone is Lord of the world, and this recognition provides at once admonition and hope.[20]

[19] See C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament,* vol. 1: *The Pentateuch,* 456: "It is the curse of sin, that it renders the hard heart harder, and less susceptible to the gracious manifestations of divine love, long-suffering, and patience. In this twofold manner God produces hardness, not only *permissive* but *effective;* i.e. not only by giving time and space for the manifestation of human opposition, even to the utmost limits of creaturely freedom, but still more by those continued manifestations of His will which drive the hard heart to such utter obduracy that it is no longer capable of returning, and so giving over the hardened sinner to the judgment of damnation." B. S. Childs, *Exodus,* 170–175: "Excursus I: The Hardening of Pharaoh," emphasizes the role of the theme of hardening in connection with the signs and the recognition of God. He mentions the problem of a psychological interpretation or explanation in the sense of divine causality, but does not attempt to solve the problem of hardening.

[20] We may conclude this discussion of the secrets of the hardening of the human heart by

3. *Conclusion*

The exodus account reflects a theological interpretation of certain historical events. Careful assessment of the relationship between the forms that express the various theological viewpoints of the narrative shows that the ultimate aim of the entire section is to convey knowledge of God. Thus the Hebrew writers could see in the plagues more than is implied by an objective view of these events as physical phenomena. The theological truth shining through the texture of the events described is the real reason why the biblical writers paid attention to it and why their work survived all the storms of later centuries. We must also bear in mind that the fundamental elements of historical description and theological interpretation in all the sources are essentially alike and consistent, which is a convincing argument that the final form of the text, an amalgam of several sources, originated from actual historical events.[21]

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stating that the process may be complete or incomplete both in regard to the subject of the hardness and to the object of the hardening. A hardening of the heart that is ultimate and inexorable takes place only when it is caused by God, whose rule has beyond question positive aims, and it occurs in a human who has utterly abandoned himself to self-will. Belief in God's absoluteness, associated with the universal experience of human resistance, renders possible a theological account of the relationship between hardening and punishment down the ages. God commands Isaiah to harden the heart of the people of Israel until desolation is complete (Isa 6), because in the past they have consistently rejected God's positive invitation, thereby undermining the foundations of their own existence. The passage can also have an etiological character. When the hardening is evaluated as punishment for guilt, the historian may conclude that it is caused by resistance (which of itself does not possess a theological character), and that the severity of the punishment was calling for justifying God. It is obvious that the reason for the destruction of the Canaanites is explained in this way. In Josh 11:19–20 we read: "There was not a city that made peace with the people of Israel, except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon; they took all in battle. For it was the Lord's doing to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle, in order that they should be utterly destroyed, and should receive no mercy but be exterminated, as the Lord commanded Moses."

[21] The subordination of historical data to various theological interpretations of the events described naturally indicates the limits of the historical veracity of the narrative. In order to emphasise God's superiority over Pharaoh and his magicians, the biblical writers lay stress on the extraordinary—i.e., the miraculous—in God's signs. It is therefore understandable that the history of exegesis displays a wide variety of viewpoints concerning the historical truth of the narrative. See above all G. Hort, "The Plagues of Egypt," *ZAW* 69 (1957), 84–103; 70 (1958), 48–59; J. P. Hyatt, *Commentary on Exodus* (NCBC; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1971), 336–345: "Appendix: The 'Natural' Explanation of the Plagues"; B. S. Childs, *Exodus,* 164–168: "History of Exegesis." Some commentators think that the narrative of the plagues has no historical foundation whatever, while at the other extreme are those who emphasise the harmony between the description of the plagues and the natural phenomena encountered in Egypt. The middle way is followed by those who assume a certain historical basis for the narrative but at the same time recognize the emphases and exaggerations that result from theological considerations. For several reasons, the middle way seems the most likely to lead to the truth. A certain measure of historical accuracy seems evident from the fact that the plagues listed are appropriate to the climatic conditions and intermittent natural phenomena of Egypt. This does not mean, however, that we should rule out miracle altogether: whether or not the description of events is compatible with natural law, the writer's primary purpose is to emphasize that the

The fundamental theological message of the exodus story is universal and is confirmed by later history. Hebrew history as a whole recognizes the conflict between God and various human forces, God always takes the part of the oppressed people, and topples the tyrants. For this reason the struggle between God and Pharaoh is welcome material for the writer who wishes to show that God is, by his very nature, the deliverer of the enslaved people and that he abandons the tyrant to the consequences of his own blindness. When writers endowed with prophetic vision seek to comfort the oppressed people of their own time, they summon up examples of despots deposed by God in the past. Apocalyptic literature in particular makes it clear that all his opponents must finally be destroyed; no one knows precisely when the despot will fall but all are convinced that fall he will. The conclusion is dictated by the incontestable law that governs the structure of the world, which is itself the work of the divine power.

The struggle between Pharaoh's force and God's power springs from the irreconcilable clash between Pharaoh's merely nominal authority and that of God, which is ontological and absolute. The conflict is not judicial in nature because God uses not relative but absolute measures.[22] God's power is identical with his essence, and its fundamental qualities and activities include deliverance, righteousness, faithfulness, conditional leniency, and justice in judging his people.

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plagues are God's signs. After all, the description given only partially matches the phenomena of normal experience. What is exceptional in the biblical story of the plagues is above all the recurrence of excess: it is the degree rather than the nature of the inflictions that is abnormal. U. Cassuto, for instance, finds in the description of the first plague a correlation between plague and natural occurrence in Egypt and, seeing an opportunity to take this as a basis for his standpoint regarding the later plagues, states in *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 99: "Similarly, the other plagues are also not actual deviations from the laws of nature, but brought about by the use of natural phenomena at the opportune moment and on an unusually large scale, until it becomes clearly evident that they have a specific significance." For a discussion of the relationship between historical and theological truth in the early history of Israel, see G. E. Wright, "Modern Issues in Biblical Studies: History and the Patriarchs," *ET* 71 (1959–1960), 292–296; G. von Rad, "History and Patriarchs," *ET* 72 (1960–1961), 213–216.

[22] This statement is of crucial importance if we are to assess the relationship between three different expressions that designate God's signs: *'ôt, môpēt, šepeṭ*. The word *šĕpāṭîm* is often translated 'judgments,' which has legalistic overtones, but in fact all three words possess an essentially similar content: a manifestation of the power of the absolute ruler of the world. In the present context all three also mean judgment—not of course, legal judgment, but the consequences of God's signs for Pharaoh. This judgment lies in the fact that in the light of God's power Pharaoh becomes aware of his frailty and his peril. Hence his increasing self-centredness as he blindly defends his own purely nominal authority. For a more general discussion of the issue, see R. H. Isaacs, *Miracles: A Jewish Perspective* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1997).

CHAPTER IV

APOSTASY AND RENEWAL OF THE COVENANT (Exod 32–34)

The initial main section of the book of Exodus, chapters 1–18, tells of the trials of the Israelites in Egypt, of their deliverance through signs and miracles, and of the first phase of the journey through the desert to Sinai. The second section, chapters 19–40, relates the drawing up of the covenant on Sinai and the revelation of the Law. There is an obvious link in content between chapters 19–24 and 32–34. The narrative framework here deals with Moses' encounter with God on Sinai and the subsequent revelation of the Law and the Commandments. Within this context chapters 32–34 stand out and various sources and legends are linked into a unit that is more thematically and literarily coherent than the remainder. The bases of the narrative are the themes of the apostasy of the covenanted people, God's intention of destroying them, Moses' moving intercession, the gradual cooling of the divine wrath, forgiveness and the renewal of the covenant. Here is a unique testimony to the profundity of human sin on the one hand and to the grandeur of divine sanctity and forgiveness on the other.

The homogeneity of theme testifies to the decisive contribution made by the final author of the text. The bounds between individual excerpts have been so blurred that acute determination of individual sources and narratives is hardly possible. Attempts to achieve this have, however, given rise to a series of fairly convincing hypotheses.[1] Hence declarations by some of the more recent interpreters that exegesis must first and foremost take the present form of the text into consideration, seem ever better substantiated.

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[1] See particularly G. Beer and K. Galling, *Exodus* (HAT 3; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1939), 153–165; M. Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichte des Pentateuch* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1948), esp. 155–160; English translation by B. W. Anderson, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972; reprinted in Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1981), esp. 141–145; idem, *Das zweite Buch Mose: Exodus* (ATD 5; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958), 200–220; O. Eissfeldt, "Die Komposition der Sinai-Erzählung Ex 19–24," *Kleine Schriften*, vol. 4 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1968), 231–237; J. P. Hyatt, *Commentary on Exodus* (NCB; London: Oliphants, 1971), 300–328; B. S. Childs, *Exodus: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1974), 553–624; J. A. Soggin, "Ancient Israelite Poetry and Ancient 'Codes' of Law, and the Sources 'J' and 'E' of the Pentateuch," *Congress Volume—Edinburgh 1974* (VT.S 28; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), 185–195; R. W. L. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32–34* (JSOT.S 22; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983), esp. 25–43: "Chapter 1: Some Considerations of Method in Narrative Interpretation"; E. Aurelius, *Der Fürbitter Israels: Eine Studie zum Mosebild im Alten Testament* (CB.OT 27; Stockholm: Almquist & Wicksell, 1988); C. Houtman, *Exodus 20–40* (Kampen: Kok, 1996). See also the preceding chapter.

Profounder theological interpretation must be sought.[2] An examination of the entire perspective of the text ultimately shows what possibilities exist and where the limits lie in researching ancient sources and traditions.[3]

1. *The Worship of the Golden Calf and Its Consequences (32:1–35)*

Contemporary critical studies and commentaries have established that discord exists over Exod 32, both on literary questions and as to content. The majority of scholars see 32:7–14 as a Deuteronomical addition. They also think that the dialogue between Moses and Aaron in 32:21–24, and the passage 32:25–35, which concerns Aaron, are an even later addition. Emphasis is given to the fact that the theme of punishment appears in diverse forms. Verse 20 states that Moses gave the people of Israel water to drink in which he had scattered the powder of the burnt and pulverized calf; 32:25–29 report upon the sons of Levi punishing the people by the sword; while v. 34 states that punishment has been laid aside until some undefined time in the future. The supposition that the second variant (32:25–29) is a later addition is fairly general because it is not in accord with the aim of the general report on events on Sinai, but confusion still prevails as to the relation between the first and second variations. How did the text reach its final form?

Prevailing scholarly opinion considers the original report (J or E) to have gradually broadened through additions and re-interpretations.[4] Some authori-

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[2] See especially B. S. Childs, *Exodus;* idem, *Introduction to the Old Testament As Scripture* (London: SCM Press, 1979); J. F. A. Sawyer, *From Moses to Patmos: New Perceptives in Old Testament Study* (London: SPCK, 1977); H. C. Brichto, "The Worship of the Golden Calf: A Literary Analysis of a Fable on Idolatry," *HUCA* 54 (1983), 1–44; R. W. L. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God.*

[3] See U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1967, 1983), 409–410: "In this story the Torah seeks to inculcate its teachings concerning punishment, atonement and forgiveness, and also the functioning of the Divine attributes of justice and mercy. When we consider the motive of the story, we shall be able to comprehend its particulars and various subdivisions and we shall be convinced that there is no need for all the theories advanced to explain the length of the account on the basis of the assumption that a number of fragmentary sources and later additions have been fused together here."

[4] See M. Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichte des Pentateuch,* 155–160; idem, *Exodus,* 200–202; S. Lehming, "Versuch zu Ex XXXII," *VT* 10 (1960), 16–50, based mainly on M. Noth, as he attempts to define sources in our text more accurately. S. E. Loewenstamm has his own particular views on this question: "The Making and Destruction of the Golden Calf," *Biblica* 48 (1967), 481–490; "The Making and Destruction of the Golden Calf—a Rejoinder," *Biblica* 56 (1975), 330–343. See a response to the first contribution by L. G. Perdue, "The Making and Destruction of the Golden Calf—a Reply," *Biblica* 54 (1973), 237–246. See further G. W. Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1968), 184–191: "Excursus: Exodus 32:1–33:6"; J. Hahn, *Das "Goldene Kalb": Die Jahwe-Verehrung bei Stierbildern in der Geschichte Israels* (Inaugural-Dissertation, Tübingen, 1980). In his introduction Hahn himself designates his own study a compilation and treatise on the opinions and consequences of research to date. Apart from Exod 32 he also deals fairly exhaustively with Deut 9:7–10:11 and 1 Chr 12:26–33, and also with

ties reject exaggerated emphasis upon disharmony between individual sections of the text, considering that literary criteria must be taken into account in assessing its structure and content, particularly as poetical elements are strongly represented. It is possible that the writer has combined contrasting scenes deliberately, in order to put across the basic message of chapters 32–34 as clearly as possible.[5]

The question of the interdependence between these texts and 1 Kgs 12:25–32 and Deut 9 is particularly problematical. Here too the theme of the Golden Calf, or Golden Calves, is to be found. In the Deuteronomistic report in 1 Kgs 12:25–32 we read how King Jeroboam had two calves of gold constructed, one being set up in Bethel, the other in Dan. In 12:28 he justifies his action: "You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt *(hinnēh 'ĕlōhêkā yiśrā'ēl 'ăšer he'ĕlûkā mē'ereṣ miṣrāyim).*" The second section of the substantation corresponds almost exactly to the announcement by the iniquitous people in Exod 32:4c: *'elleh 'ĕlōhêkā yiśrā'ēl 'ăšer he'ĕlûkā mē'ereṣ miṣrāyim.* The identical "confessions" before the Golden Calf, or Calves, in both texts and many other similarities give grounds for the supposition that one of the texts is dependent upon the other. But which? It is acceptable that the account of the Golden Calf in 1 Kgs 12:25–32 is historically reliable while the one in Exod 32 is not. Traditional accounts of events on Sinai suggest an awareness of some other cult resulting in apostasy from God; Jeroboam's cult practices ought to have provided an additional emphasis that the infidelity of Israel had been revealed even before the arrival in the Promised Land.[6] Needless to say, this thesis cannot be proved. It is equally, or even more, likely that the message of both texts is founded on historical fact. Certain elements in 1 Kgs 12:25–32, particularly Jeroboam's "confession of faith" before the two Golden Calves (12:28) seem to derive from the more ancient Sinai legend. This supposition appears even more convincing when we consider that the account of the Golden Calf on Sinai is the starting point for the thematically complete and extensive unit of Exod 32–34, which dates from an older era such as that of Deuteronomistic history.[7]

This factor is also decisive in assessing the relation between our texts and Deut 9, where the same theme is valid in another redaction. Exhaustive comparison of the two texts indicates that the given text is older than Deut 9.

Hos 8:4b–6; 10:5–6; 13:1–3 (pp. 437–445).

[5] See B. S. Childs, *Exodus,* 558–559; R. W. L. Morberly, *At the Mountain of God;* H. C. Brichto, *HUCA* 54 (1983), 1–44.

[6] See especially M. Noth, *Exodus,* 202–203; J. P. Hyatt, *Commentary on Exodus,* 301–305.

[7] See B. S. Childs, *Exodus,* 560; U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus,* 409. M. Aberbach and L. Smolar, "Aaron, Jeroboam, and the Golden Calves," *JUL* 86 (1967), 129–140, find exceptional similarity between the roles of Aaron and Jeroboam in the texts given, but leave open the question of the historical authenticity of both reports.

Theme and language indicate that it must have been put together before the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E., perhaps soon after the fall of Samaria in 722–721 With exceptional prophetic and literary inspiration and using the ancient story of Sinai, the writer is demonstrating to the people, who can sense their own end, the relation between their unfaithfulness and the divine mercifulness. With the powerful imprint of its final author, this text is valid as a promise that God will not destroy his own people.[8] The prophet Hosea had already announced this emphatically in the eighth century B.C.E.

1.1 *Making of the Golden Calf (32:1–6)*

Near the end of chapter 24 there is a report on how Moses, together with Joshua, ascended the divine mountain, leaving the leadership of the people to Aaron and Hur. "And Moses was on the mountain forty days and nights" (24:18). The unit of chapters 32–34 is linked with this account. In 32:1 we read:

> When the people saw that Moses delayed (*bōšēš,* literally 'causing shame') to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron, and said to him: "Up, make us gods *('ĕlōhîm),* who shall go before us *('ăšer yēlĕkû lĕpānênû);* as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him."

What is evident here is that the people are not demanding a direct substitute for God, but for Moses. The question as to who led Israel out of Egypt and who may lead her in future is decisive. The Israelites do not ascribe their departure to God, which is what we would have expected, but to Moses, and consequently do not regard the future in the light of God's leadership.

The theme of the departure from Egypt is perhaps the most obvious link between the entire chapter and its continuation. In 32:1 the people ascribe the departure to Moses, in v. 4 to the Golden Calf (in the plural form of the verb 'to lead out of'); in v. 7 God relates it to Moses and in v. 8 the words of the people from v. 4 are repeated. In v. 11 Moses ascribes the departure to God; in v. 23 Aaron refers to the words of the people in v. 1; in 33:1 God again ascribes it to Moses. The context provides obvious reasons for ascribing the departure to this or that factor. The people ascribe it to Moses or to the Golden Calf because they have no belief in God, but Moses' ascription is attributable to his total trust in God, acknowledging his absolute master. God ascribes it to Moses, no longer wishing to know Israel after her apostasy.

The role of Aaron in the making of the Golden Calf is puzzling. He bows to the demands of the people, ordering them, indeed, to take off their earrings to provide *material* (v. 2). The response is astonishing:

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[8] See J. Loza, "Exode XXXII et la redaction JE," *VT* 23 (1973), 31–55.

> So all the people took off the rings of gold which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool *(wayyāṣar 'ōtô baḥereṭ),* and made a molten calf *(wayya'ăśēhû 'ēgel massēkāh);* and they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" (32:3–4).

The phrase *wayyāṣar 'ōtô baḥereṭ* poses problems, and translations and interpretations vary greatly.[9] Nevertheless, the main message is the concluding statement that Aaron *made* the Golden Calf. This leaves no doubt about his active complicity,[10] although it does seem as if he had no evil intent. Verse 5 gives us his word: "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord." The Golden Calf was not intended as a substitute for God but to represent God.

The people, however, saw things differently. Demanding "gods who shall go before us" (v. 1), after the Golden Calf had been set up, they interpreted it as the "gods" that had led them from the Land of Egypt (v. 4). They behaved in accordance with their demands and beliefs: "And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play" (v. 6). It is obvious that the people were indulging in the orgies that pagan customs permitted. Some interpreters consider that the entire account indicates a complete fall into undiluted idolatry; others merely syncretism in connection with the God of Israel.[11] Who is right? The people apparently did not believe in Yahweh as the sole God and absolute Lord of the world and their own history, which is why they reverted to idolatry of one kind or another at a critical moment. The essence of their sin is an inability to subjugate themselves to the absolute divine will and going their own way in pursuit of their baser needs. Thus, willingly or unwillingly, the narrative of the Golden Calf has become the classical example of Israel's chronic infidelity, and simultaneously the most dramatic instance of the alienation of the human being. The events on Sinai also illuminate something that occurs endlessly in human civilizations:

> They exchanged the glory of God
> for the image of an ox that eats grass (Ps 106:20).

1.2 *Moses' First Intercession (32:7–14)*

The behaviour of the people at Mount Sinai amounted to an enormous challenge and demanded an appropriate response from God. Verses 7–14 demonstrate that response in the tension between the divine anger and forbearance. First, God reveals to Moses the apostasy of the people, thereby ex-

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[9] See Vulgate: "formavit opere fusorio"; RSV: "and fashioned it with a graving tool"; ZB: "goss es in eine Tonform; Einheitsübersetzung: zeichnete mit einem Griffel eine Skizze", etc.

[10] See B. S. Childs, *Exodus,* 565.

[11] See L. R. Bailey, "The Golden Calf," *HUCA* 42 (1971), 97–115.

tending Moses' role as intermediary. In Egypt he had been chosen by God to save the people of Israel from slavery; on Sinai the divine Law was revealed to him for the people as a whole, taking the form of a covenant with the people through their leader. Verses 7–8 talk of the total apostasy of the people, and the conclusion about punishment is appropriately severe: "I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people; now therefore let me alone *(wĕ'attāh hannîḥāh lî),* that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; but of you I will make a great nation" (32:9–10). The most significant idea here is that the decision to destroy an apostate people does not involve the total destruction of Israel. Like Noah and Lot before him, Moses serves as the impartial one who should be the herald of God's new people, carrying the promise that had once been given to Abraham (cf. Gen 12:2). If we reflect that even Aaron gave in to the people's demand for "gods," it is obvious that Moses remains the only righteous man worthy of redemption and the divine promises.

Moses' righteousness simultaneously signifies a possibility of mediation for the fallen people. This is demonstrated in the divine demand *wĕ'attāh hannîḥāh lî,* "now therefore let me alone" (v. 10), where God expresses himself as if the actualization of divine wrath and destruction depends upon Moses' permission. Moses' response confirms high degree of his righteousness. He is not interested in any ratification of himself and future generations of his line but in the salvation of the rebellious people he led out of Egypt. Perhaps the reason for this lies in Moses' realism about human beings; it must have been clear to him that another new people might also prove perfidious since they too were descendants of Noah's new race of humankind. However, it is enough for Moses if God does not nullify the divine work done to date; the chosen people are saved and preserved because they are loved according to the law of faithfulness to God's own existence. Moses thus appears in the guise of a mediator, with a humble request for forbearance thrice substantiated (32:11–13). First, he says, came deliverance from Egypt "with great power and a mighty hand" (v. 11), an event so exceptional that it cannot be nullified by destroying the people. Secondly, God's good reputation involved Moses' plea: "Why should the Egyptians say: 'With evil intent did he bring them forth, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'?" (v. 12). Third come the promises made to the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, "whom thou didst swear by thy own self" (v. 13).[12]

[12] We must not overlook the fact that Moses is calling upon the promises made by God to the elders, without asking for any explanations. Because the promises do not only concern the elders, but all the people of Israel, the reason needs to be much more far reaching than the merits of the elders. These are sovereign decisions made by Lord concerning the run of redemptive history. Precisely this has convinced Moses that the promises connected with Israel's very existence will remain valid despite the apostasy of the people. Concerning the importance of the "merit" of the elders in Jewish tradition see S. Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*

Moses' plea in v. 12 is based on these three premises: "Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people *(wehinnāḥēm 'al-hārā'āh lĕ'ammekā).*" Moses' well-founded request achieved its aim; in v. 14 we read: "And the Lord repented of the evil *(wayyinnāḥēm yhwh 'al-hārā'āh)* which he had thought to do to his people."

Naturally, the aims of all requests and agreements cannot be the pardoning of all punishments. Here we are concerned solely with the question of whether it is possible to have mercy on the people in the matter of destruction, making it feasible for them to atone for their iniquity through some milder punishment. Ultimately this means a demand for the validity of individual retribution. Similar examples of how God repents (the verb *nḥm*) his decision to destroy special peoples or nations appear in Hos 11:8; Amos 7:3, 6; Jonah 3:10 (cf. Num 14:10; Deut 9:19–20; Jer 18:8; 26:3, 13, 19; 42:10, 12; Joel 2:14; Jonah 3:9; 4:2).[13]

1.3 *Moses' Sanctions (32:15–29)*

When the time was ripe, Moses and Joshua descended the mountain. The writer emphasizes that Moses was holding in his hands the two tablets of the Law that were inscribed front and back and were the work of God (32:15–16). As the two men draw near to the camp they hear much noise, which Joshua describes as *qôl milḥāmāh,* "the noise of war" (v. 17). Moses replies:

> It is not the sound of shouting for victory *(gĕbûrāh)*
> or the sound of the cry of defeat *(ḥălûṣāh)*
> but the sound of singing *('annôt)* I hear.

The parallelism "the sound of shouting for victory" // "the sound of the cry of defeat" plays the role of merism and defines *every possible type of battle cry* from victorious cheers to the wail of defeat. Moses considers the noise to be quite different from that of war and the word *'annôt* (third line) possibly denotes liturgical singing.[14]

When he perceives the Calf and the dancing, "Moses' anger burned hot *(wayyēḥar 'ap mōšeh),* and he threw the tables out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt it with fire, and ground it to a powder, and scattered it upon the water, and made the people of Israel drink it" (32:19–20). Here Moses acts differently from the way he did upon the mountain, when God tells him of the apostasy of the people. In v. 10 the divine voice says: "Now therefore let them alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them *(wĕyīḥar-'appî bāhem),*" and

(New York: Schocken Books, 1923), 170–198: "The Zachuth of the Fathers."

[13] See J. Jeremias, *Die Reue Gottes* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1975).

[14] See J. Krašovec, "Merism—Polar Expression in Biblical Hebrew," *Biblica* 64 (1983), 234.

in v. 11 Moses replies: "O Lord, why does thy wrath burn hot against thy people *(yeḥĕreh 'appĕkā bĕ'ammekā)?*" Moses' "anger now burned hot" and he breaks the tablets of the Law as testimony to the end of the covenant with God. The description of the total destruction of the Golden Calf is reminiscent of the absolute downfall of the god Mot in Ugaritic mythology.[15] Moses goes even further, however: from the remains of the Golden Calf he prepares the "water of damnation," giving it to the "stiff-necked people" to drink.[16] By this device he hopes to make them comprehend that their guilt lies at the core of their own being and nowhere else.

Moses' forceful response stands in complete contrast to that of Aaron, who had done nothing to prevent the apostasy. Moses questions Aaron's conscience with the words: "What did this people do to you that you have brought a great sin upon them?" (32:21). Aaron probably thought he was doing the people a favour by acceding to their desires; in actual fact he has thrust them into the direst misfortune. Moses reacts so forcefully because his love for his people is so extreme. He is aware that their greatest enemy is their own guilt, something that cannot continue without dreadful consequences. Apostasy from the living God means inescapable ruin unless conciliation and reconciliation are achieved. Aaron attempts to calm Moses with the same words Moses had used before Yahweh but his arguments are completely different: "Let not the anger of my Lord burn hot *('al-yīḥar 'ap 'ădōnî);* you know the people, that they are set on evil" (32:22). Moses has defended the people before God, even though the only justification he could call upon was the Lord's redemptive work and promise to the Patriarchs. Aaron accuses them in order to justify himself; without evil intent, merely passively, he bowed to the demand of the people; the Calf just happened to emerge from the fire (32:23–24).

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[15] See the poetical description of how goddess 'Anat wishes to destroy Mot completely in *UT* 49 II: 31–35; translation according to D. Pardee, *The Context of Scripture,* I: *Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World* (ed. W. W. Hallo; Leiden / New York / Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1998), 270:

bn ilm mt	She seizes Môtu, son of 'Ilu:
bḥrb tbq'nn	with a knife she splits him,
bṯr tdrynn	with winnowing-fork she winnows him,
bišt tšrpnn	with fire she burns him,
brḥm tṯḥnn	with grindstones she pulverizes him,
bšd tdr'nn	in the field she sows him.

S. E. Loewenstamm, who stresses a similarity between the above Ugaritic text and Exod 32:30, does not consider this a direct dependence but the common Canaanite literary tradition. See *Biblica* 56 (1975), 341.

[16] Some interpreters in this connection mention the statute on jealousy in Num 5:11–31, which ascribes the ascertainment of the fidelity or infidelity of a wife by the drinking of "the water of cursedness." Nevertheless, our example is not concerned with the ascertainment but with the eradication of guilt.

Despite this, Aaron does not receive any punishment directly. An indirect punishment is given, however, for he retains the mark of an unfaithful priest, thereby rendering possible the introduction of the dominant line of Levi into the priesthood. The writer of this part of the text substantiates this predominance with the singular enthusiasm of the sons of Levi for Yahwism even upon Sinai, when the people had already fallen for the Golden Calf. As if overlooking the fact that until now he has spoken about the guilt of "all the people" (v. 3; cf. v. 9), 32:25–29 shows that the entire line of Levi was the sole exception; on Moses' orders they now punish the offenders with death. The description of the judgment presents problems, because it gives the impression that only later did the sons of Levi stand on the Lord's side, and only a certain number (3,000) of the apostates are actually slaughtered. Interpretations of this passage need to take primarily into account that the description of events is both literary-poetical and also summative. This means that in the phrase "all people" in 32:3 above, "all" cannot be taken literally. In every fall from grace, there are only a few leaders, while many helpless and mute witnesses of events remain faithful to the profounder comprehension of truth. Here is a key to why the sons of Levi stand on the side of the Lord after Moses' exhortation. The iniquity of the offenders also varies: not everyone deserves death. The carrying out of the punishment must have observed defined criteria, although no mention is made of them.

The account of the judgment is proof of how deeply the iniquity of apostasy was understood. Some kind of satisfaction was needed for the purification of the people to be achieved and for conciliation to become possible. The death of some means the salvation of others, and for those carrying out the sentence, even blessing; Moses promises the sons of Levi: "Today you have ordained yourselves for the service of the Lord, each one at the cost of his son and of his brother, that he may bestow a blessing upon you this day" (32:29).

1.4 *Moses' Second Intercession (32:30–35)*

As Moses' wrath wanes, his most important function waxes. The people have become so estranged from God that on their own they will not be able to acknowledge their iniquity adequately, repenting of it and sincerely asking for forgiveness. In this situation Moses the mediator seems essential. On the one hand he must gradually prepare his people for re-conversion, on the other he must persuade an angered God to forgive a reprehensible people. As is ever the way when the relationship between the absolute Lord of the world and one of its limited inhabitants is involved, anthropomorphism intrudes itself.

In 32:30 Moses addresses the alienated people: "You have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for

your sin *('ûlay 'ăkappĕrāh bĕ'ad ḥaṭṭa'tkem).*" Moses cannot be certain of success, first because God is not obliged to forgive an unfaithful people, and secondly, because it is unclear whether the people for their part have fulfilled the conditions expressly laid down for conciliation.[17] Since the ultimate purpose of Moses' plea is to achieve forgiveness, to bring about the renewal of the covenant, it is understandable that he needs to return to the holy mountain once again, to meet with the Lord. His prayer runs: "Alas, this people have sinned a great sin; they have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if thou wilt forgive their sin *(wĕ'attāh-'im tiśśā' ḥaṭṭā'tām)*—and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written" (32:31–32). Moses is aware that he has a good record in the book of life (cf. Isa 4:3) and now senses that he must share the fate of his people: if God cannot forgive their iniquity, let him, Moses, be rejected together with them. Is Moses prepared to go even further and suggest that God erase him from the book *instead* of them? Any such interpretation is extremely uncertain.[18]

God's answer emphasizes the place of individual retribution: "Whoever has sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book" (32:33). Judging from this declaration, Moses' mediation cannot be considered where true apostates are concerned, but the people have evidently by now recognized the gravity of their iniquity and this means that God may forbear at least from dealing out the severest of penalties: destruction. Moreover, at least some of the punishment may be postponed until a time in the future. In 32:34 we read: "But now go, lead the people to the place of which I have spoken to you; behold, my angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them *(bĕyôm pōqĕdî ûpāqadtî 'ălêhem ḥaṭṭā'tām).*" It is essential to note that God is not retracing any promises about the division of the land. Nevertheless, sufficient conditions for conciliation have not yet been achieved and God cannot therefore be present amongst the people and is unable to lead them personally into the Promised Land; instead, an angel will accompany them. The statement on the delay in punishment is perhaps an echo from the fall of Samaria in 722–721, interpreted as punishment for Israel's former infidelity, which included the idolatry of Golden Calves at Bethel and Dan (cf. 2 Kgs 17:7–18).

After all this, how do we understand the concluding verse, 32:35? It runs:

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[17] For the place and meaning of the root *kpr* designating various nuances of the idea of conciliation or satisfaction, see B. Janowski, *Sühne als Heilsgeschehen: Studien zur Sühnetheologie der Priesterschrift und zur Wurzel KPR im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament* (WMANT 55; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1972), about our example esp. pp. 142–145.

[18] See U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 43: "Some exegetes have regarded this request as a suggestion by Moses to receive the punishment instead of his people. Such a proposal would undoubtedly have been very noble on Moses' part, but this does not appear to be the actual meaning of the text."

"And the Lord sent a plague upon the people, because they made the calf which Aaron made." The conflict between this and the declaration on the delay in punishment until a later time is so extreme that one is justified in concluding that an unsatisfactory drawing together of diverse sources and traditions took place here.[19] That is not, however, the only possible explanation. Here we have an avowedly literary tale paying no heed to the demands of formal logic. These final verses summarize the basic idea of the whole story. The author of the first part of the section chapters 32–34 concludes with a sense of the awfulness of the iniquity of the people, on account of which God had been forced to strike. Belief in and experience of the inseparable link between iniquity and punishment speak clearly of the many blows that are inevitable throughout some future period, whenever great guilt is involved. In this particular example the greatest blow seems to be that God does not wish to be with the chosen people on their march to the Promised Land. In cases of great seriousness, conciliation and forgiveness cannot be rapid or easy.

2. *God's Presence among His People (33:1–23)*

In 32:34 God commands Moses to lead his people into the Promised Land, assuring him: *hinnēh mal'ākî yēlēk lĕpānêkā,* "Behold, my angel shall go before you." In 33:2 this is repeated and in 33:3 it is affirmed that God will not go with them in person for they are a stiff-necked people. Moses now continues his role as mediator, seeking to persuade God to ultimately take over the leadership of the people, travelling in their midst. His urging introduces the repetition of the word *yāda',* 'to know,' *pānîm,* 'face, features, before,' and the phrase "find favour in the sight of the Lord" (33:12–23). Consequently the basic theme in chapter 33 is the question of the divine presence amidst God's people. This theme links minor passages that do not always harmonize and indeed raise quite considerable problems of literary and historical criticism within the context of the thematic whole, bearing as it does the very distinctive stamp of its author/editor.

2.1 Signs of Repentance (33:1–6)

Chapter 33 begins a new narrative, although the promise of the angel in 32:34 seems like a thematic link between the end of chapter 32 and the whole of chapter 33. In 33:1–3 God commands Moses: "Depart, go up hence, you and the people whom you have brought up out of the land of Egypt, to the land of

[19] M. Noth, *Exodus,* 206, assumes that a direct link must once have existed between 32:20 and 32:35.

which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying: 'To your descendants I will give it.' And I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up among you, lest I consume you in the way, for you are a stiff-necked people." This makes clear the reason for the promise of the angel in 32:34 and 33:2. Thanks to Moses' forceful reaction to Israel's sin and to his humble plea for forgiveness on the one hand, and to the first signs of penitence on the part of the people on the other, God is prepared to spare them the last penalty—destruction—but is unable to travel in their midst. The apostasy of Mount Sinai has demonstrated that Israel is *'am-qĕšēh-'ōrep,* "a stiff-necked people." Because God cannot tolerate this any repetition of such iniquity is bound to lead the destruction of the people. God's decision not to accompany the Israelites sounds like the severest possible punishment, but in the light of the encounter between absolute holiness and chronic rebelliousness, the divine decision is in fact a paradoxical expression of benevolence, of a boundless will ultimately to redeem the people.

It was nevertheless a decision that must have caused much pain: "When the people heard these evil tidings, they mourned *(wayyit'abbālû);* and no man put on his ornaments" (33:4). This seems the most natural and therefore most appropriate reaction of those who are at fault. There can be no doubt that the people's mourning chiefly signified regret for their own iniquity, which was the reason for God's decision not to be amongst them. Yet the report that no one adorned himself with ornaments must surely possess a profounder significance than a mere gesture of mourning. It implies a rejection of the objects used in the manufacture of the symbols of their iniquity. By such repudiation, the people sought to express their devotion to God.[20]

A stubborn people might again allow ornaments to play a role in the future. Hence the divine adjurement to Moses in 33:5: "Say to the people of Israel, 'You are a stiff-necked people; if for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you. So now put off your ornaments from you, that I may know what to do with you.'" But how does one reconcile the report that no one had adorned himself with ornaments (33:4) in mourning, and God's demand that they now be stripped off (33:5)? This problem probably cannot be dismissed merely by pointing the finger at those involved in the final editing. One must ask *why* they behaved as they did and a linking of thematic and literary-psychological reasons allows a reasonable reply to be devised. In God's decision not to go amidst them, the people of Israel had seen at least indirectly an absolute demand for objects that had been and remained a temptation to iniquity (cf. Gen 35:4). Hence it ap-

[20] See U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 427.

peared self-explanatory that no-one had put them on; if anyone was wearing them at that moment, he was to take them off. God's command to remove all ornaments is much more sweeping and more radical than a mere declaration that no-one was wearing such things. Hence the conclusion also seems sensible: "Therefore the people of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onwards" (33:6). The report supposes that after Horeb the people no longer wore any ornaments at all. Thus it becomes obvious that their mourning, penitence and desire to return to God are sincere; this opens up fresh possibilities for God to reflect on to how to deal with the chosen people (cf. 33:5c).

2.2 *The Tent of Meeting (33:7–11)*

The people are overcome by sorrow following God's decision not to travel in their midst, and show signs of true penitence: accordingly, Moses has fresh, more cogent reasons for mediating on their behalf. Nevertheless, the author sets the excerpt about the meeting tent *('ōhel mô'ēd)*—which at first glance is not directly connected with the passages dealing with the people's mourning (33:4–6) and Moses' mediation (33:12–17)—between these two extracts. Thus the question of what kind of narrative this excerpt originated from and what role it has in this particular place becomes unavoidable.[21]

Some exegetes consider that the meeting tent has two different roles: a holy tent dating from the desert days for occasional revelations of God in the pillar of cloud, and a tabernacle to serve as the permanent home of the covenant chest. The narrative of the pillar of cloud is ascribed to E, the tabernacle to P.[22] Other than Exod 33:7–11, Num 11–12 and Deut 31 (see also 1 Sam 2:22 and later account in 1 Chr 16:39; 21:29; 2 Chr 1:3, 13) also offer a conclusion based on the older E narrative. Because God only periodically appeared as a pillar of cloud to Moses in the meeting tent, it seems appropriate that the tent should have been pitched outside the camp. On the basis of these passages, however, it is not possible to conclude that during a time of desert dwelling the meeting tent was set up frequently, as if it were some kind of semi-establishment, outside the camp so that Moses might meet God there. The writer does in fact possess a particular, very well-founded reason for the emphasis in 33:7 that Moses pitched the tent "outside the camp, far off from the camp *(mīḥûṣ lammaḥăneh ḥarḥēq min-hammaḥăneh)*." After

[21] The excerpt starts with the words: "And Moses took the tent *('et-hā'ōhel)* ..." The word 'tent' with a definite article means that this is probably a quite definite tent, which is known and that already has a decisive role. This fact poses various questions to interpreters that do not permit definite answers. See especially M. Görg, *Das Zelt der Begegnung: Untersuchung zur Gestalt der sakralen Zelttraditionen Altisraels* (BBB 27; Bonn: P. Hanstein, 1967), esp. pp. 151–170: "Ex 33,7–11."

[22] See J. P. Hyatt, *Commentary on Exodus*, 314–315; B. S. Childs, *Exodus*, 590–592.

the apostasy to the Golden Calf, the camp environs are contaminated with sin and the people utterly unworthy that God should appear in their midst.[23]

Despite this, the meeting tent signifies another sign of God's exceptional benevolence towards the people. Early signs of penitence made it possible to acknowledge the people again in the proximity of the tent, thereby offering them a fresh opportunity for penitence and purification. The people were permitted to draw close to the meeting tent: "And every one who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp" (33:7b). The extreme similarity between the manner of the divine revelation upon Mount Sinai and in the tent of meeting is obvious. In both cases God appeared to Moses, accompanied by Joshua in the form of a pillar of cloud.[24] With regard to the reaction of the people, however, the passage on the meeting tent represents a complete antithesis to the report on God's appearance on Mount Sinai. At that time the people indulged themselves in an orgy of licentiousness, alienating themselves as much from Moses as from God, whereas now they demonstrate an extreme respect for both. In 33:8–10 we read: "Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose up, and every man stood at his tent door, and looked after Moses, until he had gone into the tent. When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the door of the tent, and the Lord would speak with Moses. And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the door of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, every man at his tent door." This display of respect convinced Moses that he could plead for divine forgiveness of their iniquity, ultimately assuming leadership in their midst, and God thus receiving fresh confirmation that Moses' plea could be granted.[25]

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[23] See U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 429: "Since Moses saw that for the present the Lord would not permit the building of the Tabernacle in accordance with His original plan, because of the unworthiness of the children of Israel, he thought of the idea of establishing a temporary surrogate for the Tabernacle, 'until the wrath be past.' It was not possible to commune with the Divine Presence in the midst of Israel's camp, because it had become defiled by the iniquity of idolatry, and the Lord did not wish to let His Presence dwell there; hence Moses took his tent and pitched it without the camp so that it might serve as place of meeting between himself and the Lord." Cassuto thus rejects the implication of a dual role for the tent, in accordance with traditions. M. Görg, *Das Zelt der Begegnung*, arrives at a similar conclusion. In his synopsis (p. 174) he says: "Es besteht kein Anlaß zu einer Alternativentscheidung zwischen Kultzelt und Orakelzelt. Kult und Orakel sind durchaus nicht unvereinbar."

[24] See M. Haran, "The Nature of the *'ōhel mô'ēdh'* in the Pentateuchal Source," *JSS* 5 (1960), 50–65. Verse 11 states that Joshua "did not move from the tent." The assembly tent was obviously not allowed to remain without a permanent servant or guard. As leader of the people Moses would have had too many matters for his attention to have been able to be in the tent permanently.

[25] U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 429–432, justifiably draws attention to the poetical and rhetorical characteristics of the given excerpt. He particularly takes into account the repetition of the key expressions 'outside' and 'entrance' and the word play *'ammûd*, 'pillar,' and *'āmad*, 'to stand,' in vv. 9–10. On p. 430 he says: "The entire paragraph is written in poetic style and has a poetic rhythm, and traces of the ancient epic poem are discernible in it."

2.3 *Moses Prays for God's Presence (33:12–17)*

The basic theme of this section is Moses' tenacious plea for God to accompany the people into the Promised Land. There is no mention here of Moses turning to God because it is sufficiently obvious that this had occurred in the meeting tent—a substitute, as it were, for the mountain.[26] Moses' third request is extraordinary in both theme and presentation. Although God had explicitly promised an angel to accompany the people on their journey (32:34), Moses says that it had not been revealed to him who will be sent with them (33:12). He echoes God's statement: "I know you by name, and you have also found favour in my sight" (33:12).[27] Moses expects a clear demonstration that he has truly found favour in God's eyes, and therefore asks for an indication of the divine way and to remember that this is a matter of the chosen people (33:13). Because Moses' entreaty incorporates a plea for forgiveness, a revelation of the divine ways chiefly amounts to a manifesto of God's mercifulness; nevertheless Moses is also reckoning upon divine fidelity to the promise made to the Patriarchs (cf. 32:11–13).

God responds to Moses' plea with a clear declaration: *pānay yēlēkû wahănīḥōtî lāk,* "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest" (33:14). The promise of rest could indicate the bestowal of the land (cf. Deut 3:20; 12:10) although in this particular context it probably does not do so, for the division of the land is not in question. It seems as if God is personally promising Moses general alleviation and assistance.[28] But Moses takes the part of his people and is not yet satisfied with the divine confirmation. He insists: "If thy presence will not go with me, do not carry us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favour in thy sight, I and thy people? Is it not in thy going with us, so that we are distinct, I and thy people, from all other people that are upon the face of the earth?" (33:15–16). Here Moses twice uses the phrasal link "I and thy people"; consequently he expects an unambiguous confirmation that God will go amongst the people and only then and thus will it be signified that they have been forgiven and that the covenant may be renewed. Moses' sustained demand that God should deal equally benevolently with all the people demonstrates that he is indeed a true prophet. Eventually God replies to such magnanimity as Moses had wished: "This very thing that you have spoken I will do; for you

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[26] See U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 430–431.

[27] See J. Muilenburg, "The Intercession of the Covenant Mediator (Exodus 33:1a, 12–17)," *Words and Meanings: Essays Presented to David Winton Thomas* (ed. P. R. Ackroyd and B. Lindars; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 159–181. The author researches primarily the meaning of the word 'to know' in witness about the covenant in the Hebrew Bible and elsewhere in the ancient Near East.

[28] See S. Terrien, *The Elusive Presence, Toward a New Biblical Theology* (RP 26; New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 141: "The phrase 'And I will give thee rest' literally means 'I will cause thee to be transformed from a fretful to a secure person.'"

have found favour in my sight, and I know you by name" (v. 17).

2.4 *Moses Prays for a Revelation of God's Glory (33:18–23)*

Characteristic of all three of Moses' requests to date (32:11–13, 30–34; 33:12–17) is that he has made no plea for himself but is concerned only with the salvation and blessing of the people. Hence 33:18–23 seems all the more unusual, when the prophet requests God to reveal the divine glory to himself. In 33:18 we read: "I pray thee, show me thy glory *(kĕbōdekā).*" Verses 18–23 are probably a re-arrangement of an older narrative dealing with the relationship between God and Moses.[29] In the context of chapters 32–34, these verses indirectly clarify why God is unable constantly to forgive the people or to draw completely close to them.

The instances in which the word *kābôd,* 'glory, majesty,' appear in the Bible testify to the exceptional semantic breadth of this concept; it may designate all the inexpressible extent of God's majesty, sanctity and benevolence in relation to the world and humankind. But if Moses expects a divine revelation to him in all God's immeasurable greatness, he has gone too far; he has not taken into consideration that the infinite Creator is unable to draw close without trammel to a limited creature. It is understandable that Moses' request cannot be met fully. God replies in three sentences, each beginning with the same introduction "and he said ..." Verse 19 brings the first part of the answer: "I will make all my goodness *(kol-ṭûbî)* pass before you, and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord'; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy *(wĕḥannōtî 'et-'ăšer 'āḥōn wĕrīḥamtî 'et-'ăšer 'ăraḥēm).*" From the declaration that all the divine goodness will pass before Moses, it is obvious what God wishes to make clear through the famous second sentence that is fairly similar, although in form only, to other statements in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Exod 3:14; 4:13; 16:23). God is essentially a benevolent, compassionate and merciful master over man, but does not demonstrate this mercy unconditionally. Humans must display righteousness—i.e., above all trust in and fidelity to God—but only the Creator is able to judge reliably who is in fact righteous and justifiably reserves total freedom of decision as to whom, when and in what measure the divine compassion will be shown. What does God's principle have to say in this context? Only one reliable conclusion can be reached: God guarantees full benevolence, mercy and forgiveness to those who have truly undergone reform.

The second and third parts of the reply (33:20–23) define for Moses the boundary that exists between God and every human being, a boundary that

[29] See B. S. Childs, *Exodus,* 595–597.

also exists for Moses even though it applies less severely. This is a matter of life and death; no human being may see the face of God and live. This means that two contradictory extremes may exist for the death of a human: he may become completely alienated from God or he may draw too close to divinity. Using a characteristic anthropomorphism, the writer says that when God's majesty shows itself, Moses must hide in a cave where his face is covered by the divine hand, so that he may not look upon God save from behind.

This representation of the boundary between divine and human is possibly of much deeper significance than is apparent. The writer's primary purpose in showing why Moses must not gaze upon the divine countenance is to explain why God cannot go amidst the people unconditionally. If not even Moses may approach his Creator unreservedly without dying, how could a people who have desecrated themselves with apostasy to a Golden Calf hope to survive? (cf. 33:3, 5). Divine majesty signifies a standing call to the reform and purification of a sinful people. The fulfilment of that demand will dictate God's method of drawing near to them with redemptive compassion and mercy.

3. *The Renewal of the Covenant Relationship (34:1–35)*

Clear signs of penitence by the people and Moses' persistent plea for forbearance have thus persuaded God to forgive Israel's apostasy, and the covenant is now ready for renewal. Chapter 34 talks of that renewal (vv. 1–10), of God's demand for a break away from foreign peoples (vv. 11–16), of laws (vv. 17–26), of the drawing up of the covenant on Mount Sinai (vv. 27–28), and of Moses' glowing face (vv. 29–35). From the literary-critical point of view these passages present exceptional problems. Two types of narrative intermingle here, one connected with the revelation of the laws and the drawing up of the covenant on Sinai, the second linked to the apostasy to the Golden Calf.[30] Only the first of these speaks directly about the renewal of the covenant as a sign of reconciliation.

3.1 *Forgiveness and Renewal of the Covenant (34:1–10)*

God now orders Moses to hew stone tablets similar to the first two that were broken by the prophet. God will personally write the words of the covenant upon the tables (34:1). As in the case of chapter 19, Moses receives a divine

[30] For the question of sources and traditions, see especially F.-E. Wilms, *Das jahwistische Bundesbuch in Exodus 34* (StANT 32; Munich: Kösel-Verlag, 1973); J. Halbe, *Das Privilegrecht Jahwes: Ex 34,10–26* (FRLANT 114; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975); B. S. Childs, *Exodus*, 604–619.

command that no one other than himself should ascend the mountain. The divine decree on the drawing up of a fresh covenant is the most reliable proof that God has forgiven the iniquity of the people.

As Moses ascends the mountain with the stone tablets in his arms, God "descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord" (34:5). In 34:6–7 God utters the renowned words:

> The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children, to the third and fourth generation.[31]

This form is not found in chapter 19, although it does appear in the revelation of the Ten Commandments in 20:5–6, in a somewhat different mould in which God's positive and negative relations with the people are placed in the opposite order. Of prime importance in 20:5–6 is the threat of collective punishment for those hostile to the true God, followed by an assurance of benevolence for a thousand generations to those who love their God and do what is commanded of them. In the present example the order is reversed, and God not only gives a general assurance of benevolence *(hesed)* but speaks mostly of mercifulness and forbearance. Such references abound here.[32]

The reason for this difference in the use of what is in fact the same form is obvious. Before the apostasy, warnings had mostly to be issued with the threat of the punishment prescribed in the case of apostasy. After the apostasy, the prescribed penalty ought to have been carried out in accordance with the divine threat; God would have been justified in abandoning the people and destroying them. That this did not happen, that God was even prepared to renew the covenant, signifies what is essentially a "... God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness ... ." Naturally, it is understandable that God should show forgiveness only to those who acknowledge their own iniquity and who are willing to turn again and be reformed. Mercy will be valid only while human fidelity endures, and experience so far suggested the abiding possibility of renewed apostasy—which is why the threat of punishment is once again necessary after the drawing up of the new covenant. The threat is secondary but no less real than in 20:5–6 where it is validated before the assurance of God's benevolence.

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[31] See the discourse on this and parallel texts in J. Krašovec, "Božja dobrota za tisoč, kazen za tri ali štiri rodove (God's Love to Thousands, Punishment to Three or Four Generations)," *BV* 48 (1988), 357–384, esp. 358–359.

[32] For source and meaning of this creed form, see especially R. C. Dentan, "The Literary Affinities of Exodus XXXIV 6f," *VT* 13 (1963), 34–51. Dentan ascertains that the form originates from wisdom liturgical circles and has a universal significance, because it is not designating the Lord's opportune works in his relation to Israel but only the nature of the sole God.

Moses is well aware of this, for he knows that the renewal of the covenant is possible only through the divine forbearance, for which he himself must humbly plead. He bows to the ground and submits his request: "If now I have found favour in thy sight, O Lord, let the Lord, I pray thee, go in the midst of us, although it is a stiff-necked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for thy inheritance" (v. 9).[33] In these words he summarizes all the main points of his pleas in chapters 32 and 33.

In the end God responds to Moses' concluding plea by announcing the fashioning of the covenant and promising miraculous signs beyond the comprehension of the covenanted people and the surrounding nations: "Behold, I make a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels, such as have not been wrought in all the earth or any nation; and all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the Lord; for it is a terrible thing that I will do with you" (34:10). *Noblesse oblige:* the more magnificent the promises made for the good of Israel, the more she is bound to adhere to the laws of God and not to look to the customs of other nations. This provides the theological explanation for the ultimate author introducing the Ten Commandments here (34:11–26). The covenant is the source of all Israel's bounty and the reason for its excellence: hence the people are bound to it unconditionally. A covenant without the law is impossible to conceive.[34]

3.2 *The Radiant Face of Moses (34:29–35)*

After drawing up the covenant, Moses returns from Sinai, taking both the tablets with him. Verse 29 states: "Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God," and in 34:30 we learn that Aaron and "all the people of Israel" saw Moses' face shining and were afraid to come near him. Moses called Aaron and the leaders of the congregation to him: "And afterward all the people of Israel came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken with him in Mount Sinai. And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil *(masweh)* on his face" (34:32–33). Moses continued his role as mediator. "Whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he took the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, the people of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone; and Moses would put the veil upon his face again, until he went in to speak with him" (34:34–35).

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[33] For the relation between vv. 8 and 9, see K.-H. Walkenhorst, "Warum beeilte sich Mose niederzufallen?—Zur literarischen Einheit von Ex 34,8f," *BZ* 28 (1984), 185–209.

[34] See J. P. Hyatt, *Commentary on Exodus,* 319: "It is natural to expect that in the interval between verse 10 and verse 27 we have a series of 'words' (laws, commands, or the alike) which constituted the terms of the covenant." Further, pp. 319–322, Hyatt questions the source of the 'ritual decalogue' in Exod 34:11–26 and the 'ethical decalogue' in Exod 20.

The phrase *qāran 'ôr pānâw (pĕnê mōšeh)* appears three times in the text: vv. 29, 30, 35. Both Aquila and the Vulgate are based upon the original meaning of the root *qrn,* '(to have) a horn,' so that 34:29 is translated in the Vulgate as "... et ignorabat quod cornuta esset facies sua ... ." Other translators take into account the secondary meaning of the verbal form of 'to shine,' giving us "the skin of his [Moses'] face shone." In the given context this is the only meaningful translation, although religious history does of course record the use of a horned mask for ritual purposes.[35] This glow upon the face does not mean that Moses had changed, for he himself is actually unaware of what has happened to him (cf. 34:29). This effulgence is the mark of God's splendour[36]—hence the understandable fear shown by Aaron and "all the people of Israel" in approaching Moses. Eventual awareness of this phenomenon led Moses to cover his face with something whenever he spoke to the people.

Once again, in a new form, emerges the theme from 33:18–23: no one, not even Moses, may gaze upon the divine glory; and it explains why God covers his countenance when passing Moses. This particular passage does not mention God's face, but the effect would of course be similar. Moses' face shone "because he had been talking with God" (34:29). This indicated an instance of the epiphany of the Lord's glory which arouses fear and trust at the same time. For the people of Israel this awakens a consciousness that they are created, limited, sinful beings and as such cannot approach God without inhibition. At the same time it demonstrates that the divine magnificence is truly present amidst them. With this, the final and principal aim of Moses' plea is attained. A manifestation of divine majesty is an indicator of divine benevolence, and in this particular context it is above all an assurance of the forgiveness of iniquity. Now all the conditions for the advent of the new covenant, heralding a brighter future, are in place.

4. *Echoes of the Narrative of the Golden Calf*

Exod 32–34 give the impression that the desertion to the Golden Calf was the most remarkable iniquity in the history of Israel. Despite this, the Old and New Testaments do not say much about it or from different angles. Only in Deut 9:7–10:77 can we find an equally detailed account of these events. Others merely mention this or that aspect of what happened. In complaining about the consistent unfaithfulness of the people of Israel in the

[35] Amongst more recent authors K. Jaros in "Des Mose 'strahlende Haut': Eine Notiz zu Ex 34,29, 30, 35," *ZAW* 88 (1976), 275–280, draws our notice to these traditions.

[36] See translations in the Targums, especially *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan.* See also F. Dumermuth, "Moses strahlendes Gesicht," *ThZ* 17 (1961), 241–248.

past, Psalm 106 recounts their sinfulness by Sinai in the scathing vv. 19–20:

> They made a calf in Horeb
> and worshipped a molten image.
> They exchanged the glory of God
> for the image of an ox that eats grass.

In penitent worship, the book of Nehemiah (9:1–37) subordinates remembrance of Israel's iniquity to avowals of divine mercifulness. When the people, in great distress, plead for mercy and assistance, it sees the story of the Golden Calf above all as confirmation of divine forbearance. In 9:16–19 the narrative states:

> But they and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey thy commandments; they refused to obey, and were not mindful of the wonders which thou didst perform amongst them; but they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their bondage in Egypt. But thou art a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them. Even when they had made for themselves a molten calf and said, "This is your God who brought you up out of Egypt," and had committed great blasphemies, thou in thy great mercies didst not forsake them in the wilderness; the pillar of cloud which led them in the way did not depart from them by day, nor the pillar of fire by night which lighted for them the way by which they should go.

In the New Testament, the theme of the Golden Calf appears in Ac 7:39–42; 1 Cor 10:7; 2 Cor 3:7–18. The Deacon Stephen gives an exhaustive account of the history of Israel's disbelief and rejection of true prophets (Ac 7:1–33) to a great crowd in Jerusalem. When he talks of Moses' resistance, he says:

> This is he who was in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living oracles to give to us. Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, saying to Aaron, "Make us gods to go before us; as for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and rejoiced in the works of their hands (vv. 38–41).

Paul touches upon the theme in 1 Cor 10:7 when warning against the bad example of the fathers: "Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, 'The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to dance.'" In 2 Cor 3:7–18 Paul makes use of the story of the drawing up of a new covenant to emphasize the uniqueness of the Revelation according to Christ. On the making of the new covenant on Sinai, Moses covered his head because of the glow upon his face. It is in this covering that Paul discerns the limits of revelation in the Old Testament. Christ removed this covering so that the brilliance of the New Testament might become fully evident.

An explicitly historical comprehension of divine revelation and the response of a covenanted people to divine acts explain why the theme of the

Golden Calf does not appear more frequently in the Bible. Making idols in imitation of foreign cults occurred so frequently in the story of Israel that historical memory could not continually bring the faithful to a halt with the first great apostasy. The final orgies around the Golden Calf on Sinai were far from a unique occurrence; from Jeroboam's apostasy (1 Kgs 12:26–32) and from Hosea's criticism of Israel's errors (8:4b–6; 10:5–6; 13:1–3) it is possible to conclude that the cult of the Golden Calf also played a fairly visible role even in the Promised Land.

After the canon of the Old Testament was established, a new era of interpretation began. Distance in time from the events and fresh historical conditions led exegetes toward a more principled evaluation of individual events. Earlier happenings gradually acquired a greater significance than more recent ones. The apostasy at the time of the drawing up of the covenant was the first outrageous iniquity by the people of Israel, and inevitably acquired the stamp of original sin.

Apart from the passage discussed here, only Deut 9:7–10:11 rehearses all the fundamental points of view and reminds us of the apostasy on Mount Sinai; it is also worth attention. So too is the history of the earlier Jewish and Christian interpretations of this event, in order to ascertain what fundamental questions arise and how they may possibly be solved.

4.1 *Pedagogic-Critical Role of the Episode in Deuteronomy 9:7–10:11*

The author of Deuteronomy makes use of the essential elements in the tale of the Golden Calf, right up to the renewal of the covenant, but he does subjugate them to the basic pedagogic-didactic aim of his own writing. Here Moses incites the people to obedience to the divine law because he is convinced that they will not otherwise be able to continue to exist. In support of his own exhortations he makes use of memories of the consequences of the rebellious and stiff-necked attitude of the people of Israel in the past. In 9:7 we read: "Remember and do not forget how you provoked the Lord your God to wrath in the wilderness; from the day you came out of the land of Egypt, until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the Lord" (example relates to the "stubborn people" in 9:6–13).

In the apostasy to the Golden Calf, the Deutoronomic author sees the classic example of the rebelliousness of the people of Israel; hence he frequently emphasizes that God had wished to destroy them (9:8, 14, 19, 20; cf. 9:25, 26; 10:10). On account of Moses' exceptionally impassioned and persistent plea, however, the divine hand had been held. In Deuteronomy there is no talk of these dramatic events in the third person. Moses speaks in the first person, explaining events in the light of his personal experiences. First describing how he fasted on the mountain for forty days and forty nights, he then relates how God gave him the stone tablets of the covenant

(9:10–11). After this, as in Exod 32:7–10, Moses is told that the people have defected to the Golden Calf and that God intends to destroy them (9:12–14). Moses descends the mountain and breaks both the tablets of the covenant (9:15–17) in full view of the defaulting people. He continues:

> Then I lay prostrate before the Lord as before, forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all the sin which you had committed, in doing what was evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger. For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure which the Lord bore against you, so that he was ready to destroy you. But the Lord hearkened to me that time also. And the Lord was so angry with Aaron that he was ready to destroy him; and I prayed for Aaron also at the same time (9:18–20).

Moses says that he prayed "as before" and that God hearkened "that time also," although this is in fact the first plea in this particular passage. Further on he says that he also pleaded for Aaron, although in Exod 32–34 there is no explicit mention of any such entreaty. All this merely clarifies the wish by the author to emphasize Moses' role as mediator—which is precisely why Moses here reports on his intervention before moving on to the theme of burning and destroying the Golden Calf (9:21).

The report on events on Sinai is interrupted by an insertion on Israel's rebelliousness in a later period (9:22–24); Moses then speaks again of his plea for Israel (9:25–29). As in Exod 32:11–13, he summons up the deliverance from Egypt with concomitant signs of divine power, and the fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and God's honour before the land of estrangement. Finally, in a similarly stereotyped style, he talks of his own plea in 10:10–11 without any linkage at all to the intervening passages. In 10:1–4 Moses reports on the renewal of the covenant (cf. Exod 34:1–4), and continues: "Then I turned and came down the mountain, and put the tables in the ark which I had made; and there they are, as the Lord commanded me" (10:5). He then speaks of the journey from Beeroth to Jotbathah (10:6–7) and of the singling out of the tribe of Levi to serve as priests (10:8–9). The plea in 10:10–11 seems to be linked with the interrupted report on events related to the Golden Calf: "I stayed on the mountain, as at the first time, forty days and forty nights, and the Lord hearkened to me that time also; and the Lord was unwilling to destroy you. And the Lord said to me, 'Arise, go on your journey at the head of the people, that they may go in and possess the land, which I swore to their fathers to give them.'"

In content Deut 10:11 essentially complements Exod 32:34. Nowhere in the passage we are considering do the themes of Exod 33 become significant; no mention is made of the penitence of the people. The Deuteronomic author evidently sees apostasy from God as the certain road to ruin, and only Moses' exceptional role as mediator can explain the divine forbearance. This presages extremely serious trouble for the future, when Moses is no longer available. In the event of a fresh deviation, no one will defend the

people of Israel from the destructive wrath of their God.[37]

4.2 *Echoes in Earlier Jewish and Christian Interpretations*

Jewish and Christian narratives adopt very different viewpoints when dealing with the iniquity of the people upon Mount Sinai. These differences can be discerned within each individual tradition and even more in the relationships between them. The Jewish understanding is marked by an exceptionally powerfully apologetic tendency, because it was a target equally for pagan and Christian accusations, founded upon the story of the Golden Calf *inter alia.* From the beginning, Christians linked the apostasy to the Golden Calf with the Jewish rejection of Christ. In their eyes, the fall at Sinai was both the beginning and the peak of characteristic Jewish rebelliousness, disbelief and idolatry in the Old Testament. It was on account of this sin that the people of Israel lost their position as a covenanted people. Because they also rejected Christ, it is even more understandable that God ultimately abandoned them, the New Testament becoming valid within the Church. Such an interpretation is characteristic of Barnabas' Letter, Justin, Origen, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Ephraim of Syria, and Augustine.

The Jewish response to pagan and Christian accusations exhibits two differing apologetic tendencies. In one there is an attempt to conceal, to apologize in one way or another, or even to deny Israel's guilt; the other acknowledges without hesitation that the iniquity was very great, but notes that God forgave the sin and thus did not abandon Israel. During the pre-Rabbinic period (for example, Joseph Flavius and Philo of Alexandria), no mention whatever of the apostasy to the Golden Calf is made when reporting on events in the desert. From the second century onwards, the Rabbinists vigorously defended the validity of the covenant with Israel, the law in general and circumcision. In doing so, they took into consideration the exceptional circumstances prevailing. Later, they were of the opinion that an entire people did not fall from grace, but only a minority—essentially only those who were not true-blooded Israelites. The idea is particularly strong that Aaron, who was the predecessor of the Temple priesthood, must be forgiven. The belief even surfaced that it was God who was responsible for the apostasy to the Golden Calf because God himself had created the opportunity for such a sin.

On the other hand, some Rabbinists admit to Israel's total guilt. To them, this apostasy is the greatest iniquity of all. They are convinced that the sin is

[37] In Exod 32–34 there is only one mention of the Lord's intention to destroy Israel (32:10; cf. 33:3, 5). The texts dealing with apostasy of Israel contain a variety of words denoting destruction of the people because of their apostasy. In Exod 32:10 the verb *kālāh* (Pi'el) appears once, in Deut 9:7–10:11 *šāmad* is used five times (9:8, 14, 19, 20, 25) and *šāḥat* twice (9:26; 10:10), both in Hiph'il. In Deut 9:7–10:11 Moses' intermediary role is thus to save Israel from destruction.

unpardonable, and consequently ranks as original sin; all Jewish people will always suffer because of what their fathers did. The Rabbinists consider that it explains the misfortunes in the desert and in the Promised Land. Ultimately, they hold that the destruction of the priesthood and the monarchy, plus the tragedy of exile are all direct consequences of this sin. Nevertheless the conviction that God did forgive Israel's iniquity later gained validity; despite the divine wrath Moses was designated to mediate for his people, thus providing an opportunity for sorrow. There even arose belief that no satisfaction was required whatever for the breaking of the covenant because at the moment of idolatry before the Golden Calf the covenant had not yet been finally drawn up. In every case the Rabbinists are convinced that God did not totally abandon Israel and will again some day guide them to the Promised Land. During the Late Middle Ages and the period of the Reformation, this Jewish point of view strongly influenced Christian scholars, resulting in their taking greater account of the significance of forgiveness and the renewal of the covenant in the narrative of the Golden Calf.[38]

4.3 *Critical Assessment of Biblical and Postbiblical Interpretations*

Echoes in the Bible and later interpretations characteristically do not cover every aspect of the story of the Golden Calf in the period between the fall of the people and the renewal of the covenant. If it is clear that diverse narratives of the apostasy and its consequences existed before the definite editing, it is even more obvious that the text's final author wove the tales into a whole, so that great emphasis is laid simultaneously upon the enormity of the sin, the significance of Moses' mediation, the penitence of the people and divine forbearance. All these aspects are presented in marvelous harmony, intensifying up to the renewal of the covenant. Because the apostasy occurred in the early part of this era, the guilt is truly unprecedented. Despite this, after the intervention of Moses, and after clear signs of penitence from the people, God revoked the decision to destroy Israel. Even more, there was a redrawing, ultimately a renewing, of the covenant with them. Hence it is understandable that, within such a theological perspective of the dialectic between human frailty and the all-embracing divine faithfulness to a personal redemptive plan, the writer does not feel any need to deny or conceal the iniquity of the people as a whole and particularly the guilt of the priest Aaron.

Other biblical texts adopt this or that point of view without, of course,

[38] For the question of Jewish and Christian interpretations, see especially L. Smolar and M. Aberbach, "The Golden Calf Episode in Postbiblical Literature," *HUCA* 39 (1968), 9–116; B. S. Childs, *Exodus,* 574–579: "History of Exegesis"; P. C. Bori, *Il vitello d'oro: Le radici della controversia antiguidaica* (Turin: P. Borinchieri, 1983).

denying or excluding others. Even in Deut 9:7–10:11 one of the basic emphases is evident: God has retracted the decision on the destruction of the people, thanks to Moses' persistent request for forbearance. The weight of the argument here lies more upon the sinfulness of the people because of their infidelity than upon divine forbearance as a result of a sovereign divine plan related to the history of redemption. All this makes it clear that Exod 32–34 is the most extensive and universal witness to the relationship between punishment on account of human iniquity and divine forbearance on account of the righteous minority—or even one single righteous person—and because it is divine faithfulness to its own essence that creates and preserves life.

Why then, despite this, were later Jewish and Christian interpretations rife with biased and even exclusive points of view? Why do Christian interpreters reject divine mercy in relation to the Jewish people, when the biblical texts achieve their greatest moments through the triumph of divine mercy and the formulation of a new covenant? On the other hand, why all the apologetics on the part of the ancestors? Ultimately the Jewish people survived, despite ever and again rebelling against their God. Are not both sides of the argument all too human? Humans wish to build upon their own righteousness, God's people can exist only where all admit to their sinfulness and look for divine forgiveness. When this realization ceases, every religious group, every reform and every call to a new covenant turns into a new cult of a latter-day golden calf, whether within the Jewish faith, or Christianity, or anywhere else.

No new covenant comes of its own accord, unconditionally, already in possession of the benefits of its own promises. On the contrary, the more complete the revelation of such a covenant, the more humans are conscious of their sinful nature and that consequently they are unable to redeem themselves. Nowhere has this comprehension become so clearly valid as in the revelation of Christ's new covenant. In his Letter to the Romans, Paul initially demonstrates the sinfulness of all mankind, later to show wherein lies the essence of the revelation of divine righteousness according to Christ, the sole righteous mediator. The whole emphasis is upon the divine fidelity that, in the final analysis, signifies divine forgiveness. Only he who admits his infidelity and believes in forgiveness for all who accept the concept of an all-embracing divine measure will participate in the divine mercy. At the start of the history of the people of Israel, the apostasy to the Golden Calf was necessary. When the human lie became apparent, the divine truth showed through all the more transparently (cf. Ps 51:6; Rom 3:1–8).

CHAPTER V

IS THERE A DOCTRINE OF "COLLECTIVE RETRIBUTION" IN THE HEBREW BIBLE?

The general imprecision of attempts to define "collectivism" and "individualism"—and the equally uncertain term "doctrine"—in relation to punishment or retribution makes any examination of the complex question of " collective retribution" all the more difficult. We shall start, therefore, with a brief clarification of the key terms used in this study: the adjective "collective" with its synonyms and antonyms, the concept of "doctrine," and possible applications of "retribution."

The use of the term "collective" must reflect the structure and role of society in ancient Israel. Provided the general characteristics of that society are adequately defined, the nature and function of the "community," the "clan" or "family," and the "self" or "individual" as reflected in the Hebrew Bible can be properly determined.[1] There are many different views regarding "collectivism" and "individualism" in ancient Israel. It remains incontestable, however, that the Hebrew understanding of any type of community, on the one hand, and the role of the individual, on the other, could never deteriorate into "collective determinism" or "autonomous individualism," as is often the case in the Enlightenment and emancipative types of society, for the Israel of history was animated by profound sentiments of responsibility and solidarity within the community. Walther Eichrodt responds to the challenge of philosophical idealism in its handling of concepts of "collectivism" and "individualism" thus: "Instead of employing such conceptual categories it is better to keep firmly in mind the striking fundamental characteristic of all forms of community in the ancient world, and in particular of those of Israel, namely the strength of their sense of solidarity—a sense which adjusts itself in a variety of ways to changes in the shape of society,

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[1] For the background and the relationship between these terms, see especially J. de Fraine, "Individu et société dans la religion de l'Ancien Testament," *Biblica* 33 (1952), 324–355, 445–475; F. Spadafora, *Collettivismo e individualismo nel Vecchio Testamento* (QE 2; Rovigo: Istituto Padano di Arti Grafiche, 1953); J. Scharbert, *Solidarität in Segen und Fluch im Alten Testament und in seiner Umwelt* (BBB 14; Bonn: P. Hanstein, 1958); W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament,* vol. 1 (trans. from the German J. Baker; London: SCM Press, 1967), esp. chap. 20 (pp. 231–267): "The Individual and the Community in the Old Testament God-Man Relationship"; E. E. Gendler, "Community," *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought: Original Essays on Critical Concepts, Movements, and Beliefs* (ed. A. A. Cohen and P. Mendes-Flohr; New York: Free Press (Macmillan); London: Collier Macmillan, 1987), 81–86; P. Ochs, "Individuality," *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought,* 483–485; C. E. Vernoff, "Unity" *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought,* 1025–1032; P. D. Hanson, *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible* (San Francisco, Calif.: Harper & Row, 1987).

but is always the essential determinant of its distinctive quality."[2]

It is generally recognized that the documents of the Hebrew Bible imply a progression in the role and value of the individual and some strengthening of individuality within the various types of Israelite society. In the pre-monarchic period, Israel shared the clan or tribe-centered community sense characteristic of a nomadic way of life. The clan is founded on a close spiritual and psychic association of individual and community. It seems that the tribes' view of the covenant was based not only on their particular concept of God but also on genealogical relationship. After the settlement in Canaan this sense of solidarity was transferred from the clan to the local communities, on the one hand, and to the immediate family, on the other. It is taken for granted that the underlying sense of solidarity within a clan or a family, or even within a local community, implies an idea of communal responsibility (collective liability) and corporate guilt, and a concept of collective divine retribution.[3] But "a permanent organic connection between the descendants and the father of the family, by virtue of which they partake of his special powers or suffer as a result of his guilt, is unknown."[4] In the monarchic period the predominantly collective sense of solidarity was reshaped by the new entity designated as the "house of Israel" and by the personalist stamp of the covenant. The more God was perceived as the One and transcendent, the more the whole existence of the nation was seen to depend on the divine will, and the individual appreciated for his distinctive personal quality and capacity for decision. The divine demand for repentance proclaimed by classical prophets to the nation as a whole was decisive in finally transcending the confrontation of "collectivism" and "individualism."

The supremacy of Israel's monotheism over all forms of pantheism and polytheism brought about a strengthening of sacred unity between various forms of Israelite society (the community) and between that society and the individual. It is justifiable to claim: "For Israel's sages, God alone endures, while the things of this world pass away, acquiring individuality only as instruments of God's purposes. Only idol-worshipers place their trust in mere

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[2] See W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, 232.

[3] See the great study of this issue by G. Glotz, *La solidarité de la famille dans le droit criminel en Grèce* (Paris: A. Fontemoing, 1904), esp. chap. 9, pp. 557–597: "La responsabilité collective dans la religion." See also Plutarch (c. 46–120 C.E.) on solidarity within a city, presented in his *On the Delays of the Divine Vengeance (De Sera Numinis Vindicta)* (559a1–e9); trans. P. H. de Lacy and B. Einarson, *Plutarch's Moralia*, vol. 7 (LCL 405; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: W. Heinemann), 245: "A city, like a living thing, is a united and continuous whole. This does not cease to be itself as it changes in growing older, nor does it become one thing after another with the lapse of time, but is always at one with its former self in feeling and identity, and must take all blame or credit for what it does or has done in its public character, so long as the association that creates it and binds it together with interwoven strands preserves it as a unity."

[4] See W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, 235.

things ... The meaning and value of individuality depends on its source: creator or creature."[5] Since the goal of creation and of God's dealings with the world is completion of that creation, it follows that "a whole cannot be itself or function as it should unless each part is fully itself within the whole. Thus the whole depends upon its parts, each of which contributes a unique and indispensable function to the whole. The part, in turn, can realize its unique identity and fulfill its functional potential only within the whole of which it is a part and outside of which it is devoid of meaning. Therefore each part depends upon the whole to define itself and become actualized as uniquely meaningful and valuable. The uniqueness of the part and the completeness of the whole are reciprocal values that can be actualised only in and through their inherent mutuality. Thus, for example, unique personal individuality and total corporate solidarity—both Judaic emphases—are not contradictory, but complementary aspects of unity."[6]

The relationship between God and creation makes the distinction between divine and human retribution crucial. And when divine retribution comes into play, it is important to determine whether it (or of course recompense) is direct or indirect. The distinctions are vital in cases of collective divine retribution, for God may rule the world not only according to general principles, but also according to the exigencies of special circumstances and reasons that are beyond human grasp or fitness to employ. In either situation God may execute retribution by direct intervention or by permitting human deeds to produce their appropriate fruits, which may then be considered as punishment or reward. It follows that use of the term "doctrine" in relation to collective retribution must be subject to scrutiny. Etiological explanations of tragic historical events dependent on the guilt of ancestors, or execution of collective retribution for singular reasons, cannot be dignified by the term "doctrine." A classic example of etiological interpretation is provided by the lamentations of Mursilis, the Hittite king (c. 1340–1310).[7] Stricken by a national plague that lasted for twenty years the king asks whether this is a punishment inflicted by the Storm-god, because the Hattians have violated an agreement made between them and the Egyptians during the reign of his father Suppiluliuma (c. 1375–1340). It is important to note that the prayers

[5] See P. Ochs, "Individuality," *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought,* 482.

[6] See C. E. Vernoff, "Unity," *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought,* 1029. In this context we may note the discussion on the concept of the "corporate personality": W. H. Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1964, 1980); J. R. Porter, "The Legal Aspects of the Concept of 'Corporate Personality' in the Old Testament," *VT* 15 (1965), 361–380; J. R. Rogerson, "The Hebrew Conception of Corporate Personality: A Reconsideration," *JThS* 21 (1970), 1–16.

[7] See the translation by A. Götze, "Die Pestgebete des Muršiliš," *KAF* 1 (1929), 204–235; idem, "Plague Prayers of Mursilis," *ANET,* 394–396; G. Beckman, "Plague Prayers of Muršili II (1.60)," *The Context of Scripture,* vol. 1*: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World* (ed. W. W. Hallo; Leiden / New York / Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1998), 156–160.

of Mursilis do not imply a divine statement about collective retribution, but amount only to a surmise by the king that the crisis might betoken an inherited punishment. Since the king is uncertain he begs: "... let those that are still able to give sacrificial loaves and libations die no longer! If, on the other hand, people are dying for some other reason, either let me see it in a dream, or let it be found out by an oracle, or let a prophet declare it, or let all the priests find out by incubation whatever I suggest to them ... For whatever reason people are dying, let that be found out! ..."[8] Such documents cannot be considered witnesses to "doctrines" of causality in the sense of collective retribution or inherited punishment.[9]

In the Hebrew Bible there are a number of passages showing that divine collective retribution was not dictated by a doctrine or a principle but by special circumstances. Against that, others reflect a crude desire for vengeance and a belief or feeling that ancestral guilt is inheritable. It becomes all the more urgent to consider the question of how to interpret the famous retribution formula that occurs several times in various forms: Exod 20:5–6 (= Deut 5:9–10); 34:6–7; Num 14:18; Deut 7:9–10; and Jer 32:18. These passages are somewhat problematic from both the linguistic and theological points of view, and are in consequence variously translated and interpreted.[10] Since the formula leaves the impression that it may reflect a doctrine of collective retribution, many exegetes try to avoid the conclusion that it has anything to do with collective retribution. It is therefore necessary that it should be assessed as much in light of its linguistic and literary structure on each occurrence as in relation to other cases that concern collective retribution, taking into account the immediate or broader context in every case.

The following questions are of cardinal importance in dealing with passages concerned with collective retribution and that imply an idea of communal responsibility or suggest other grounds for its justification or a feeling of the inheritability of ancestral guilt: how far do historical and ideological setting determine the meaning of individual passages? Where are the boundaries between their literal and metaphorical or symbolical-literary meanings? How

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[8] See a.11; trans. A. Götze, "Plague Prayers of Mursilis," *ANET*, 396.

[9] It is striking that A. Malamat deals with these prayers and the similar case reported in 2 Sam 21:1–14 under the inappropriate title: "Doctrines of Causality in Hittite and Biblical Historiography: A Parallel," *VT* 5 (1955), 1–12. It is true that Mursilis at one point refers to inherited punishment: "It is only too true that man is sinful. My father sinned and transgressed against the word of the Hattian Storm-god, my lord. But I have not sinned in any respect. It is only too true, however, that the father's sin falls upon the son. So, my father's sin has fallen upon me" (see a.9; trans. A. Götze, "Plague Prayers of Mursilis," *ANET*, 395). We have no proof that this statement expresses more than the view of the king. Moreover, that view does not reveal how inherited punishment is supposed to be exercised: whether directly by the will of the gods or indirectly by the operation of natural law.

[10] This fact is particularly clearly indicated by J. Scharbert, "Formgeschichte und Exegese von Ex 34,6f und seiner Parallelen," *Biblica* 38 (1957), 130–150, and M. Weiss, "Some Problems of the Biblical 'Doctrine of Retribution,'" *Tarbiz* 32 (1962–1963), 1–18 + I–II.

are individual and collective retribution related to each other? Is there any ground in the Hebrew Bible for treating examples of "collective retribution" as expressions of doctrine or principle?

1. *The Structure and Semantics of the "Collective Retribution" Formula*

The passages cited above are similar in their basic antithetical structure and constituent parts. Nevertheless, there are certain significant differences that divide them into two groups: 1) Exod 34:6–7; Num 14:18; Jer 32:18; and 2) Exod 20:5–6 (= Deut 5:9–10); Deut 7:9–10. The first group appears to be older than the second,[11] although the development of the passages into their present form has not been convincingly established. This makes it even more necessary to take into account their present structure, their role within context, and their semantics. The following are questions of special interest: what sort of relationship exists between divine steadfast love, retribution, and forgiveness? What are the reasons or conditions that bring one or the other into play?

1.1 *Exodus 34:6–7*

The book of Exodus may be divided into three major parts, following the narrative sequence: Israel in Egypt (1:1–13:16); Israel in the Wilderness (13:17–18:27); Israel at Sinai (19:1–40:38). The statement of retribution reported in 34:6–7 appears within the composite literary structure of section 32:1–34:35, which deals with Israel's violation of the covenant by the apostasy to the golden bull-calf and the restoration of the covenant through intercessory mediation by Moses.[12] Since the section is a compilation of J, E, and several editorial elements it is difficult to establish the date of the solemn statement in 34:6–7 with any certainty, but it seems to present a very ancient summary of divine characteristics in the form of a professional formula.[13] All the more is it

[11] See J. Scharbert, *Biblica* 38 (1957), 131–137.

[12] For general questions about the book of Exodus and the section chaps. 32–34, see especially A. H. McNeile, *The Book of Exodus* (WC; London: Methuen, 1908); G. Beer and K. Galling, *Exodus* (HAT 3; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1939); R. E. Clements, *Exodus* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972); B. S. Childs, *Exodus: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1974); U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1983); J. I. Durham, *Exodus* (WBC; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987).

[13] See the statement by J. I. Durham, *Exodus*, 454: "In fact, we have no basis for certainty regarding the origin of these verses; they are certainly a part of a confession of faith about Yahweh, but probably of a very ancient one, far older than the Wisdom movement in any formal sense and connected with Israel's oldest perception of Yahweh and his relationship to those he claimed as 'his own people.'" For the more detailed discussion about the confession formula, see R. C. Dentan, "The Literary Affinities of Exodus XXXIV 6f.," *VT* 13 (1963), 34–51.

appropriate to acknowledge the function of the formula within the section as a whole: it marks the turning-point in the greatest crisis of the covenant relationship between God and Israel. God is present to lead again the people of Israel despite their act of idolatry and an earlier threat: "I will not go up among you, lest I consume you in the way, for you are a stiff-necked people" (33:3b); the formula announces, then, divine mercy and forgiveness.

The theme of the section 34:1–28 is the renewal of the covenant that had been broken by the people.[14] God orders Moses: "Cut two tables of stone like the first; and I will write upon the tables the words that were on the first tables, which you broke" (34:1). God emphasizes that the divine hand will write the words of the law upon the tables, which may be regarded as a clear sign that the people have been forgiven their sin of apostasy and that God wishes to renew the covenant. In the morning Moses makes his solitary ascent of Mount Sinai with the stone tablets. "And the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord" (34:5). Further on God uses the third person: "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness *(wĕrab ḥesed wĕ'ĕmet),* keeping steadfast love for thousands *(nōṣēr ḥesed lā'ălāpîm),* forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting *(pōqēd)* the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation *('al-šillēšîm wĕ'al-ribbē'îm)*" (vv. 6–7).[15] The repetition of the divine name recalls its revelation in 3:14–15; self-unveiling of that name provides a very special knowledge of the nature of the Divine itself. The formula presents a confessional definition of God by referring to the divine nature and activity; it is thus of exceptional theological significance.

The structure of the formula suggests clarification of some terms. First, we may point to the wide semantic range of the verb *pāqad,* 'to pay attention to, look after, take care of, muster, appoint, allot, assign, observe, investigate, test, visit'; in Niph'al it includes even the opposing aspect 'to miss, lack.' The verb *nāṣar* means 'to watch, keep, guard.' Regarding the syntax it is especially important to note that the formula employs—in all its manifestations—a participial predicate to denote the opposing divine characteristics, which does not function as a finite verb with a clear time or mood reference. "The *participle active* indicates a person or thing conceived as being in the continual uninterrupted *exercise* of an activity."[16] This syntactic form con-

[14] For the origins of the section, see R. E. Clements, *Exodus,* 220: "Several features indicate that the present narrative is basically from J, whereas the earlier covenant ceremony reported in Exod. 19, 24 centres upon an account from E ..."

[15] Note that in the Pentateuch, God usually speaks of himself in the first person. See J. Scharbert, *Biblica* 38 (1957), 131–132.

[16] See E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910, 1980), § 116a.

firms the view that the retribution formula arises from an old Israelite hymnic liturgical tradition. In general, an abounding use of participles for designating divine activity or attributes is especially characteristic of hymnic parts of the Hebrew Bible (cf. Deutero-Isaiah and Psalms). In this context the meaning of the divine quality of *ḥesed,* 'steadfast love,' must be taken into consideration. God's *ḥesed* designates a covenantal relationship toward faithful followers—the reciprocal relationship of God to the patriarchs, to David and his house, to his people, and to his community.[17] The relationship between *ḥesed* and its synonyms shows that "God's *ḥesed* corresponds to the demands of loyalty, justice and righteousness and already contains these concepts. God's *ḥesed* and *'ĕmet* are to be considered a hendiadys, in which *'ĕmet* has the value of a descriptive adjective."[18]

The other point of interest is the contradictory numerals with their appropriate prepositions *(lā)'ălāpîm // 'al-šillēšîm wĕ'al-ribbē'îm* (cf. Exod 20:5–6 = Deut 5:9–10; Num 14:18; Jer 32:18). Whom do they denote? Most commentators take the indefinite plural form *'ălāpîm* to mean 'a thousand generations,' so the majority of translations render the phrase *nōṣēr ḥesed lā'ălāpîm* as "keeping steadfast love for a thousand generations (or thousands of generations)."[19] Consequently, they also see the equally indefinite numbers *šillēšîm* and *ribbē'îm* in the parallel clause as designating generations of descendants. The connecting sentence *pōqēd 'ăwôn 'ābôt 'al-bānîm wĕ'al-bĕnê bānîm 'al-šillēšîm wĕ'al ribbē'îm* is usually translated as follows: "... visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."[20] Some recent commentators emphasize the importance of solidarity within the tribe (clan), family, or nation, and think that the number *'ălāpîm* denotes an indefinitely large number of living members of a community.[21] Others apply the numbers *šillēšîm* and *ribbē'îm* to living persons who are related more remotely to the link with the third and fourth generation.[22]

Such differences are not crucial from the theological point of view. Whatever one makes of numerals and prepositions, the passage remains a declaration of collective retribution or refers to inherited reward or punishment. The second section of the formula poses a difficult theological question: how can the statement that God will visit the iniquity of the fathers

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[17] See N. Glueck, *Ḥesed in the Bible* (trans. A. Gottschalk from the German; Cincinnati, Ohio: Ktav, 1975), 70–102: "*Ḥesed* As Divine Conduct."

[18] See N. Glueck, *Ḥesed in the Bible,* 102.

[19] See Targums Onkelos and Neophyti 1. But the Septuagint and Vulgate preserve the general form "thousands."

[20] Here the Septuagint and Vulgate conform.

[21] See A. H. McNeile, *The Book of Exodus,* 117; S. R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895, 1973), 102.

[22] See G. Beer and K. Galling, *Exodus,* 100–101; R. E. Clements, *Exodus,* 124.

upon the children and the children's children be reconciled with the principle of divine justice? The question prompted an attempt to seek other explanations of the significance of the numerals. It was suggested that they do not signify a doctrine of collective retribution over an unlimited period of time, but are used as a superlative expressing divine reward and punishment in the most absolute sense.[23]

No matter how the numbers are interpreted, two clearly related facts are important for an understanding of the confessional definition of the Divine. First, the declaration is made in the context of divine reconciliation with a people who have greatly sinned; and secondly, it is primarily a promulgation of divine benevolence, mercy, and forgiveness, and only secondarily of punishment for iniquity. God restores Israel to a relationship of grace after it has become aware of its rebellion, and this gesture is a response to Moses' intercession in the previous chapter (33:12–23). In this context (33:19), we find an extraordinary disclosure of the divine true nature: "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord'; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy *(wĕḥannōtî 'et-'ăšer 'āḥōn wĕrīḥamtî 'et-'ăšer 'ăraḥēm).*" That Moses was capable of assessing the magnitude of the divine mercy is made clear in 34:8–9: "And Moses made haste to bow his head toward the earth, and worshipped. And he said, 'If now I have found favour in thy sight, O Lord, let the Lord, I pray thee, go in the midst of us, although it is a stiff-necked people; and pardon *(wĕsālaḥtā)* our iniquity and our sin, and take us for thy inheritance.'" The terminology echoes God's command to Moses in 33:5: "Say to the people of Israel, 'You are a stiff-necked people; if for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you. So now put off your ornaments from you, that I may know what to do with you.'" What Moses could achieve with his humble intercession was reconciliation. It is right to claim: "Moses asks for reconciliation, not forgiveness; for assurance that Israel will be brought to its land, not that the sin of the Exodus generation will be exonerated. Moses is quite content to invoke the dreaded doctrine of vertical retribution, provided that *salaḥ* will also be dispensed, justice will be tempered by mercy, and God will continue as Israel's God and fulfill the promise of His covenant."[24]

The supremacy of divine mercy over the demands of punishment appears striking especially when we compare the biblical retribution formula with

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[23] See M. Weiss, *Tarbiz* 32 (1962–1963), 1–18 + I–II. For the significance of the numerical sequence in general, see W. M. W. Roth, "The Numerical Sequence X/X+1 in the Old Testament," *VT* 12 (1962), 300–311; Y. Zakovitch, *"For Three ... and for Four"* (in Hebrew with English summary; Jerusalem: Makor, 1979). Roth and Zakovitch do not reach the same conclusion as Weiss.

[24] See J. Milgrom, "Vertical Retribution: Ruminations on *Parashat Shealah*," *CJud* 37 (1981), 16.

the statements of collective punishment contained in the Hittite instructions relating to the sacral law and to offences against the king (14th and 13th centuries B.C.E.). We find there only a statement about collective punishment; mercy is out of the question. The whole context excludes any possibility of mercy in cases of greater transgressions. In instructions for temple officials we find a statement of collective retribution after a significant comparison between the human and the divine authority:

> Are the minds of men and of the gods generally different? No! With regard to the matter with which we are dealing? No! Their minds are exactly alike ... If a slave causes his master's anger, they will either kill him or they will injure him at his nose, his eyes (or) his ears; or [they will seize] him, his wife, his children, his brother, his sister, his in-laws, his kin whether it be a male slave or a slave-girl. They may (either) *impose the extreme penalty,* (or) they may do to him nothing at all. If ever he is to die, he will not die alone; his kin will accompany him. If then, on the other hand, anyone arouses the anger of a god, does the god take revenge on him alone? Does he not take revenge on his wife, his children, his descendants, his kin, his slaves, and slave-girls, his cattle (and) sheep together with his crop and will utterly destroy him? Be very reverent indeed to the word of a god![25]

The Hittite instructions contain several similar declarations of collective punishment. Consequently we may conclude that the instructions reflect the general practice of collective punishment in the Hittite empire at that time. The instruction relating to the matter of fire in the temple, for example, concludes:

> ... he who commits the crime will perish together with his descendants. Of those who are in the temple not one is to be spared, together with their descendants they shall perish. So for your own good be very careful in the matter of fire.[26]

1.2 *Numbers 14:18*

The story of the spies (Num 13:1–14:45) occupies a central place in the wilderness itinerary; it is the first account of conflicting attitudes regarding the conquest of the Promised Land. Martin Noth states: "This narrative is presented in great detail. The reason for this is that several literary sources have been conflated and that these sources have then been expanded by later additions."[27] It seems that the narrative "in its present form is a blending of P,

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[25] See §§ 2–3; trans. A. Götze, "Instructions for Temple Officials," *ANET,* 207–208. See also translation by G. McMahon, "Instructions to Priests and Temple Officials (1.83)," *The Context of Scripture,* vol. 1, 217–221.

[26] See § 13; trans. A. Götze, "Instructions for Temple Officials," *ANET,* 209.

[27] See *Numbers: A Commentary* (trans. J. D. Martin from the German; OTL; London: SCM Press, 1968), 101. For the question of sources and other explanations, see also K. D. Sakenfeld, "The Problem of Divine Forgiveness in Numbers 14," *CBQ* 37 (1975), 317–330; P. J. Budd, *Numbers* (WBC; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1984), 140–164.

Old Epic (JE), and pre-P supplements of the Old Epic."[28] To the P-version are attributed the following sections: 13:1–17a, 21, 25, 26, 32, 33; 14:1–3, 5–10, 26–38. The retribution formula appears within a J-section 14:11–25. It is noteworthy that a Deuteronomistic version of the story of the spies is preserved in Deut 1:20–45—without the retribution formula. A combination of various traditions is probably the main reason for some tensions in the text.

The present composition of the story opens with God's command to Moses: "Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I give to the people of Israel; from each tribe of their fathers shall you send a man, every one a leader among them" (13:2). The spies return to Paran at Kadesh and report on the strength of the inhabitants and their towns. The Israelites are disheartened and express the desire to replace Moses with another leader and to return to Egypt: "Let us choose a captain, and go back to Egypt" (14:4). The rebellion against the designated leader implies contempt for the divine promises and rejection of the whole covenant relationship with God. Consequently, it cannot go unpunished; God declares: "How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs which I have wrought among them? I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they" (14:11–12; cf. Exod 32:9–10). Now Moses intercedes (14:13–19) in a way that calls to mind his intercession after the rebellion of the people at Sinai (Exod 32:11–14), at Taberah (Num 11:1–3), and the complaint of Miriam and Aaron against Moses (Num 12:1–16). The retribution formula reappears, then, at the crucial moment of Moses' intercession, which incorporates God's own words from Exod 34:6–7, in slightly shorter form:

> And now, I pray thee, let the power of the Lord be great as thou has promised, saying, "The Lord is slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving *(nōśē')* iniquity and transgression, but he will by no means clear the guilty, visiting *(pōqēd)* the iniquity of fathers upon children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation." Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray thee, according to the greatness of thy steadfast love *(sělaḥ-nā' la'ăwôn hā'ām hazzeh kĕgōdel ḥasdekā),* and according as thou hast forgiven this people *(wĕka'ăšer nāśā'tāh lā'ām hazzeh),* from Egypt even until now (14:17–19).

It is noteworthy that the supremacy of mercy over reasons for punishment is emphasized through the positive/negative sequence in God's way of dealing with the people, but here the striking "(keeping steadfast love) for thousands" is omitted, whereas the negative part of the retribution formula retains the numerals three-four (generations). God yields to Moses' intercession and declares forgiveness: "I have pardoned *(sālaḥtî),* according to your word ..." (v. 20). In what follows, however, there is a foreshadowing of punishment for all who persist in rebellion: they will not see the Promised

[28] See K. D. Sakenfeld, *CBQ* 37 (1975), 317.

Land (vv. 21–23, 26–29). This ambiguous reply illuminates the antithetic nature of the retribution formula: God is above all a benevolent and compassionate God, but cannot tolerate the stubborn resistance of "despisers." Ultimately, God deals with each according to his deeds. The faithful Caleb is separated from the rebels (vv. 24, 30) when the "despisers" are condemned to death in the desert (vv. 23, 29).

This fact is crucial in interpreting the purpose of Moses' intercession and the role of the retribution formula in this context. It may be concluded that Moses' intention is not to save everyone—including even the rebels—but only the substance of the nation. The situation is very similar to that obtaining after the apostasy at Sinai. In both cases Moses' intercession is based on the evidence that there was a "remnant" of the faithful, and his prayer implies that the people should be judged according to the principle of individual retribution. Collective retribution may be exercised only to a limited extent; "despisers" should not cause a judgment of obliteration to be passed upon the whole of Israel. In this critical situation, the declaration of God's nature, as expressed in the retribution formula with its clear reference to Exod 34:6–7, offers a good foundation for intercession. Seen in retrospect, however, the whole story provides an explication of why "the people" were not completely destroyed in the wilderness.[29]

1.3 *Jeremiah 32:18*

In Jeremiah the retribution formula appears in the account of the purchase of a field in Anathoth (32:1–44), which clearly falls into three sections: God's command and the act of purchase (vv. 1–15); Jeremiah's prayer (vv. 16–25); and God's response (vv. 26–44). It seems that the account is not original to Jeremiah but to the Deuteronomic editor. The narrative was obviously written before the fall of Jerusalem. It is centered on a declaration that amounts to a crucial proclamation of hope for Judah: "Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land" (v. 15b).[30]

The prayer of Jeremiah, uttered at the moment of giving the deed of pur-

[29] See the appropriate interpretation by K. D. Sakenfeld, *CBQ* 37 (1975), 317–330. On p. 326 she states: "It is essential to recognize that the real content of God's forgiveness here is in the non-destruction of the people, in the very continuation of his relationship to the community as his community, in the decision not to create a new nation of Moses or of anyone else and not to disinherit the presently constituted community of God. Yahweh's willingness to maintain the covenant relationship is based solely in his great *ḥesed*, just as it has been from the time of the initiation of the relationship with the people in the Exodus."

[30] For more detailed discussion about the chapter in general, see especially P. Volz, *Der Prophet Jeremiah* (KAT 10; Leipzig: W. Scholl, 1928), 302–310; J. P. Hyatt, *The Book of Jeremiah* (IB 5; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1956), 1042–1048; W. Rudolph, *Jeremia* (HAT 12; 3th ed.; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1968), 207–215; W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah*, vol. 2 (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1989), 203–220.

chase to Baruch, is composed in the style of hymns expressive of God's general characteristics (cf. the longer prayer in Neh 9:6–38). The aim of Jeremiah's prayer is to acknowledge that the judgment passed upon Israel is fully justified, which could mean that the fate of Jerusalem is sealed for ever. Sudden divine tidings of hope naturally astonished the prophet: "... What thou didst speak has come to pass, and behold, thou seest it. Yet thou, O Lord God, hast said to me, 'Buy the field for money and get witnesses'— though the city is given into the hands of the Chaldeans" (vv. 24c–25). But exactly here lies the key to the question of why the hymnic retribution formula, enshrining as it does the ambiguous character of God's dealings with the people, was included in the opening section of the prayer:

> Ah Lord God! It is thou who hast made the heavens and the earth by thy great power and by thy outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for thee, who showest steadfast love to thousands *('ōśeh ḥesed la'ălāpîm),* but dost requite the guilt of fathers into the lap of their children after them *(ûmĕšallēm 'ăwôn 'ābôt 'el-ḥêq bĕnêhem 'aḥărêhem),* O great and mighty God whose name is the Lord of hosts, great in counsel and mighty in deed; whose eyes are open to all the ways of men, rewarding every man according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings *(lātēt lĕ'îš kidrākâw wĕkiprî ma'ălālâw)* (vv. 17–19).

The positive aspect of the retribution formula, "who showest steadfast love to thousands," linked to the phrase "Nothing is too hard for thee," is crucial in the context of the prayer. It stands at the beginning, thus evoking the hope that, in the final analysis, God will act according to this principle.

The function of the retribution formula in Jer 32 is obviously the same as its role in Exod 32–34 and Num 13–14, although there are differences in dimension, emphasis and vocabulary. The most obvious of these is the use of the second person (Jer 32:18) rather than the third (Exod 34:6–7; Num 18). And there are others: in Exod 34:7 we find the verbal link *nōṣēr ḥesed,* "keeping steadfast love," in Jer 32:18 *'ōśeh ḥesed,* "showest steadfast love"; in Exod 34:7 and Num 14:18 we find *pōqēd 'ăwôn 'ābôt 'al bānîm ...,* "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children ...," in Jeremiah *mĕšallēm 'ăwôn 'ābôt 'el-ḥêq bĕnêhem 'aḥărêhem,* "dost requite the guilt of fathers to their children after them" (cf. Isa 65:6b–7a). The conclusion in Jeremiah's version (v. 19) is important for an understanding of the retribution formula: "... rewarding every man according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings."

The rest of the passage demonstrates that the retribution formula is based on a critical assessment of Israel's history and upon the mystery of its election. In vv. 20–25, Jeremiah asserts that Jerusalem's present misfortune has to be understood as punishment for Israel's past infidelity: "... therefore thou hast made all this evil come upon them" (v. 23). In vv. 26–35 God says the same thing: "For the sons of Israel and the sons of Judah have done nothing but evil in my sight from their youth ..." (v. 30). In both passages it is made

clear that the present generation is suffering for its own sins and those of its ancestors.

The positive aspect of the retribution formula can provide God's promise for the future, because it constitutes a summary of divine promises and deeds arising out of divine benevolence in times past. This is true even though the sombre state of Jeremiah's Israel may show otherwise: to the human eye it seemed as if only Israel's guilt and God's wrath could be discerned in either the horizon of the past or the landscape of the present. Nor, at that moment, was God prepared to abate the demand for faithfulness, and any bestowal of favour presupposes that the people change their ways. Because past experience gave no basis for the hope that Israel would reform of its own accord, God, in the response to Jeremiah's prayer, promises (in vv. 36–44) to give the chosen people "one heart and one way," that they may fear their Lord, and to make a lasting covenant with them and set them firmly in the land. The divine punishments and promises are summarized thus: "Just as I have brought all this great evil *('ēt kol-hārā'āh haggĕdōlāh hazzō't)* upon this people, so I will bring upon them all the good *('et-kol-haṭṭôbāh)* that I promise them" (v. 42).

The sequence of the positive and negative aspects of the retribution formula and of historical illustration is probably significant. In the retribution formula we have an attestation of benevolence // punishment; in the application, the opposite. The sequence can hardly be adequately explained in terms of the supposition of dependence derived from Exod 34:6–7 or Num 14:18, for the formula in Jeremiah is much rearranged. The key to understanding lies in the context, the whole of chapter 32, and its main burden is positive change. In the darkest hour Jeremiah receives a command to buy a field in Anathoth, which is a token of divine good intent. In times of darkness God represents hope against hope, which ultimately means that God is in essence one who "shows steadfast love."

It is possible to link all three passages with the question of why the positive aspect of the formula is given pride of place. Everything indicates that similar situations produce a similar answer: the people have sinned and have shown certain signs of penitence. Both Moses and Jeremiah admit Israel's guilt, and God then affirms anew a readiness to look upon them with favour and benevolence.

1.4 *Exodus 20:5–6 (= Deuteronomy 5:9–10)*

These verses form part of the Decalogue (Exod 20:1–17; Deut 5:6–18), which is an integral part—the centre and very heart—of the great Sinai narrative; the Exodus context of the Decalogue belongs to the E source. In order to discern the role of the retribution formula in this context it is necessary first to clarify the main characteristics of the Ten Commandments so far as location and form are concerned.

The placing of the Decalogue within the Sinai narrative means that the commandments reflect the liberation from slavery in Egypt and God's covenant with Israel. They take the form of a personal divine address in the first person to the individual, for whom the second person singular is used. The I–Thou relationship is a very distinctive and highly significant feature of the Decalogue. Other notable points are the negative formulation of the commandments in the form of prohibitives and the apodictic style of the unconditional "You shall," which contrasts with the customary casuistic forms of ancient Near Eastern legislation. These characteristics combine to provide the distinctive nature and role of the Decalogue: "The peculiarity of the Decalogue does not express itself in its contents, for almost all of the commandments are found in a similar form elsewhere in the Pentateuch ... What makes this collection of commandments peculiar is its specific nature. It is a creed, a basic formal affirmation in the religion of Israel."[31]

In their original state, the Ten Commandments appear to have been shorter. An example of the later augmentation some of them underwent is found in the retribution formula in Exod 20:5b–6 (= Deut 5:9b–10).[32] Attempts to establish the earlier development of the Decalogue have produced many hypotheses but few convincing conclusions,[33] and we must therefore consider the place and meaning of the formula in the structure and role of the Decalogue as we now have it. The linkage with the revelation on Sinai gives the Decalogue a historical context. It begins with the self-revelation of God as Redeemer: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (20:2; cf. 3:14; 6:2; Deut 5:6). Again, the experience of deliverance from Egypt provides a historical setting for the commandments and prohibitions of the Decalogue, particularly the prohibition against worshipping foreign gods (20:3–5). Herein lies the basis of the covenant. As sole Redeemer, God sets up a covenant with the chosen people, demanding of them complete faithfulness so that they may be saved from errors that can lead to their destruction.[34]

In this context, the retribution formula (20:5b–6) acquires its own justification and weight. It is causally linked with the preceding prohibition of the worship of foreign gods and is uttered by God in the first person:

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[31] See M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11* (AB 5; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 245–246.

[32] See J. Scharbert, *Biblica* 38 (1957), 134.

[33] See B. S. Childs, *Exodus*, 391–393: "Traditio-History of the Decalogue." See, however, the conclusions by R. E. Clements, *Exodus*, 122: "... we should date the Decalogue earlier rather than later, and almost certainly before the introduction of the monarchy at the end of the eleventh century B.C., ..."; and by J. I. Durham, *Exodus*, 282: "Any establishment of a precise date for the origin of the ten commandments, or for that matter their successive expansion into the form in which we know them is of course impossible – but we can now be confident of an earlier rather than a later dating."

[34] See B. S. Childs, *Exodus*, 393–402.

> ... for *(kî)* I the Lord your God am a jealous God *('ēl qannā')*, visiting *(pōqēd)* the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me *(lĕśōnĕ'āy)*, but showing steadfast love to thousands *('ōśeh ḥesed la'ălāpîm)* of those who love me and keep my commandments *(lĕ'ōhăbay ûlĕšomrê miṣwôtāy)*.

In vv. 3–5a, God prohibits with special emphasis the making and worshipping of "other gods," and it therefore stands to reason that the reference to *'ēl qannā'*, "a jealous God"—should *precede* the pronouncement of the retribution formula; this innovation explains why the formula starts with the threat of punishment instead of the assurance of God's steadfast love.

Unfortunately the text is not as clear as may seem at first glance. In contrast to Exod 34:6–7, Num 14:18, and Jer 32:18, we find here at the end of the first half of the formula *lĕśōnĕ'āy* and at the end of the second *lĕ'ōhăbay ûlĕšomrê miṣwôtāy*. It is these additions that give rise to an insoluble linguistic problem, and a correct interpretation of the meaning of this formula actually depends more on a general understanding of collective versus individual retribution than on linguistic evidence. A translation alone does not indicate clearly enough in which of these two senses the translator views the text. *Lamed* before *śōnĕ'āy* and *'ōhăbay* is usually understood as a genitive relating to the fathers: in the sense of collective retribution, God will visit their iniquity upon the children of those fathers who hate their Lord, and demonstrate benevolence to thousands of those fathers who love their God and keep the divine commandments.[35] Some exegetes consider a collective interpretation too problematic, and propose other solutions. Mention should be made of the suggestion that *lamed* should be taken to mean "with regard to, in relation to." In that case the formula would imply individual retribution: God will visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation in relation to those who hate their Lord, and show steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love their Creator.[36]

The most convincing view seems to be that *lamed* before *śōnĕ'āy* and *'ōhăbay* denotes a dative in relation to "I ... God." So the translation quoted above should be somewhat modified to read: "... for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God to those who hate me, visiting the iniquity of the fathers to the third and the fourth, but to those who love me and keep my commandments, I show steadfast love for thousands."[37] The indefinite use of the

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[35] See F. Spadafora, *Collettivismo e individualismo nel Vecchio Testamento*, 177–183. Spadafora mentions various attempts at solving the problem.

[36] See C. F. Keil, *Genesis und Exodus* (BC; 4th ed.; Gießen / Basel: Brunnen-Verlag, 1983), 511: "Gott straft die Sünde der Väter an den Kindern bis ins dritte und vierte Glied in Bezug auf die, welche ihn hassen, und er zeigt Gnade bis ins tausendste Glied in Bezug auf die, welche ihn lieben."

[37] See J. Scharbert, *Biblica* 38 (1957), 146: "Denn ich, Jahwe, dein Gott, bin *denjenigen*, die mich hassen, ein eifernder Gott, der Väterschuld an den Söhnen ... heimsucht, *denjenigen*, die mich lieben und meine Gebote halten, aber einer, der Gnade übt an Tausenden."

numbers "the third and the fourth" and "thousands" inevitably creates some obscurity in translation, but does not muddy the overall meaning.

In the end, one has to admit that the interpretation in the sense of inherited guilt is unavoidable, even though the phrases "to those who hate me" and "to those who love me" are not related only to "the fathers" but to all the generations suffering punishment or enjoying divine benevolence.[38] The declaration that God visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children necessarily preserves the idea of inherited punishment, thereby raising the question of divine justice.[39] Interpretations to the contrary are too partial and one-sided to be convincing. They have insufficient linguistic and theological support, and must remain mere hypotheses that invite contradiction, or at least complementary clarification.[40]

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[38] See I. Drazin, *Targum Onkelos to Deuteronomy* (Hoboken: Ktav, 1982), 98–100: "For I the Lord your God am an impassioned God visiting the guilt of the fathers upon the rebellious children, upon the third generation and upon the fourth generation of those who reject Me, when the children continue to sin as their fathers"; A. D. Macho, *Ms. Neophyti 1*, II: *Éxodo* (TE 8; Madrid / Barcelona: Consejo superior de investigaciones científicas, 1970), 465, English translation of Exod 20:5–6: "... because I am the Lord, your God, a jealous and revenging God who takes revenge with zeal on the wicked, upon the rebellious sons, until the third and fourth generation on those who hate me; when the so(n)s follow their fathers in sin I call them those who hate me. But I observe grace and goodness unto thousands of generations for the just who love me and for those who observe my commandments"; M. L. Klein, *Genizah Manuscripts of Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch,* vol. 1 (Cincinnati, Ohio: Hebrew Union College Press, 1986), [266], English translation of Exod 20:5–6: "... for I am the Lord your God, a jealous and retributive God, Who jealously exacts punishment. [I] visit the gui[lt] of wicked fathers upon rebellious children, upon the third generation and upon the fourth generation, of my [enem]ies. However, I preserve kindness and good for thousands of generations, for My righteous beloved ones, and for those who keep the commandments of My Torah"; A. D. Macho, *Ms. Neophyti 1*, V: *Deuteronomio* (TE 11; Madrid: Consejo superior de investigaciones científicas, 1978), 463, English translation of Deut 5:9–10: "... for I am the Lord your God, a jealous and revenging God who takes revenge in jealousy, who remembers the sins of the wicked fathers on rebellious sons to the third and fourth generations on those who hate me, when they bring sin to completion before me; and who observes grace and goodness for thousands of generations for the just who love me, and for those who observe the precepts of my law." It is noteworthy that Targum Onkelos has an identical translation for Exod 20:5–6 and Deut 5:9–10, while in Neophyti 1 the translations differ slightly. See also the Septuagint, with, in essence, the same translation for both texts: "... for I am the Lord thy God, a jealous God, recompensing the sins of the fathers upon the children, to the third and fourth generation to them that hate me, and bestowing mercy on them that love me to thousands of them, and on them that keep my commandments." For the explanations by the Church Fathers, see F. Spadafora, *Collettivismo e individualismo nel Vecchio Testamento,* 19–33, 178–179. Among more recent interpreters, C. F. Keil, *Genesis und Exodus,* 512, and U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 243, offer a similar interpretation of the Targum.

[39] When C. F. Keil, *Genesis und Exodus,* 512, mentions Targum Onkelos, he adds: "... so daß die Nachkommen für ihre eigenen und für ihrer Vorfahren Missetaten Strafe leiden."

[40] J. Scharbert, *Biblica* 38 (1957), 146, for instance, first affirms: "Haß oder Liebe sind das allein Entscheidende dafür, wie sich Gott zu den Menschen verhält." Immediately after this he says that God adds the sins of the fathers to those of the sons if the latter follow in their evil footsteps. Does not this signify a uniting of individual and collective retribution?

1.5 *Deuteronomy 7:9–10*

Deut 7 is a coherent chapter based on Exod 23:20–33. It deals with the conquest of Canaan in three sections: first, the nations and their cultic installations must be utterly exterminated according to the prescriptions of the ban (vv. 1–5); second, Israel is distinguished from all other nations by its election as a holy people (vv. 6–16); and third, faith in God should overcome all fear (vv. 17–26). The retribution formula is part of the affirmation that God has freely chosen Israel from among all peoples and is faithful to the promises given to its fathers, which were affirmed most notably in the deliverance from Egypt. The writer speaks of God in the third person:

> Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God *(hā'ēl hanne'ĕmān)* who keeps covenant and steadfast love *(šōmēr habbĕrît wĕhaḥesed)* with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations *(lĕ'elep dôr),* and requites to their face those who hate him, by destroying them; he will not be slack with him who hates him, he will requite him to his face. You shall therefore be careful to do the commandment, and the statutes, and the ordinances, which I command you this day (vv. 9–11).

Divine fidelity is primarily the basis for an invitation to the people to be faithful to their God and it therefore seems extremely apt that the retribution formula should begin with its positive aspect. This (v. 9) contains the following new elements: *šōmēr* instead of *nōṣēr* (Exod 34:7) or *'ōśeh* (Exod 20:6 = Deut 5:10; Jer 32:18); *bĕrît,* appearing only here; and *lĕ'elep dôr.* The expression *lĕ'elep dôr* provides valuable confirmation that, in the passages already dealt with, *la'ălāpîm* (Exod 20:6 = Deut 5:10; Exod 34:7; Jer 32:18) must be understood in the sense of a succession of up to a thousand generations and not as denoting a mass of people living at one particular time. The negative section (v. 10) departs notably from the classical formula. Every trace of inherited punishment in the succession of generations has vanished, because the immediacy of the death penalty for those who "hate" God is emphasized. Finally it is worth taking into account that the expressions "those who love him" and "those who hate him" are not placed at the end as they are in Exod 20:5–6 (= Deut 5:9–10). The Deuteronomist wanted to show unambiguously that love given to God was the precondition required for divine faithfulness and for the covenant with all its rich fruits, while hostility leads inexorably and directly to destruction.

1.6 *Conclusion*

The fundamental similarity of the passages considered above and their characteristic participial style provide sufficient evidence to show that we have here a more or less fixed retribution formula, and the term "credo-formula" is probably appropriate and justified. The formula does in fact summarize a

generally valid understanding of God's nature, and is a kind of synthesis of Hebrew belief. It is accordingly of exceptional solemnity and significance.[41] Because it comprehends two opposed aspects of the divine character and activity, it represents both promise and threat, emphasis being laid on one or the other in accordance with particular circumstances. This may provide an explanation of the selection of the positive/negative or negative/positive sequence in describing aspects of God's dealing with the chosen people. In Exod 34:6–7, Num 14:18, Deut 7:9–10, and Jer 32:18, the formula serves as an assurance of divine fidelity, mercy, and forgiveness, whereas in the Decalogue (Exod 20:5–6 = Deut 5:9–10) it functions primarily as a threat in the warning given against the worshipping of foreign gods.

Owing to its brevity, the formula cannot provide sufficient linguistic evidence for all aspects of its profound theological message. The main emphasis is, however, evident. Of the utmost importance is the enormous gap between the numbers "thousand" and "three-four" used to denote opposing aspects of the divine activity in relation to Israel; this difference cannot be fortuitous. God is, by his own nature, a benevolent God, and, regardless of how one understands the expression *la'ălāpîm*—whether as a succession of generations, or as people living at one particular time—a thousand denotes a very large number, and in the hymn-like declaration of the formula it sounds like a synonym for unlimited: God's steadfast love towards the faithful is without limit.[42]

Despite the disparity of the numbers, the negative section of the formula still holds a question. No attempt to explain this section can escape the conclusion that collective retribution or inherited punishment is at least partially presupposed: the children suffer as much for their own iniquity as for that of their fathers—but why should they suffer at all for what their fathers did? How can this statement be brought into line with the postulate that divine justice is incontrovertible and with the frequent assertions of the Bible that God punishes each only according to his own iniquity? So major a question can only be authoritatively answered within the framework of all the statements of the Hebrew Bible that are in any way connected with either collective or individual retribution.[43]

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[41] See R. Knierim, *Die Hauptbegriffe für Sünde im Alten Testament* (Gütersloh: G. Mohn, 1965), 103: "Die Vermutung liegt nahe, daß in diesen, in Kultus entstandenen und tradierten Sätzen Israel seine Geschichtserfahrung unter Jahwe summarisch und doxologisch zusammengefasst hat und daß wir in ihnen die Kernstellen haben, die ausdrücklich bezeugen, was sich in der Gesamtkomposition des Pentateuch – und darüber hinaus in der Gesamtgeschichte Israels – breit entfaltet niederschlug." J. Scharbert, *Biblica* 38 (1957), 130, calls the formula "Bekenntnisformel."

[42] The majority of commentators look for the difference in the numbers thousand // three-four along these lines.

[43] In what follows, we shall be searching for instances related only to the negative aspect of the formula, in order to provide a broader basis for a synthetic discussion of the problem of

2. *The Execution and Rejection of Punishment for Ancestral Guilt*

Quite a number of passages in the Hebrew Bible testify to the validity of collective or inherited (vicarious) punishment. Their diversity requires that they should be investigated in categories: punishment for ancestral iniquity; pronouncement of collective punishment; and execution of collective punishment. There are also a few passages that explicitly reject the dogma of inherited punishment or affirm the validity of individual divine retribution. In spite of their paucity, it is these texts that answer decisively the question whether collective retribution should be considered a doctrine.

Etiological explanations of certain facts present a special problem. When unusual, tragic historical events occur, it is normal to look for reasons, and biblical writers tend to conclude that there must either be obvious personal guilt, or the familial guilt of the fathers, or the communal (generic) guilt of the people. An etiological explanation of this sort may be partially convincing, especially when it is supported empirically; it is sometimes obvious that a specific transgression has led to a particular misfortune. Again, misfortune may awaken memories of past guilt that are suddenly recognizable as the cause of tribulation.[44] Arguing from misdeed to mishap in this way is, however, in principle of only relative validity: misfortune may have other causes.

2.1 *Punishment for the Iniquity of the Fathers (Ancestors)*

The Holiness Code (Lev 17:1–26:46) contains laws and instructions buttressed by powerful exhortations to Israel to be holy and distinct from all other nations. The great concluding exhortation, the Epilogue to the Holiness Code (26:1–46), sets before the people the way of life and the way of destruction.[45] The section dealing with "curses" (vv. 14–39) declares four times that God will punish them sevenfold if they do not hearken to the divine voice (vv. 18, 21, 24, 28). The reiterated threat ends with the words: "And you shall perish among the nations, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up. And those of you that are left shall pine away in your enemies' lands because of their iniquity; and also because of the iniquities of their

collective retribution. The positive aspect of the formula is not disputable and it is therefore unnecessary to deal with it.

[44] See the resonance of the massacre of Elijah's descendants in Nob (1 Sam 22:11–19) in 1 Sam 2:31–33; the inference of David's transgression in connection with the population census, when the plague spreads (2 Sam 24:1–25 = 1 Chr 21:1–30); the death of Jeroboam's son Abijah in 1 Kgs 14:1–18 and the extermination of his line in 1 Kgs 15:29–30; the inference of the guilt of the fathers when considering the fall of Jerusalem and the Exile (Lam 5:7; Dan 9:16).

[45] M. C. A. Korpel in her recent study "The Epilogue to the Holiness Code," *Verse in Ancient Near Eastern Prose* (ed. J. C. de Moor and W. G. E. Watson; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1993), 123–150, defends the poetical integrity of the Epilogue and points to its Exilic or post-Exilic origin.

fathers they shall pine away like them" (vv. 38–39). The next section, dealing with divine forbearance (vv. 40–45), begins with the promise: "But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers ..., then I will remember my covenant with Jacob ..." There must be cogent reasons for the inclusion of ancestral iniquity in these opposing statements. The severity of the threat of punishment for disloyalty is emphasised, while the demand for the admission of personal guilt and that of the fathers shows that only an eagerness for radical change will incline God to benevolence.

An extremely odd example of vicarious collective punishment is given in the self-contained narrative of the Gibeonites' revenge in 2 Sam 21:1–14. The passage states that during David's reign there were three years of famine, and that the king sought from God the reasons for it. A similar situation (noted above) arose in the Hatti land during the reign of Mursilis who made like inquiries. In both cases the conclusion was that the disaster might have arisen from an earlier violation of treaty obligations.[46] The treaty between the Israelites and the Gibeonites was concluded by an oath sworn in the time of Joshua (cf. Josh 9:3–27), and David was told: "There is bloodguilt on Saul and on his house, because he put the Gibeonites to death" (v. 1).[47] David takes the explanation to heart, and asks the Gibeonites: "What shall I do for you? And how shall I make expiation, that you may bless the heritage of the Lord?" (v. 3). They reject material compensation but, in accordance with the principle of blood-vengeance, demand the lives of seven of Saul's sons: "The man who consumed us and planned to destroy us, so that we should have no place in all the territory of Israel, let seven of his sons be given to us, so that we may hang them up before the Lord at Gibeon on the mountain of the Lord" (vv. 5–6). David agrees, and hands over seven of Saul's sons to the Gibeonites, who hang them on the mountain "before the Lord" (vv. 6–9) in the first days of harvest. He arranges for them to be decently buried together with the remains of their father, Saul, and his son, Jonathan. The tale ends: "And after that God heeded supplications for the land" (v. 14).

This interpretation of divine will and the attempt to appease God by human sacrifice is problematic in several respects. It is obvious that both the Gibeonites and David had reasons for taking vengeance on the "house of Saul"; the request of the Gibeonites was probably motivated by their crude desire for vengeance rather than by a feeling of the inheritability of ancestral guilt. David's consent was not understood by everybody as a measure of propitiatory justice; during his flight before Absalom he was cursed by Shimei: "Begone, begone, you man of blood, you worthless fellow! The

[46] See A. Götze, "Plague Prayers of Mursilis," *ANET*, 394–396; A. Malamat, *VT* 5 (1955), 1–12; G. Beckman, "Plague Prayers of Muršili II (1.60)," *The Context of Scripture*, vol. 1, 156–160.

[47] Biblical documents do not provide sufficient evidence as to when and how Saul violated the treaty, thus incurring blood-guilt.

Lord has avenged upon you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the Lord has given the kingdom into the hand of your son Absalom. See, your ruin is on you; for you are a man of blood" (2 Sam 16:7–8). The plague prayers of Mursilis do not provide any justification of David's consent, for Mursilis pleads for mercy, claiming that restitution has already been made twentyfold, and does not mention propitiatory sacrifice. Unlike the story in 2 Sam 21:14, the plague prayers of Mursilis do not end with any mention of the Storm-god's heeding his supplication for the land, but express the king's readiness to do anything the Storm-god or other gods might order.[48] In the final analysis, past transgression cannot be considered the only possible reason for a misfortune and therefore propitiatory sacrifice cannot be the only possible means of expiation.

Much less problematical is the etiological interpretation of misfortune in reference to the notorious "sin of Manasseh" and other earlier transgressions, especially when the inherited sin is linked with the communal sin of Israel. In 2 Kgs 21:10–15, God gives reasons for the decision to destroy Jerusalem, which include a severe indictment of King Manasseh and past generations: "Because Manasseh king of Judah has committed these abominations, and has done things more wicked than all that the Amorites did, who were before him, and has made Judah also to sin with his idols; therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, Behold, I am bringing upon Jerusalem and Judah such evil that the ears of every one who hears it will tingle ..., because they have done what is evil in my sight and have provoked me to anger, since the day their fathers came out of Egypt, even to this day" (cf. Jer 15:1–4). In 2 Kgs 23:25, the writer singles out King Josiah for special praise, but adds: "Still the Lord did not turn from the fierceness of his great wrath, by which his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked him" (v. 26). Verse 27 speaks of God's decision to remove Judah as Israel was removed. In 2 Kgs 24:3–4 the writer concludes that misfortune has befallen Judah according to God's will because of all Manasseh's sins. He had filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, and this God could not forgive.

The report on the finding of the Book of the Law in 2 Kgs 22:8–20 (cf. 2

[48] See a.10; trans. A. Götze, "Plague Prayers of Mursilis," *ANET*, 395–396: "... if the servant has incurred a guilt, but confesses his guilt to his lord, his lord may do with him whatever he pleases. But, because (the servant) has confessed his guilt to his lord, his lord's soul is pacified, and his lord will not punish that servant. I have now confessed my father's sin. It is only too true, I have done it. If there is to be restitution, it seems clear that with all the gifts that have already been given because of this plague, with all the prisoners that have been brought home, in short with all the restitution that Hattusa has made because of the plague, it has already made restitution twentyfold. And yet the soul of the Hattian Storm-god, my lord, and of the (other) gods, my lords, is not pacified. But, if ye demand from me additional restitution, tell me of it in a dream and I will give it to you." Cf. translation by G. Beckman, "Plague Prayers of Muršili II (1.60)," *The Context of Scripture*, vol. 1, 158–159.

Chr 34:14–28) reflects a conviction that the current generation was suffering on account of the iniquity of their fathers. But the punishment was not irrevocable: he who bowed before God's law might hope for mercy. The High Priest Hilkiah finds the Book of the Law in the temple. When the scribe Shaphan reads it before Josiah, the king rends his garments and orders his trusted men: "Go, inquire of the Lord for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us" (v. 13). The prophetess Huldah confirms the fundamental meaning of the Book of the Law and predicts punishment for the whole of Jerusalem because of its infidelity to God (vv. 16–17), but she also tells King Josiah that God wishes to exempt him from the general misfortune since he had humbled himself, rending his clothes when he heard the divine castigation of Jerusalem (vv. 18–20).

All cited examples from 2 Kings are part of the Deuteronomistic etiological *(post eventum)* interpretation, which shows that "Manasseh's sin" was paradigmatic. In principle, even an experience of the most determined apostasy does not compel the conclusion that a particular misfortune has to be linked with the guilt of ancestors or (and) the present generation. Nevertheless, the Deuteronomistic historian insists, by contrasting the sin of Manasseh and the faithfulness of David and Josiah, that the people of Israel must acknowledge their guilt and that of past generations. The main purpose of his demonstration that continual disobedience finally caused the destruction of Israel and Judah through divine judgment is his desire to awaken a sense of repentance.[49] But by doing so he discloses his profound feeling of communal responsibility and the inheritability of ancestral guilt—in the period when the principle of individual responsibility and retribution was about to prevail over all kinds of collectivism.

The theme of inherited punishment is particularly important in the book of Jeremiah. In rebuking Judah's evil deeds (2:1–37), God reproaches the people for their backsliding, and v. 9 declares: "Therefore I still contend with you, says the Lord, and with your children's children I will contend." It is possible that the reference is not to the apostasy of the "children's children" then alive but to the rule that children tend to follow the bad example of their fathers. The longer the record of past apostasy, the greater the likelihood of it in future generations.

[49] For the discussion about sources and themes of the book of Kings, see especially M. Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (trans. from the German; 2nd ed.; JSOT.S 15; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981); F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Mass. / London: Harvard University Press, 1973), 274–289: "The Themes of the Book of Kings and the Structure of the Deuteronomistic History."

The dialogue between God and the prophet in Jer 14:1–15:9 is highly relevant to the issue of inherited punishment. The structure is as follows: description of the drought (14:2–6); lament of the people (14:7–9); divine response (14:10–17a); defeat (14:17b–18); lament of the people (14:19–22); divine response (15:1–4); divine judgment on the people (15:5–9). First, Jeremiah speaks of the exceptional circumstances affecting humans and beasts (14:2–6). This is followed by contrite self-reproach and a plea by the people (vv. 7–9): "Though our iniquities testify against us, act, O Lord, for thy name's sake ..." God in reply reproaches the people and orders Jeremiah: "Do not pray for the welfare of this people ..." (v. 11). The prophet vainly attempts to justify the people (vv. 13–16) and complains of their extreme desolation (vv. 17–18). The people are penitent once more in vv. 19–22: "Hast thou utterly rejected Judah? ... We acknowledge our wickedness, O Lord, and the iniquity of our fathers, for we have sinned against thee ..." But God replies even more decisively that he will not relent: "Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my heart would not turn toward this people. ... And I will make them a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth because of what Manasseh the son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, did in Jerusalem" (15:1–4). The reference to Manasseh's transgression as the final reason for the catalogue of promised disaster implies that his sin must have been exceptional indeed (cf. 2 Kgs 21:10–16; 23:25; 24:3–4).

The story of Jeremiah's life serves as a warning. In Jer 16:1–13, the prophet is commanded to eschew three normal human acts in order that the threat of terrible punishment shall be brought home to the people: he must not marry, for God will bring unnatural death upon all newborn children and their parents (vv. 2–4); nor may he enter any house of mourning, for God will "remove peace" *(šālôm)* from "this people," and though many will die, no one will weep for them nor comfort their orphans (vv. 5–7); nor, finally, may he enter any house of feasting, for God will end all rejoicing in Israel (vv. 8–9). Jeremiah is warned that when he announces these prohibitions and threats, the people will self-confidently ask: "Why has the Lord pronounced all this great evil against us? What is our iniquity? What is the sin that we have committed against the Lord our God?" (v. 10). The prophet must answer: "Because your fathers have forsaken me, says the Lord, and have gone after other gods and have served and worshipped them, and have forsaken me and have not kept my law, and because you have done worse than your fathers, for behold, every one of you follows his stubborn evil will, refusing to listen to me; therefore I will hurl you out of this land into a land which neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you shall serve other gods day and night, for I will show you no favour *(ḥănînāh)*" (vv. 11–13). The punishment is dictated by the *lex talionis:* because they chose freely in the past to worship other gods, they will be forced to serve them in the future. Verses 10–13 parallel the declaration in 5:19: "And when

your people say, 'Why has the Lord our God done all these things to us?' you shall say to them, 'As you have forsaken me and served foreign gods in your land, so you shall serve strangers in a land that is not yours.'"

Trito-Isaiah speaks in Isa 65:1–16a to a divided post-exilic community of the contrasting fates that await them: punishment and reward. The first section (vv. 1–7) contains a reproach to the rebellious, who have rejected God's offers of salvation and are following false ways. The rebuke ends with the threat of punishment for their own iniquity and that of the fathers:

> Behold, it is written before me:
> "I will not keep silent, but I will repay,
> yea, I will repay into their bosom
> their iniquities and their fathers' iniquities together,
> says the Lord;
> because they burned incense upon the mountains
> and reviled me upon the hills,
> I will measure into their bosom
> payment for their former doings."

The history of Israel shows that threats of punishment were usually ineffective. Only infliction of punishment brought the people to their knees, admitting their guilt and showing a genuine desire for amendment of their ways. The prayers in Lam 5 and Dan 9:4–19 testify to this stubborn fact. Self-criticism by the people is characteristic of the book of Lamentations. The complaint of the excessive pain endured by a humbled and trampled people never becomes a complaint about God, but accompanies an admission of, and regret for, their own guilt. On one occasion they also refer to inherited punishment (5:7):

> Our fathers sinned, and are no more;
> and we bear their iniquities.

From what follows it is evident that the people ascribe only part of their guilt to the fathers. In 5:16 they exclaim:

> The crown has fallen from our head;
> woe to us, for we have sinned!

Daniel's prayer (Dan 9:4–19) confesses Israel's guilt in the first person plural, admitting that God has justifiably smitten Jerusalem and dispersed the chosen people. In 9:16b the people acknowledge: "Because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people have become a byword among all who are round about us." Parallel to the admission of iniquity, Daniel acknowledges God's mercy and forgiveness (9:9, 18), pleading for a deflection of the divine wrath from Jerusalem (9:16a) and that the guilt of Israel be pardoned (9:19).

2.2 *Pronouncement of Collective Punishment*

The Holiness Code (Lev 17:1–26:46) provides penalties for sacrifice to Molech (20:1–5). In 20:2 it is laid down that an Israelite, or anyone temporarily resident in Israel, who dedicates his child to Molech shall be stoned to death. In 20:4–5 the law threatens collective punishment: "And if the people of the land do at all hide their eyes from that man, when he gives one of his children to Molech, and do not put him to death, then I will set my face against that man and against his family, and will cut them off from among their people, him and all who follow him in playing the harlot after Molech." The reason for this collective punishment is that some types of apostasy are held to desecrate God's name and the temple. Purification is possible only at the cost of the transgressor's life. To tolerate such aberrations would be to encourage the spreading of desecration and the contamination of society.

A classical example of such desecration ending with radical purification is the story of rebellion and punishment in Num 16:1–35. It is generally agreed that this section is a complex of traditions. It seems that the Dathan and Abiram material belongs to JE, and the Korah material to P. The final editor, however, worked the various traditions together in the hope of providing a unifying theological perspective. As has been aptly said: "Different persons are involved and they have in common only the fact that they rebel against something or other."[50] The Levite Korah rebels against Moses and Aaron, demanding the high priesthood. He is joined by Dathan and Abiram and 250 leaders of the congregation, who formulate their grievances thus: "You have gone too far! For all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them; why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?" (16:3). Moses calls for a divine judgment that will make it clear whom God has chosen and who is holy (16:4–7), and tries to persuade Korah to be content with his existing status and relinquish his claim on the priesthood (16:8–11). But Korah gathers together the whole community against Moses and Aaron at the entrance to the tent of meeting (16:19), and the glory of the Lord appears to all the congregation. God tells Moses and Aaron: "Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment" (16:21). The two respond in deep humility: "O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and wilt thou be angry with all the congregation?" (16:22). This intercession is reminiscent of the Hittite plague prayers of Mursilis, which end with the appeal: "Whatever rage (or) anger the gods may feel, and whosoever may not have been reverent toward the gods,—let not the good perish with the wicked! If it is one town, or one [house], or one man, O gods, let that one perish alone!

[50] See M. Noth, *Numbers*, 121.

Look ye upon the Hatti land with favorable eyes, but the evil plague give to [those other] countries!"[51] The difference between the two cases is that Moses and Aaron appeal to the principle of individual retribution in order to prevent collective judgment being unleashed on the entire congregation, while the Hittite petition is inspired by the observed effects of a supposed collective judgment and the hope that further casualties may be averted.

Moses orders the people to remove themselves from the vicinity of the dwelling-places of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, and calls on the judge of all the world to indicate who has been sent: "Hereby you shall know that the Lord has sent me to do all these works, and that it has not been of my own accord. If these men die the common death of all men, or if they are visited by the fate of all men, then the Lord has not sent me. But if the Lord creates something new, and the ground opens its mouth, and swallows them up, with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, then you shall know that these men have despised the Lord" (16:28–30). The rebels, their families,[52] and all their possessions are duly engulfed, while fire consumes another 250 who have offered incense (16:31–35; 26:10). Thus God hearkened to Moses' and Aaron's plea not to destroy the whole community, but restricted retribution to the instigators of the rebellion, upon whom, however, an even more radical collective punishment was imposed. In the last resort, nonetheless, this terrible sentence is concerned not with the principle of collective punishment but with the cleansing of an entire region that had become contaminated by a brazen challenge to God's absoluteness and sanctity.

The books of Samuel contain several pronouncements of collective or inherited punishment: 1 Sam 2:31–33; 2 Sam 3:28–29; and 2 Sam 12:14. The first passage appears in the oracle against the house of Eli (1 Sam 2:27–36), which is regarded by many exegetes as an insertion by the Josianic historian. Verses 31–33 reflect a desire to justify the exclusion of Eli's house from the Jerusalem sanctuary. The passage of doom is clearly concerned with the destruction of the whole of Eli's house on account of the unfaithfulness of his sons Hophni and Phinehas: "Behold, the days are coming, when I will cut off your strength and the strength of your father's house, so that there will not be an old man in your house ..." This prediction is probably an echo of Saul's slaughter of the priests in Nob (1 Sam 22:11–19), since they were Eli's descendants. Saul carried out a horrible act of collective punishment out of his crude desire for vengeance, but "a man of God" (2:27) anticipates this event in his oracle of future judgment.

The second passage, 2 Sam 3:28–29, is a report of David's curse on Joab and his household after Joab treacherously murdered Abner, the commander

[51] See the section b; trans. A. Götze, "Plague Prayers of Mursilis," *ANET*, 396.

[52] See also Deut 11:6. In Num 26:11 it is stated that Korah's sons did not die.

of the Israelite army under Saul: "I and my kingdom are for ever guiltless before the Lord for the blood of Abner the son of Ner. May it fall upon the head of Joab, and upon all his father's house; and may the house of Joab never be without one who has a discharge, or who is leprous, or who holds a spindle, or who is slain by the sword, or who lacks bread." David's explicit avowal of his innocence and some other formal indications suggest that this pronouncement might be of Deuteronomistic origin.[53] His ruthless legacy to his son of Joab's punishment in 1 Kgs 2:5–6, which points to the court source, in common with most of the Succession Document (2 Sam 9–20 + 1 Kgs 1–2), indicates, however, that the present formulation of David's curse must have some historical ground.

The pronouncement of punishment in 2 Sam 12:10 is part of Nathan's Parable (11:27b–12:25), which referred to David's affair with Bathsheba (11:1–27a). The prophet Nathan begins by pronouncing a general retributive punishment: "Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have smitten Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have slain him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house ... I will raise up evil against you out of your own house ..." (12:9–12). This prediction "looks very much like a prophecy after the event in order to provide a theological interpretation of Absalom's rebellion and, especially, of his appropriation of David's concubines (16:21–22)."[54] It is striking how David's own words justifying Uriah's death come back to haunt him according to the principle of *jus talionis: kî-kāzōh wĕkāzeh tō'kal heḥāreb,* "for the sword devours now one and now another," (11:25). The point of Nathan's prophecy is, however, the pronouncement of a curse on David's house, which strikes the child born of his adultery. David's sincere confession: "I have sinned against the Lord" (v. 13a) saves *his* life, but the punishment is *transferred* to his child: "The Lord also has transferred your sin *(gam-yhwh he'ĕbîr ḥaṭṭā'tkā);* you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child that is born to you shall die" (vv. 13b–14). P. Kyle McCarter is obviously right in commenting: "The verb *(he'ĕbîr)* means more than 'has put away' (RSV). The sin cannot simply be forgotten: It must be atoned for. Thus, if David himself is not to die, the sin must be transferred to someone who will."[55] Nathan's pronouncement of doom, then, does imply that the death of David's child was a result of God's direct intervention.[56] David's subsequent

[53] See especially T. Veijola, *Die ewige Dynastie: David und die Entstehung seiner Dynastie nach der deuteronomistischen Darstellung* (STTAASF B/193; Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1975), 30–32.

[54] See A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel* (WBC 11; Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1989), 163.

[55] See *II Samuel* (AB 9; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984), 301.

[56] See G. von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (trans. E. W. Trueman Dicken from the German; Edinburgh / London: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), 196: "The solemn decla-

history, especially the narrative of Absalom's rebellion, however, shows that his house was stricken by aberrations of a kind which are reminiscent of an inherited curse.[57]

In 1 Kgs 14:1–18, we find an account of the death of Jeroboam's son. The original story seems to be preserved in vv. 1–6, 12, and 17, whereas the remainder is the work of the Deuteronomic editor. The illness of his son Abijah moves King Jeroboam to send his wife secretly to Shiloh to ask the prophet Ahijah for a prognosis. He, however, goes further: recounts to her Jeroboam's apostasy (vv. 5–9) and pronounces merciless punishment upon him (vv. 10–16). The beginning and end of the passage have the taste of inherited punishment: "Therefore behold, I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam every male, both bond and free in Israel, and will utterly consume the house of Jeroboam, as a man burns up dung until it is all gone ..." (v. 10); "And he will give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, which he sinned and which he made Israel to sin" (v. 16). Jeroboam's wife returns to face the fulfilment of the prophet's prediction, for Abijah is already dead. The end of the dynasty is recounted in 15:29–30: Baasha has murdered Jeroboam's son Nadab, and reigns in his stead (vv. 27–28). "And as soon as he was king, he killed all the house of Jeroboam; he left to the house of Jeroboam not one that breathed, until he had destroyed it, according to the word of the Lord which he spoke by his servant Ahijah the Shilonite; it was for the sins of Jeroboam which he sinned and which he made Israel to sin, and because of the anger to which he provoked the Lord, the God of Israel" (vv. 29–30).

A similar punishment befalls King Ahab at Elijah's intervention (1 Kgs 21:17–29). Verses 20b–22 and 24 come from the early, vv. 25–26 from the later Deuteronomic editor. Ahab connives at the murder of Naboth by means of false witnesses suborned by the Lady Macbeth of her day, his wife Jezebel, and the prophet Elijah announces the divine punishment: "I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the Lord. Behold, I will bring evil upon you; I will utterly sweep you away, and will cut off

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ration of a prophet has brought into prominence the motive of retribution which pervades unseen the whole work. The *jus talionis,* so often secretly at work in history, is here prophetically revealed as the personal activity of the Lord of History against the adulterer. The whole history of David can, indeed, be in some sense understood as the history of the punishment for this one transgression."

[57] At this point we must, however, reject any conclusive interpretation in terms of an inherited curse. G. von Rad, for example, correctly observes in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays,* 166–204 (chap. 8): "The Beginnings of Historical Writing in Ancient Israel," that II Samuel, especially the Succession Narrative, is based on the perception of indirect ways of divine retribution. On p. 204 he concludes: "... now for the first time it was possible to understand God's activity in an all-embracing sense. It is no longer seen as something which operates from time to time through the charisma of a chosen leader, but as a much more constant, much more widely embracing factor concealed in the whole breadth of secular affairs, and pervading every single sphere of human life."

from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel" (vv. 20–21; cf. 2 Kgs 9:7–8; 9:26). Jehu, who has killed King Joram, Ahab's son (2 Kgs 9:24) and Ahab's remaining 70 sons (2 Kgs 10:6–9), justifies his action before the people in Jezreel: "Know then that there shall fall to the earth nothing of the word of the Lord, which the Lord spoke concerning the house of Ahab; for the Lord has done what he said by his servant Elijah" (2 Kgs 10:10; cf. 10:17).

The book of Jeremiah refers three times to collective or (and) inherited punishment: twice in the form of prediction and once of demand. In one of Jeremiah's "confessions" (11:18–12:6) we find that the prophet is prohibited from prophesying in the Lord's name in Anathoth, so he demands divine punishment: "But, O Lord of hosts, who judgest righteously, who triest the heart and the mind, let me see thy vengeance upon them, for to thee have I committed my cause" (11:20). He receives the following divine answer: "Behold, I will punish them *(hinĕnî pōqēd 'ălêhem);* the young men shall die by the sword; their sons and their daughters shall die by famine; and none of them shall be left. For I will bring evil upon the men of Anathoth, the year of their punishment" (11:22–23). When Jeremiah's opponents hatched a plot against him (18:18–23), similar to that of 11:18–12:6, the prophet turns to the Lord, demanding their punishment (18:21):

> Therefore deliver up their children to famine;
> give them over to the power of the sword,
> let their wives become childless and widowed.
> May their men meet death by pestilence,
> their youths be slain by the sword in battle.

One of Jeremiah's concerns was the exiles in Babylonia. Their religious leaders were promising an immediate return to their homeland, but Jeremiah was obliged to rebut this false hope. In a general letter to the exiles (29:1–23), which shows much evidence of Deuteronomic editing, he pronounces judgment on their prophets Ahab and Zedekiah. Another letter (29:24–32) is concerned with Shemaiah of Nehelam who had written to the temple overseer in Jerusalem in an attempt to counteract Jeremiah's influence on the exiles. This letter closes with a pronouncement of divine punishment: "Behold, I will punish *(hinĕnî pōqēd)* Shemaiah of Nehelam and his descendants; he shall not have any one living among this people to see the good that I will do to my people, says the Lord, for he has talked rebellion against the Lord" (v. 32).

In the eighth century, a clash between Amos and Amaziah, the official representative of the state priesthood, resulted in a famous oracle, Amos 7:10–17, which consists of three scenes and an epilogue of judgment: Amaziah accuses Amos of conspiracy against Jeroboam II (vv. 10–11); he orders Amos to leave Bethel and return to Judah (vv. 12–13); and Amos denies any connection with "professional" prophets, but emphasizes that God himself

has made him a prophet (vv. 14–16). Since Amaziah was attempting to interfere with divine rule, he becomes the target of a fivefold curse affecting himself, his family, and the people of Israel as a whole (v. 17):

> Your wife shall be a harlot in the city,
> and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword,
> and your land shall be parcelled out by line;
> you yourself shall die in an unclean land,
> and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land.

In Job's speeches, contradictory statements are sometimes made concerning the fate of the wicked. When Zophar claims that their earthly glory and joy are transient (20:1–29), Job asserts exactly the opposite (21:7–34). In 27:13–14, however, he says:

> This is the portion of a wicked man with God,
> and the heritage which oppressors receive from the Almighty:
> If his children are multiplied, it is for the sword;
> and his offspring have not enough to eat.

2.3 *Execution of Collective Punishment*

The first case to be considered here is the story of Achan, which is part of the account of the campaign against Ai in Josh 7:1–8:29. The narrative contains traditional material from J and E, but the decisive strain is the Deuteronomic interpretation by the Josianic historian in the light of the ancient ideology of the holy war. An expedition against Ai shows that God helps Israel only in return for obedience; in the present context *ḥērem* status is concerned, i.e., the things devoted to destruction (see 6:17–19; cf. Deut 7:26; 13:16). Joshua is told by God that there are "devoted things" concealed among the people. He is therefore to carry out the procedure of the sacred lot, "and he who is taken with the devoted things shall be burned with fire, he and all that he has" (7:15). After "Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken" (7:18), "Joshua and all Israel with him took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver and the mantle and the bar of gold, and his sons and daughters, and his oxen and asses and sheep, and his tent, and all that he had; and they brought them up to the Valley of Achor" (7:24). Joshua employs a significant word-play upon the *jus talionis: meh 'ăkartānû ya'korkā yhwh bayyôm hazzeh,* "Why did you bring trouble on us? The Lord brings trouble on you today," (7:25). He then delivers the guilty man to collective execution by stoning. The narrator thinks it important to add: "... then the Lord turned from his burning anger" (7:26). It is obvious that this execution does not reflect any doctrine or principle of collective retribution, not even "the strong feeling of solidarity, amounting to a

sense of corporate personality, which existed in ancient Israel,"[58] but rather the view that an exceptionally serious sin resulted in contamination of the whole area where the crime was committed. Hence purification was possible only if everything belonging to the transgressor was destroyed.[59]

Another difficult case is the punishment of the Benjaminites for a crime reminiscent of that committed by the people of Sodom (see Judg 19:22–26; cf. Gen 19:4–11). Their obscene behaviour impelled the tribes of Israel "to a man" to gather before the Lord in Mizpah in order to decide how to destroy the tribe of Benjamin (Judg 20:1–11). When this was achieved, after initial reverses, only 600 escaped, all the others being slaughtered, "men and beasts and all that they found" (20:48). Jabesh in Gilead was similarly punished, because its inhabitants had not come to Mizpah to collaborate in dealing with the Benjaminites (21:4–11). The congregation commanded: "Go and smite the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead with the edge of the sword; also the women and the little ones. This is what you shall do; every male and every woman that has lain with a male you shall utterly destroy" (21:10–11). The extermination was, however, incomplete: 400 virgins were selected and handed over to the Benjaminites who escaped the earlier slaughter (21:12–14), an expression of the pain the tribes of Israel felt at the punishment meted out to the latter. The people cried in Bethel: "O Lord, the God of Israel, why has this come to pass in Israel, that there should be today one tribe lacking in Israel?" (21:3). Because they had vowed they would not give their own daughters as wives to the Benjaminites (21:7), they chose this ingenious way out of the quandary, ensuring that the tribe of Benjamin would continue to exist (cf. 21:15–23). The story in its entirety testifies that extreme wickedness calls for an extreme punishment, which leads in turn not to victorious joy but to sorrow. This is the beginning of mercy. The ultimate aim of the punishment is not destruction but conciliation.[60]

Mention may be made also of Saul's crude revenge on the priests of Nob who had aided David in his flight: "You shall surely die, Ahimelech, you

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[58] See J. Bright, *The Book of Joshua* (IntB 2; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1953), 589–590.

[59] See M. Noth, *Das Buch Josua* (HAT I/7; 2nd ed.; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1953), 45; M. Greenberg, "Some Postulates of Biblical Criminal Law," *Yehezkel Kaufmann Jubilee Volume* (ed. M. Haran; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1960), [24]: "Achan's misappropriated objects—the story tells us four times in three verses (Josh. 7:21, 22, 23)—were hidden in the ground under his tent. Therefore he, his family, his domestic animals, and his tent, had to be destroyed, since all incurred the חרם status. This is not a case, then, of vicarious or collective punishment pure and simple, but a case of collective contagion of a taboo status. Each of the inhabitants of Achan's tent incurred the חרם status for which he was put to death, though, to be sure, the actual guilt of the misappropriation was Achan's alone." A similar explanation is to be found in J. R. Porter, *VT* 15 (1965), 372; R. G. Boling, *Joshua* (AB 6; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1982), 227–228. Boling states on p. 228: "... this execution does not reflect excessive and disproportionate retaliatory 'justice' but a serious concern for public health."

[60] See H. W. Hertzberg, *Die Bücher Josua, Richter, Ruth* (ATD 9; 4th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969), 248–256.

and all your father's house" (1 Sam 22:16). At his command the Edomite Doeg murdered 75 priests (22:18). "And Nob, the city of the priests, he put to the sword; both men and women, children and sucklings, oxen, asses and sheep, he put to the sword" (v. 19). This is not, of course, a pronouncement and execution of divine punishment, but rather the lawless reaction of a deceived king.

In contrast, the narrative of David's census and the plague in 2 Sam 24:1–25 (= 1 Chr 21:1–30) has a strongly theological implication. In its fundamental theological message the passage resembles the tale of the blood revenge of the Gibeonites (2 Sam 21:1–14). Both narratives are based on an account of a specific transgression by a king resulting in divine anger, which could be appeased only by some kind of expiation. The narrative clearly falls into three parts: the census story (vv. 1–9); the plague story (vv. 10–17); and the altar story (vv. 18–25). There is a wide diversity of opinion about the original nucleus and its growth into the present narrative.[61] "Seen in its totality, chapter 24 is primarily concerned with *the plague,* its cause (the census), and solution (the altar)."[62] The account does not make it clear wherein the evil of a population census consists, since that seemed self-evident to the writer. In establishing the impressive number of his warriors, David is seeking to demonstrate his own importance and strength, instead of trusting in the divine power and its providence. Joab perceives the sinfulness of the deed at its inception; David, only after its implementation. Collective punishment then follows, and God threatens the entire people with destruction on account of David's sin, but later repents of the evil he has unleashed – independently of the king's plea. Only when David sets up an altar on the spot selected by God is there forgiveness for the transgression and an end to the pestilence.

David's attitude is highly significant for an assessment of the concept of collective retribution. When David becomes conscious of his guilt, he recognizes it and asks for mercy: "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O Lord, I pray thee, transfer your servant's guilt *(wĕ'attāh yhwh ha'ăber-nā' 'et-'ăwôn 'abdĕkā),* for I have done very foolishly" (v. 10). It is crucial to see that the verb *'ābar* does not mean simply 'taking away' (see RSV), but 'transfer' of the guilt (cf. 12:13).[63] God accedes to David's request and allows him to choose between three possible punishments (v. 13). David's answer is ingenious in its argumentation: "I am in great distress; let

[61] See especially T. Veijola, *Die ewige Dynastie,* 108–117; H. Schmid, "Der Tempelbau Salomos in religionsgeschichtlicher Sicht," *Archäologie und Altes Testament: Festschrift für Kurt Galling* (ed. A. Kuschke and E. Kutsch; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1970), 241–250; K. Rupprecht, *Der Tempel von Jerusalem: Gründung Salomos oder jebusitisches Erbe?* (BZAW 144; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1977), 1–13; P. K. McCarter, *II Samuel,* 502–518.

[62] See P. K. McCarter, *II Samuel,* 518.

[63] See P. K. McCarter, *II Samuel,* 511: "David requests a way to save his life by transferring his guilt to someone or something else."

us fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercy is great; but let me not fall into the hand of man" (v. 14).[64] But when David realizes the extent of the punishment chosen by God, he prays (v. 17):

> Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Let thy hand, I pray thee, be against me and against my father's house.

This prayer is astonishing, because it shows that David does not accept the principle of individual retribution without qualification. He sees clearly that the people should not be the object of collective or inherited punishment, but finds it justifiable—or unavoidable?—that both he and the house of his father should suffer for his sin. Where lies the reason for limiting collective retribution to his "father's house"? Is he bound by his plea for "transfer" of his guilt in v. 10, or by the general consciousness of communal responsibility within a family and of the inheritability of ancestral guilt?

No exegete has tried to answer this question. But in the final analysis, the solution is a matter of common sense and experience: it seems unavoidable that the guilt of a particular person must affect his closest associates, especially his family. We may even be inclined to think of genetic "transfer" of collective retribution. It is therefore more than justifiable to speak of inherited punishment. It is not by chance that the link between sin and curse is so close. Consequently, only God can save human beings from their curses—once they are aware of the fatal nature of their misdeeds and are willing to amend their ways.

A further example of execution of collective retribution is found in the book of Esther. There punishment is carried out by human beings, but within the context of God's involvement in the life of the chosen people, who are saved while God's enemies are exterminated. Influenced by Queen Esther, King Ahasuerus hangs Haman from the gallows the latter had intended for Mordecai (7:9–10). He also fulfils Esther's wish and hangs 10 of Haman's sons who had already been slaughtered by the Jews in Susa (9:12–14); the queen, not content with their murder, demands their posthumous humiliation. This fact shows how inexorable the demand for collective retribution could be for the Jews. The essence of the message of the book of Esther is epitomized in 9:24–25: "For Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur, that is the lot, to crush and destroy them; but when Esther came before the king, he gave orders in writing that his wicked plot which he had devised against the Jews should come upon his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows."

A similar case occurs in the book of Daniel. The Persian satraps, casting

[64] See the comment by H. W. Hertzberg, *I and II Samuel*, 413: "David merely decides against the second punishment and leaves it to the Lord to decide between the first or the third."

about for reasons why Daniel should die, persuade King Darius to sign a death warrant against his will (6:5–16). Daniel is cast into a lions' den, but the beasts leave him alone because he is innocent before God and the king (6:17–24). He is brought out of the den unharmed, and his accusers are thrown into it in his stead, along with their wives and children: "Before they reached the bottom of the den the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones into pieces" (6:25).

2.4 *Prohibition of Collective Punishment*

There is a curious example of rejection of the principle of collective retribution in the ordinance given within the framework of the "Book of the Covenant" (Exod 20:22–23:33). Here we have a collection of individual laws giving evidence of differing origins, applications, patterns, literary forms, and style.[65] One section, 21:18–36, deals with bodily injuries in general, and 21:28–32 prescribe punishment for injuries caused by a bull's horns in particular. Verse 28 runs: "When an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall be clear." This stipulation harmonizes with God's declaration in Gen 9:5: "For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning; of every beast I will require it and of man; of every man's brother I will require the life of man." Since the human race was created in the image of God and is bound to its maker by covenant, the death penalty applies to the beast even though it is not responsible, because it has offended against the sacral and communally-covenanted nature of human life and has thereby become impure. The community must not only inflict the death penalty on the beast—and in certain circumstances on its owner—but also solemnly remove the agent of the misdeed from its midst. Hence the prohibition of eating the flesh of the punished animal. An important point is that the owner of the ox is free of guilt, unless he was aware that the beast was dangerous and had failed to restrain it. Then, if the owner is an accessory to someone's death, the death penalty (not by stoning, however) affects him also, though the court may commute this to a fine (21:29–30). Verse 31 provides that: "If it gores a man's son or daughter, he shall be dealt with according to this same rule." This statute appears to reject vicarious punishment under the severe *lex talionis* in favour of the principle of individual retribution, thus opposing the

[65] For the date of this collection, see R. E. Clements, *Exodus,* 128: "So far as the date of this law code is concerned, a precise ascription can hardly be given, since the laws apply to the everyday life of a typical settled community, without direct reference to external political conditions. As the laws of Deuteronomy (not later than 621 B.C.) show an attempt to revise and adapt the Book of the Covenant to a later era, the latter must be older. It presupposes in a number of its laws the conditions of life in the settled land of Palestine so that it must have been compiled after the settlement of Israel in the late thirteenth century B.C."

judicial tradition in the ancient Near East, which at that time demanded for a son's death the life of a son of the guilty person.[66] The statute provides for the death penalty to fall on the person responsible and not on his son or daughter.[67] If this interpretation is correct, the passage contains what was in its time and place a double novelty. First, exceptional severity is shown in punishing the guilty person; secondly, punishment of the one who is not guilty is rejected. The point gains in importance because the ordinance belongs among the older provisions of Israelite law.

This interpretation of Exod 21:31 is confirmed by the provision found within the code of the laws of Deuteronomy (12:1–26:16); collective punishment is forbidden in 24:16:

> The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor shall the children be put to death for the fathers; every man shall be put to death for his own sin.

There are good reasons for ascribing this prohibition to an early period of Hebrew law: "It is not in the form expected of a deuteronomic law (viz. expressed in the second person singular form of address) and gives no sign of being a late addition; it must, therefore, be an older law quoted by the deuteronomic legislator. It affirms a principle which is by no means a late phenomenon in Israelite history."[68] It is highly significant that a similar prohibition appears in the Middle Assyrian laws from the time of Tiglathpileser I in the twelfth century. There we find the provision:

> If a woman, whether the wife of a seignior or the daughter of a seignior, has uttered blasphemy or indulged in loose talk, that woman shall bear the penalty due her; they shall not touch her husband, her sons (or) her daughters.[69]

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[66] See §§ 229–230 of Hammurabi's Code of laws, which prescribe the death of a builder's son if a finished building collapses, killing the son of the owner. See also §§ 116 and 209–210. See S. A. Cook, *The Laws of Moses and the Code of Hammurabi* (London: A. & C. Black, 1903), 260–262; G. R. Driver and J. C. Miles, *The Assyrian Laws* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), 347–348.

[67] See D. H. Müller, *Die Gesetze Hammurabis und ihr Verhältnis zur mosaischen Gesetzgebung sowie zu den XII Tafeln* (Vienna: A. Hölder, 1903), 165–169: "Das stößige Rind"; D. Daube, *Studies in Biblical Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), 166–168; P. J. Verdam, "'On ne fera point mourir les enfants pour les pères' en droit biblique," *RIDA* 2/3 (1949), 414–415; U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus,* 280; M. Greenberg, *Yehezkel Kaufmann Jubilee Volume,* [22–23].

[68] See A. D. H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy* (NCBC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1979), 326. See further G. von Rad, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (trans. D. Barton from the German; OTL; London: SCM Press, 1966), 152: "A thorough study of early legal history, including that outside Israel, has shown that the conception of a general development from collective to individual liability is incorrect. The principle of personal responsibility was by no means unknown in the earlier times. The whole Book of the Covenant knows nothing of such corporate liability within the family. Therefore we must reckon with the possibility that our Deuteronomic regulation is after all much earlier than was formerly assumed."

[69] See tablet A.2; trans. T. J. Meek, "The Middle Assyrian Laws," *ANET,* 180.

Within the Hebrew Bible the prohibition of Deut 24:16 is strongly reminiscent of Ezekiel's reaction to Israel's collectivist mentality:

> The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself (Ezek 18:20).

The prohibition of collective or vicarious punishment takes the form of a positive commandment, binding upon human legal systems. There are at least two reasons for making such a provision: first, the existence of a law with an opposite sense; secondly, the ubiquitous recognition of collective or vicarious retribution in the tradition, although the positive law nowhere prescribes it. As noted above, Hebrew law does not recognize positive legal provisions that might call for collective or vicarious retribution, though other nations in the ancient Near East were familiar with such decrees.[70] An even more important reason for such a prohibition might have been the human propensity to take full or even excessive revenge upon an enemy. Anyone in a position of authority—particularly any ruler—may permit himself to impose collective punishment, even when it defies objective, rational explanation.[71] Some of the collective or vicarious punishments recorded in the Hebrew Bible probably have their origin here. A crude human desire for vengeance that justifies itself as a demand for collective punishment was not well thought of, and King Amaziah, who succeeded his murdered father Joash, received praise for acting in the opposite sense. After strengthening the royal authority, he put to death both his father's murderers (2 Kgs 14:5). "But he did not put to death the children of the murderers; according to what is written in the book of the law of Moses, where the Lord commanded, 'The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, or the children be put to death for the fathers; but every man shall die for his own sin'" (14:6; 2 Chr 25:4). It is evident, then, that the prohibition in Deut 24:16 rejects both contrary legal provisions made by some neighbouring nations and misuse of the practice by the Israelites. Hence there are no reasons for concluding that the verse is more recent than, or replaces, the previously generally valid principle of collective retribution.

The prohibition of collective punishment in Deut 24:16 is crucial in distinguishing between the divine and the human administration of justice. Even though collective punishment is explicitly prohibited to humans and their legal institutions it may in certain circumstances be dictated by God. It is important to note that such a distinction is not to be found in the corresponding Hittite documents. In instructions for temple officials, the justifi-

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[70] See J. B. Mozley, *Ruling Ideas in Early Ages and Their Relation to Old Testament Faith* (Oxford / Cambridge: Rivingtons, 1877), 99–100; P. J. Verdam, *RIDA* 2/3 (1949), 396–397, 415–416; M. Greenberg, *Yehezkel Kaufmann Jubilee Volume*, [21–27].

[71] See C. F. Keil, *Leviticus, Numeri und Deuteronomium* (BC; 4th ed.; Gießen / Basel: Brunnen-Verlag, 1987), 520.

cation of human and divine collective punishment is introduced thus: "Are the minds of men and of the gods generally different? No! With regard to the matter with which we are dealing? No! Their minds are exactly alike."[72] In a much later period, Cicero (106–43 B.C.E.) was equally unable to see any difference between divine and human administration of justice. When Stoic philosophers contend that children, grandchildren, and their descendants may inherit punishment from a person who has escaped it by dying, he reacts in ironical indignation: "What a wonderful equality of gods! Would any state tolerate a proposer of such a legal measure that a son or grandson was to be sentenced if a father or grandfather had transgressed?"[73] It is significant that Cicero rejects the principle of collective retribution both in relation to gods and to humans, but it is questionable whether his criticism of Stoic philosophy is justified, for the Stoics may be referring to the natural operation of inherited guilt rather than to a principle of collective retribution. The ideological presuppositions of Greek and Roman religions are the most pressing reasons for assuming that such statements of collective punishment probably rest on perception of indirect rather than of direct ways of divine punishment, for the gods work through nature and do not intervene directly in human affairs.[74]

In this context mention may be made of Philo Judaeus (c. 30 B.C.E.–45 C.E.) who clearly distinguishes between the action of divine providence and the law. In his treatise *On Providence,* Philo defends divine justice in general and finds it justifiable that God should permit collective punishment for special reasons:

> Earthquakes, pestilence, thunderbolts and the like though said to be visitations from God are not really such. For nothing evil at all is caused by God, and these things are generated by changes in the elements. They are not primary works of nature but a sequel of her essential works, attendant circumstances to the primary. If some persons of a finer character participate in the damage which they cause, the blame must not be laid on God's ordering of the world, for in the first place it does not follow that if persons are considered good by us they are really such, for God judges by standards more accurate than any which the human mind employs. Secondly providence or forethought is contented with paying regard to things in the world of the most importance, just as in kingdoms and commands of army it pays regard to cities and troops, not to some chance individual of the obscure and insignificant kind. Some declare that just as when tyrants are put to death it is justifiable to execute their kinsfolk also, so that wrongdoings may be checked by the magnitude of the punishment, so too in times of pestilence it is well that some of the guiltless should perish also as a

[72] See the translation by A. Götze, *ANET,* 207.

[73] See *De natura deorum* 3.90(38); in original: "O miram aequitatem deorum! Ferretne civitas ulla latorem istius modi legis ut condamneretur filius aut nepos si pater aut avus deliquisset?"

[74] See especially H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus* (SCL 41; Berkeley / Los Angeles / London: University of California Press, 1971, 1983).

> lesson extending further to call all others to a wiser life ...[75]

But in dealing with the law, Philo provides, in *The Special Laws,* a magnificent argument against applying the principle of collective punishment:

> ... Indeed in the past the legislators themselves, who are the landmarks and standards of justice, have not shrunk from acting as such to the greatest injustice. With an eye to men's opinions rather than to truth they have ordained that the fate of traitors and tyrants should be shared by the children in the first case and by the next five families in the second. Why, one might ask? If they were companions in error let them also be companions in punishment, but if they had no association with the others, never followed the same objects, never let elation at the success of their kinsmen tempt them to a life of ease and pleasure, why should they be put to death? Is their relationship the one sole reason? Then is it birth or lawless actions which deserve punishment? Probably you, most reverend lawgivers, had worthy people for relations. If they had been bad, I do not think the idea of such enactments would have entered your minds ... He therefore expressly forbade that sons should be slain instead of fathers or fathers instead of sons. Thereby also he gave it as his judgement that persons who had sinned should be the persons who were punished, whether the punishment consisted of monetary fines or stripes and injurious treatment of a still more violent kind, or wounds and maiming and disfranchisement and exile or any other kind of sentence. For in the single statement that one man should not be killed instead of another he included also the cases which he left unmentioned.[76]

2.5 *Advocacy of Individual Retribution*

Apart from the legal provisions governing the human administration of justice we have so far encountered few supporters of divine methods of enforcing individual or limited collective retribution. When God decided to annihilate a whole region on account of Korah's rebellion, Moses and Aaron fell on their faces, crying: "O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and wilt thou be angry with all the congregation?" (Num 16:22). And when David saw the angel slaughtering the people because of his transgression, he appealed to God:

> Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Let thy hand, I pray thee, be against me and against my father's house (2 Sam 24:17).

There are other passages, involving Abraham, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, that are even more significant in this respect. Once an explicit demand that legal institutions sentence a person according to the principle of individual retri-

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[75] See 2.53–55; trans. F. H. Colson, *Philo,* vol. 9 (LCL 363; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: W. Heinemann, 1941, 1985), 493–495.

[76] See 3.163–168; trans. F. H. Colson, *Philo,* vol. 7 (LCL 320; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; Lodnon: W. Heinemann, 1937, 1984), 577–581.

bution had surfaced in the Hebrew Bible, it became ever more evident that for God this rule must be decisive. Jeremiah and Ezekiel make it clear that God ultimately deals with Israel in conformity with this principle.[77] When facing the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham argues with God:

> Wilt thou indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; wilt thou then destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from thee to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from thee! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? (Gen 18:23–25).

One would have expected Abraham to rely on the principle of individual retribution and suggest a separation of the righteous from the wicked, followed by the punishment of the latter. God's justice would then have been unarguably displayed. But Abraham embroils himself in an extremely controversial argument, demanding that the divine forbearance be shown to all, on account of a hypothetical handful of the righteous.

Jeremiah's personal experience with his people must have made him conclude that the nation as a whole had gone astray, and that there were no righteous folk left in the land. It thus stands to reason that the prophet saw the ruin of the nation as proof of divine administration of justice. But at the same time he knew that God could not abandon the chosen people entirely. Once the severity of the punishment had opened their eyes and made them acknowledge their guilt (31:18–19), God promised radical changes: "And it shall come to pass that as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy and bring evil, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the Lord" (31:28). God will conclude a new covenant with them, different from the previous one broken by Israel: "I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (31:33). This new covenant will be marked by forgiveness of iniquity (31:34), which will afford an incentive towards proper comprehension and permanent faithfulness on the part of the people.

How should the declaration in vv. 29–30 be understood in this context? The passage states:

> In those days they shall no longer say: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." But every one shall die for his own sin; each man who eats sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.

This statement shows that the proverb "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" was in use at the time to express a complaint that the present generation was suffering an inherited punishment

[77] See especially H. G. May, "Individual Responsibility and Retribution," *HUCA* 32 (1961), 107–120.

or curse. Such a reproach cannot be tolerated in the hands of evil-doers who want to pin all the guilt on past generations and on God, but it may be justified to some degree when uttered by the relatively righteous, by believers who see clearly that Israel's present condition is chiefly the result of the sins of former generations. The retribution formula in Exod 20:5 (= Deut 5:9), Exod 34:7, Num 14:18, and Jer 32:18 must be an awkward stumbling-block to such people. Since Jeremiah does not appear to oppose the current application of the proverb, and promises that individual retribution will apply only in the future, it is clear that, regardless of the virtues or defects of his contemporaries, he sees the current situation as providing confirmation of the proverb's validity. The present generation is indeed suffering on account of the sins of its fathers (cf. 32:18). Yet Jeremiah also knows that it is being penalized for its own sins. Its present state is a consequence of both past and present iniquity and it cannot expect instant amelioration.

The magnificent promise of a future covenant (31:31–34) may suggest that there will be no call in the future for either collective or individual retribution, since iniquity itself will have disappeared. So it is possible to perceive a contradiction between the statement about individual retribution in v. 30 and the promise of forgiveness in v. 34.[78] But can we accept a purely literal explanation of such a rhetorical and even emotional passage, regardless of fundamental theological postulates and of historical reality? Does the promise in 31:31–34 really mean that in the future "all," without exception, will know God, and that God will forgive them without exception? It seems more probable that the promise of forgiveness stems from circumstances—the penitent attitude of the suffering people—but is not intended to have general and absolute validity. Those who eat sour grapes will continue to have their teeth set on edge. Historical realism requires us to acknowledge that the statement "they shall all know me" cannot be understood in an absolute sense. Who can believe in universal righteousness prevailing in all human affairs, without any possibility of man's going astray? Even in Christ's "new covenant," the threat of death for apostates remained.[79]

Ezekiel quotes the same proverb in a situation closely resembling Jeremiah's, but does so with a different motivation. In 18:2–4 he rebukes the people:

[78] W. Rudolph, *Jeremia* (HAT 12; 3rd ed.; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1968), 200–201, even sees in this seeming contradiction proof that the text was not put together by Jeremiah. The opposite viewpoint is presented by A. Weiser, *Das Buch Jeremia* (ATD 20/21; 8th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981), 285 (n. 1), 288; H. G. May, *HUCA* 32 (1961), 114–115; H. J. Stoebe, "Jeremia, Prophet und Seelsorger," *ThZ* 20 (1964), 397–398.

[79] P. Volz, *Der Prophet Jeremia* (HAT X; 2nd ed.; Leipzig: W. Scholl, 1928), 297, comments on our text: "In Zukunft wird kein Abfall mehr möglich sein." J. Morgenstern, "The Book of the Covenant: Part III—The Ḥuqqim," *HUCA* 8–9 (1931–1932), 6, however, assumes that some Jews will sin but that they will be given the chance of reconciliation and a full relationship with God. See A. Weiser, *Das Buch Jeremia,* 285 (n. 1), 288.

> What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge"? As I live, says the Lord God, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sins shall die.

Ezekiel saw only too clearly that his own generation did not admit its guilt and showed no signs of penitence. The proverb was being used to accuse previous generations and to justify the present one. Ezekiel therefore drew the attention of his fellow-countrymen to the need for amendment of their conduct. His view that everyone dies for his own sins did not imply a denial of inheritability of ancestral guilt. It must have been clear to Ezekiel that the current state of affairs was largely the result of the sins of the fathers.[80] He knew, however, that salvation was ultimately dependent upon the actions and attitudes of the present generation, and that the people needed nothing more than true repentance and returning to the Lord. It was precisely this question of repentance that convinced both Jeremiah and Ezekiel that individual retribution is decisive. In the last resort, each is responsible for his own fate. Ezekiel concludes his reply to the challenge of the people with these words: "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, says the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of any one, says the Lord God; so turn, and live" (18:30–32).

2.6 *Conclusion*

The passages that deal with one or another mode of collective or inherited punishment testify to a demand for collective punishment, a feeling of the inheritability of ancestral guilt, and an idea of communal responsibility in the history of Israel. But even more do they set limits to all brands of collectivism. Its relative character is made clear mainly in the relationship between divine and human administration of justice, and in relation to individual retribution. The relative character of collective punishment becomes apparent from the fact that human institutions are not allowed to practice it.[81]

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[80] See Ezek 16; 20; 21:3, 9; 23.

[81] See Exod 21:28–31; Deut 24:16. Even J. B. Mozley, *Ruling Ideas in Early Ages and Their Relation to Old Testament Faith*, 83–103: "Exterminating Wars," saw in these prohibitions the key to assessing all the examples of collective retribution found in the Old Testament, including the extermination of pagans during the period of conquest. Mozley emphasizes that these cases are not an expression of positive law but special circumstances dictating miraculous divine intervention in events, or the explicit authorization of human beings to impose collective

From this prohibition it may be concluded that the principle of collective retribution is in essence negative. A God who makes use of it must have very cogent reasons for doing so. In principle, collective or vicarious punishment directly concerns only the transgressor: "Where the deity is expected to take punitive action, it is not uncommon for the criminal's punishment to include the extermination of his family. But this is less a genuine instance of collective responsibility than of retribution against the paterfamilias who in this way is touched in the loss of his family and so of his posterity."[82] It is, however, sometimes impossible to establish in particular instances whether a collective punishment has been dictated by God. In cases of contamination or brazen rebellion against divine authority,[83] it is possible to see justification for God's direct intervention and the imposition of radical and total judgment, but the case is different when revenge most foul is taken by human beings.[84] In such instances human agents may attempt to justify their actions, unjustifiable in human terms, by referring to God's will.

The most important argument against inflicting collective punishment is the principle of individual retribution. The Bible normally assumes that humans are responsible only for their own actions; only a punishment that is deserved is justifiable. Jeremiah and Ezekiel explicitly emphasise that individual retribution is normative for God's dealings with mankind (cf. Jer 31:29–30; Ezek 18:1–32). Examples of collective punishment are therefore exceptions to a rule, and there are clear-cut reasons for them. Once we accept that those reasons must be left to God, the problem posed by instances of collective retribution is solved. It becomes all the more urgent to determine the true meaning of the solemn formula in Exod 20:5 (= Deut 5:9), Exod 34:7, Num 14:18, and Jer 32:18 which presents collective or inherited punishment as an eternal law governing the Lord's dealings with Israel. How can this law and the supposed inheritability of ancestral guilt be reconciled with that of individual retribution? Is there an irreconcilable contradiction between the two, or may both be valid without one excluding the other? This question calls for a more general and synthesized assessment of the

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punishment. In his opinion, in the earlier era the Israelites were exceptionally open to such miraculous divine authorization, because they did not as yet possess any developed sense of human individuality.

[82] See W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, 235.

[83] See especially the ordinance on dedicating children to Molech in Lev 20:4–5, the sentence upon the rebels Korah, Dathan, and Abiram in Num 16:28–35, and the extermination of Achan together with his family in Josh 7:24–25.

[84] See in particular the terrible revenge upon the Benjaminites (Judg 20:1–48) and Jabesh-gilead (Judg 21:10–11); the blood revenge of the Gibeonites (2 Sam 21:1–14); Jehu's liquidation of Ahab's sons and other members of his court (2 Kgs 10:6–12); the revenge upon Haman and his sons according to the *lex talionis* (Esth 9:12–14); the punishing of Daniel's enemies, together with their wives and children, also according to the *lex talionis* (Dan 6:25). It is difficult to see the operation of the divine will in the background to these events, because they testify only too clearly to the human tendency towards inexorable and total revenge.

problem of collective retribution in the light of correlation between historical witness to the distinctive Hebrew concept of God and fundamental human experience of the relation between guilt and punishment. Only within this framework can the issues raised by all other cases referring to inherited punishment in the Hebrew Bible be properly assessed.

3. *Operation of Natural Law Implies Collective or Inherited Punishment*

In the first part of this examination, the conclusion was reached that the formula of collective retribution, in its several variations, amounts to a credo-formula expressing the very essence of God's attitude towards Israel in accordance with its attitude to divine law. After all attempts to explain the retribution formula have been exhausted, the only possible conclusion is that it reflects a demand for collective punishment or a feeling that ancestral guilt is inheritable. In the second part it has emerged that biblical examples of collective punishment resulting from direct intervention in events by God or human agents are not expressions of a doctrine or a principle of collective retribution but are dictated by special circumstance. On the other hand, passages referring to inherited punishment reflect either rhetorical threats of future corporate punishment or experience of the inheritability of ancestral guilt. Sections dealing with punishment motivated by a crude desire for vengeance are a special case. The idea of communal responsibility hardly comes into question. It now seems possible to find a way of explaining the issue of collective or inherited punishment in the Hebrew Bible in the context of divine retribution in general. The Bible testifies that God appears as a judge of human affairs both directly and indirectly: directly in a personal response to aberration; indirectly, through the operation of natural laws. This fact is compatible both with the human feeling that collective punishment should not be viewed as a doctrine or a principle and with the historical experience that evil unavoidably affects both the guilty and the guileless.

3.1 *Collective Punishment As a "Natural" Consequence of Guilt*

Many passages—notably in Wisdom literature—show that an evil deed often triggers its own punishment,[85] while the historical and prophetic books,

[85] Passages reflecting indirect retribution have been provided by K. Koch in his treatise "Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament?," *ZThK* 52 (1955), 1–42 = idem, *Um das Prinzip der Vergeltung in Religion und Recht des Alten Testaments* (WdF 125; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972), 130–181; English translation, "Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?," *Theodicy in the Old Testament* (ed. J. L. Crenshaw; IRTh 4; Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press; London: SPCK, 1983), 57–87, with arguments for rejecting the concept of "retribution." See R. Knierim, *Die Hauptbegriffe für Sünde im Alten Testament,*

on the other hand, tend to use the language of divine wrath, jealousy, repentance, revenge, and retribution.[86] Indirect retribution makes clear the causal link between guilt and punishment: the sin inexorably avenges itself upon the sinner. Explicitly cosmic explanations of the problem carry this causal link to extremes and, as a result, exclude the possibility of forgiveness. An inexorable natural sequence of guilt followed by punishment can be tragic, particularly when the consequences of evil are borne by the innocent as well as by the evil-doer. There are so many examples of this that it seems as if nearly all individual retribution is, at least indirectly, also collective. No man is, indeed, an island. This fact shows that human beings are often quite helpless when confronted with the problem of moral evil in the ascendant. Once the moral order is demolished and the damage becomes irreparable, those affected are at best left with the possibility of avenging themselves upon evil-doers and excluding them from the community.

Experience of the "natural" method of collective retribution may be considered the key to an appropriate method of interpreting the credo-formula and passages like it. It is an indisputable and universal experience of human life that evil deeds have adverse effects on persons other than the perpetrator. The reputation of a whole family can be sullied by one of its members, and an inadequate leader can bring misfortune upon a whole nation, as far as the third or fourth generation. Since we are concerned with universal experience of inherited punishment, and the credo-formula in Exod 20:5–6 (= Deut 5:9–10) and elsewhere is presented as a universal rule governing God's attitude towards Israel, we may conclude that the formula is speaking not of a direct but of an indirect manifestation of God's steadfast love or punishment. If so, this means that the threat of punishment is not an announcement of impending revenge, but merely a metaphorical pointer to the inescapable

73–91: "Tat und Tatfolge"; 91–96: "Die Aufhebung der Einheit von Tat und Tatfolge"; M. H. Lichtenstein, "The Poetic Justice: A Comparative Study in Biblical Imagery," *The Gaster Festschrift = JANESCU* 5 (1973), 155–165; J. Barton, "Natural Law and Poetic Justice in the Old Testament," *JThS* 30 (1979), 1–14. Influenced by K. Koch's treatise, J. Barton suggests the use of the term "natural law" when talking of indirect retribution.

[86] Many reacted to Koch's challenge on the basis of such passages and defended the traditional meaning of retribution: F. Horst, "Recht und Religion im Bereiche des Alten Testamentes," *EvTh* 16 (1956), 71–75; J. Scharbert, *Biblica* 38 (1957), 140–141; idem, "Das Verbum PQD in der Theologie des Alten Testaments," *BZ* 4 (1960), 209–226; idem, "ŠLM im Alten Testament," *Lex tua veritas: Festschrift für Hubert Junker* (ed. H. Gross and F. Mussner; Trier: Paulinus-Verlag, 1961), 209–229; H. Gese, *Lehre und Wirklichkeit in der alten Weisheit: Studien zu den Sprüchen Salomos und zu dem Buche Hiob* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1958), 34–43; E. Pax, "Studien zum Vergeltungsproblem der Psalmen," *SBFLA* 11 (1960–1961), 56–112; H. Graf Reventlow, "'Sein Blut komme über sein Haupt,'" *VT* 10 (1960), 311–327; J. G. Plöger, *Literarkritische, formgeschichtliche und stilkritische Untersuchungen zum Deuteronomium* (BBB 26; Bonn: P. Hanstein, 1967), 196–213: "Vergeltung im Dt"; J. G. Gammie, "The Theology of Retribution in the Book of Deuteronomy," *CBQ* 32 (1970), 1–6; W. S. Towner, "Retribution Theology in the Apocalyptic Setting," *USQR* 26 (1971), 204–205. J. G. Gammie provides a particularly good survey of the reaction to Koch's work.

consequences of evil conduct—particularly when it is a matter of apostasy from God. Only such a conclusion can explain why the same law threatens collective punishment by God, but disallows its use by human institutions. This prohibition is considered to be a positive ordinance, whereas indirect divine retribution is plainly a natural law.[87]

This conclusion makes it evident that the credo-formula has to be interpreted in the light of the characteristic symbolic and anthropomorphic Hebrew style embodied in biblical texts. The Hebrew Bible emphasizes unceasingly that God is absolute, all-embracing, unfathomable, incomprehensible, utterly different from human beings. Consequently, the portrayal of the divine is in theory prohibited, although in practice God is presented through analogy, allegories, symbols, and expressions that are used to depict human nature, with all its extremes of feeling. If we comprehend and acknowledge these characteristics of biblical writing in general, we ought to take them more into account in particular cases. In view of all the unsuccessful attempts to deny the existence of collective retribution in the credo-formula, we can only conclude that the formula is a metaphorical expression of human experience of indubitable, indirect divine retribution in the world.[88]

The main weakness of most alternative explanations is that the formula has to be taken literally as a promise or threat of a direct manifestation of God's steadfast love or collective punishment. Being absolute and transcendent, God does not need to intervene directly in the course of events without compelling reason. The belief in creation implies that God rules the world

[87] See S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, 277–278, who draws a parallel between the threat in Deut 7:10 and the prohibition in Deut 24:16: "There the reference is to the providence of God, operating naturally through the normal constitution of society: children are linked to their parents by ties, physical and social, from which they cannot free themselves; and they suffer, not because they are *guilty* of their fathers' sins, but because by the self-acting operation of natural laws their fathers' sins entail disgrace or misfortune upon them. Here a law is prescribed for *human action*, and a principle is laid down for the administration of justice by the State: the family of a criminal is not to be punished judicially with him. The two cases are thus altogether different: it is one thing that, in virtue of the physical and social conditions in which they live, children should suffer for their fathers' sins; it is another thing that, by the deliberate intervention of human authority, they should be punished for criminal acts which they have not committed." See also S. R. Driver, *The Book of Exodus* (CBSC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), 195–196. Driver relies on J. B. Mozley, *Ruling Ideas in Early Ages and Their Relation to Old Testament Faith*, 104–125: "Lecture V: Visitation of the Sins of the Fathers upon the Children." Mozley uses the expressions "self-acting vindication" and "the law of God's natural providence." On p. 112 he states: "The link which connects the sin of the father with the injured condition of the children under the law of providence, is not a judicial but a *physical* one." See also the statement by J. R. Porter, *VT* 15 (1965), 378, about the retribution formula in Exod 20:5: "... the phrase about the iniquity of the fathers may be understood as referring to the effects of their sins, whose physical contagion inevitably infects their children since they are the ones most closely in contact with them."

[88] When this study was finished I discovered L. E. Goodman's *On Justice: An Essay in Jewish Philosophy* (New Haven / London: Yale University Press, 1991), which adopts the same interpretation on pp. 137–140: "The Sins of the Fathers."

primarily through natural law, and permits this natural law to punish iniquity. God also allows history to form constellations of human factors, until it becomes necessary to intervene directly in the chain of human events.

How, then, are examples of direct divine retribution to be explained? In the conclusion to the second section, attention has been drawn to the relative character of passages concerned with that subject, and this relativity needs emphasis. Nowhere does God appear as the only actor, but always in company with human beings whose actions are prey to personal feelings and passions. There is always a danger that humans claiming to act in the name of the divine will are giving effect to their own wishes and to a crude desire for vengeance. There is good reason, therefore, at least to inquire whether all the recorded cases of collective or inherited punishment were truly willed by God. It is evident that they happened because God permitted them to happen, but permission implies only indirect divine retribution; it is based on definite reasons that a human being, most often, is unable to comprehend.

This uncertainty as to whether certain historical events depict God's direct intervention does not mean that the personal relationship between God and human beings should not be taken too seriously. On the contrary. It is not necessary for us to be told directly by God that our intentions are good or bad. We have simply to realize that the causal link between guilt and punishment is ubiquitous, on the cosmic level as well as on the personal-spiritual one. The community must recognise that evil actions and even wicked thoughts can destroy the harmony between God and the people, and that in every case the whole nation or even the whole human race is affected by them. If people pour poison upon their hearts, it is not necessary for God to intervene in order to destroy them. And when they choose not to live in communion with the divine, it is enough for God to withdraw and abandon them to their own deserts.

If the credo-formula envisages God's dealings with Israel as indirect, this does not diminish the weight of its message—quite the opposite. It gains much greater significance than is perhaps at first apparent. This way of looking at things can make human beings more responsive to the facts of experience, which show how destructive man's behaviour can be. Only someone with a comprehensive personal experience of the destructiveness of human iniquity is able to sense the gravity of the warning in the credo-formula.[89] It is not a matter of a hypothetical future possibility, but of a certainty buttressed by past experience.

The complaints of the people of Israel that they are suffering on account of the guilt of the fathers are not based solely on imagination, but rather on

[89] See L. E. Goodman, *On Justice*, 137: "The first impact of the statement that God visits the sins of ancestors upon subsequent generations is that of a warning directed more to the parents than the offspring, a caution as to the impact of our acts."

knowledge of the actual errors of earlier generations, and of the sequence of events that logically followed these errors. Hence they express a feeling that God has abandoned them to their own devices, instead of redeeming them from their difficult situation. Their complaint that the Lord has not taken pity on them is a mark of confession of their guilt and the guilt of their fathers. Confession of sin is always the best way to salvation. Those who recognise the gravity of their own iniquity and of that of the people as a whole may meet with their God in the depths of their souls and experience the divine presence, even though nothing has changed externally.[90] The healing process must start in the human heart.

3.2 *The Relation between Collective and Individual Retribution*

Julius Wellhausen put forward the view that in ancient times Israel was familiar only with collective retribution; the idea of individual retribution supposedly came later. This view is based on the type of solidarity derived from clan thinking in the early period of the history of Israel. Most recent exegetes, however, think that the two concepts existed concurrently, although the principle of individual retribution became prominent only during the period around the exile, when the individual shook off his collective ties as a result of the destruction of organized national communities.

Such differences of opinion are mainly due to the state of the biblical texts. They came into existence within a relatively short period of time, so that the basis for diachronic research is very limited. It is difficult to determine which elements in particular passages are original, where they came from, and how they evolved to reach their final form. And there is another problem: the passages dealing with retribution are extremely varied and are often declarative rather than descriptive in nature. If the theme of retribution occurs in a broader context, the same writer may recognise both individual and collective retribution.[91]

Of the utmost importance is the finding that in contrast to neighbouring cultures and religions the Hebrews acknowledged only a divine right of collective retribution.[92] When the law in Deut 24:16 explicitly forbids hu-

[90] See especially Job 40:1–42:6, and many psalms of lament.

[91] Ezekiel, for example, presents collective retribution in chaps. 16; 20; 21 (vv. 3 and 9); and 23, whereas in chap. 18 he emphasizes the validity of individual retribution. Cf. Job 20:1–29; 21:7–34; 27:13, 14.

[92] S. Segert, "Bis in das dritte und vierte Glied," *CV* 1 (1958), 37–39, draws attention to the possibility that the numbers *šillēšîm, ribbē'îm* in the credo-formula have their basis in the execution of the law on blood revenge, still valid among Bedouins today. The law of blood revenge permits revenge up to the fourth generation, the fifth generation being exempt. Does the anthropomorphic comparison of a norm of divine justice with existing customs in human communities also signify approval of these customs? Segert thinks the opposite: "Die Formulierung im Dekalog ist eher illustrativ als imperativ, sie ist als Widerspiegelung einer bestehenden Ge-

man institutions to implement the principle of collective retribution, it affirms that such retribution must, in essence, be wrong. This, however, only makes the question of how to understand examples of divine collective retribution more urgent.[93] An answer to this crucial question can only be sought within the framework of the Hebrew concepts of God's absoluteness and omniscience. Only God is the sovereign law-giver; only God can unchallengeably punish humankind. In the light of this divine absoluteness, all human authority is open to question. Consequently, God can set limits to human competence to act, even when the principle acted upon is valid, as, for example, in cases of individual retribution.

Once it is clear that cases of God's direct collective retribution are dictated by exceptional circumstance, it may be asked how we are to justify the general rule of God's indirect collective retribution. An answer is possible only if, alongside the divine absoluteness, we take into account the relativity of the world as a whole and of human freedom within it. In dealing with a world in which so much is relative, God simply cannot apply absolute and irreversible rules. The created world is not perfect, but stands poised before the goal of completeness, and conflict arises between the absolute rules of

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wohnheit und nicht als ihr Grund anzusehen" (p. 38). In essence, this affirmation is correct. The characteristic (and advantage) of anthropomorphic speech in expressing transcendent divine attributes lie precisely in the fact that it is not an adequate expression of them, but is merely analogical. Nevertheless, it implies some correspondence between allegory and reality, otherwise the allegory would lack foundation. It is not difficult to perceive that a basic accord exists between the primitive law of blood revenge and the message of the credo-formula. Blood revenge is the most paradoxical proof that, in the depths of the human conscience, murder is held to be so terrible a deed that it cannot be appropriately dealt with other than by the taking of another life. This elemental desire for adequate compensation is probably more a cry for justice than a matter of someone being harmed: what is at stake is the fundamental requirement of restoring equilibrium to the moral order. Were it otherwise, the law would not have acquired broad social support. In its essence, this law must be in accord with the will of the Creator and Lord of the cosmic and moral orders, but he for several reasons ultimately retains jurisdiction over life and death. The indisputable fact that every moral evil done by humans avenges itself in some way as much upon the evil-doer as upon those in any way linked to him and his dead, and that it may resound negatively down through several generations, signifies in the light of divine absoluteness and providence that the specific human practice of blood revenge may serve as a universal anthropomorphic expression for a divine levelling of the moral order in the broadest sense and in all its aspects.

[93] P. J. Verdam, *RIDA* 2–3 (1949), 393–416, states correctly that a differentiation between what is valid for human jurisdiction and the rules of divine justice is of essential significance for an assessment of the commandment on individual retribution in Exod 21:28–31; Deut 24:16, and collective retribution in the Bible. In p. 408 he states: "... il va de soi qui'il n'est pas permis au peuple d'Israël d'user des normes de la justice divine." On p. 412 he says: "Celui qui distingue ces deux terrains: le droit divin et le droit humain, chacun avec ses prescriptions propres, peut aussi voir des cas-limites dans la législation comme dans la pratique israélites." Verdam does not, however, take the risk of trying to give a more profound and critical assessment of examples of indirect and direct collective punishment in the light of the experience and the reciprocity of the fundamental postulates of Hebrew belief. He is content with the finding that humans cannot comprehend the rules of divine justice, and that some biblical examples of collective retribution are not legitimate.

God the Creator and the contingent reality of a created world. Within this framework, human beings with their own freedom can create situations that demand departures from the rules. When, for instance, individuals demolish the bases of their own existence and that of the nation, God does not intervene to separate the wicked from the righteous, but permits the chronicles of time to unfurl in a manner that reflects the behaviour of the wrong-doers. So may the righteous become victims of the ways of the wicked.

It appears to follow that the problem of collective divine retribution is one of human righteousness rather than of divine justice. The sheer destructiveness of human iniquity is particularly evident in the indisputable fact that it has consequences not only for the evil-doer but also for the innocent. The realization that this is so provides society with well-founded reasons for punishing the wrongdoer—although the problems do not end there. Ultimately, everyone must acknowledge his own unrighteousness and guilt before others, and everyone deserves punishment. Consequently, the call for universal penitence and returning to the Lord is more appropriate than the demand for punishment. This call must not be made solely "in the interest" of the individual, but on behalf of the whole of human society. Since iniquity is always social in nature, whether we like it or not, penitence must be so as well. Only in this light does the response in chapter 18 of the prophet Ezekiel to the complaint of the people that they are suffering for the sins of their fathers become understandable: he calls them to an admission of their own iniquity and to amendment of their conduct.

4. *Conclusion*

This investigation of the credo-formula in Exod 20:5–6 (= Deut 5:9–10), 34:6–7, Num 14:18, Deut 7:9–10, and Jer 32:18 has made it clear that the formula is based on a consciousness of the collective effects of God's dealings with Israel. Attempts to argue otherwise have failed. Other biblical passages dealing with collective divine retribution show, however, that it is impossible to regard this concept as a doctrine or a principle, although an awareness of it existed alongside the principle of individual retribution in all periods of the history of Israel. We may conclude that consciousness of collective retribution was dominant during earlier periods on account of the more powerful social, tribal, and family ties then obtaining, but that the conviction gradually prevailed that only individual retribution was justifiable and applicable. Individual retribution, then, can be considered a doctrine or a principle in the strict sense of the word.

In assessing the relation between individual and collective retribution, we must distinguish between principle or theory, on the one hand, and reality, on the other. Reality can differ sharply from a theory, consciousness, princi-

ple or moral imperative. The contradiction between individual and collective retribution does not signify a clash between two principles, but between a principle or imperative, and the objective facts resulting from the interplay between the laws of the world as a whole and human life in that world. In a relative, self-contained, and internally cohesive world, God cannot act exclusively in accordance with the principle of individual retribution, distinguishing the wicked from the righteous. All have to dwell together under the sun, and participate in the triumph and travail of the created world. It follows that collective divine retribution cannot be considered as a direct, but only as an indirect way of God's acting in the world. It does not occur because God positively wishes it to do so, but because events are permitted to unroll in accordance with destructive intervention by human beings in the created order of things.

For Hebrew religion, the personal relationship between God and the chosen people is cardinal, although God is transcendent and completely different from the world and human beings. Hebrew historic and prophetic religion overcomes the fatal nature of the process of individual and collective retribution with the belief in divine providence, in divine freedom, in relative human freedom, and in the covenant. These foundations of belief and sentiment make it possible to deal with the relation between guilt and punishment not only on a cosmic but also on a personal level. That is why the biblical writers express themselves anthropomorphically, making use of the most familiar symbols to arouse in the people a feeling for God's providence and mysterious ways of acting in the world. In spite of the poetic colouring with which the Hebrew faith is expounded, and the difficulty of defining basic terms with complete precision, the conclusions reached so far are firmly founded. This fact legitimates the methods employed by those exegetes who take their stand somewhere between the literal and the metaphorical or symbolic-literary approaches.

CHAPTER VI

THE ANTITHESIS BLESSING // CURSE AND RENEWAL (Lev 26 and Deut 28 + 30:1–10)

It is well known that there are in the ancient documents that have come down to us from the Near East many similarities of form and content. The Mesopotamian legal texts and Egyptian, Hittite, and Akkadian treaties from Syria and Assyria are examples of this. Both types of text, particularly the treaties, end with very similar promises, assurances, or wishes for success or blessing for those who observe the laws or treaties, and with threats of punishment or curse, or even destruction, for those who do not. This thematic antithesis gave rise to some classical antithetical constructions, of which a good example is the treaty between the Hittites and Egypt. Its concluding section contains an exemplary curse // blessing antithesis, although these terms are not explicitly used:

> As for these words which are on this tablet of silver of the land of Hatti and of the land of Egypt—as for him who shall not keep them, a thousand gods of the land of Hatti, together with a thousand gods of the land of Egypt, shall destroy his house, his land, and his servants. But, as for him who shall keep these words which are on this tablet of silver, whether they are Hatti or whether they are Egyptians, and they are not *neglectful of* them, and gods of the land of Hatti, together with a thousand gods of the land of Egypt, shall cause that he be well, shall cause that he live, together with his houses and his (land) and his servants.[1]

Another example is the treaty between the Hittite King Mursilis and Duppi-Tessub of Amurru:

> The words of the treaty and the oath that are inscribed on this tablet—should Duppi-Tessub not honor these words of the treaty and the oath, may these gods of the oath destroy Duppi-Tessub together with his person, his wife, his son,his grandson, his house, his land, and together with everything that he owns.But if Duppi-Tessub honors these words of the treaty and the oath that are inscribed on this tablet, may these gods of the oath protect him together with his person, his wife, his son, his grandson, his house (and) his country.[2]

The symmetry of the antithetic sections in these examples is exceptional.[3]

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[1] See the translation by J. A. Wilson, "Egyptian Treaty," *ANET,* 201. See also S. Langdon and A. H. Gardiner, "The Treaty of Alliance between Hattušili, King of the Hittites, and the Pharaoh Ramesses II of Egypt," *JEA* 6 (1920), 196–197.

[2] See the translation by A. Götze, "Hittite Treaties," *ANET,* 205. See also J. Friedrich, "Der Vertrag Muršiliš' II. mit Duppi-Tešup von Amurru," *MVAG* 31 (1926), 24–25.

[3] For similar examples of antithetical structure in other Hittite treaties, see E. F. Weidner, *Politische Dokumente aus Kleinasien: Die Staatsverträge in akkadischer Sprache aus dem Ar-*

Normally the section dealing with the threat of a curse is longer and has more subsections than its counterpart. Thus Hammurabi's and Lipit Ishtar's Codes of Laws have three sections: the prologue, the collection of laws, and the epilogue. The epilogue of both Codes expresses, in conditional formulation, the wish that he who is loyal, who observes the laws, may partake of "blessing," and that he who is disloyal, who does not keep the laws, may suffer "malediction." In Lipit Ishtar's Code of law the negative section is only slightly longer than the positive,[4] but in Hammurabi's Code of Laws the blessing section has only seven lines (XXVI,7–13), while the malediction section is surprisingly long (XXVI,20–XXVIII,90). As a sanction, Hammurabi invokes all the known deities to punish the transgressor according to their jurisdiction.[5] The Hittite treaty between Suppiluliumas and Kurtiwaza has at the end, in conditional form, the sequence malediction // blessing, yet here too the section on malediction is twice as long as the one that deals with blessing.[6]

Akkadian treaties from Syria and Assyria may dispose with the section on blessing, and have the threats of malediction of various lengths.[7] The treaty between Aššur-nerari V with Mati'-ilu, the King of Arpad has an extremely lengthy threat of punishment, expressed in conditional form. A further example of a protracted appeal to the gods to punish the transgressor with curses, is Esarhaddon's treaty with Baal, King of Tyre. Especially noteworthy in this respect is the long text of Esarhaddon's Succession treaty. The text begins with an oath before all the gods and ends an exceptionally lengthy threat of punishment, expressed in conditional form: if the contracting party does not take all the obligations of the treaty into consideration, the punishment of all the gods will strike him, in accordance with their jurisdiction.

In view of the numerous occurrences of the blessing // curse antithesis in the ancient Near East, we may expect to find similar examples in the Hebrew Bible,[8] and there are in fact three passages of this nature. In Exodus, at

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chiv vom Boghazköi (BogSt 8; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich'sche Buchhandlung, 1923), 2–37: "Vertrag zwischen Šubbiluliuma, König von Hatti, und Mattiuaza, König von Mitanni" = the antithesis curse (Rs. 59–69) // blessing (Rs. 70–75); 36–57: "Vertrag zwischen Mattiuaza, König von Mitanni und Šubbiluliuma, König von Hatti" = the antithesis in the second person curse (Rs. 44–53) // blessing (Rs. 53–62); 58–71: "Vertrag zwischen Šubbiluliuma, König von Hatti, und Tette, König von Nuhašši" = the antithesis curse (Rs. IV, 48–52) // blessing (Rs. IV, 53–57); 70–75: "Vertrag zwischen Šubbiluliuma, König von Hatti, und Aziru, König von Amurru" = the antithesis curse (Rs. 13–16) // blessing (Rs. 17–20).

[4] See the translation by S. N. Kramer, "Lipit-Ishtar Lawcode," *ANET,* 161.

[5] See the translation by T. J. Meek, "The Code of Hammurabi," *ANET,* 178–180.

[6] See the translation by A. Götze, "Hittite Treaties," *ANET,* 206.

[7] See especially S. Parpola and K. Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths* (SAA 2; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1988). For the translation, see also E. Reiner, "Akkadian Treaties from Syria and Assyria," *ANET,* [531–541].

[8] For mentions and significance of the theme blessing and curse, or only curse, in the an-

the end of the Book of the Covenant, threat and promise are to be found, but without the characteristic antithetical scheme (23:20–33). The other two passages, however, do have this structure: Lev 26:3–39 and Deut 28:1–68. Both passages are sermons setting before the people the way of life and the way of destruction. Both occupy important positions, standing at the end of revelations of God's will: Lev 26 follows the Holiness Code, while Deut 28 concludes the exhortation about keeping the commandments that define God's will in general. Both passages present, in conditional form, the correlations obedience = blessing and disobedience = curse, and in both cases the threat of curse is much lengthier than the promise of blessing. For reasons of theme and structure the passages deserve special attention. In spite of their basic similarity, however, some differences are obvious: first, Lev 26 speaks in the second and third persons plural, but Deut 28 in the second person singular; secondly, the word-pair blessing // curse appears in Deut 28, but not in Lev 26, which uses other expressions of promise and threat; thirdly, in the majority of cases the motifs are different. It is thus obvious that these passages present two independent elaborations of the same traditional theme.[9]

In Lev 26, vv. 40–45 are particularly important, bearing as they do the promise of a renewal of the covenant if guilt and penitence are forthcoming.

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cient Near East and in the Hebrew Bible, see J. Hempel, "Die israelitischen Anschauungen von Segen und Fluch im Lichte altorientalischer Parallelen," *ZDMG* 79 (1925), 20–110 = in the revised edition: *Apoxysmata: Vorarbeiten zu einer Religionsgeschichte und Theologie des Alten Testaments* (BZAW 81; Berlin: A. Töpelmann, 1961), 30–113; M. Noth, "'Die mit des Gesetzes Werken umgehen, die sind unter dem Fluch,'" *In piam memoriam Alexander von Bulmerincq* (AHGHIR VI/3; Riga: E. Plates, 1938), 127–145 = idem, *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (ThB 6; 3th ed.; Munich: C. Kaiser, 1966), 155–171; S. Gevirtz, "West-Semitic Curses and the Problem of the Origins of Hebrew Law," *VT* 11 (1961), 137–158; F. C. Fensham, "Maledictions and Benedictions in Ancient Near Eastern Vassal-Treaties and the Old Testament," *ZAW* 74 (1962), 1–9; idem, *ZAW* 75 (1963), 155–175; D. R. Hillers, *Treaty-Curses and the Old Testament Prophets* (BibOr 16; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1964); R. Frankena, "The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon and the Dating of Deuteronomy," *OTS* 14 (1965), 122–154; M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972); D. J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant* (AB 21A; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981), 172–187.

[9] S. R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895, 1973), 304, identifies similarities in theme and language well, and also the great difference between Lev 26 and Deut 28. See M. Noth, *Das dritte Buch Mose: Leviticus* (ATD 6; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), 171; D. R. Hillers, *Treaty-Curses and the Old Testament Prophets*, 30–42: "Two Biblical Lists of Curses: Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26." Hillers states on p. 42: "The point to be grasped is that both in Israel and elsewhere there were living and primarily oral traditions of curses on which writers and speakers might draw for various purposes, either leaving the material as they found it or recasting it into their own style. The authors of Deut 28 and Lev 26 drew on this tradition, each in his own way." Mention may be made also of H. Graf Reventlow, *Wächter über Israel: Ezechiel und seine Tradition* (BZAW 82; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1962). The main concern of this study is thematic and linguistic comparison between the speeches of the prophet Ezekiel and the presumed liturgical tradition in Lev 26.

From this it is evident that Lev 26 is a carefully composed unit with three sections: blessing // curse // renewal. Since Deut 28 does not contain this third section, it is obvious that 30:1–10 serves as an appropriate complement to the antithesis in chapter 28. Third sections of this type do not occur in any non-biblical text that bears the promise of blessing and the threat of curse.[10]

1. *The Antithesis: Leviticus 26:3–13//14–39*

Lev 26 is clearly divided into five unequal sections:

1–2	Prohibition of the making of idols and the commandment to keep the Sabbath and revere the temple;
3–13	The conditional formulation of the promise: if Israel fulfils God's commandments, it will enjoy blessings of all kinds;
14–39	The conditional formulation of the threat: should Israel not fulfil God's commandments, it will suffer all kinds of calamities;
40–45	The conditional formulation of renewal: if the people of Israel admit their guilt, God will, after punishment, renew his covenant with them;
46	A reference to the law-giving on Mount Sinai.[11]

[10] The limits of this study do not permit any exhaustive source-critical analysis of the texts. Apart from this, it may be noted that in commentaries and special studies there is no lack of theories proving the limits of source criticism. Finally, our concern is to explain the meaning of the present composition of the above-mentioned passages.

[11] For the structure and history of the text in its entirety or in sections, see especially H. Graf Reventlow, *Das Heiligkeitsgesetz formgeschichtlich untersucht* (WMANT 6; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1961), 142–161; M. Noth, *Das dritte Buch Mose,* 171–176; R. Kilian, *Literarkritische und formgeschichtliche Untersuchung des Heiligkeitsgesetzes* (BBB 19; Bonn: P. Hanstein, 1963), 148–163; K. Elliger, *Leviticus* (HAT I/4; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1966), 360–379; N. Lohfink, "Die Abänderung der Theologie des priesterlichen Geschichtswerks im Segen des Heiligkeitsgesetzes: Zu Lev. 26,9.11–13," *Wort und Geschichte: Festschrift für Karl Elliger zum 70. Geburtstag* (ed. H. Gese and H. P. Rüger; AOAT; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1973), 129–136; P. Buis, "Comment au septième siècle envisageait-on l'avenir de l'Alliance? Étude de Lv. 16,3–45," *Questions disputées d'Ancien Testament: Méthode et Théologie* (ed. C. Brekelmans; BEThL 33; Gembloux: J. Ducu-lot; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1974; 2nd ed. Leuven: Leuven University Press / Peeters, 1989), 131–140; G. J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (NIC; London / Sydney / Auckland / Toronto: Hodder & Stoughton, 1979), 324–334; B. A. Levine, "The Epilogue to the Holiness Code: A Priestly Statement on the Destiny of Israel," *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel* (ed. J. Neusner, B. A. Levine, and E. S. Frerichs; Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortess Press, 1987), 9–34; N. Lohfink, *Studien zum Pentateuch* (SBAB 4; Stuttgart: Kath. Bibelwerk, 1988), 157–168: "Die Abänderung der Theologie des priesterlichen Geschichtswerks im Segen des Heiligkeitsgesetzes: Zu Lev. 26,9.11–13"; J. E. Hartley, *Leviticus* (WBC 4; Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1992), 448–475; M. C. A. Korpel, "The Epilogue to the Holiness Code," *Verse in Ancient Near Eastern Prose* (ed. J. C. de Moor and W. G. E. Watson; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirckener Verlag, 1993), 123–150; J. Joosten, *People and Land in the Holiness Code: An Exegetical Study of the Ideational Framework of the Law in Leviticus 17–26* (VT.S 67; Leiden / New York / Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1996). It is characteristic of the majority of exegetes that they are more inter-

The introductory prohibition and commandment (vv. 1–2) point to the bases of the three main sections that follow. The first section of the antithesis (vv. 3–13) has a simple structure. God himself, addressing Israel in the second person plural, first states the condition, then lists various types of blessing: God will send the rains in their season, and provide the fruits of the earth and the trees in the fields (v. 4); he will ensure abundance and safety in the land (v. 5), freedom from enemies and wild beasts (v. 6), and victory over opponents (vv. 7–8); he will multiply and expand his people, confirming his covenant with them (v. 9); they will have abundance of everything (v. 10); he will dwell among them and not abhor them (v. 11); he will live amid his people, which he brought out of Egypt (v. 13). In its theme, this section reminds us of Ezek 34:25–31; 37:26–27—indeed, the similarity is so great that we may posit here a common tradition that acquired various forms and emphases during the editing process.[12]

The negative section of the antithesis (26:14–39) is three times longer than the positive one, and contains a number of subsections. Even the introductory conditional sentence is longer than in the first section; in vv. 14–15 we read:

> But if you will not hearken to me, and will not do all these commandments, if you spurn my statutes, and if your soul abhors my ordinances, so that you will not do all my commandments, but break my covenant ...

This conditional sentence, which goes on to substantiate the threat with calamities, appears in shorter and altered form in four other verses (18, 21, 23, 27). The repetition serves to emphasize that no disaster will occur without good cause, but at the same time makes possible an intensification by listing all the varieties of punishment. Following the first instance of disobedience (26:14–15) God threatens "normal" punishment (26:16–17), but thereafter he threatens it sevenfold:

> And if in spite of this you will not hearken to me, then I will chastise you again sevenfold *(šeba')* for your sins (v. 18; similarly vv. 21, 23, 27).

Here "sevenfold" is evidently symbolical, indicating the breadth and fullness of divine punishment.[13] In contrast to God's threat to his own people,

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ested in the history of the text than in its present structure. K. Elliger analyzes in detail the entire text from the source-critical point of view. His attempt to show the diverse strata of the text leads him to the conclusion that the original core was a liturgical formular put together in metric form; in his opinion, the text was probably used at the celebration of the great autumnal festival. M. C. A. Korpel deals with the poetic devices of Lev 26 and comes to the following conclusion (p. 150): "If the integrity of the poetical Epilogue may be assumed, as has been defended in this study, its date can hardly be advanced before the Exile ..."

[12] See K. Elliger, *Leviticus*, 364–367, 373–374; N. Lohfink, *Wort und Geschichte*, 129–136.

[13] See M. Noth, *Das dritte Buch Mose*, 174: "Jetzt erscheint die Siebenzahl nur noch als ein Ausdruck für das Umfassende und Vollständige der göttlichen Züchtigung."

they in their distress call upon him in Ps 79:12 to inflict a similar measure of punishment upon their enemies:

> Return sevenfold *(šib'ātayim)* into the bosom of our neighbours
> the taunts with which they have taunted thee, O Lord!

The intensification in the threat carries an important theological implication: the aim of the punishment is penitence and reform. It would be normal for the disobedient people to acknowledge their error and return to their God when punishment fell upon them, but the passage suggests pertinacity in wrongdoing—i.e., stubbornness. The first calamity must then be followed by a more severe infliction, in order to impel them more effectively towards amendment of their conduct. All calamities function as disciplinary measures, with an exclusively positive aim. The use of the root *yṣr,* which in various forms designates education or discipline, testifies—along with other evidence—to the educational aim of the punishment. In the present passage this root is fairly conspicuous (26:18, 23, 28). Intensification in the threat of punishment demonstrates that God admits no compromise; the people must change their ways if they are to exist. Persistence in rebellion leads inexorably to destruction.

How far do the antithetical sections correspond to each other from a thematic and literary point of view? First, it may be noted that there is congruence in theme and form between the conditional clauses that introduce each section or subsection: vv. 3//14, 18, 21, 23, 27. There is further a marked antithetical correspondence between the promise of blessing and the threat of punishment, although sequence, length and vocabulary are largely different. The antithesis between vv. 4–5 (cf. v. 10) and 19–20 (cf. also vv. 16–26, 29) is obvious. In vv. 4–5 we find:

> ... then I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And your threshing shall last to the time of vintage, and the vintage shall last to the time of sowing; and you shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land securely.

But the declaration of punishment in 26:19–20 reads:

> ... and I will break the pride of your power, and I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like brass; and your strength shall be spent in vain, for your lan shall not yield its increase, and the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit.[14]

The most complete antithesis is that between vv. 4 and 20:

[14] The sentence "the heavens above you will be like iron and your earth like brass" must be an established means of expression for denoting extreme drought, for it also appears in similar form in Deut 28:23 and in Esarhaddon Vassal Treaties, lines 528–532. For an interpretation of these similarities, see D. R. Hillers, *Treaty: Curses and the Old Testament Prophets,* 41–42.

4 *... wĕnātĕnāh hā'āreṣ yĕbûlāh*
wĕ'ēṣ haśśādeh yittēn piryô
20 *... wĕlō' tittēn 'arṣĕkem 'et-yĕbûlāh*
wĕ'eṣ hā'āreṣ lō' yittēn piryô

The promise in 26:6a: "And I will give peace *(šālôm)* in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid *(wĕ'ên maḥărîd)* ..." matches the threat of enemy havoc in vv. 17, 25–26, 29, 39 and sudden terror *(behālāh)* in v. 16. just as 26:6b: "And I will remove evil beasts from the land" has its counterpart in the growing threat in v. 22: "And I will let loose the wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you few in number, so that your ways shall become desolate." The further promise of v. 6b: "... and the sword shall not go through your land" corresponds to the threat in v. 25: "And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall execute vengeance for the covenant." Similarly, vv. 7–8 have their counterpart in vv. 17 and 36–37. The earlier verses read: "And you shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall chase ten thousand; and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword." Verse 17, and even more so vv. 36–37, state the direct opposite. The promise of increase and multiplication in v. 9 corresponds chiefly to the threat of exile and perdition in foreign hands in vv. 38–39. The promise in vv. 11–12: "And I will make my abode *(miškānî)* among you, and my soul shall not abhor you *(wĕlō'-tig'al napšî 'etkem)* ..." matches the threat in vv. 30–31: "And I will destroy your high places, and cut down your incense altars, and cast your dead bodies upon the dead bodies of your idols; and my soul will abhor you *(wĕga'ălāh napšî 'etkem).* And I will lay your cities waste, and will make your sanctuaries *('et-miqdĕšêkem)* desolate, and I will not smell your pleasing odours." The historical reference in v. 13a partially corresponds to the threat in v. 33, while v. 13b has its counterpart in v. 37b. Verse 13b reads: "And I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect *(wā'ôlēk 'etkem qômmiyyût)*"; v. 37b says: "And you shall have no power to stand before your enemies *(wĕlō'-tihyeh lākem tĕqûmāh lipnê 'ōyĕbêkem).*"

The direct link between obedience and promise on the one hand and disobedience and calamities on the other indicates that both sections of the antithesis are derived from the principle of retribution. The conditional clauses in vv. 14–15 are followed by the threat *'ap-'ănî 'e'ĕśeh-zō't lākem,* "I will do this to you." The threat here is not concerned with punishment of a specific kind, but with retribution appropriate to the nature and extent of the people's disobedience and disloyalty. Retributive divine justice thus becomes effective in full measure. The use of the same expressions in the conditional clauses in v. 15 and the threat of punishment in v. 30 is reminiscent of the *lex talionis*:

15 ... *wĕ'im 'et-mišpāṭay tig'al napšĕkem,* ... and if your soul abhors my ordinances.

30 ... *wĕgā'ălāh napšî 'etkem,* ... and my soul will abhor you.

In vv. 23–24 the *lex talionis* becomes even more explicit:

> And if by this discipline you are not yet turned to me, but walk contrary to me *(wahălaktem 'immî qerî),* then I also will walk contrary to you *(wĕhālaktī 'ap-'ănî 'immākem bĕqerî),* and I myself *(gam-'ānî)* will smite you sevenfold for your sins.

This declaration is repeated with only slight differences in vv. 27–28. It is explicit in vv. 40–42, where God presumes that, after having received just punishment, the people will acknowledge their guilt:

> But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers in their treachery which they committed against me, and also in walking contrary to me *(wĕ'ap 'ăšer-hālĕkû 'immî bĕqerî),* so that I will have walked contrary to them *('ap-'ănî 'ēlēk 'immām bĕqerî)* and will have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised heart is humbled and they make amends for their iniquity *(wĕ'āz yirṣû 'et-'ăwônām);* then I will remember my covenant with Jacob, and I will remember my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land.

Finally, attention must be drawn to vv. 34–35, which indicate why the introductory section (v. 2) emphasizes the commandment to celebrate the Sabbath. The only proper response for the people in the Promised Land is be to celebrate the Sabbath freely, joyfully and with gratitude. If they do not observe this commandment, and by violating it bring violence into their own land—a land that calls for rest—they shall be driven into exile. Then the Sabbath rest will become grimly effective in the deserted land. Verses 34–35 bring out the principle of retribution, using an appropriate terminology:

> Then the land shall enjoy its sabbaths *('āz tirṣeh hā'āreṣ 'et-šabbĕtōtêhā)* as long as it lies desolate, while you are in your enemies' land; then the land shall rest, and enjoy its sabbaths *('āz tišbat hā'āreṣ wĕhirṣāt*[15] *'et-šabbĕtōtêhā).* As long as it lies desolate it shall have rest, the rest which it had not in your sabbaths when you dwelt upon it.

Verses 41 and 43 show especially clearly how inexorable is the demand for retribution. Renewed divine favour presumes not only an admittance of guilt, but also a making of amends. Verse 41b mentions the condition: "... if then their uncircumcised heart is humbled and they make amends for their iniquity *(wĕ'āz yirṣû 'et-'ăwônām)* ..." And v. 43 lays down what must happen before God will remember the covenant made with the fathers:

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[15] The Hebrew-Samaritan version has here the form *wĕhirṣĕtāh.* See A. F. von Gall, *Der hebräische Pentateuch der Samaritaner: Leviticus* (Gießen: A. Töpelmann [J. Ricker], 1918; reprint in Berlin: A. Töpelmann, 1966).

> But the land shall be left by them, and enjoy its sabbaths *(wĕtīreṣ*[16] *'et-šabbĕtōtêhā)* while it lies desolate without them; and they shall make amends for their iniquity *(wĕhēm yirṣû 'et-'ăwônām),* because they spurned my ordinances, and their soul abhorred my statutes.[17]

Investigation of the relationship between the pairs of antithetical sections opens up the broader horizon of the biblical tradition within which the text originated. It brings to light among other things the important points of contact between Lev 26 and Deut 28. Lev 26:1 is reminiscent of Exod 20:4 and Lev 19:4. The whole of v. 2 is also found in Lev 19:30. As has already been stated, there are numerous points of contact between vv. 3–13 and Ezek 34:25–31; 37:26–27. The expression *wĕ'ên maḥărîd* (v. 6) is found also in Deut 28:26; Josh 17:2; Jer 7:33; 30:10; 46:27; Ezek 34:28; 39:26; Mic 4:4; Nah 2:12; Zeph 3:13; Job 11:19. Verses 9 and 11–12 correspond in contents to Exod 29:45–46; Deut 26:17–19; Ezek 37:26–27. Verse 9b contains the important expression *wahăqîmōtî 'et-bĕrîtî 'ittĕkem* which, apart from Num 8:18 and Ezek 16:60, 62, appears in the same combination of the verb *qwm* (Hiph'il) and the noun *bĕrît* only in the Priestly source: Gen 6:18; 9:1, 17; 17:7, 19; Exod 6:4.[18]

In the second antithetic section (vv. 14–39), the similarities between v. 16 and Deut 28:22, between v. 17 and Deut 28:25, and between 19b and Deut 28:23 are noteworthy. Verse 22 corresponds largely to Ezek 5:17 (cf. 2 Kgs 17:25–26). The motifs of sword, pestilence and famine (v. 25–26) are particularly reminiscent of Jer 14:12; 24:10; Ezek 5:12, 17; 6:11–12. The content of v. 29 corresponds to the more extensive text in Deut 28:53–57 (cf. Jer 19:9; Ezek 5:10; Lam 2:20; 4:10), while v. 30 is very closely related to Ezek 6:3–6. Verse 31 is reminiscent of Jer 4:7; 6:20; 7:21; 9:10; Ezek 6:6; 12:20; Amos 5:21–23; 7:9, while v. 32 corresponds to Jer 18:16, and v. 33 to Isa 1:7; Jer 7:34; 22:5; Ezek 22:23. Of great importance in Lev 26 is the verb *rāṣāh* II in Qal (vv. 34a [= 2 Chr 36:21], 41, 43 [twice]) and Hiph'il (v. 34b). The verb signifies 'pay off, get restituted.'[19] In this meaning the verb appears once in Niph'al (Isa 40:2).

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[16] The Hebrew-Samaritan version has the form *wĕhirṣĕtāh* here too.

[17] The end of v. 43 has the same word-stock as the start of v. 15, but in a different combination. Verse 15a runs: "If you spurn *(mā'as)* my statutes, and if your soul abhors *(gā'al)* my ordinances ..."; v. 43b reads: "... because they spurned my ordinances, and their soul abhorred my statutes."

[18] For the consequences of these findings in textual criticism, see N. Lohfink, *Wort und Geschichte,* 129–136, esp. pp. 131–134.

[19] R. Kilian, *Literarkritische und formgeschichtliche Untersuchung des Heiligkeitsgesetzes,* 152, says in regard to this meaning of the verb *rṣh:* "Das seltene Vorkommen von רצה ist ein nicht unbedeutender Hinweis, die vv. 34f. 41. 43 nicht gänzlich unabhängig voneinander und beziehungslos zu betrachten."

2. *The Antithesis: Deuteronomy 28:1–14//15–68*

The writer of this passage appears as an orator addressing his people in the second person singular. He is fond of repeating key words and expressions, sometimes with striking variations. He takes as the starting point and also the crux of his speech the diametrical opposition between blessing and curse. This fundamental contrast opens up numerous possibilities in any examination of the various aspects of the antithesis. The orator makes such an abundant use of the antithetical style that almost all the elements in the section on blessing (vv. 1–14) have their counterparts in the section on curse (vv. 15–68). Despite the great disproportion in their lengths, the antithetical structure makes possible a certain symmetry between the two sections.

The book of Deuteronomy itself explains why the notions of blessing and curse are central to chapter 28, although they do not appear in Lev 26. In Deuteronomy blessing is one of the characteristic aspects of the promise of reward for obedience to God—i.e., for observing his commandments (cf. 11:27; 14:29; 15:4, 6, 10, 18; 23:21; 24:19; 28:1–6; 30:16, 19).[20] The principle of antithesis offers a welcome opportunity for the word blessing to appear in parallel with the word curse. The writer of Deuteronomy made use of this possibility in 11:26–29:

> Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day, and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods which you have not known. And when the Lord your God brings you into the land which you are entering to take possession of it, you shall set the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal (cf. 27:11–13).

In 28:1–68 the writer repeatedly contrasts blessing for obedience (vv. 1–14) with curse for disobedience (vv. 15–68). According to 30:19 God proclaims:

> I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live.

Words that express the idea of curse occupy a central place in 27:15–26 and 29:20, 26; while 27:15–26 provides the liturgy for a traditional ceremony in Shechem.[21]

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[20] See 15:14, where the word blessing does not appear in connection with retribution, and 24:13, where the subjects of blessing are humans.

[21] The notion of curse is not represented by one single root, as is blessing *(brk)*, but by three: *qll* in its noun form *qĕlālāh* (11:26, 28, 29; 27:13; 29:26; 30:19), *'lh* in its noun form *'ālāh* (29:20), and *'rr* in its verbal form *'ārûr* (27:15–26 twelve times; 28:16–19 six times). For terminology of the antithetical notions blessing // curse in the Hebrew Bible, see S. H. Blank, "The Curse, Blasphemy, the Spell, and the Oath," *HUCA* 23/1 (1950–1951), 73–95; J. Scharbert, "'Fluchen' und 'Segnen' im Alten Testament," *Biblica* 39 (1958), 1–26; W. Schottroff, *Der altis-*

The first section of Deut 28 (vv. 1–14) begins with a conditional passage of four parts: condition // promise // promise // condition:

1a Condition: And if you obey *(wĕhāyāh 'im-šāmôa' tišma')* the voice of the Lord Your God, being careful to do all his commandments which I command you this day,

1b Promise: the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth.

2a Promise: And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you,

2b Condition: if *(kî)* you obey the voice of the Lord your God.[22]

This introduction is followed by the assurance of diverse types of blessing (28:3–13a). As a coda (28:13b–14), the enunciation of the conditions for receiving blessing is repeated:

> ... if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day, being careful to do them, and if you do not turn aside from any of the words which I command you this day, to the right hand or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them.

The assurance of blessing in the main section (28:3–13a) has two parts. In vv. 3–6 the orator promises blessing in various guises, using the passive participial form *bārûk*. The passage has an obvious rhythmic structure:

> Blessed shall you be in the city,
> and blessed shall you be in the field.
> Blessed shall be the fruit of your body,
> and the fruit of your ground, and the fruit of your beasts,
> the increase of your cattle, and the young of your flock.
> Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading-trough.
> Blessed shall you be when you come in,
> and blessed shall you be when you go out.

Contrasting pairs of words are used here to express the whole of which they form a part. Particularly striking is the meristic use of city // field as a substitute for the abstract "everywhere," and of come in // go out to designate the totality of man's activity. The "fruits" mentioned represent all types of fruit. By employing the rhetorical blessing-formula in this way, the speaker invokes blessing in all its aspects.[23] In the second part (28:6–13a) he assures his hearers that God will defeat their enemies, guarantee the success of what they undertake, establish Israel as a sacred people and shower gifts upon them, so

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raelitische Fluchspruch (WMANT 30; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969).

[22] See J. G. Plöger, *Literarkritische, formgeschichtliche und stilkritische Untersuchungen zum Deuteronomium* (BBB 26; Bonn: P. Hanstein, 1967), 137.

[23] See J. Krašovec, *Der Merismus im Biblisch-Hebräischen und Nordwestsemitischen* (BibOr 33; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1977), 83, 129. J. G. Plöger, *Literarkritische ...*, 174–185, points to other possible connotations of the pair arrival // departure, though aware that the role of merism is very likely.

that they will surpass all other nations. The passage contains a series of rhetorical phrases, recurring in the antithetical counterpart (28:15–68).

This latter section, dealing with curses, is four times longer than that concerned with the proclamation of blessing. This explains why it contains not only a contrasting idea and the formal antithesis to the section on blessing, but also a series of new motifs and images. This diversity of themes, and particularly the vast disproportion in length between the two sections, has led exegetes to assume that the present text is the result of consecutive additions to an original, shorter text, which had been much more symmetrical.[24] This theory suggests that a new attempt should be made to examine all the linguistic and structural elements of the entire text of Deut 28, together with parallels in non-biblical legal collections and treaties.

There are in fact many antithetical correspondences throughout the two sections. Both introductions contain conditional clauses and statements about consequences. Verse 15 is the diametrical opposite of vv. 1–2. Even more striking is the antithesis between the blessing-formula in vv. 3–6 and the curse-formula in vv. 16–19. Less obviously, the conclusion of the first section (28:13b–14) corresponds to the end of the first part of the second section (28:45–46). The introduction and conclusion of the first part of the section on curses (vv. 15–46) form a fine chiastic structure:

15a But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command you this day,
15b then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you.
45a All these curses shall come upon you and pursue you and overtake you, till you are destroyed,
45b because (particle *kî* instead of *'im*) you did not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which he commanded you.[25]

Between the introduction (28:15) and the interim conclusion (28:45) we find a whole series of motifs from the section on blessing, which play a distinctly antithetic role. An example of this antithetic relationship in extreme form occurs in vv. 7 and 25:

7 The Lord will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before you; they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways.
25 The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you shall go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them ...

The character of the antithesis is intensified by the antithetic composition of

[24] See J. G. Plöger, *Literarkritische* ..., 130–217: "III. Teil: Dt 28," esp. pp. 130–136: "Der gegenwärtige Stand der Forschung."
[25] See J. G. Plöger, *Literarkritische* ..., 138.

its segments: the arrival in one way // flight in seven ways, i.e., many ways. There is a similar internal antithetic arrangement in vv. 12b–13a and their counterpart in vv. 43–44:

12b–13a	... and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. And the Lord will make you the head, and not the tail; and you shall tend upward only and not downward ...
43–44	The sojourner who is among you shall mount above you higher and higher; and you shall come down lower and lower. He shall lend to you, and you shall not lend to him; he shall be the head and you shall be the tail.

Verse 43 has an antithetic relationship to v. 13a as well as to v. 1b, which holds out the promise that, if Israel is obedient, God will set her high above all the nations of the earth (cf. vv. 9–10). In the first half of the section on curses, there are two other groups of antithetically structured declarations (28:30–31, 38–41); these have no counterparts in the section on blessing.

The section on curses is—even more than the section on blessing—marked by characteristic rhetorical devices: vivacity of narration, repetition of motifs and words, and expansion of some themes. The threats employed cover almost every kind of disaster experienced by man over thousands of years in the ancient Near East: terrible plagues, diseases, drought, famine, and the calamities of war bringing with them cannibalism and exile. This sequence demonstrates a clear tendency towards intensification. In vv. 20–26 the orator threatens utter failure in work, as well as disease, severe drought, and total defeat in battle. Verses 27–37 warn of terrible illnesses, madness, epilepsy, general failure, robbery by the enemy, and the shame of exile. Verses 38–44 cover the destruction of every kind of produce, and subjection to foreign rulers in the Ismaelites' own land. In vv. 45–48 the listing of disasters is interrupted in order to emphasize anew the reasons for them—i.e., disobedience to God and his commandments. Verses 45–46 must be understood as the conclusion to the first half of the section on curses, and vv. 47–48 as the introduction to the second half. It is probably not by chance that in the interim conclusion, with its theme of obedience, the speaker does not make use of the conditional particle *'im* as he did in the introductions (vv. 1, 15; cf. v. 58), but of the causal particle *kî* (v. 45) and the conjunction *taḥat 'ăšer* (v. 47). The causal particle helps to give a sense of dramatic disasters as actual facts.[26] The passage is obviously composed under the spell of the painful experience of Israel's constant disobedience.

The second part of the section on curses contains two distinct segments: vv. 49–57 and 58–68. In the first of these, an attack by unidentified hostile

[26] We must, however, not forget that the particle *kî* can also have a conditional meaning. See P. Joüon, *Grammaire de l'hébreu biblique* (Rome: Institut biblique pontifical, 1923), § 167; J. G. Plöger, *Literarkritische* ..., 137 (n. 29).

forces is threatened, causing calamities so dire that starving mothers will devour their own children. The second segment begins with the conditional sentence: "If you are not careful to do all the words of this law which are written in this book ...," and threatens diseases of awful severity, uneasy exile, and even a return to slavery in Egypt. This is clearly the high point of the general antithesis between the section on blessing, which speaks of God's proximity and benevolence, and that on curses, which concludes with the threat of total rejection even in the land from which God had once wished to save Israel for ever. In v. 68 we find the statement: "And the Lord will bring you back in ships to Egypt, a journey which I promised that you should never make again; and there you shall offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but no man will buy you."

The second part of the section on curses (28:47–68), unlike the first part (28:15–46), contains no words that directly correspond to those in the section on blessing, but in vv. 62–63 there are two original antitheses, expressing the contrast between the state of blessing and that of curse:

> Whereas you were as the stars of heaven for multitude, you shall be left few in number; because you did not obey the voice of the Lord your God. And as the Lord took delight in doing you good and multiplying you, so the Lord will delight in bringing ruin upon you and destroying you ...

The exegetes who consider that the second part of the section on curses (28:47–68) is a later extension of the original text, base their view on the theme of exile. They see in the description of exile a *vaticinium ex (post) eventu(m)* relating to the Babylonian exile. This view, however, overlooks the fact that the theme of exile appears in both parts of the section on curses (vv. 32, 36–37, 64–68) and that some legal texts and treaties of the ancient Near East contain features that match those found throughout the biblical text.[27]

Certain differences in motifs between the first (28:15–46) and second (28:47–68) parts may create the impression that the section on curses is disjointed. A careful reading, however, will establish that it is linked by the repetition of certain motifs and key expressions—for example, the theme of terrible disease (vv. 21–22, 27–28, 35, 59–61) and the descriptions of attacks by enemies, wars and exile (vv. 29–34, 36–37, 48–57, 64–68). Further obvious connecting elements are three synonymous verbs: *nkh* in Hiph'il, 'to strike' (vv. 22, 27, 28, 35; cf. 59); *'bd* in Qal, 'to perish' (v. 22), and Hiph'il, 'to destroy' (vv. 20, 51); *šmd* in Niph'al, 'to be exterminated' (vv. 20, 24, 45, 51, 61) and Hiph'il, 'to exterminate' (vv. 48, 63). The roots *'bd* and *šmd* recur throughout the whole section on curses, and are thus indisputable witnesses to its uniformity. They confer an added severity on the mournful catalogue of threats, for the conclusion "... until you are destroyed," with a

[27] See table in D. J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant*, 173–174.

few variations, echoes like a refrain throughout the entire section (vv. 20, 21, 22, 24, 45, 48, 51, 61, 63).[28]

3. *The Promise of Reconciliation and Renewal*

3.1 *Leviticus 26:40–45*

In Section 1 above it was noted that in Lev 26:14–39 the threat of punishment is intensified in cases of disobedience. Verses 36 and 39 mention "those that are left," while v. 39 predicts that even they shall perish:

> And those of you that are left *(wĕhanniš'ārîm bākem)* shall pine away in your enemies' lands because of their iniquity *(ba'ăwônām);* and also because of the iniquities of their fathers *(wĕ'ap ba'ăwônōt 'ābōtām)* they shall pine away like them.[29]

The third section of chapter 26 (vv. 40–45), however, resets the stage dramatically. God no longer addresses his people directly in the second person plural, but uses the impersonal third person plural. One would expect this section to begin with a conditional clause, as did the first and second sections (vv. 3, 14), the latter falling into four parts, each starting with a conditional clause (vv. 18, 21, 23, 27). But the third section begins, in fact, with the usual waw consecutive: *wĕhitwaddû 'et-'ăwônām wĕ'et-'ăwôn 'ābōtām* ... Some translate this introduction as a conditional: "But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers ..."; others as a principal clause: "Then they will confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers ..."[30]

This difference in translation deserves greater attention than it would seem to merit at first sight. If the phrase is translated as a conditional, the contingent nature of the entire promise that follows is directly emphasized. Reconciliation and renewal presuppose, then, that the people, afflicted by a deserved punishment, acknowledge and admit their guilt. In its essence, the

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[28] D. J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant,* 172–187, deals well with the rhetorical devices of Deut 28: repetition, vivid narration, and the expansion of certain motifs. He sees no reason for the supposition about subsequent additions or for postulating uniformity of style. He also emphasizes the harmony with the content and basic structure of Deuteronomy. On pp. 179–180 he states his description of the structure.

[29] The word link *nmq b'wn,* appearing elsewhere only in Ezek 4:17; 24:23, shows that the word *'āwôn* means not only guilt, but punishment. See R. Knierim, *Die Hauptbegriffe für Sünde im Alten Testament* (Gütersloh: G. Mohn, 1965), 185–256, esp. 251–254: "*'āwôn* im Rahmen des Ganzheitsdenkens und das Übersetzungsproblem."

[30] Targum Onkelos and the Septuagint translate this introduction as a principal clause: "And they will (then) confess their iniquities ..." They are followed by a majority of recent translations. The Vulgate links the sentence with the second part of the text as a whole: "... donec confiteantur iniquitates suas ..." RSV translates it conditionally: "But if they confess their iniquity ...," as do also ZB and NIV. NEnglB goes its own way, translating: "But though they confess their iniquity ..., I will defy them ..."

promise of renewal is conditional, as are the promise of blessing in the first section (26:3–13), and the threat of punishment in the second section (26:14–39). If, however, the phrase is translated as a principal clause, the way is open to other possible interpretations. In particular, we can conclude that the severity of the punishment will certainly achieve its educative aim—i.e., the admission of guilt. Thus it becomes clear why the threat of punishment is intensified in the second section: God wishes to safeguard his people from destruction by guiding them to the true way of life through the imposition of harsh discipline, and allowing punishment to compel repentance. This translation therefore assumes that God's discipline must be effective.

Does this imply that God's promise in vv. 40–45 need not be understood conditionally? This can scarcely be so, as is indicated by the intensification of the threat in the second part of the text (26:14–39). The recurring conditional clauses in vv. 18, 21, 23, 27 make it evident that calamities will not lessen, but rather increase to the point of destruction, unless the people change their attitude towards their God. As already noted, vv. 36 and 39 threaten "those of you that are left." And finally, the fair promise of vv. 42–45 is darkened by the reminder that the people must first expiate their guilt. Verse 43 states:

> But the land shall be left by them, and enjoy its sabbaths while it lies desolate without them; and they shall make amends for their iniquity *(yiršû 'et-'ăwô-nām)*, because they spurned my ordinances, and their soul abhorred my statutes.

It is scarcely possible to envisage a clearer statement than this that God's promise of reconciliation and renewal is conditional.

Nevertheless, God cannot completely abandon the people of Israel. This reassurance sounds its clarion in v. 44:

> Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not spurn *(mā'as)* them, neither will I abhor *(gā'al)* them so as to destroy them utterly and break my covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God.

To evaluate this statement properly, it is not enough to take into account the initiative, independence, and absoluteness of God's redemptive plan in its most profound essence and to its fullest extent. Two additional facts concerning Israel must also be considered: first, it is never a whole people that becomes unfaithful, but only a certain part of it, large or small. Secondly, despite the validity of collective retribution or inherited punishment in view of human freedom to obey or to disobey the threat of punishment to the point of destruction is meant only for those who have gone far astray and have no desire to repent.

The initiative of God's salvation plan and its constancy, plus the fact that a minority always remains faithful while others respond to punishment with penitence, have indicated to the prophets promises of renewal in the near or distant future (cf. Jer 31:31–34). In the passage now under consideration,

these same reasons evoked the memory of God's covenant concluded with the patriarchs and with the tribes of Israel on Sinai. In vv. 41b–42 we find:

> ... if then their uncircumcised heart *(lĕbābām he'ārēl)*[31] is humbled and they make amends for their iniquity *(wĕ'āz yirṣû 'et-'ăwônām);* then I will remember my covenant *(wĕzākartî 'et-bĕrîtî)* with Jacob, and I will remember my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land.

Verse 45 contains a similar promise:

> But I will for their sake remember the covenant with their forefathers *(bĕrît rī'šōnîm),* whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am the Lord.

The promise of "remembrance" of the covenant, occurring as it does in two separate places, has given rise to differences of view regarding the history of the text. The first thing to settle is whether both verses were part of the original text. The concluding verse contains a conditional promise of blessing, which strongly suggests that it is a more likely candidate than v. 42.[32] Verse 45 is a characteristic expression of the Hebrew historical consciousness. Past events serve as signs of hope for the future, and liberation from Egyptian slavery is the classical foundation for the hope that God will deliver the people of Israel from Babylonian exile. This, however, does not mean that "remembrance" of the covenant with the Patriarchs is superfluous. On the contrary, the promise gains a broader historical basis from this summoning up of things past. Deutero-Isaiah sensed the need to go even further: right back to creation. The linking of creation and the new exodus is the pivotal point in his message of hope. In this he is original and unique, although there is a point of contact between the two writers in regard to their common starting point: the promise of renewal can be fulfilled only after the people have admitted their iniquity and made amends for it. Lev 26:41, 43 points this out expressly *(yirṣû 'et-'ăwônām),* and Deutero-Isaiah is the only other writer who uses this terminology, although he proclaims that the amendment has already occurred. His introductory exhortation carries a message of hope (Isa 40:2):

> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
> and cry to her
> that her warfare is ended,

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[31] *Lĕbāb 'ārēl* only appears here, but in Deut 30:6 we read: "And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live." Cf. Jer 4:4.

[32] See W. Zimmerli, "Sinaibund und Abrahambund: Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis der Priesterschrift," *ThZ* 16 (1960), 268–280 = idem, *Gottes Offenbarung: Gesammelte Aufsätze zum Alten Testament* (ThB 19; Munich: C. Kaiser, 1963), 205–216, esp. p. 177 (ThB, 214): "Hier hatte der Grundtext von H davon gesprochen, daß Jahwe in der Stunde des Gerichtes seines Bundes mit dem Israel der Auszugszeit gedenken und es nicht gänzlich vertilgen wolle. Eine jüngere Hand hatte dann die Aussage hinzugefügt, daß Jahwe seines Bundes mit den Vätern gedenken wolle."

> that her iniquity is pardoned *(kî nirṣāh 'ăwônāh),*
> that she has received from the Lord's hand
> double for all her sins.

In contrast to Deutero-Isaiah's universalist theology of creation, the Levitical writer points to another mark of God's absoluteness; at the end of the passage (26:45), he inserts God's declaration *'ănî yhwh,* "I am the Lord." In such a context, this declaration affirms the absolute faithfulness of God to his promises made in connection with the covenant he concluded with his people in an earlier age.[33] Remembering God's works in times past helps the people to determine the true foundation for hope in times present and to come.

3.2 *Deuteronomy 30:1–10*

During the classical period of Hebrew monotheism, belief in God's absolute justice was balanced by belief in his absolute fidelity towards his creation and people. Thus the threat of destruction, even in the most critical moments, could not extinguish all hope for the future existence of a covenanted people. In the light of the splendour of the concluding section of Lev 26 (vv. 40–45), Deut 28 appears too gloomy, too forlorn. If the original text encompassed only the blessing // curse antithesis, it is reasonable to look for an addition parallel to that of Lev 26:40–45. In fact, the book of Deuteronomy contains such a passage, which complements Deut 28 in the expected sense—Deut 30:1–10. After Moses had spoken, (in chap. 29) to the people in the second person plural, God resumes his address to his people in the second person singular. The close link between Deut 28 and 30:1–10 is also recognizable from their same or similar vocabulary and style. The introduction (30:1) is similar to the introduction to the section on blessing (28:1) and to that on curses (28:15): *wĕhāyāh kî-yābō'û* ... and links the essential elements of the two preceding introductions, particularly the key words "blessing" and "curse." In 30:9a the promise of blessing is partly expressed in the language of 28:4, 11, 18. In 30:9b the motif and terms dealing with God's "delight" are already familiar from 28:63, which runs:

> And as the Lord took delight in doing you good and multiplying you, so the Lord will take delight in bringing ruin upon you and destroying you ...

The opposite is promised in 30:9b:

> ... for the Lord will again take delight in prospering you *(kî yāšûb yhwh lāśûś 'ālêkā lĕṭôb),* as he took delight in your fathers.[34]

The agreements between Deut 28 and 30:1–10 suggest that the two passages

[33] See K. Elliger, *Leviticus,* 379.
[34] This motif appears elsewhere only in Jer 32:41.

are the work of the same author and were perhaps composed simultaneously.[35] The majority of exegetes incline to the view that 30:1–10 presupposes the experience of exile, although this explanation is not as cogent as it first appears. There are several reasons for caution: first, the fundamental theological postulates are independent of specific situations, and therefore gain universal recognition. Secondly, the book of Hosea places in the foreground the assurance of God's fidelity and mercy long before the exile—apart, of course, from calling for repentance and threatening merciless punishment. Thirdly, Lev 26 links the sequence blessing // curse // renewal.[36] Fourthly, Deut 4:29–31 switches (like 30:1–10) from the second person plural to the singular.

It should be noted that there are close similarities between Deut 4:29–31 and 30:1–10, pointing to a common authorship.[37] The arrangement of the passages within the framework of the book of Deuteronomy as a whole can hardly be accidental: 4:29–31 stands at the beginning and 30:1–10 at the end of its central section. It obviously follows from this that obedience and repentance belong together. Since obedience is always inadequate, repentance must stand as the most important message of the testament of Moses. If 30:1–10 was composed at the same time as chapter 28, this theme of repentance may well be the reason why the two passages are no longer juxtaposed. The position of 30:1–10 in the concluding chapter of the entire paraenesis gives this passage an enhanced significance.[38] Passage 4:29–31 reads:

> But from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and all your soul. When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the Lord your God *(wĕšabtā 'ad-yhwh 'ĕlōhêkā)* and obey his voice, for the

[35] This conclusion is suggested by H. W. Wolff, "Das Kerygma des deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerks," *ZAW* 73 (1961), 181. Wolff also points out that both passages are strongly reminiscent of the book of Jeremiah. M. Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien,* vol. 1: *Die sammelnden und bearbeitenden Geschichtswerke im Alten Testament* (SKG 18/2; Halle [Saale]: M. Niemeyer, 1943, 1957), 16, considers the entire main part of Deuteronomy, i.e., 4:44–30:20, older than Deuteronomistic history; nevertheless, he sees in the background of the "Trostrede" 30:1–14 the situation of Exile (p. 17).

[36] H. Graf Reventlow, *Das Heiligkeitsgesetz,* 157–160, rejects the fairly widespread opinion that at least vv. 40–45, if not the whole of chap. 26, in Leviticus must be dated at the time of exile, emphasizing above all the universal characteristics of sin and obedience. On pp. 159–160 he states: "... Die Ausführungen der Prediger über Sünde und Buße entspringen einem zeitlosen seelsorgerlichen Anliegen: wo es Sünde gibt, muß es auch Buße geben, sonst hätte jeglicher Anruf an die Gemeinde keinen Sinn. Die Sünde ist eine Wirklichkeit, die immer schon hinter dem Hörer liegt und seine Gegenwart bestimmt. So ist auch die Umkehr jederzeit aktuell, nicht erst im Exil."

[37] See H. W. Wolff, *ZAW* 73 (1961), 183: "Die Eigenheiten der Formulierung von 4:29–31 machen es unwahrscheinlich, daß der Passus erst sekundär auf Grund des bereits vorliegenden Textes von 30:1-10 eingefügt wurde. Vielmehr legt die enge thematische und sprachliche Verwandschaft es nahe, beide Stücke einer gleichzeitigen Arbeit an der Verzahnung des Deuteronomium mit dem deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerk zuzuordnen."

[38] See H. W. Wolff, *ZAW* 73 (1961), 183.

> Lord your God is a merciful God *(kî 'ēl raḥûm yhwh 'ĕlōhêkā);* he will not fail you or destroy you or forget the covenant *(wĕlō' yiškaḥ 'et-bĕrît)* with your fathers which he swore to them.

In 30:1–10 the theme of returning to the Lord is even more prominent than in 4:29–31. The root *šwb,* appearing at the beginning (v. 2a) and at the end (v. 10b) in the usual sense of returning, has a chiastic role.

Returning to God is the prerequisite for returning to the enjoyment of God's benevolence to the people of Israel. To emphasize this causal link, the writer uses the same root *šwb* for both aspects of returning (cf. vv. 2, 3, 9, 10). The conditional clause in vv. 1–2 is followed in v. 3 by the promise that God will change the fate of the people, have compassion upon them,[39] and gather them again from all the nations of the world. The promise of renewal presumes both a change of heart by the people and a direct divine intervention in their existence. In Deut 10:16 (cf. Jer 4:4) God demands: "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn." In Lev 26:41b–42 God's promise of renewal begins with conditional clause: "... if then their uncircumcised heart is humbled and they make amends for their iniquity; then I will remember my covenant with Jacob ..." In Deut 30:6 the writer affirms, finally, that the new relationship between God and Israel will result from divine creative work:

> And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.[40]

4. *The Theological Significance of the Texts*

This analysis of Lev 26 and Deut 28 + 30:1–10 has shown that there is extensive agreement between the passages with regard to themes and motifs, place and meaning in the broader context, and structure, while differences in vocabulary and style are not significant. Comparison of these passages with those invoking curses or curses // blessing at the end of non-biblical legal documents and treaties shows that all texts of this kind have a number of common features. It is therefore all the more striking that the third section, calling for penitence by the people following their deserved punishment, so as to make possible a renewal of God's favour towards them, is found only in the Bible. One must obviously try to identify the reasons for these similarities and differences.

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[39] For the theme of God's mercy, cf. also Deut 4:31; 13:18; Jer 12:15; 33:26.

[40] Cf. the promise of a new heart in Jer 31;33; 32:39–40; Ezek 11:19; 36:26–27.

4.1 *Similarities Arising from Universality of Experience and Forms of Expression*

Legal documents and treaties tend to impose obligations that are usually unpleasant and sometimes difficult to fulfil. It is thus understandable that humans should have violated them in every age and clime, and that law-givers and treaty partners down the centuries have faced the question of how best to ensure their fulfilment, so that the law or treaty concerned may achieve its aim. The most obvious motivation is the promise of reward for obedience or loyalty, and the threat of punishment for their opposites. Historical experience shows that promises are, on the whole, less effective than threats, since a human beings, by their very nature, try to avoid whatever demands effort and causes trouble. Promises of reward often lack persuasive power because they prescribe an arduous discipline: what is offered is not worth the effort of winning it. At the same time, the urge to avoid pain (and even difficulty) causes humans to fear punishment so much that they obey laws and fulfil promises, even when they would rather break them. Consequently, the stick is generally mightier than the carrot.

The effectiveness of promises and threats also depends on the authority of the one who imposes the obligation, as well as on the specific promises or threats one may hold out. It may sometimes seem that human authority carries more weight than its divine counterpart, for the human ruler or judge has at his disposal very real and immediate benefits or penalties, while the divine activity is more difficult to identify. It is often impossible to determine whether good fortune is in truth a reward for loyalty to the divine law, or suffering a penalty for recalcitrance. This priority of human authority can be sustained, however, only for a time—i.e., while it is sufficiently powerful to dominate its subjects. In the longer term, divine authority must predominate: first, because it is permanent, while human power sooner or later falters and fails; secondly, because of its special relationship with natural forces—since primeval times humans have sensed the link between divinity and the world of nature that imposes itself upon them; and thirdly, because of the "cosmic" nature of divine authority—a human being suspects that "blessing" may be the result of living in harmony with the cosmic (i.e., divine) order, while "curse" may follow from discord.

The entire history of mankind demonstrates how deeply rooted in human nature is the consciousness of divine authority, of some kind of transcendent divine beings, of their close links with the cosmic order and, ultimately, of their effect on human destiny. We find in every culture an experience of divinity and basic modes of expressing that experience that have the same or similar features. It is thus understandable that human law-givers and contractual partners should often seek a divine sanction for their own authority. They sometimes call upon all the gods—even upon heaven and earth—as

witnesses, and emphasise the wish that the gods may reward or punish those who are parties to their laws or treaties.

Orientalists, exegetes, and classical philologists like to emphasize the "collective" and magical way in which blessing and curse were understood in the ancient Near East, Greece, and Rome,[41] a characteristic supposedly shared by early Israel. In doing so, however, they scarcely take into account the profounder reasons for statements on blessing and curse in both secular and religious texts. They fail to perceive the natural human feel for the causal link between harmony with a moral order and good fortune, and between transgression of that order and misfortune of every kind. Some extreme views, such as the fatalistic understanding of human iniquity, show particularly clearly how primeval and universal this sensitivity is.

An examination of the natural basis and ubiquity of declarations on blessing and curse is essential for the methodology of comparative theology. Here we must take into account the possibility that similar literary forms developed independently of each other in different cultures. Further, it is clear that reciprocal influence between cultures is facilitated whenever their expression and their literary forms reflect the natural order, general human experience, inbuilt human feelings, and the natural conditions governing human modes of communication. The ancient Near East was an ideal breeding-ground for such reciprocity, because it is relatively unified geographically. Diverse cultural currents criss-crossed in Syria and Palestine, and it is usually assumed that the conditional form of the blessing // curse antithesis had found a home in Canaan before the arrival of the tribes of Israel.[42]

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[41] See E. von Lassaulx, *Studien des classischen Alterthums* (Regensburg: G. J. Manz, 1854), 159–177: "Der Fluch bei Griechen und Römern"; L. Schmidt, *Die Ethik der alten Griechen,* vol. 1 (Berlin: W. Hertz, 1882), 47–155: "Die religiösen Voraussetzungen der Sittlichkeit" (on pp. 85–92, there is a discussion on the place and significance of curse); E. Ziebarth, "Der Fluch im griechischen Recht," *Hermes* 30 (1895), 57–70; G. Glotz, *La solidarité de la famille dans le droit criminel en Grèce* (Paris: A. Fontemoing, 1904), 557–579: "La responsabilité collective dans la religion" (on pp. 566–572, the author discusses "l'imprécation dans le droit"); S. Mowinckel, *Psalmenstudien,* V: *Segen und Fluch in Israels Kult und Psalmendichtung* (VS.HF 3; Kristiania: J. Dybwad, 1924; reprinted in Amsterdam: P. Schippers, 1966); J. Hempel, "Die israelitischen Anschauungen von Segen und Fluch im Lichte altorientalischer Parallelen," *ZDMG* 79 (1925), 20–110 = *Apoxysmata,* 30–113; R. Thurnwald, "Fluch. A. Allgemein," *Reallexikon der Vorgeschichte,* vol. 3 (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1925), 391–398; R. Thurnwald and K. Galling, "Segen. A. Allgemein. B. Palästina-Syrien," *Reallexikon der Vorgeschichte,* vol. 12 (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1928), 5–12; L. Brun, *Segen und Fluch im Urchristentum* (NVAO.HF 1; Oslo: J. Dybwad, 1932); J. Hempel, *Das Ethos des Alten Testaments* (BZAW 67; Berlin: A. Töpelmann, 1938), 32–67 + 216–224: "Kollektivismus und Individualismus"; S. H. Blank, *HUCA* 23/1 (1950–1951), 73–95; J. Scharbert, *Solidarität in Segen und Fluch im Alten Testament und in seiner Umwelt* (BBB 14; Bonn. P. Hanstein, 1958); T. C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1966), 20–21.

[42] Amongst others, D. R. Hillers draws attention to this possibility in *Treaty-Curses and the Old Testament Prophets,* 78, 86. This assumption can ultimately find support in the existing documents from the Syro-Canaanite cultural sphere, i.e., from the Aramaic treaty texts of Sefîre (see n. 8).

There is, in principle, no objection to the supposition that Lev 26:3–39 and Deut 28 contain some material from the pre-Israelite period. This is particularly true of the antithesis Deut 28:1–14//15–68, because the emphasis on the promise of blessing and the threat of curse is in disaccord with the two themes of Deuteronomy taken as a whole. It is the only book of the Hebrew Bible in which the positive aspect of retribution dominates the negative one. Because the relationship is reversed in the concluding antithesis, there is added reason to suppose that this particular text is part of a common tradition in the ancient Near East.

4.2 *Differences Attributable to Diverse Starting Points and Aims*

The greater the general thematic and formal similarity of texts coming from different peoples, languages, cultures and religions, the more cogent must be the reasons for the differences among them. As we have seen, there is a striking difference between non-biblical and biblical texts dealing with the main themes with which we are concerned: non-biblical examples contain only the blessing // curse antithesis, whereas in the Bible it is followed by a section on penitence and renewal. Other differences are less obvious, but they explain why the Bible alone recognizes the possibility of renewal. In non-biblical texts, the subject of laws or treaties is human authority—a king or other potentate. It is he who pleads for blessing upon obedience and loyalty, and calls down all kinds of curses upon their opposites. Human authority does not promise anything or threaten any precise penalty, but asks of the gods reward or punishment in the *subjunctive mood.* In the Hebrew Bible, on the contrary, God himself is the Law-giver; hence he speaks of blessing or curse not in the subjunctive, but in the *indicative mood.*[43] This means that blessing or punishment will assuredly follow if the people obey or disobey God's commandments. It is also evident that the promise or threat is not restricted to any particular case, but has a universal application, for the God of Israel is the Creator and Lord of all the earth.

Non-biblical laws and treaties have different authors with differing aims, who usually do not call for obedience or loyalty on account of some inner quality that their products possess; neither do they care for the well-being of those upon whom they impose obligations, regarding their provisions as props for the formal authority of the law-giver or treaty-maker. A code of laws is primarily seen by them as a monument to the law-giver, a treaty as a buttress of their power or that of their descendants. The promise of blessing and the threat of curse are thus not based on the intrinsic authority of laws, or on the moral obligations of an oath of allegiance, but on the need felt by

[43] This difference is well observed by S. Mowinckel, *Psalmenstudien*, V: *Segen und Fluch in Israels Kult und Psalmendichtung*, 113.

human potentates to defend their own interests.[44] The deepest motive for compliance is fear of authority, and this explains completely why only the threat of punishment is sometimes held out, and why it is almost always lengthier in its expression than any promise of blessing. He who is threatened defends himself with a threat.

A human law-giver or treaty-maker has to remember that a successor may make fulfilment of previously imposed obligations impossible. It is therefore hardly reasonable to rely on human authority to punish the transgressor, and this enhances the importance of the authority of the gods. Earthly legislators do not hesitate to invoke all the gods as witnesses, begging them to punish the transgressor. They are aware that the authority of the gods is indisputable in the hearts and minds of the populace, and can rely on their taking seriously obligations imposed in the presence of divinities.

If laws and treaties are primarily intended to serve human interests, then the rehabilitation of transgressors following punishment is something that need not even be taken into consideration. A man of power who feels threatened desires only the destruction of his opponent. Things are totally different, however, with almighty God, for he is the sole source and purpose underlying every human being. The exclusive aim of his Law is, therefore, the well-being of the people, and its nature is congruent with this aim, which touches the most fundamental questions of the relationship between the world, humanity, and God. Rejection of God's Law affects primarily the rejecter, who has turned his back upon the source of all things and strayed from the way that leads to life. But it also erodes the foundation of God's world and its moral order (cf. Ps 11:3).

But the Law-giver is also the supreme Judge, and must act accordingly. The aim of divine punishment, however, cannot be the destruction of the transgressor, but his reform. It follows that God is always open to those who acknowledge their aberration and desire to amend their ways. Men usually discover the eternal truth of God's Law when they taste the fruits of their own disobedience; suffering makes them ready to return to their God. Since disobedience followed by penitence under the pressure of punishment is highly characteristic of Israel's attitude towards its God, it follows that Lev 26 and Deut 28 must point to the possibility of penitence and renewal. If Deut 30:1–10 was not written by the same hand as Deut 28, this does not mean that the writer of Deut 28 excluded the possibility of renewal, which is not dependent on this or that author, but is a fundamental postulate of He-

[44] It is surprising that F. C. Fensham is the only one to state this finding. In *ZAW* 75 (1963), 173–174, he says: "Curses of the ancient Near East, those outside the Old Testament, are directed against a transgression on private property, erasing of an inscription etc., but the moral and ethical obligation in connection with his duty to one God and love to his neighbour, is not touched on."

brew monotheism. If another hand subsequently added the later passage, it only made explicit what was implicit in the knowledge of the God of Israel.

The section dealing with the return of the people and a renewal of God's favour is the high point of Lev 26 and Deut 28 + 30:1–10. From it, one can view the crevasse that divides the biblical from the non-biblical world. In the Bible, the question of what happens when the people break covenant with their God is not of crucial significance. The central question is what they will do when struck by misfortunes following in the train of their iniquity. Will they repent? The biblical writers know that no sin is finally fatal, because God is far superior to the forces of this world. They also know that there is no comparing the importance of the material and personal-spiritual worlds. For them, the only thing that matters is a correct personal relationship between the people and their God. They firmly believe that God is prepared to pardon their guilt and bestow on them the gifts they cannot secure for themselves, once the signs of true repentance are visible. God's blessings are available not only to those who remain ever faithful to him, but also to sinners who acknowledge the futility of their ways.

It follows obviously from the prophetic biblical view that the main reason for the differences between non-biblical and biblical testimonies is biblical personalism. God is not only absolute Lord over the laws of the cosmos, but also over those that pertain to the spiritual-personal life. Hence the laws are concerned not only with material things, but also with spiritual-personal gifts such as loyalty and love. Here too, lies the reason why the return of the people and a renewal of God's favour are possible. What is not possible in the cosmic order is feasible in the spiritual-personal one. For mankind, a correct personal relationship with the absolute God is the surest way of escaping from magic, fatalism, and hydra-headed egoism.[45] Only in it can the full and entire truth of human life in relation to the world, humanity, and God find adequate expression.

[45] See H. Graf Reventlow, *Das Heiligkeitsgesetz,* 158, who says in connection with Lev 26: "Das kultische Segen- und Fluchformular entstammt der Sphäre des blindwaltenden Schicksals im Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang – die Predigt redet von der Möglichkeit der Buße und dem Gedenken Jahwes an seinen Bund und motiviert dies durch das Auszugsgeschehen (V. 45); das Ich Jahwes besiegt das dunkle Wirken der Dinge." See also J. Hempel, *Das Ethos des Alten Testaments,* 32–67: "Kollektivismus und Individualismus," esp. pp. 65–67; F. C. Fensham, *ZAW* 75 (1963), 174–175.

CHAPTER VII

REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS IN DEUTERONOMY

Deuteronomy is a document unique in the realms of Hebrew theology and piety. It is presented as the testament of Moses, the supreme prophet, the mediator of the Law. One of its concluding verses states: "And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face" (34:10). In a moving personal address to his people, he outlines all the fundamental characteristics of Hebrew theology and religious life. His starting point is explicitly theological, for the basic emphasis is upon the Holy One of Israel, who is the only true God. Out of pure love, the Lord has elected the people of Israel from among the nations to be a special possession (4:20, 37; 7:6; 10:15; 14:2; 26:18), delivering them from slavery in Egypt, leading them through the desert to the Promised Land, and presenting to them his Law, the source of life. The aim of Israel's election is its own welfare, which presupposes an undivided faithfulness to and love of God, a resolute rejection of foreign gods, and good intent towards man, be he kith and kin or a stranger.

All the characteristic types of testimony to God's activity throughout the history of Israel and to the obligations of a covenanted people are interwoven in the book of Deuteronomy. We find here historical, prophetic, legal and wisdom writing, all of it serving a parenetic purpose. There is constant reference to an intimate personal relationship with God, concluding with the promise of the fruits of life and other benefits. The emphasis is not on punishment, but on the promise of good—i.e., the positive aspect of retribution. The writer bases his argument on the conviction that disloyalty can only bring misfortune, and upon examples of past punishments. Life and death have always been determined by fidelity or infidelity to God and his Law. This alternative is given so much emphasis that the terminology used in describing the blessing // curse antithesis is more effective here than in any other book. Judging the whole of Israel's history in the light of the principle of retribution results in a "philosophy of history," achieving a complete, organic accord between the history and wisdom traditions.[1]

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[1] Some exegetes point expressly to the wisdom characteristics of Deuteronomy: M. Weinfeld, "The Source of the Idea of Reward in Deuteronomy," *Tarbiz* 30 (1960–1961), 8–15 (in Hebrew) + I–II; idem, "The Origin of the Humanism in Deuteronomy," *JBL* 80 (1961), 241–247; idem, "Deuteronomy—The Present State of Inquiry," *JBL* 86 (1967), 249–262; idem, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972); J. Malfroy, "Sagesse et Loi dans le Deutéronome: Études," *VT* 15 (1965), 49–55; J. R. Boston, "The Wisdom Influence upon the Song of Moses," *JBL* 87 (1968), 198–202; J. G. Gammie, "The Theology of Retribution in the Book of Deuteronomy,"*CBQ* 32 (1970), 1–12; D. J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant* (AB 21A; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981), 157–205. For the prob-

The theme of punishment for human errors of all kinds recurs frequently in the ancient narrative literature and in the prophets, but that of reward for virtues is heard only rarely. Deuteronomy was the first to make this unevenness even, to emphasize both aspects of retribution equally. The writer's exhortation to loyal fulfilment of God's Law is based on the promise of life, numerous offspring, and abundant material benefits.[2] The call to faithfulness runs constantly into the assurance of reward, and subordinate clauses introduced by the preposition *lĕma'an,* "that you may ...," recur throughout the book, along with similarly structured statements about reward. The tendency to make much of the positive aspect of retribution does not, of course, mitigate its negative aspect. On the contrary: the delectable fruits of fidelity make the consequences of apostasy appear all the more horrifying: destruction in place of life, curse instead of blessing.[3] The personal relationship of the people with their God is ultimately what matters, and only those benefits that are the fruit of this relationship can have permanent value. Material goods are in the end worthless if there is no harmony at the higher spiritual level.

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lem of authorship, other fundamental questions in Deuteronomy, and bibliography, see especially S. R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895, 1973); C. Steuernagel, *Das Deuteronomium* (BK I/3,1; 2nd ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1923); P. Buis and J. Leclercq, *Le Deutéronome* (SBi; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1963); G. von Rad, *Das fünfte Buch Mose: Deuteronomium* (ATD 8; 2nd ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968); J. D. Levenson, "Who Inserted the Book of the Torah?," *HThR* 68 (1975), 203–233; P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (NIC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 1976); A. D. H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy* (NCBC; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1979); G. Braulik, *Deuteronomium 1–16,17* (NEB; Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1986); N. Lohfink, *Studien zum Deuteronomium und zur deuteronomistischen Literatur,* 3 vols. (SBAB 8, 12, 20; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1990, 1991, 1995); G. Braulik, *Studien zur Theologie des Deuteronomiums* (SBAB 2; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1990); idem, *Studien zum Buch Deuteronomium* (SBAB 24; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1997); I. Cairns, *A Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy* (ITHC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans; Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1992); K. Zobel, *Prophetie und Deuteronomium* (BZAW 199; Berlin / New York: W. de Gruyter, 1992); M. Braun, *Deuteronomy* (Milwaukee, Wis.: Northwestern Publ. House, 1993); E. H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy* (NAC 4; Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 1994); E. Nielsen, *Deuteronomium* (HAT I/6; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1995); T. Veijola, *Das Deuteronomium und seine Querbeziehungen* (SFEG 62; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996); B. M. Levinson, *Deuteronomy and the Hermeneutics of Legal Innovation* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1997); M. Vervenne (ed.), *Deuteronomy and Deuteronomic Literature: Festschrift C. H. W. Brekelmans* (BEThL 133; Leuven: University Press, 1997); J.-P. Sonnet, *The Book within the Book: Writing in Deuteronomy* (BIS 14; Leiden / New York / Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1997); G. Braulik, *Studien zum Buch Deuteronomium* (SBAB 24; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1997).

[2] See E. Würthwein, "Der Vergeltungsglaube im Alten Testament," *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament,* vol. 4 (ed. G. Kittel; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1939), 715.

[3] For the question of retribution in Deuteronomy, see especially M. Weinfeld, *Tarbiz* 30 (1960–1961), 8–15 + I–II; idem, *Deuteronomy and Deuteronomic School,* 307–319: "The Doctrine of Reward"; J. G. Plöger, *Literarkritische, formgeschichtliche und stilkritische Untersuchungen zum Deuteronomium* (BBB 26; Bonn: P. Hanstein, 1967), 196-213: "Vergeltung im Dt"; J. G. Gammie, *CBQ* 32 (1970), 1–12. All of them, however, treat retribution very generally, without any attempt at analysis and theological evaluation. It is noteworthy that, contrary to K. Koch, J. Plöger defends the traditional meaning of the word "retribution."

1. *Rewards for Obedience*

After a historical introduction (1:1–6) Deuteronomy opens with Moses' first discourse (1:6–4:40), which has two parts: a historical review (1:6–3:29) and an exhortation to Israel (4:1–40). The historical section is an outline of the history of the tribes of Israel from the time when they set off from the mountain of Horeb until they took possession of the land promised to their fathers. The theological doctrine implicit in this historical outline is best expressed in Moses' apostrophe: "O Lord God, thou hast only begun to show thy servant thy greatness and thy mighty hand; for what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do such works and mighty acts as thine?" (3:24). The past testifies to God's incomparable power, as well as to his judgment and mercy towards his elected people, and therefore justifies their expectations for the future—a future that can only be envisaged in the union of the people with their God.

In his exhortation to Israel (4:1–40), Moses impresses upon the hearts of his hearers that they must obey God's Law, promising them in return a secure tenure of the land. He opens his discourse with the words: "And now, O Israel, give heed to the statutes and the ordinances which I teach you, and do them; that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land *(lĕma'an tihyû ûbā'tem wîrištem 'et-hā'āreṣ)* which the Lord, the God of your fathers, gives you. You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it; that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you" (4:1–2). The discourse closes in similar terms: "Know therefore this day, and lay it to your heart, that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other. Therefore you shall keep his statutes and his commandments, which I command you this day, that it may go well with you, and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land *('ăšer yîṭab lĕkā ûlĕbānêkā 'aḥărêkā ûlĕma'an ta'ărîk yāmîm 'al-hā'ădāmāh)* which the Lord your God gives you for ever" (4:39–40).

Chapters 1–4 could be described as actualization of the salvation history and the covenant with God. This applies even more to the second main section, chapters 5–11. Moses addresses his people in the role of a preacher and uses the second person singular or plural, inviting them to love their God and to obey his Law. In this manner he prepares them for the acceptance of the laws laid down in chapters 12–26. From the thematic and literary points of view, the section is a unified whole; in essence, it is an expansion of the first commandment of the Decalogue. The call to love and obedience constantly recurs, as does the promise of reward for love and obedience, and of punishment for hatred and disobedience. In the remarkable retribution formula 5:9–10 we read (v. 10) that God shows steadfast love to thousands of those who love him and keep his commandments. In 7:9–10 the formula re-

appears, with the difference that it starts with its positive aspect and also mentions the covenant: "Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations ..." A comparison of the commandment relating to parents in Exod 20:12 and Deut 5:16 is instructive. In Exod 20:12 we find: "Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land *(lĕma'an ya'ărīkûn yāmêkā 'al hā'ădāmāh)* which the Lord your God gives you." Deut 5:16 is similar, but offers a slightly longer motivation: "Honour your father and your mother, as the Lord your God commanded you; that your days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with you, in the land *(lĕma'an ya'ărîkun yāmêkā ûlĕma'an yîṭab lāk 'al hā'ădāmāh)* which the Lord your God gives you."

In 5:29 the speaker exclaims: "Oh that they had such a mind as this always, to fear me and to keep all my commandments, that it might go well *(lĕma'an yîṭab)* with them and with their children for ever!" In 5:33 he adjures: "You shall walk in all the way which the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land which you shall possess *(lĕma'an tiḥyûn wĕṭôb lākem wĕha'ĕraktem yāmîm bā'āreṣ 'ăšer tîrāšûn).*" These and similar encouragements to scrupulous obedience to God's commandments are repeated in 6:2–3, 18, 24–25; 8:1; 10:12–13; 11:8–9, 21. In 7:12–15 the speaker promises divine fidelity to the covenant, God's blessing upon the fruit of their body and the fruit of their ground, and immunity from the plagues of Egypt. In 11:14–15 he guarantees abundance of rain, grass in the fields, and food in plenty. In 11:22–25 he declares that God will drive out all other nations before them and give them land extending from the desert to Lebanon and from the Euphrates to the Mediterranean, sending fear and dread before them, provided they obey his commandments and love him.

In 6:24–25 the use of the word *ṣĕdāqāh* should be noted, since it is usually translated "righteousness." These two verses sum up the purpose of the laws: "And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive *(lĕṭôb lānû kol-hayyāmîm lĕḥayyōtēnû)*, as at this day. And it will be righteousness for us *(ûṣĕdāqāh tihyeh lānû)*, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us." A similar example occurs in 24:13, and elsewhere in Gen 15:6; Ps 106:31. In Deut 24:13 the speaker says of a poor man: "When the sun goes down, you shall restore to him the pledge that he may sleep in his cloak and bless you; and it shall be righteousness to you *(ûlĕkā tihyeh ṣĕdāqāh)* before the Lord your God." The famous passage Gen 15:6 (cf. Rom 4:3; Gal 3:6; Jas 2:23) says of Abraham: *wĕhe'ĕmīn bayhwh wayyaḥšĕbehā lô ṣĕdāqāh,* "And he believed the Lord; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness." Ps 106:31 makes a similar statement about Phinehas in connection with the punishment of apostates: "And that has been

reckoned to him as righteousness *(wattēḥāšeb lô liṣdāqāh)* from generation to generation for ever."

The common point of all four passages is the explicit acknowledgement of a particular and positive attitude towards God. Is this merely a signpost pointing its finger to human righteousness, or is it something more? The context obviously favours the conclusion that the word *ṣĕdāqāh* here designates God's reward rather than human righteousness, or the link between them. It is well known that *ṣĕdāqāh/ṣedeq* frequently signifies divine faithfulness, steadfast love, and redemption.[4] It seems most probable that in Deut 6:25 and 24:13, the word points to some gift of God—or, more generally, to 'welfare, blessing.' Abraham's faith is seen as his trust in God's promise of progeny without number: hence the declaration that the Lord counted his faith as righteousness is an affirmation that God's promises will be fulfilled, rather than of a certain virtue in Abraham. In short, Abraham's faith is to his credit. Something similar may be the case in Ps 106:31.[5]

The Code of special laws in chapters 12–26 is a revised and expanded version of the "Book of the Covenant" (Exod 20:22–23:33) and the related laws in Exod 13:3–16; 34:10–26.[6] The difference between the two accounts lies mostly in the fact that in Exodus the laws are presented without elaboration, while in Deuteronomy they serve an educational purpose and are expanded into interpretations that provide exhortation and encouragement. The first section, chapters 5–11, is an introduction to the second, chapters 12–26, and there is a fundamental similarity between the two, attributable to their common didactic aim. The statements on retribution underline this similar-

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[4] See J. Krašovec, *La justice (ṣdq) de Dieu dans la Bible hébraïque et l'interprétation juive et chrétienne* (OBO 76; Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988).

[5] See H. Gunkel, *Die Psalmen* (BK; 5th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), 467, concerning Ps 106:31: "צְדָקָה hier im Sinne von 'Verdienst'. — Der Lohn des Pinehas, auf den der Verfasser anspielt, ist das 'für ewig' 31 (Num 25,13) verliehene Priestertum." See the more extensive studies: H.-H. Heidland, *Die Anrechnung des Glaubens zur Gerechtigkeit* (BWANT IV/18; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1936), esp. pp. 82–84; G. von Rad, "Die Anrechnung des Glaubens zur Gerechtigkeit," *ThLZ* 76 (1951), 1929–1932 = idem, *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (ThB 8; Munich: C. Kaiser, 1965), 130–135; H. Wildberger, "'Glauben' im Alten Testament," *ZThK* 65 (1968), 129–159, esp. pp. 142–147; F. Hahn, "Genesis 15,6 im Neuen Testament," *Probleme biblischer Theologie: Gerhard von Rad zum 70. Geburtstag* (ed. H. W. Wolff; Munich: C. Kaiser, 1971), 90–107; O. Palmer, "Genesis 15,6: New Covenant Exposition of an Old Covenant Text," *WThJ* 42 (1980), 259–289; G. Edathotty, *Abraham Believed in God: The New Testament Interpretation of Genesis 15:6* (Dissertation Pont. Bibl. Inst., Rome, 1982); D. D. Sutherland, *Genesis 15:6: A Study in Ancient Jewish and Christian Interpretation* (Dissertation, Southern Baptist Seminary, 1982). See also the words antithetical to *ṣĕdāqāh* in Deut 15:9; 23:22–23; 24:4, 15 (21:22). Here the noun *ḥēṭ'* or the verb in Hiph'il appears, linking the usual meaning of 'sin, guilt' and 'punishment.' For the relation between sin and punishment, see especially R. Knierim, *Die Hauptbegriffe für Sünde im Alten Testament* (Gütersloh: G. Mohn, 1965), esp. pp. 67–73: "Objektive Verfehlung und subjektive Verantwortlichkeit"; 73–91: "Tat und Tatfolge."

[6] See S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, III–XIX.

ity, and assurances of reward for obedience appear in 12:25, 28; 14:29; 15:4, 6, 10, 18; 16:20; 17:20; 19:13; 22:7; 23:21; 24:19; 25:15.

The stipulations on slaughtering and consumption of flesh in 12:20–28 (cf. 12:15–16) include a prohibition of drinking blood, justified in almost identical terms in vv. 25 and 28: *lĕma'an yîṭab lĕkā ûlĕbānêkā 'aḥărêkā,* "that it may go well with you and with your children after you." The law on setting aside a tenth of the annual produce for the benefit of the Levite, the stranger, the orphan, and the widow (14:22–29) ends with the incentive: "... that the Lord your God may bless you *(lĕma'an yĕbārekkā)* in all the work of your hands that you do." The motivation of blessing first appears in 7:13–14. In the present Code it appears in a similar form in 15:4, 6, 10, 18; 23:21; 24:19 (see also 28:8; 30:16). In 15:4, 6 the speaker promises God's blessing—provided the commandments are obeyed. In 15:10 he recommends generosity in lending: "...because for this the Lord your God will bless you *(kî biglal haddābār hazzeh yĕbārekkā yhwh 'ĕlōhêkā)* in all your work and in all that you undertake" (cf. Prov 19:17). In 15:18 the commandment to liberate slaves ends similarly: "So the Lord your God will bless you *(ûbērakkā yhwh 'ĕlōhêkā)* in all that you do." In 23:21 the rules on interest offer further incentive: "To a foreigner you may lend upon interest, but to your brother you shall not lend upon interest; that the Lord your God may bless you *(lĕma'an yĕbārekkā yhwh 'ĕlōhêkā)* in all that you undertake in the land which you are entering to take possession of it." In 24:19 there is yet another return of the theme: "When you reap your harvest in your field, and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow; that the Lord your God may bless you *(lĕma'an yĕbārekkā yhwh 'ĕlōhêkā)* in all the work of your hand." The same commandment is given in Lev 19:9–10 and 23:22 without this motivation—additional evidence that such incentives are peculiar to Deuteronomy.

In the remaining passages mentioned above, the motivation of reward appears in a miscellany of contexts. In 16:18–20 it is ordained that "judges and officers" shall be appointed who will judge the people with integrity: "... Justice, and only justice, you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land *(lĕma'an tiḥyeh wĕyāraštā 'et-hā'āreṣ)* which the Lord your God gives you." In the instructions regarding the appointment and activities of a king in 17:14–20, the emphasis is laid on fulfilling God's Law, "that his heart may not be lifted up above his brethren, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left; so that he may continue long in his kingdom *(lĕma'an ya'ărîk yāmîm 'al-mamlaktô),* he and his children, in Israel" (v. 20). In the provisions concerning cities of refuge for anyone who has killed his neighbour accidentally (19:1–13), it is stated that the privilege of asylum is not to be extended to the murderer. The passage concludes: "Your eye shall not pity him, but you shall purge the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, so that it may be well with you *(wĕṭôb lāk).*"

The prohibition against taking the mother with the young birds in 22:6–7 is prompted by the same recurrent motive: "... that it may go well with you, and that you may live long *(lĕma'an yîṭab lāk wĕha'ărakta yāmîm).*" And in 25:15 we find: "A full and just weight you shall have, a full and just measure you shall have; that your days may be prolonged in the land *(lĕma'an ya'ărîkû yāmêkā 'al hā'ădāmāh)* which the Lord your God gives you."

In chapter 28, which concludes the Deuteronomic law, the promise of reward for obedience is found in the first section (vv. 1–14). In Moses' third complementary discourse in chapters 29–30, the speaker first touches upon God's great deeds in times past, and concludes in 29:8: "Therefore be careful to do the words of this covenant, that you may prosper *(lĕma'an taśkîlû)* in all that you do." It may be noted that the exhortation of Joshua in Josh 1:6–9 and the testament of David to his son Solomon in 1 Kgs 2:2–10, are prompted by quite similar motives.[7] In Deut 30:6 the phrase *lĕma'an ḥayyêkā,* "that you may live," is employed to motivate love towards God. In 30:16 the commandment to love God is underpinned by the promise: "... then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you are entering to take possession of it." Finally, there is 30:19–20: "I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse, therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live *(lĕma'an tiḥyeh 'attāh wĕzar'ekā),* loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice, and cleaving to him; for that means life to you and length of days, that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them" (cf. 32:47).[8]

2. *Punishments for Disobedience*

In Deuteronomy, reward for obedience is not depicted as a generally valid principle.[9] Neither is the promise of it based on the experience of the past. It is presented rather as a possibility for the future, for the period following possession of the land. It is therefore to be expected that, parallel to the promise of reward, one should find a threat of punishment for disobedience. Hence in Deuteronomy the theme of reward, like that of punishment, serves primarily the parenetic aim of the book. The theme of punishment, however, appears not only in the didactic sections of the book, but also in its historical retrospects, which recall typical examples of Israel's unfaithfulness, despite God's great works of deliverance and the obduracy of the nations whom the people

[7] Cf. 1 Sam 18:5, 14–15; 2 Kgs 18:7; Jer 20:11; 23:5; 50:9; Prov 17:8.

[8] There are elsewhere three passages reminiscent of the promise of reward in Deuteronomy: Isa 1:19–20; 3:10–11; Amos 5:14.

[9] We can except the retribution formula in 5:9–10 and 7:9–10.

of Israel encountered. Punishment affected the disobedient Israelites as much as it did the nations who resisted God's decision to bring his own people to the Promised Land. In their clashes with pagan peoples, the principles of the Holy War and of proscribed objects *(ḥērem)* come into effect, to ensure that Israel protects itself against the corrosive influence of pagan customs.

The theme of punishment holds an important place within the historical review in 1:6–3:29. The passage 1:26–33 records that Israel doubted God's gracious guidance and his intention to fulfil his promises. God was angered, and vowed: "Not one of these men of this evil generation shall see the good land which I swore to give to your fathers" (1:35), which drove Moses to complain: "The Lord was angry with me also on your account, and said, 'You also shall not go in there'" (1:37; cf. 3:26; 4:21–22). In 1:39 God declares: "Moreover your little ones, who you said would become a prey, and your children, who this day have no knowledge of good or evil, shall go in there, and to them I will give it, and they shall possess it." Belatedly the people recognize their sin, but only superficially: they continue to expect divine assistance in the battle against the Amorites. But God was not impressed by their behaviour and took no notice of their emotional outburst following defeat (1:41–46). In 2:14–15 the story continues: "And the time from our leaving Kadesh-barnea until we crossed the brook Zered was thirty-eight years, until the entire generation, that is, the men of war, had perished from the camp, as the Lord had sworn to them. For indeed the hand of the Lord was against them, to destroy them from the camp, until they had perished." Then king Sihon refused Israel passage through his land: "But Sihon the king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him; for the Lord your God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, that he might give him into your hand, as at this day" (2:30). The Israelites retaliated by laying waste his land, observing the proscriptions of *ḥērem;* 2:34 reads: "And we captured all his cities at that time and utterly destroyed every city *(wannaḥărēm 'et-kol-'îr),* men, women, and children; we left none remaining." The kingdom of Og in Bashan met a similar fate (3:1–7).

In chapter 4, after an introductory exhortation to obedience, the speaker goes on: "Your eyes have seen what the Lord did at Baal-peor; for the Lord your God destroyed from among you all the men who followed the Baal of Peor; but you who held fast to the Lord your God are all alive this day" (4:3–4). There is some evidence that in Peor was established a worship of Baal that was in complete contradiction to Yahwism.[10] Examples of past apostasy serve as a basis for encouragement (and warning) for the future. The passage 4:25–28 contains a severe threat: "When you beget children and children's children, and have grown old in the land, if you act corruptly by making a graven

[10] Cf. Num 25:1–15, 18; Josh 22:17; Hos 9:10; Ps 106:28.

image in the form of anything, and by doing what is evil in the sight of the Lord your God, so as to provoke him to anger, I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that you will soon utterly perish from the land which you are going over the Jordan to possess; you will not live long upon it, but will be utterly destroyed. And the Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the Lord will drive you. And there you will serve gods of wood and stone, the work of men's hands, that neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell."

In the didactic section chapters 5–11, historical reminiscence intertwines with encouragements and warnings relating to future occupancy of the land. In the remarkable retribution formula, 5:9–10, God speaks in the first person singular, first threatening collective punishment for those who hate him (5:9), but then promising "steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments" (5:10). In 5:11 the speaker warns the people against profaning the name of God: "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain." In 5:9, three points silhouette the severity of the utterance: first, God himself is speaking; secondly, he mentions chastening before talking of love; thirdly, he speaks not only of individual, but also of collective, retribution. The situation is rather different in 7:9–10 where the retribution formula recurs in a slightly modified form. Here the formula begins with the positive aspect: "Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations ..." In the proclamation that follows on punishment for hostility towards God, instant reprisals are envisaged, but without any definite pronouncement on collective retribution (7:10). The remarkable phrase *'ēl qannā'*, "a jealous God," is used several times (4:24; 5:9; 6:15), and lends a dark shadow to the threats; 6:14–15 says: "You shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the peoples who are round about you; for the Lord your God in the midst of you is a jealous God; lest the anger of the Lord your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth."

In 7:1–5 (cf. 20:15–18) stern treatment is prescribed for the peoples living in the Promised Land: "... you must utterly destroy them *(haḥărēm taḥărîm 'ōtām);* you shall make no covenant with them, and show no mercy to them ... For they would turn away your sons, from following me, to serve other gods; then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly" (7:2–4). The promise in 7:17–26 that God himself will gradually drive out all these peoples before the Israelites concludes with a warning against coveting their artifacts: "The graven images of their gods you shall burn with fire; you shall not covet the silver or the gold that is on them, or take it for yourselves, lest you be ensnared by it; for it is an abomination to the Lord your God. And you shall not bring an abomi-

nable thing into your house, and become accursed like it *(wĕhāyîtā ḥērem kāmōhû);* you shall utterly detest and abhor it; for it is an accursed thing *(kî ḥērem hû').*" In 8:19–20 the speaker threatens that the people of Israel will certainly perish like the nations the Lord had destroyed before them, if they forget him and go after other gods.

In 9:4–6 the speaker states three times that God will not lead them into the land on account of their righteousness *(ṣĕdāqāh),* but rather because of the wickedness *(riš'āh)* of neighbouring nations. In 9:6 he says: "Know therefore, that the Lord your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness; for you are a stubborn people." Four points arise here. First, *ṣĕdāqāh* primarily denotes righteousness in relation to God, i.e., obedience to his law—in other words, the opposite of obduracy. Secondly, the history of Israel shows that the people had never been truly righteous; the principal shadow from the past is cast by the worshipping of the Golden Calf (9:7–10:11). God might then have destroyed the whole nation, but bore with them following Moses' humble plea for mercy.[11] Thirdly, God persists in his decision to lead the people into the Promised Land because the iniquity of the other nations is apparently even greater than that of Israel. The word *riš'āh,* which is a classical antonym for *ṣĕdāqāh,* probably means all the shortcomings of these nations that can possibly be enumerated, but chiefly their erroneous understanding of the nature of deity and their repugnant ways of worship (cf. 12:31). Fourthly, the record of past iniquity and punishment carries an implicit threat for the future, when Moses will no longer be alive to plead for mercy.

Some of these points are developed in chapter 11. Verses 1–9 recount how God's greatness was shown in his chastisement of Pharaoh and the leaders of the desert rebellion (vv. 1–7), thus providing a firm basis for an exhortation to obedience and a promise of prosperity (vv. 8–9). Verses 13–17 pledge copious rainfall in return for faithfulness, while apostasy may be scourged by drought: "... and the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and he shut up the heavens, so that there be no more rain, and the land yield no fruit, and you perish quickly off the good land which the Lord gives you" (v. 17). Finally, the speaker poses the alternatives: "Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day, and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods which you have not known" (11:26–28).

In the Code of special laws (chaps. 12–26), the theme of punishment is set in a framework of casuistic law; punishment is said to be mandatory for

[11] Regarding 9:7–10:11, see above all the Yahwist and Elohist reports in Exod 32–34.

the most diverse forms of aberration. There is therefore much diversity of substance, but a general similarity in literary structure and style. The first example is found in chapter 13, which contains instructions for the punishment of those who stray into apostasy. This chapter continues the theme of 12:29–31 and is divided into an introduction (v. 1) and three similarly composed sections: vv. 2–6, 7–12, and 13–19. In the introduction, the demand stated in 4:2 is repeated: the whole "word" is to be fulfilled. No invitation to turn and serve other gods is to be heeded, and any prophet who so misleads his countrymen is to be put to death (13:2–6). All who promote idolatry, even a human's nearest relatives, must die (13:7–12). City-dwellers who accept an invitation to idolatry must be put to the sword, and the spoil of their city burned in its open square, the site being then abandoned (13:13–16; cf. 17:2–7). The chapter ends: "None of the devoted things *(ḥērem)* shall cleave to your hand; that the Lord may turn from the fierceness of his anger, and show you mercy, and have compassion on you, and multiply you, as he swore to your fathers, if you obey the voice of the Lord your God, keeping all his commandments which I command you this day, and doing what is right in the sight of the Lord your God" (13:18–19).

In later chapters, the stipulations governing the death penalty are not of an immediately theological nature, except in 18:20–22, which concerns false prophets. All of them, however, are based on moral-theological presuppositions that demand the death penalty even in cases that do not seem grave in themselves. Demands for punishment usually end with the justification: "So you shall purge the evil from the midst of you (from Israel)" (13:6; 17:7, 12; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21, 22, 24; 24:7; cf. 19:13). 17:12 deals with the tribunal of the central sanctuary, requiring obedience to its verdicts under penalty of death: "The man who acts presumptuously, by not obeying the priest who stands to minister there before the Lord your God, or the judge, that man shall die; so you shall purge the evil from Israel." 19:12 demands death for those who murder their neighbour in hate. 19:16–21 prescribes that a false witness is to be punished in accordance with the *lex talionis:* "... then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother; so you shall purge the evil from the midst of you" (v. 19). In 19:21 the *lex talionis* appears in its classical literary form: "Your eye shall not pity; it shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot." In 21:21 the death penalty is mandatory for the rebellious and incorrigible son, in 22:21 for the newly-married wife found beyond doubt not to have been a virgin, in 22:22 for adultery, in 22:23–24 for the seduction of a betrothed virgin, in 22:25 for raping a betrothed woman, in 24:7 for a person who has stolen and sold into slavery a brother-Israelite. In every case, punishment is demanded only for those who have committed the offences specified, and the provisions of 24:16 confirm in principle the procedure adopted by the Code of special laws: "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor shall the children be put to death

for the fathers; every man shall be put to death for his own sin."

In the chapters of Deuteronomy that follow the Code of special laws, the predominant aspect of punishment is the curse: 27:14–26;[12] 28:15–68; 29:15–27; 30:15–19. The theme of iniquity followed by punishment is highlighted in the Song of Moses (32:1–43) and in the introduction to it (31:16–22, 24–30). These passages present considerable problems with regard to authorship and dating, being inconsistent with the characteristic themes and style of chapters 5–26 + 28. Here we are concerned, above all, with differences in the timing and aim of punishment. In chapters 5–26 + 28 both obedience and disobedience are regarded as alternative possibilities for the future, and linked to these are reward or punishment, blessing or curse. In the introduction to the Song of Moses, however, it is made clear that the people will certainly be unfaithful in the Promised Land, bringing down upon themselves God's anger: "Then my anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide my face from them, and they will be devoured; and many evils and troubles will come upon them, so that they will say in that day, 'Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?' And I will surely hide my face in that day on account of all the evil which they have done, because they have turned to other gods" (31:17–18; cf. 31:29). The aim of the Song of Moses is probably to testify against the sons of Israel (31:19–21, 28). The summoning up of the story of God's goodness—Israel's iniquity—punishment in the first part of the song (32:1–25) is consistent with this aim. And if the first part bears witness against Israel, the second testifies to God's revenge upon her enemies and to reconciliation with his covenanted people (vv. 36, 40–43).

3. *The Theological Significance of Rewards and Punishments*

It is obvious that the principle of retribution holds a central place in Deuteronomy; it also has certain special characteristics. The most noticeable of these is the importance of promise or assurance of reward for obedience to God's commandments. In chapters 4–26 + 28 the theme of reward occurs as frequently as that of punishment. The promise of the one and the threat of the other are proclaimed to a people who are about to enter the Promised Land and take possession of it. When they have done so, their fate will depend on faithfulness or unfaithfulness to the God who led them out of Egypt. The writer urges love of God and fidelity to his commandments with such ardour that it seems as if they are his sole concern. Identical or similar declarations of promises and threats occur again and again and he seems to

[12] It seems that the editor lifted the whole of chapter 27 from the liturgical tradition to insert it between chapters 26 and 28.

concentrate his all on these twin themes.

The promises and threats are usually general rather than specific, suggesting that the writer is greatly influenced by the wisdom tradition. He promises (long) life (4:1, 40; 5:16, 33; 6:2, 24; 8:1; 11:9, 21; 16:20; 22:7; 25:15; cf. 32:47), success (4:40; 5:16, 29; 6:3, 18, 24; 12:25, 28; 19:13; 22:7), blessing (11:27; 14:29; 15:4, 6, 10, 18; 23:21; 24:19; 28:1–14; 30:16, 19), possession of the land (4:1, 40; 6:18; 8:1; 11:8; 16:20; 25:15; cf. 32:47), multiplication of progeny (6:3; 8:1; 11:21), a long reign for the king (17:20), strength (11:8), and seasonal rain (11:14). In contrast, disobedience will mean extermination or destruction (6:15; 7:4, 10; 8:19–20; 11:17) and curse (11:28; 28:15–28). There are provisions for the death penalty in cases of unfaithfulness, seduction or apostasy (13:1–4; 17:2–7, 8–13; 18:20; 19:11–13, 16–21; 21:18–21; 22:20–27; 24:7). The future tense, characteristic of the didactic approach, and the general nature of what is said about reward or punishment, may create the impression that the writer sees the principle of retribution as an offshoot of absolute monotheism instead of deriving it from experience. We must, however, remember that the didactic husk has a kernel of rich historical experience. The writer does not rely solely on theological postulates characteristic of Hebrew monotheism during the classical period of Israel; he is also aware of the ebb and flow of faithfulness and unfaithfulness, of his people's prosperity and decline throughout their history. Injunctions for the future reflect the past, which is why historical retrospect occupies such an important place in Deuteronomy (cf. chaps. 1–3; 9:7–10:11; 29:1–8; 32:1–27, 49–52).

This emphasis on experience is undoubtedly one of the main reasons why the principle of retribution did not give rise to ideological dogmatism. Yet experience could not be decisive: the writer judges historical events in the light of God's absoluteness and holiness, and it follows that the principle of retribution is seen to operate as a divine law. The presentation of the history of Israel is theocentric even when the impression is given that it is anthropocentric. Deuteronomy makes clear that the people must not impute any virtue to themselves, for it was God who chose them through his propensity for love and fidelity, bringing them out of Egypt with a powerful hand (4:37; 6:21–23; 7:6–8; 9:29; 26:5–8). He chose them from among all the nations as his special possession (4:20, 37; 7:6; 10:14–15; 14:2; 26:18–19), and awarded them the land not on account of their own righteousness, but because of the iniquity of their rivals (9:1–6). It follows from all this that Israel's future will be possible only if she preserves a life-sustaining link with God—i.e., in obedience to his laws.

Obedience to these commandments does not bind God to any sort of *quid pro quo,* for it is entirely natural that a people should be loyal to their God in thanksgiving for his antecedent promises and deeds, which surpass any possible human desert. It is up to an obedient people to fulfil the prescribed conditions so that they may receive what was determined long ago. It follows from God's independence of human merit that success or calamity

does not always spring from obedience or disobedience. God's discipline may be due to his testing the trust of the people in his providence (8:2–5), and a gift of prosperity may serve to show his faithfulness to the promises given to earlier generations (8:18; cf. 4:37; 7:8).

Reward and punishment are twin options, but a third theme, that of renewal, is also important in Deuteronomy (4:29–31; 13:18; 30:1–10). The relationship between the three shows that all of them are conditional, and the possibility of renewal implies that punishment is, in its essence, not necessarily terminal. God shows mercy when he sees penitence, but he may also have regard to the intercession of a righteous mediator.[13] The promise of reward and the threat of punishment are expressed in general terms, and their timing, scale and nature remain unspecified for clear theological reasons. Reward and punishment are usually envisioned in the light of the people's final destiny; only exceptionally is immediate retribution demanded (7:10).[14]

How are the objective or external and the subjective or inner worlds related to each other in Deuteronomy? It is important to notice that God is not here presented as the Creator and absolute fashioner of the world's and of Israel's history, but rather as the personal God of the covenant. He singled out the people of Israel and bestowed his gifts upon them out of love (7:8, 13; 23:6; cf. 4:37; 10:15). Thus he demands more than obedience to codified laws from them; the climax of his argument lies in the words: "... and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (6:5). The promises of benefits and the threats of punishment are made in terms so general that they may sometimes denote ex-

[13] See the role of Moses' intercession in Exod 32–34 and Deut 9:7–10:11.

[14] J. G. Gammie, *CBQ* 32 (1970), 7–9, takes far too little account of these characteristics when talking of the anthropocentrism of the promise of reward for obedience in Deuteronomy. The same applies to J. Hempel, *Altes Testament und Geschichte* (SAS 27; Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1930), to whom Gammie refers. On pp. 15–22, Hempel distinguishes between "anthropozentrische Geschichtsbetrachtung" and "theozentrische Geschichtsbetrachtung." The former would mean that human activity *(das Handeln der Menschen)*, namely sin, conditions divine activity, namely punishment. That such a view is one-sided is evident from *inter alia* the explanation of the idea "theozentrische Geschichtsbetrachtung." According to Hempel, the theocentrism becomes effective with the theology of the covenant, which is itself a free divine decision to conclude a covenant with the fathers and with Israel, despite Israel's unfaithfulness. On p. 21, Hempel declares: "Theozentrische Geschichte ist Gottessieg über die Sünde." Among others, Hempel cites Paul's theology of election, but does not take into consideration the testimony of both Old and New Testaments that God preserves the covenant only with those who are faithful to him, while rejecting the faithless. Covenant with a certain people does not exist merely because of divine fidelity, but also on account of the faithfulness, belief, and penitence of the minority. Were the people of Israel ever completely and entirely to break the covenant, it seems self-evident that God would reject them utterly (cf. 1 Chr 28:9; 2 Chr 7:19–22), preferring to elect or create some other people. Ultimately, the chief sin of the world is disbelief, and because of this mankind's existence is always threatened. The problem of disbelief in the world is so prevalent that we find in the Gospel according to Luke the question: "Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (18:8). In relation to obstinate non-believers, it is possible to see God's victory in judging them, but not in preserving a covenant with them.

ternal and objective as much as inner and subjective realities. This is particularly true of the opposites life // perdition, blessing // curse. The Hebrew world-view does not perceive any dualism in material and spiritual realities, and would not have considered it appropriate to apply statements on blessing and punishment exclusively to this or that reality. God is active both as the Creator and Lord of the objective world and as the personal God of the covenant who contrives harmony among the many branches of his creation and instructs his people how to play their part in preserving this concord instead of destroying it. A full and complete life is only possible within the harmony between the two contrasting worlds. Of these, the personal and spiritual world is of course the higher, and personal and spiritual values are consequently much more important than material goods. When the writer of Deuteronomy urges his people with such ardour to love their God, he certainly does not expect to reap rewards that are primarily material; what he says derives from his own experience and evaluation of life in the profoundest personal and spiritual sense.

This precedence is also obvious when capital punishment is the prescribed penalty. Only rarely in such cases is the offence related to material goods; most frequently it concerns a human relationship to God or fellow people. Here guilt cannot be expiated by expropriation. Moreover, punishment cannot be postponed on the argument that the curse will automatically follow from the iniquity. There are at least two reasons for rejecting postponement. First, there is the conviction that shedding blood, breaking the covenant between God and his people, and other such evils lead to contamination of the human environment as a whole; on this view, purification is only possible at the cost of human life.[15] The commandment to banish or utterly destroy *(ḥērem)* pagan nations in the Holy War rests upon this assumption. Secondly, there is the indisputable fact that moral evil has an extremely adverse effect on others. These two points explain why so many provisions on capital punishment end with the justification: "So you shall purge the evil from the midst of you (from Israel)" (13:6; 17:7, 12; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21, 22, 24; 24:7; cf. 19:13, 20; 21:7). This justification is dictated by the high calling of God's people: they must be a "holy people" (7:6; 14:2, 21; 26:19; 28:9).[16]

[15] Cf. 21:22–23; 24:1–4; Lev 18:24–28; Num 35:33–34.

[16] J. G. Gammie, *CBQ* 32 (1970), 6–7, is too facile in deciding that the reason for the provisions on capital punishment lies in the destructive power of evil as such. On page 7 he argues: "What is presupposed, I submit, is that the consequences of the evil deed would so inevitably come back on the evil-doer and bring in its wake such a widespread destruction that many of society's innocent members would also suffer in the process." Gammie sees "an impersonal principle" in the background to retribution.

PART TWO

THE FORMER PROPHETS

The themes of punishment, reward, and forgiveness play a prominent role in the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. But any investigation of them is complicated by the fact that these texts underwent many alterations in the course of their transmission over a long period—especially concerning the text's perspectives. An examination of the editorial changes undertaken reveal a tendency to harmonize the interpretation of events with Yahwistic theological principles. In Joshua the possession of the Promised Land is seen as conditional on obedience to the law of Moses. In Judges a distinctive pattern is formed by the sequence sin / distress as a sign of punishment, which in turn leads to a cry of the people and to God's mercy. In Samuel and Kings recompense is connected with obedience to God's will or law. The clearest evidence of editorial changes can be found in the Deuteronomi(sti)c layers of the material. Since the Deuteronomistic treatment of the themes of reward, punishment, and forgiveness will, however, be examined in more depth elsewhere in the study, this section is limited to investigating the books of Joshua and Samuel.

Chapters 5 and 6 deal with two important issues in a larger framework: the holy war in the context of the traditions of the ancient Near East as well as the nature of confession in the Jewish traditions. Certain theological presuppositions distinguish the understanding of the holy war in the Hebrew Bible from other traditions in the Near East. The imperatives behind the holy war lie in the belief that God's authority over creation is supreme and that some values are more important than life itself, values which must be defended against attack. A holy war, therefore, was seen as serving the double function of protecting but by punishing: of protecting the chosen people and the Promised Land by punishing aggressors. The Hebrew Bible shows a gradual tendency to judge all events in terms of the basic attitude of Israel to God. Defeat and natural disasters are seen to be an expression of God's punishment for sin. Consequently, confessional formulas for the individual and for the community as a whole were developed for particular situations and for the liturgical celebration of Yom Kippur

One of the most important questions raised in this section is how the different fates of nations and of individuals, within those nations, can be reconciled, for example, the different fates of Israel and Saul and David? Is the promise of forgiveness moreover ever unconditional?

CHAPTER VIII

PUNISHMENT AND FORGIVENESS IN THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

According to the documentary hypothesis the book of Joshua is so closely connected with the five preceding books that it virtually extends the Pentateuch into a Hexateuch. In contrast, the fragmentary hypothesis postulates that Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings form a separate Deuteronomistic historical entity. Neither of these theories has gained general acceptance because neither can explain satisfactorily the literary and historical tensions between individual parts or units and the present canonical shape of the composition. There is notable disagreement in the assessment of two discrete parts of the book: chapters 1–12 dealing with the conquest and chapters 13–24 which cover the division of the land and life within it. In two respects, however, there is agreement between the two main views of the composition of the book: first, it is accepted that the account given of the conquest does not reflect historical facts; and secondly, the strong influence of a Deuteronomic editor is recognized.[1] Theological and

[1] In addition to standard introductions to the Old Testament, the following commentaries and studies are especially valuable: C. F. Keil, *Das Buch Josua* (BC II/1; 2nd ed.; Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1874); H. Holzinger, *Das Buch Josua* (KHC 6; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1901); C. Steuernagel, *Das Buch Josua* (HK I/3,2; 2nd ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1923); J. Garstang, *Joshua, Judges* (FBH; London: Constable, 1931); M. Noth, *Das Buch Josua* (HAT 7; 2nd ed.; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1953); P. D. Baldi, *Giosué* (SB; Rome / Turin: Marietti, 1952); H. W. Hertzberg, *Die Bücher Josua, Richter, Ruth* (ATD 9; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1953); J. Bright and J. R. Sizoo, *The Book of Joshua* (IntB 2; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1953), 539–673; J. Gray, *Joshua, Judges and Ruth* (CeB; London / Edinburgh: T. Nelson, 1967); J. A. Soggin, *Le Livre de Josué* (CAT V/a; Neuchâtel / Paris: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1970); English translation by R. A. Wilson, *Joshua: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1972); J. M. Miller and G. M. Tucker, *The Book of Joshua* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974); M. H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua* (NIC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 1981); R. G. Boling and G. E. Wright, *Joshua* (AB 6; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1982); T. C. Butler, *Joshua* (WBC 7; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1983); L. G. Stone, "Ethical and Apologetic Tendencies in the Redaction of the Book of Joshua," *CBQ* 53 (1991), 25–36; V. Fritz, *Das Buch Josua* (HAT I/7; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1994); K. Bieberstein, *Josua – Jordan – Jericho: Archäologie, Geschichte und Theologie der Landnahmeerzählungen Josua 1–6* (OBO 143; Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995); N. Winther-Nielsen, *A Functional Discourse Grammar of Joshua: A Computer-Assisted Rhetorical Structure Analysis* (CB.OT 40; Stockholm: Almquist & Wicksell, 1995); R. S. Hess, *Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC 6 Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996); L. L. Rowlett, *Joshua and the Rhetoric of Violence: A New Historicist Analysis* (JSOT.S 226; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); D. Merling, *The Book of Joshua: Its Theme and Role in Archeological Discussions* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1997); D. Jericke, *Die Landnahme in Negev: Protoisraelitische Gruppen im Süden Palästinas: Eine archäologische und exegetische Studie* (ADPV 20; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997).

ethical matters dominate the foreground so much that strictly historical and geographical elements have been relegated to the background.

What then is the key to a proper understanding of the book as a whole? There is general agreement that the main purpose of the book of Joshua is indicated in 1:6–9 and 23:6–16 (cf. Deut 30:19–20). The dominant theme is God's promise to the fathers concerning the Land. In Deuteronomy the fulfilment of divine promises is made dependent on Israel's obedience to the Mosaic law; disobedience would mean loss of the Land and the opening of a Pandora's box of curses. The same is true of Joshua. But how is the principle worked out in this book? Was the conquest the result of an unconditional divine promise, or was it, too, contingent upon Israel's obedience?

An answer to this question can be provided by the first and third major sections of the book: chapters 1–12 and 22–24; the intermediate chapters (13–21) form a continuous account of the apportionment of the Land, and the issue of obedience or disobedience very rarely arises.

1. *The Promise of the Land Is Fulfilled by Divine Mighty Acts and Judgment (Chapters 1–12)*

The first part of the book (chaps. 1–12) covers developments and activities within the community of the people of Israel. Ancient stories—spies in Jericho, the crossing of the Jordan, the Holy War, sacral judgment, etc.—were greatly revised and adapted. The dramatis personae, therefore, are not presented in their original forms but in exemplary, idealistic, and typological versions. The Deuteronomic editor supplied this portion of the book with an introduction (chap. 1) and a conclusion (chap. 12). Individual smaller units are often integrated into larger sections with the same or similar thematic concerns. The issues of sin, punishment, and forgiveness arise in all the chapters except 3 and 4. It is all the more striking that they are of no relevance in the second part of the book (chaps. 13–21).

1.1 *God's Plan and Human Cooperation (1:1–2:24)*

Chapter 1 serves as a transition between the books of Deuteronomy and Joshua and presents an introduction to the latter in two sections: God's address to the new leader Joshua (1:1–9), and Joshua's orders to the officers of the people (1:10–18). The first section uses a typically Deuteronomic vocabulary and rhetorical style and introduces several important motifs that will recur in subsequent chapters. It also concludes the series of narratives found in Deuteronomy concerning the role of Joshua after Moses' death (1:37–38; 3:21–22, 28; 31:2–8, 14–15, 23). The emphasis is on God's command to Joshua, who is called "Moses' minister" (1:1), that he should "go over this Jordan"

with his people and take possession of the Land which their God plans to give them (1:2; cf. Gen 12:7; 13:15; 15:18; 26:3–4); the Land which God promised to Moses (v. 3) and swore to their fathers they would receive it in possession (1:6). God assures them: "I will not fail you or forsake you" (1:5), but his exhortation in 1:7–8 makes it clear that success in the Promised Land depends on faithfulness to the law: "Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law *(kĕkol-hattôrāh)* which Moses my servant commanded you; turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success *(lĕma'an taśkîl)* wherever you go. This book of the law *(sēper hattôrāh hazzeh)* shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success *('āz taṣlîaḥ 'et-dĕrākekā wĕ'āz taśkîl).*" The injunction to hold fast to the law in order to succeed in practical matters recalls some passages in Deuteronomy (5:32–33; 6:1–3; 29:8; cf. 17:11, 20; 31:29), 1 Kgs 2:3, and the spiritual atmosphere of Psalm 1.

The second section of the introduction reports Joshua's address to the officers of the people (1:10–15) and their answering acknowledgments of Joshua's authority (1:16–18). Their leader passes on to them the command he has received from God. The key term in what is said of the Land, is however, the word *mĕnîaḥ,* 'rest, settle' (1:13, 15; cf. 11:23; 14:15; 21:44; 22:4; 23:1), which obviously signifies freedom from attack by surrounding enemies (see Deut 12:9; 25:19; 1 Kgs 8:56). It is obvious that Joshua's orders to the officers have to be interpreted against a background of the conditional nature of God's exhortation in 1:7–8. Ps 95:11; Heb 3:11; 4:1–13 link the promise of enjoying "rest" explicitly with obedience or faith. Heb 4:6–8 argues: "... those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience ... Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, that no one fall by the same sort of disobedience ..." Ps 132:8, on the other hand, exclaims: "Arise, O Lord, and go to thy resting place, thou and the ark of thy might."

The espionage story in chapter 2 and 6:22–25 represents an independent historical tradition that tells of the capture of Jericho by treachery; it seems to be based on an older version of the conquest than the parallel one attested by chapter 6, but was substantially elaborated as an entertaining etiological legend reflecting didactic interest. The emphasis is not on treachery but on God's providence which manifests itself in the guiding of two young Israelites to the first place in the Promised Land, and on Rahab's profession, which provides justification for her collaboration in the conquest of Jericho and an explanation of the survival of the Canaanites. The ironical emphasis on the prostitute's profession of faith (cf. Heb 11:31) is an obvious comment on Israel's lack of it. Rahab recognizes the unique authority of Israel's God and the divine plan concerning the Land that does not belong to the Canaanites: "... I know that the Lord has given you the land ... for the Lord your God is

he who is God in heaven above and on earth beneath" (2:9–11; cf. Jer 27:5–6). Her profession justifies her collaboration in the conquest, which in turn gives ground for her expectation of special treatment for her family: "Now then, swear to me by the Lord that as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father's house *(kî-'āśîtî 'immākem ḥāsed wa'āśîtem gam-'attem 'im-bêt 'ābî ḥesed),* and give me a sure sign *('ôt 'ĕmet)* ..." (2:12–13).

The spies swear that they will protect Rahab's family, but set the condition that she will not betray their purposes: "Our life for yours *(napšēnû taḥtêkem lāmût)!* If you do not tell this business of ours, then we will deal kindly and faithfully with you *(wĕ'āśînû ḥesed wĕ'ĕmet)* when the Lord gives us the land" (2:14). In response to Rahab's demand for a "sure sign" they require of her that she must carefully preserve the sign: "We will be guiltless *(nĕqiyyîm 'ănahnû)* with respect to this oath of yours which you have made us swear. Behold, when we come into the land, you shall bind this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down; and you shall gather into your house your father and mother, your brothers, and all your father's household. If any one goes out of the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be upon his head, and we shall be guiltless *(dāmô bĕrō'šô wa'ănahnû nĕqiyyîm);* but if a hand is laid upon any one who is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head *(dāmô bĕrō'šēnû).* But if you tell this business of ours, then we shall be guiltless *(wĕhāyînû nĕqiyyîm)* with respect to your oath which you have made us swear" (2:17–20). Blood guilt calls automatically for vengeance (cf. Gen 4:10), because "the blood is the life" (Deut 12:23).[2] In the framework of the etiological interest of the narrative, this idea reinforces the claim that the Israelites were obliged to spare and protect only those Canaanites who had treated Israel with kindness (cf. Deut 20:10–20).

1.2 *The Camp at Gilgal and the Fall of Jericho (5:2–6:27)*

This section contains four independent traditions: the circumcision at Gilgal (5:2–9), the celebration of the Passover at Gilgal (5:10–12), the appearance of "the commander of the army of the Lord" (5:13–15), and the conquest of Jericho (6:1–27). Circumcision recalls the liberation of the Israelites from oppression in Egypt, but also signals fitness for marriage (cf. Exod 4:24–26), and is a divinely ordained preparation for going to war, as well as a rite of initiation into the covenant community. Consequently, it is an indispensable precondition for eating the Passover meal (cf. Exod 12:43–51) and for taking part in the conquest of the Promised Land. The present literary setting of the

[2] This belief called for the covering of shed blood with earth or salt (cf. Judg 9:45).

passage, however, seems to reflect the condition of the Israelites in the land of captivity (Babylon), where they are ridiculed by the pagans but not deprived of hope that divine promises concerning the Promised Land will be kept.

It is noteworthy that the passage 5:2–9 is considerably shorter in the Septuagint version, and also displays some difference in its treatment of the circumcision of previous generations. The MT account, followed by Targum Jonathan, is based on the supposition that Joshua's task was not to introduce the rite of circumcision into Israel for the first time but to restore Israel to her previous state.[3] He receives God's command: "Make flint knives and circumcise the people of Israel again the second time *(wĕšûb mōl 'et-bĕnê-yiśrā'ēl šēnît)*" (5:2). The Septuagint has: "Make thee stone knives of sharp stone, and sit down *(kaì kathísas)* and circumcise the children of Israel the second time *(ek deutérou)*." In 5:4–6 the Deuteronomic historian indicates the reason for circumcision by Joshua: "All the males of the people who came out of Egypt, all the men of war, had died on the way in the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt. Though all the people who came out had been circumcised, yet all the people that were born on the way in the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt had not been circumcised. For the people of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the nation, the men of war that came forth out of Egypt, perished, because they did not hearken to the voice of the Lord; to them the Lord swore that he would not let them see the land which the Lord had sworn to their fathers to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey." In contrast to the claim in MT that "all the people who came out had been circumcised" but were denied admittance to the Promised Land because of their disobedience (cf. Num 13–14; Deut 1:19–46), the Septuagint specifically states that "most of the warriors were uncircumcised, who came out of Egypt, the ones who disobeyed the commandments of God." According to this version, the purpose of circumcision at Gilgal is not an idealistic restoration of Israel to her previous state after a disobedient generation has perished but purification of the generation that survived the Exodus: Joshua "purified *(periekátharen)* the Bene Israel: all who had been born on the way and all those who were uncircumcised at the Exodus from Egypt."[4] Since the purification implies atonement for the sin of neglect it provides a way forward—to restoration.

Before the conquest of Jericho begins, Joshua encounters someone who presents himself as "commander of the army of the Lord" (5:14; cf. Num 22:23, 31; 2 Sam 24:16–17; 2 Kgs 19:35; 1 Chr 21:15–16). Joshua is told: "Put off your shoes from your feet; for the place where you stand is holy" (5:15) and the narrator concludes: "And Joshua did so." The passage 5:13–

[3] The rite of circumcision had presumably been instituted by Abraham (cf. Gen 17:9–14, 22–27) and was practiced by Moses himself (cf. Exod 4:25–26).

[4] For the translation of the Septuagint version see R. G. Boling, *Joshua*, 193.

15 is a self-contained unit but serves as an introduction to the history of the conquest. The emphasis is on God's authority and initiative in the struggle and on Joshua's total obedience. The scene attests the dependence of Joshua upon Moses, for it is obviously a replica of the extraordinary encounter between "the angel of the Lord" and Moses reported in Exod 3:1–6.

As extraordinary as Joshua's encounter with the heavenly messenger is the conquest of Jericho (6:1–25). In order to emphasize that the conquest was the work of God the narrator goes beyond historical fact: Jericho, it seems, was captured within the framework of a liturgical procession. Save for Rahab and her household, the city is then given over destruction *(ḥērem),* and Joshua lays a curse upon any would-be rebuilder:

> *'ārûr hā'îš lipnê yhwh 'ăšer yāqûm ûbānāh 'et-hā'îr hazzō't 'et-yĕrîḥô bibkōrô yĕyassĕdennāh ûbiṣĕ'îrô yaṣṣîb dĕlātêhā,* Cursed before the Lord be the man that rises up and rebuilds this city, Jericho. "At the cost of his firstborn shall he lay its foundation, and at the cost of his youngest son shall he set up its gates" (6:26).

At this point one can reasonably ask: "Is it possible, since the cursing at Jericho is the culmination of the chapter, that it was from the outset the goal of the expedition and is thus the key to the whole story?"[5] This slant best explains why the application of *ḥērem* was so severe and also helps us to understand why the cursing of Jericho is unique in the Hebrew Bible,[6] although it also appears in 1 Kgs 16:34 in revised form: "In his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho; he laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the Lord, which he spoke by Joshua the son of Nun." Moreover, the structure and the literary function of the oath in Joshua shows that it must be understood in an absolute sense, for it is built up as a rhetorical figure of merism covering the *whole work* of reconstruction and the *whole posterity* of any reconstructor.[7] The writer of 1 Kgs 16:34 apparently did not understand the figurative nature of the oath, for he identifies indefinite opposing terms—first-born // youngest son, which in the original version represent the totality of posterity,—with the specific names of Hiel's sons.

The more the narrator emphasizes the severity of the commitment of Jericho to destruction, followed by the curse, the more the importance of sparing Rahab and her family becomes clear, not only in the context of the book of Joshua but also in the larger context of the Hebrew Bible. Their exemption

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[5] See R. G. Boling, *Joshua,* 214.

[6] For examples from other cultures, see S. Gevirtz, "Jericho and Shechem: A Religio-Literary Aspect of City Destruction," *VT* 13 (1963), 52–62.

[7] See C. F. Keil, *Das Buch Josua,* 52; H. Holzinger, *Das Buch Josua,* 18; C. Steuernagel, *Das Buch Josua,* 231; H. Muszyński, "Sacrificium fundationis in Jos 6,26 et 1 Reg 16,34?," *VD* 46 (1968), 259–274, esp. p. 267; J. Krašovec, "Merism—Polar Expression in Biblical Hebrew," *Biblica* 64 (1983), 233–234.

from the general mayhem has parallels in all other examples of restraint from total destruction: the accounts of the Flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, etc. It seems that in the framework of Hebrew theological presuppositions total devastation is unthinkable. When the generality is at risk there is always some reason for sparing a minority. The story of Rahab makes it possible to resolve the inconsistency between the sweeping nature of *ḥērem* and the fact that Jericho must have been settled in some later period (cf. Josh 18:21; 2 Sam 10:5). Those who remained could be explained as descendants of Rahab.

1.3 *Consequence of a Broken Covenant (7:1–8:29)*

It seems that this section is a combination of at least two independent traditions: the campaign against Ai and the Achan story associated with the ban on Jericho. The Deuteronomistic historian relates the episodes to the covenant with its moral and religious implications. The Ai narrative is split into two sections (7:2–5 and 8:1–29) by the Achan episode. The first section is characterized by the over-confidence of the spies sent by Joshua to explore the land: "Let not all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai; do not make the whole people toil up there, for they are but few" (7:3). The result of this attitude was humiliating defeat, "and the hearts of the people melted, and became as water" (7:4–5). In the context of the Deuteronomistic historical interpretation such a debacle was understood as punishment inflicted by God. But for what offence? The compiler does not consider either self-confident human planning against the background of divine purpose, or Joshua's lack of sound military judgment responsible, but associates the incident with the disregard of the ban on Jericho and introduces the story of sacral procedure against Achan. It seems that the old and true story of Achan's offence and punishment was used to show that only after the restitution of the violated order was Joshua's army successful in conquering Ai (8:1–29). We may conclude with J. A. Soggin: "This has now become the model and pattern of such incidents: the obedience of faith is the only thing which can give victory to Israel, while disobedience leads to disaster."[8]

The main emphasis of the section is indicated by the introductory statement: "But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things *(wayyim'ălû bĕnê-yiśrā'ēl ma'al baḥērem);* for Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things *(min-haḥērem);* and the anger of the Lord burned against the people of Israel" (7:1). It is noteworthy that the word *mā'al,* 'to act unfaithfully, treacherously,' by definition relates to personal relationships; Josh 7:1 is the only pas-

[8] See *Joshua,* 103.

sage in which the ban refers to a thing rather than to a person. It is obvious, then, that the ban represents the divine-human relationship and relates to the covenant alliance. The motif of "the anger of the Lord"—burning or kindled against a particular person or community—is a basic theme of the Deuteronomistic history (cf. Deut 6:15; 7:4; 11:17; 29:26; 31:17; Josh 23:16; Judg 2:14, 20; 3:8; 10:7; 2 Sam 6:7; 24:1; 2 Kgs 13:3; 23:26). The account of the defeat at Ai (7:2–5) shows that it was considered a manifestation of God's anger.

Defeat at the beginning of Israel's attempt to enter the Promised Land was symbolically significant. Joshua and the elders of Israel are grief-stricken, and their response of humility matches both the expected attitude of the faithful and the rite of mourning: "Then Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the Lord until the evening, he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust upon their heads" (7:6). In 7:7–9 Joshua expresses his dismay and prayer to God in terms that are reminiscent of many psalms of lament, and God reveals the true reason for the incident: "Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant *(ḥāṭā' yiśrā'ēl wĕgam 'ābĕrû 'et-bĕrîtî)* which I commanded them; they have taken some of the devoted things *(wĕgam lāqĕḥû min-haḥērem);* they have stolen, and lied, and put them among their own stuff ... Up, sanctify the people *(qum qaddēš 'et-hā'ām)* ... And he who is taken with the devoted things shall be burned with fire, he and all that he has, because he has transgressed the covenant of the Lord *(kî 'ābar 'et-bĕrît yhwh),* and because he has done a shameful thing *(nĕbālāh)* in Israel" (7:11–15). The word *nĕbālāh* denotes insensitivity to moral and religious claims (cf. Gen 24:7; Judg 19:23). The emphasis is on the need for the people to sanctify themselves, for that is the only way of escape from the curse.

Next day Joshua supervises the identification of the guilty person by casting the sacred lot. When Achan of the tribe Judah is "taken" (7:16–18) Joshua urges him to "give glory to the Lord God of Israel, and render praise to him" by telling the truth (7:19). Achan confesses his guilt: "Of a truth I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and this is what I did: when I saw among the spoil a beautiful mantle from Shinar, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing fifty shekels, then I coveted them, and took them, and behold, they are hidden in the earth inside my tent, with the silver underneath" (7:21). A confession of guilt and of the justice of God is the prerequisite both for a sentence of punishment and for the granting of forgiveness. Achan's confession sounds so complete that one looks for the latter; but the offence involved the accursed things *(ḥērem)* and that meant contagion. Consequently, the whole family as well as the possessions of the guilty man (even his tent) were exposed to the collective wrath of the community (cf. Deut 13:15–16). Everyone and everything were stoned and burned (7:22–26). In this context Joshua's sentence of *lex talionis* and his use of word-play (7:25) are especially noteworthy: *meh 'ākartānû ya'korkā yhwh bayyôm hazzeh,* "Why did you bring trouble on us? The Lord brings

trouble on you today." It seems that this word-play was evoked by the name Achor.[9] It is generally recognized that the final form of the narrative offers an etiological explanation for the existence of a mound of stones in the Valley of Achor that was still visible in the author's day. The narrative is obviously didactic in intent.

The story as a whole shows clearly enough what is intended by the divine insistence in 7:13 that the people must sanctify themselves. Once the guilty person had been identified, the sin confessed, and the appropriate penalty exacted, the contaminated land was cleansed; "then the Lord turned from his burning anger" (7:26). It is justifiable to claim that the story of Achan "displays the tension between individual guilt and corporate responsibility to Yahweh."[10] All the more so as the divine revelation of Israel's sin in vv. 11–13 is expressed in the plural form. The only satisfactory explanation of this tension seems to be the multiple evidence that the story does not reflect the doctrine of collective retribution but a special understanding of *ḥērem* in the sense of plague-bearing contamination.[11] J. A. Soggin is right in his conclusion: "There is nothing here which suggests that a collective fault has priority over individual guilt ... The sole remedy is the identification and punishment of the guilty person."[12]

The identification of the offender by drawing lots is reminiscent of the much earlier narrative of Jonathan's infringement of the taboo imposed by Saul (1 Sam 14:24–45). Nevertheless, the two cases are fundamentally different: Achan's violation of *ḥērem* is deliberate and his punishment is therefore justified; indeed, in view of the alleged contamination, it is indispensable. Joshua was authorized by God to act as he did. Jonathan's infringement, on the other hand, was inadvertent. But the crucial difference is the fact that Saul was not commissioned by God to lay an oath on the people or to cast lots. Both actions stemmed from his self-will, and his attitude does not reflect genuine belief in God but superstition. Therefore God "did not answer

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[9] See R. G. Boling, *Joshua,* 228.

[10] See R. G. Boling, *Joshua,* 220.

[11] See the statement by J. R. Porter, "The Legal Aspects of the Concept of 'Corporate Personality' in the Old Testament," *VT* 15 (1965), 372: "... his punishment was of the extremist kind, the sort of action which, in the modern world, would be taken against a disease rather than against an individual criminal. What is holy contagiously infects everything that has had contact with it, in this case Achan's household and possessions, and therefore they must be treated as suffering from the dicease also."

[12] See *Joshua,* 97. R. G. Boling, *Joshua,* 227–228, identifies well to the point, too, when he argues: "Attempts to rationalize this story in terms of the 'corporate personality' of the one and the many, a distinctive ancient idea of solidarity in sin and salvation, are not very convincing. While the OT has great texts concerning the grace of vicarious suffering, and atonement, this is not one of them. But neither should it be used as a foil for such texts. Here it appears rather to be a serious problem of physical contamination and disease which becomes possible through the offence of Achan ... This execution does not reflect excessive and disproportionate retaliatory 'justice' but a serious concern for public health."

him that day" (1 Sam 14:37), and "the people ransomed Jonathan, that he did not die" (1 Sam 14:45).

1.4 *Destruction of Hostile Coalitions and the Covenant with the Gibeonites (9:1–11:23)*

This section presents the contrast between the actions of the majority of the Canaanites and the behaviour of the Gibeonites: Canaan's kings exhibit a spirit of resistance, the inhabitants of Gibeon one of fearful submission. A brief summary introduces chapters 9–11: "When all the kings who were beyond the Jordan in the hill country and in the lowland all along the coast of the Great Sea toward Lebanon, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, heard of this, they gathered together with one accord to fight Joshua and Israel" (9:1–2). Gibeon, however, underwent a change of heart on learning what had happened to Jericho and Ai, and sued for peace (9:3–27), which moved Adonizedek king of Jerusalem to form a southern coalition against Gibeon: "Come up to me, and help me, and let us smite Gibeon; for it has made peace *(šālôm)* with Joshua and with the people of Israel" (10:4). After this coalition had been utterly destroyed by Joshua (10:6–43), Jabin king of Hazor formed—equally vainly—a northern coalition (11:1–15). In 10:42 we find the explanation of Joshua's success: "And Joshua took all these kings and their land at one time, because the Lord God of Israel fought for Israel."

Even more striking is the narrator's argument in his summary of Joshua's military achievements in 11:16–23: "There was not a city that made peace with the people of Israel, except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon; they took all in battle. For it was the Lord's doing to harden *(lĕḥazzēq)* their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle, in order that they should be utterly destroyed *(lĕma'an haḥărîmām),* and should receive no mercy *(tĕḥinnāh)* but be exterminated, as the Lord commanded Moses" (11:19–20). The key to the resolution of this paradox is found at the end of the summary: "So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the Lord had spoken to Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal allotments. And the land had rest from war" (11:23). The emphasis placed on the idea that the conquest of the Land was determined and engineered by God unavoidably results in a clash between the divine will and the self-will of human rulers. The characteristic Hebrew theological presuppositions and the nature of human reaction to the supreme divine authority makes it evident that God did not harden the hearts of the Canaanites *directly* but *indirectly,* i.e., through the plan to bestow the Land on the tribes of Israel, thus giving occasion for a manifestation of their rebellious attitude—something characteristic of human beings.

Sandwiched between accounts of hostile coalitions is a section dealing

with the conduct of the Gibeonites and their status *vis-à-vis* Israel (9:3–27).[13] The Gibeonites did not join a coalition but "acted with cunning" (9:4) to create favourable conditions for their proposal: "We have come from a far country; so now make a covenant with us *(kirtû-lānû bĕrît)*" (9:6). The elders of Israel, however, were suspicious: "Perhaps you live among us; then how can we make a covenant with you?" (9:7). The Gibeonites' claim that they belonged to "a far country" and Israel's suspicion relate to the stipulations of Deut 7 and 20:10–18: Israel was allowed to form alliances with distant peoples, but the Canaanites had to be destroyed. According to the Deuteronomistic historian, however, the Gibeonites supported their proposal of alliance with acceptable theological arguments: "From a very far country your servants have come, because of the name of the Lord your God; for we have heard a report of him, and all that he did in Egypt, and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, Sihon the king of Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who dwelt in Ashtaroth ..." (9:9–11). The climax of the narrative contains a direct condemnation of Israel's trafficking with the Gibeonites: "So the men partook of their provisions, and did not ask direction from the Lord. And Joshua made peace with them, and made a covenant with them, to let them live, and the leaders of the congregation swore to them" (9:14–15).

Only three days later the Israelites found out that the Gibeonites "were their neighbours and that they dwelt among them" (9:16). Nevertheless, they "did not kill them, because the leaders of the congregation had sworn to them by the Lord, the God of Israel. Then all the congregation murmured against the leaders" (9:18).[14] The leaders were obliged to ratify the agreement, emphasizing that an oath cannot be broken: "We have sworn to them by the Lord, the God of Israel, and now we may not touch them. This we will do to them, and let them live, lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath which we swore to them" (9:19–20).[15] "Let them live," Israel's leaders insisted, but reduced them to the status of "hewers of wood and drawers of water for all the congregation" (9:21). Joshua then summoned the Gibeonites to condemn them formally and to pronounce judgment on their deceit: "Why did you deceive us, saying, 'We are very far from you,' when you dwell among us? Now therefore you are cursed *(wĕ'attāh 'ārûrîm 'attem)*, and some of you shall always be slaves, hewers of wood and drawers of

[13] Apart from the commentaries see especially J. M. Grintz, "The Treaty of Joshua with the Gibeonites," *JAOS* 86 (1966), 113–126.

[14] See the remark by T. C. Butler, *Joshua,* 104: "Here the wilderness motif has been turned upside down, for in the wilderness the leaders were justified, while the congregation was guilty. Here the congregation is justified, while the leaders are at fault."

[15] See the remark of T. C. Butler, *Joshua,* 104: "The ironic note here is that the oath was sworn in the name of Yahweh, and thus binding, though the action had been carried through without consulting Yahweh."

water for the house of my God" (9:22–23). The frightened Gibeonites bowed to the decision of Israel's God and to her authority.

What was the justification for this leniency in the face of deception? Can an oath be considered inviolable in such circumstances? The account is self-explanatory in this regard: first, the deception is *not directed against God and against Israel* but prepares the way for peace in a spirit of submission to God's will and Israel's authority. The Gibeonites resort to deception as a way out of their weak position; it is in fact their only weapon against a stronger invader, and the divinely sanctioned oath their surest protection. Secondly, the making of the covenant is attributable not only to Gibeon's deception but also to Israel's failure to "ask direction from the Lord"; so both sides share the guilt. Thirdly, the Gibeonites' lives are spared because of the oath, but they are "cursed"—i.e., condemned to an inferior position—because of their trickery. Fourthly, in the background lies the fundamental theological idea that God spares those that fear him, even the most unworthy in human eyes (cf. the sparing of the prostitute Rahab in chap. 2). But above all other considerations towers an awareness that the oath sworn by the God of Israel, is inviolable; the Lord is absolutely faithful and cannot be deceived.

Many exegetes compare the cunning of the Gibeonites with the deception of Jacob recorded in Gen 27. In fact, the justification of the validity of Isaac's blessing in spite of Jacob's deception rests on similar grounds, even though the circumstances differ. The most significant point is that Jacob's duplicity is not directed against God and does not affect the "natural" rights of his father Isaac or his brother Esau, whose right of the first-born is not based on natural law but on convention.[16] Rebekah takes this fact into account when she instructs Jacob for his appearance before Isaac in order to secure his blessing. And Isaac offers no argument against Jacob after his discovery of the latter's deceit; he could not "curse" him on similar grounds to those used by Joshua against Gibeon. On the contrary, Isaac finds no better answer to Esau's question: "Have you but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father" (27:38) than an imposition of submission: "... and you shall serve your brother ..." (27:39–40).

To illustrate the question of deception let us consider the chain of deceptions and counter-deceptions in the Succession Narrative in 2 Sam 9–20 and 1 Kgs 1–2.[17] The key to a proper assessment of this literary and theological

[16] See C. Westermann, *Genesis: Kapitel 12–36* (BK.AT I/2; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981), 541: "Das Privileg der Erstgeburt, verbunden mit dem Sterbebettsegen des Vaters, zerbricht mit der Ausweitung des kleinen, geschlossenen Familienkreises in größere Weiten, in denen neue, andere Faktoren das Schicksal bestimmen." It is safe to argue that this argument is the heart of the issue. Most other exegetes seek the key to the problem in speculations that cannot answer the main theological and moral question.

[17] See H. Hagan, "Deception As Motif and Theme in 2 Sam 9–20; 1 Kgs 1–2," *Biblica* 60 (1979), 301–326.

masterpiece is to distinguish *between evil and good deceptions.* The deceitful and foolish use deception in furthering their desire for women (David, Amnon, Absalom, Adonijah) or possessions (Absalom, Adonijah), thus undermining the natural law and social order. Since they are in power and menace innocent people, Providence institutes counter-deceptions in order to restore the balance. The defenders of law and proper order (Nathan, the woman of Tekoa, David in flight before Absalom, Hushai) act from a position of weakness.

It is true that Jacob and the Gibeonites are not driven by deception to use such countervailing tactics. But the very reason for their position of weakness seems to justify their behaviour: the right of the first-born conferred upon Esau privileges regardless of his merits; and the same is true of God's promise to give the Land to the Israelites. Both Jacob and the Gibeonites were searching for a place in the sun and, since they complied in general with the will of God, they were permitted to achieve their goal, within the framework of God's design for history, through deception.

The covenant concluded between Israel and the Gibeonites is recorded in the account of the famine and the Gibeonite revenge during the reign of David (2 Sam 21:1–14). This fact corroborates the historical veracity of the underlying narrative relating to the alliance between the two parties. The narrative in 2 Sam 21:1–14 is based on the age-old requirement that the blood that has been shed falls upon the murderer (cf. Deut 19:10; Judg 9:24; 2 Sam 1:16; 16:8; Hos 12:15). Plagued by the famine for three years "David sought the face of the Lord" and learned by an oracle: "There is bloodguilt *(haddāmîm)* on Saul and on his house, because he put the Gibeonites to death" (21:1). The Septuagint differs slightly: "There is guilt upon Saul and his house because of his bloody murder, whereby he slew the Gabaonites." Targum Jonathan has: "*Because of Saul and because of the house of those guilty of killing, because he killed* the Gibeonites."[18] The narrator comments: "Although the people of Israel had sworn to spare them, Saul had sought to slay them in his zeal for the people of Israel and Judah" (21:2b). This information about the violation of the covenant between Israel and the Gibeonites by Saul refers to events not recorded elsewhere.

David is aware that atonement is necessary, so he asks the Gibeonites: "What shall I do for you? And how shall I make expiation *(bammāh 'ăkappēr),* that you may bless the heritage of the Lord?" (21:3). They suggest a gruesome atonement: "The man who consumed us and planned to destroy us, so that we should have no place in all the territory of Israel, let seven of his sons be given to us, so that we may hang them up before the Lord at Gibeon on the mountain of the Lord" (21:5–6). David agrees. "But the king

[18] See D. J. Harrington and A. J. Saldarini, *Targum Jonathan of the Former Prophets* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987).

spared *(wayyaḥmōl hammelek)* Mephibosheth, the son of Saul's son Jonathan, because of the oath of the Lord which was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul" (21:7; cf. 1 Sam 18:3; 20:17, 42; 23:18).

On what grounds can the obviously primitive notion of expiation through blood-vengeance be properly evaluated? Does it reflect an underlying *doctrine of collective responsibility*? Some exegetes point to the "parallel" in the Plague Prayers of Muršiliš, the Hittite king (c. 1340–1310).[19] It is true that the situation and the action of Muršiliš are to some extent reminiscent of those recorded in 2 Sam 21:1–14: the land is stricken by a plague for twenty years; the plague is considered an expression of the anger of the gods; the king consults an oracle and learns that the Hattians, who were under oath to the Hattian Storm-god owing to a treaty between them and Egypt made under his father, had ignored their obligations and broken their oath. The similarity between the two documents, however, extends only to the search for the cause of the plague. Thereafter the prayer of Muršiliš goes its own way (lines 6–11): the king cries to the Storm-god for mercy; he confesses that his father had sinned and transgressed against the word of the Hattian Storm-god, and the father's sin has fallen upon him; by confessing the father's sin he hopes for mercy, but the Storm-god is not pacified; since the king's supplication is not granted, he concludes that it is not clear why his people are dying and urges: "let that be found out!"

A thorough comparison between the biblical and the Hittite passages shows clearly enough that there is no justification for assuming that they represent "doctrines" of causality or of collective responsibility. Muršiliš and David, being in distress, surmise that past violation of an oath is the reason for a present plague. Muršiliš is, in the end, not at all sure about the oracle's validity; and David, for his part, might have misinterpreted the link of causality. Even more significant is the methodological consideration: *one swallow does not make a summer*—a single subjective interpretation of a past event cannot establish *doctrine*!

There are at least two fundamental arguments that negate the idea that the passages in question sustain a particular doctrine: first, guilt is not the only possible reason for plague, just as the book of Job is not the only document to record that many unpleasant things happen to human beings regardless of their righteousness or wickedness. Secondly, the demand for expiation through blood-vengeance is a human concept, completely incompatible with fundamental biblical theological presuppositions.

Equally problematic is the question of atonement for the guilt of ances-

[19] See A. Malamat, "Doctrines of Causality in Hittite and Biblical Historiography: A Parallel," *VT* 5 (1955), 1–12, who claims that there is a striking parallel between the Plague Prayers of Mursilis and Josh 9:1–27 + 2 Sam 21:1–14. Some recent commentaries adopt his conclusions. For a translation of "Plague Prayers of Mursilis," see A. Götze, *ANET*, 394–396.

tors. The method of expiation proposed by the Gibeonites and accepted by David is horrifying, and wholly at variance with the spirit of the prophets. Micah, for instance, asks: "Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" (6:7b). All the more is it necessary to ask such questions in relation to ancestral transgressions.

2. *Concern over Faithfulness in the Promised Land (Chapters 22–24)*

Substantial passages dealing with the conquest and allocation of the Promised Land are rounded out with Deuteronomistic statements that God "gave to Israel all the land which he swore to give to their fathers," that he "gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers," and that "not one of all the good promises which the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass" (21:43–45). This is followed by the concluding section which is mainly concerned with the response of the people of Israel.

2.1 *Building of an Altar by the Jordan Becomes a Bone of Contention (22:1–34)*

Chapter 22 tells the old story of the altar at the Jordan (vv. 9–34) after a preparatory passage (vv. 1–8). The present state of vv. 1–8 is part of the historical framework of Deuteronomistic history. Joshua's exhortation to the Transjordan tribes (vv. 1–5) is the complement of 1:12–18, while vv. 6–8 seem to combine various stages of editorial modification. The emphasis here is on the faithfulness and obedience of the Transjordan tribes, and the reward of faithfulness is "rest."[20]

All the more striking are charges of unfaithfulness brought against them by the Cisjordan tribes, occasioned by the building of an altar "large for seeing" by the Jordan (v. 10). The Cisjordan tribes gather at Shiloh "to make war against them" (v. 12). But there they decide to appoint an investigation commission consisting of "Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest" (cf. Exod 6:25; Num 25:7; 14:1; 19:51; 21:1) and the ten chiefs of the nine and a half Cisjordan tribes. The accusation of "the whole congregation of the Lord" is expressed in 22:16–18:

> What is this treachery which you have committed *(māh-hamma'al hazzeh 'ăšer mĕ'altem)* against the God of Israel in turning away *(lāšûb)* this day from following the Lord, by building yourselves an altar this day in rebellion against the Lord? Have we not had enough of the sin at Peor from which even yet we have not cleansed ourselves, and for which there came a plague upon

[20] See the statement by T. C. Butler, *Joshua*, 245: "The important point for the editor here is that the East Jordan tribes were obeying Yahweh and the Mosaic commandments."

> the congregation of the Lord, that you must turn away *(wĕ'attem tāšubû)* this day from following the Lord? And if you rebel against the Lord today he will be angry with the whole congregation of Israel tomorrow.

The charge of treachery and rebellion clearly manifests the standpoint of the Priestly editor in the light of the law of cult unification (cf. Deut 12:1–32). In Deut 12 the emphasis lies on the commandment: "You shall seek the place which the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there; thither you shall go, and thither you shall bring your burnt offerings and your sacrifices ..." (12:5–6; cf. vv. 11, 14, 18). The narrative of Josh 22 is based on the Shiloh tradition. It is taken for granted that only the sanctuary of Shiloh can be a proper place of sacrificial worship; there the symbol of God's presence is the Ark of the Covenant. The altar erected near Jordan is considered illegitimate, and the punishment expected is the bringing into operation of curses for covenant violation.

The threat of punishment is illustrated by two fresh examples: first, "the sin of Peor" (22:17; cf. Num 25:1–18; Deut 4:3); secondly, the crime of Achan (22:20; cf. Josh 7:1–26). Phinehas plays a unique intermediary role leading to reconciliation both in the Peor incident and in the assumed rebellion of the Transjordan tribes. The apostasy to the Moabite idol "Baal of Peor" took place on the east bank of the lower Jordan valley, where the Israelites "began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab" (Num 25:1). God's anger at the apostasy dictates to Moses—unusually—the divinely ordained punishment that would achieve propitiation: "Take all the chiefs of the people, and hang them in the sun before the Lord, that the fierce anger of the Lord may turn away from Israel" (Num 25:4; cf. 2 Sam 21:6, 9). Moses, however, instructed the judges of Israel that those who were actually guilty should be punished: "Every one of you slay his men who have yoked themselves to Baal of Peor" (25:5). Phinehas vigorously opposed apostasy and punished the specific offence of an Israelite and a Midianite woman by killing them both (25:7–8a). "Thus," concludes the narrator, "the plague was stayed from the people of Israel" (25:8b). Phinehas is rewarded by "the covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God, and made atonement *(wayĕkappēr)* for the people of Israel" (25:13).

Do the episodes of Num 25:1–18 and Josh 22:16–18 illustrate a "corporate feeling" that existed in ancient Israel?[21] The exhortation of Josh 22:19–20 can shed some light on the question:

> But now, if your land is unclean *('im-ṭĕmē'āh 'ereṣ)*, pass over into the Lord's land where the Lord's tabernacle stands, and take for yourselves a possession among us; only do not rebel against the Lord, or make us as rebels by building yourselves an altar other than the altar of the Lord our God. Did not Achan the

[21] See the claim of J. M. Miller and G. M. Tucker, *The Book of Joshua*, 172: "The idea of corporate guilt is taken for granted."

> son of Zerah commit a treacherous violation of the ban *(hălō' 'ākān ben-zeraḥ mā'al ma'al baḥērem)*? And wrath fell upon all the congregation of Israel? And he did not perish alone for his iniquity.

It is likely that the key to the correct interpretation is provided by the phrase: "But now, if your land is *unclean.*" It is justifiable to assume that it reflects something more than a "primitive conception" that only what lay west of the Jordan constituted the Holy Land. The tribes of the west bank may have concluded that the east bank had become unclean because of the treachery and rebellion of the two and a half tribes dwelling there. Consequently, they thought, just as Achan's treachery contaminated the entire camp, their violation of the covenant would infect the whole congregation of the Lord. To break the covenant means to destroy the very foundation of the community of God and the chosen people. It is, then, not so much a matter of "corporate feeling" or "corporate sin" as of "natural law" that such treachery must necessarily affect those who are not guilty.[22]

This much can be concluded from the long defensive speech by the Transjordan tribes about their religious intentions (Josh 22:21–29) and the commendation of the board of inquiry (22:30–34). In 22:22–23 the accused tribes call for God's intervention in the form of self-judgment, beginning with a solemn vow:

> The Mighty One, God, the Lord! The Mighty One, God, the Lord, He knows; and let Israel itself know! If it was in rebellion or in breach of faith toward the Lord, do not save us today *('al-tôšî'ēnî hayyôm)* for building an altar to turn away from following the Lord; or if we did so to offer burnt offerings or cereal offerings or peace offerings on it, may the Lord himself take vengeance *(šĕlāmîm yhwh hû' yĕbaqqēš).*

After having explained that the altar is a copy of the altar of the Lord and will serve as an inanimate witness of the covenant of the sacral community of all twelve tribes of Israel, on both sides of the Jordan the tribes, so far from being indicted for a breach of covenant, are praised by the members of the commission appointed by the Cisjordan tribes: "Today we know that the Lord is in the midst of us, because you have not committed this treachery against the Lord; now you have saved the people of Israel from the hand of the Lord" (22:31b). There is no more talk of the "uncleanness" of the Transjordan region, and the idea of passing over the Jordan "into the Lord's land" is neither expressed nor implied. Now it becomes evident that the reference to the sin of Peor (22:17) and the episode of Achan (22:20) was hyperbole.[23]

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[22] The command in Num 25:4 (cf. 2 Sam 21:6, 9) reflects, of course, an unusual way of seeing a solution for a situation of "curse." It may represent a remnant of a common ancient "primitive conception" but does not comply with Hebrew theological presuppositions.

[23] In the end, we may accept the view of R. G. Boling, *Joshua,* 510, concerning 22:9–34: "Here the total configuration is obviously not characteristic of P. It is, rather, a caricature of some major priestly preoccupations, such as genealogy and tribal identity."

2.2 *The Last Words of Joshua (23:1–16)*

This chapter "gives the conclusion of the Deuteronomic edition of the narrative of the conquest."[24] It gathers together the themes characteristic of the book as a whole, but also introduces elements relating to the making of the covenant.[25] After Israel is granted "rest," Joshua, now old, calls an assembly of Israel (where is not mentioned). The aim of his words is to persuade the people that their only appropriate response to the God who has fought for them (cf. 23:3) is utter loyalty to him and his law. Consequently, all assimilation is refused.

The exhortation "cleave to the Lord your God as you have done to this day" (23:8) for once indicates a positive evaluation of Israel's past attitude to God. Equally surprising is the optimistic statement concerning God's promises: "... not one thing has failed of all the good things which the Lord your God promised concerning you; all have come to pass for you, not one of them has failed" (23:14). The past serves as a basis for instructions concerning the guidance of Israel in future. According to the characteristic Deuteronomistic conditional view of God's grace to Israel (cf. 1:1–9) the fulfilment of God's promises concerning the Land is conditional upon the keeping of the covenant:

> But just as all the good things which the Lord your God promised concerning you have been fulfilled for you, so the Lord will bring upon you all the evil things, until he have destroyed you from off this good land which the Lord your God has given you, if you transgress the covenant of the Lord your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them. The anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and you shall perish quickly from the good land which he has given to you (23:15–16).

It seems that the optimistic evaluation of Israel's past attitude to her God is conditioned by the historical situation. The prevailing view is that these words were addressed to the exiles in Babylon. The threat of a reversal of God's attitude sounds like a *vaticinium ex eventu:* it reflects the dire reality of the present situation, which is generally considered a result of Israel's infidelity. If this interpretation is correct the early period in the Promised Land appears much more positive than it actually was, and the conditional model of exhortation // threat reflects a paradox of unconditional assumption about God's way with Israel: even the Exile does not mean that God has rejected his people; even in the present situation the covenant can be renewed and Israel's lost position regained if she is willing to follow the Lord as her fathers did in the time of Joshua. So Josh 23 is the theological explanation not only of the conditional nature of God's grace to Israel but also of God's profound at-

[24] See J. A. Soggin, *Joshua,* 217.

[25] See K. Baltzer, *Das Bundesformular* (WMANT 4; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1960), 71–73.

tachment to her. In the final analysis, the divine promise cannot be retracted.

2.3 *Covenant at Shechem (24:1–28)*

The passage 24:1–28 seems to be a later appendix to the book of Joshua. It follows the pattern of some of the last words and deeds of Moses as reported in the book of Deuteronomy. In contrast to 8:30–35[26] and 23:1–16, however, which are basically Deuteronomic in origin, it is obviously based upon very old oral or written traditions. The basic narrative reflects institutions of Israel's primitive tribal league and the liturgical practices of ancient covenant ceremonies.[27] There are good reasons for regarding it as representative of a particular genre of poetry—namely, poetic narrative.[28] Its structure takes the form of a dialogue, which underscores its strict literary unity.[29] We can divide the passage as follows: introduction (vv. 1–2a); the historical summary describing the patriarchal period (vv. 2–4), the Egyptian period (vv. 5–7), and conflict with the nations (vv. 8–13); the dialogue (vv. 14–24); the making of the covenant (vv. 25–28).

For the purposes of this book the dialogue section (vv. 14–24) is highly significant. It is introduced by the particle *wĕ'attāh:* "Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River, and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. And if you be unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (v. 14–15). Since the historical summary takes it for granted that Israel's ancestors worshipped pagan deities, the particle has an adversative function. In the light of history Joshua challenges the people to make a fundamental choice. "The emphasis is on the effort to motivate, to encourage the folk to an internal consent, a resolution to be faithful, and to elicit a firm public affirmation of this."[30]

The answer of the people is strongly affirmative: "Far be it from us that

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[26] Josh 8:30–36 treats of the same events at Shechem as chap. 24. Both passages reflect the significance of Shechem in the historical tradition of ratification of the covenant. Josh 8:30–36 relates especially to instructions given in Deut 11:29–30; 27:2–8, 11–14. The emphasis is on "the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the book of the law" (Josh 8:34; cf. Deut 11:29; 27:12–13).

[27] See especially K. Baltzer, *Das Bundesformular,* 29–37; L. Perlitt, *Bundestheologie im Alten Testament* (WMANT 36: Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969); D. J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant* (AB 21A; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981), 221–242; E. W. Nicholson, *God and His People: Covenant and Theology in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 151–163.

[28] See W. T. Koopmans, *Joshua 24 As Poetic Narrative* (JSOT.S 93; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990).

[29] See C. H. Giblin, "Structural Patterns in Joshua 24:1–25," *CBQ* 26 (1964), 50–69.

[30] See D. J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant,* 221.

we should forsake the Lord, to serve other gods ... we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God" (24:16–18). Joshua, however, pours a chilly draught upon the fires of enthusiasm:

> You cannot serve the Lord; for he is a holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive *(lō' yiśśā')* your transgressions or your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm, and consume you, after having done you good (24:19–20).

Many exegetes suggest literal interpretations of this discouraging declaration that match neither its context nor common sense. One of the concomitants of a literal explanation is the assumption that vv. 19–20 represent a later insertion made in light of the exile. But even if this conjecture were well grounded it could not relieve the tension; the point of the paradoxical statement remains the same when viewed in the larger context of the Bible.

There are several things to consider if we are to do justice to the text. First, Josh 24:19–20 is not the only paradoxical statement concerning the capacity of the people to live with and belong to God. There are very similar explicit and implicit testimonies by Jeremiah and Ezekiel (cf. esp. Jer 13:23; 31:31–34; Ezek 20). Secondly, the emergence of strict Hebrew monotheism made it evident that there is a total antithesis between God and humankind on both the ontological and moral planes. In view of God's absolute holiness it is literally true that God is *totaliter aliter*[31] and that human beings "cannot serve the Lord." Thirdly, the majority of the people were not aware what this antithesis really implied, or of the implications of their attitude. They were too strongly attracted by foreign images and the service of foreign gods. Fourthly, despite an awareness of the total antithesis between God and humankind and a discouraging experience with their people, the Hebrew prophets made every effort to motivate them to faithfulness and holiness. Underlying their ministry was a consciousness that they must not cease to attempt to win their people to obedience, even if there were no signs of willingness to listen (cf. Isa 6). Their office, in fact, implied a belief that reform of the people was possible.

Josh 24:19–20 is based both on the theology of God's absolute holiness and on an urgent need to address the people in prophetic terms. Naturally, Joshua does not expect of his people an absolute holiness, but rather an awareness of the *nature of God* that results in a willingness to do all they can; they must make a fundamental choice—not a minimum but a maximum. In order to achieve his goal of persuading and winning them he uses the paradoxical language of negation. That this is the point is shown by the resolute answer of the people: "Nay; but we will serve the Lord" (v. 21). Their decision is followed by a making of the covenant (vv. 25–28) and the

[31] See the terminology and assessments of S. Kierkegaard.

setting up of a stone of witness: "Behold, this stone shall be a witness against us; for it has heard all the words of the Lord which he spoke to us; therefore it shall be a witness against you, lest you deal falsely with your God" (24:27).

How can we explain the threat: "He will not forgive your transgressions or your sins" (24:19)? Simply by remembering that God does not withhold the grace of forgiveness because divine expectations of the people are too high, but because their willingness is too low—much lower than their true capacity. The aim of punishment is to help develop their potential for faithfulness and service by providing a stronger motivation.

3. *Conclusion*

The book of Joshua shows that the tribes of Israel were able to conquer the Promised Land because their God decided to give it to them and fought on their side (cf. 1:1–6). In order to make clear this central message the final compiler points to the highly paradoxical ways in which God's providence functions and the divine power manifests itself (cf. the role of the harlot Rahab in chapter 2 and the tactics used in conquering Jericho in chapter 6). This explains why Joshua plays a very similar role in the conquest to that of Moses in the Exodus narratives; even the mysterious encounter near Jericho is reminiscent of what happened on Horeb, the mountain of God (cf. Exod 3:1–6 and Josh 5:13–15). There is a sustained eagerness to make it clear that the conquest was not due to Israel's righteousness and power; it was God's gift (cf. 24:13).

Nevertheless, Joshua's central responsibility was to face up to the demands of God's law (cf. 1:7–9) and to admonish and exhort his people (cf. 8:30–35; 23:6–16; 24:14–28). It is generally accepted that the admonitions and exhortations do not reflect the situation before and during the conquest but that of "paradise lost," i.e., the Exile. All the more is it evident that they are based on the assumption that God's promises are unconditional: because God is bound to various promises in perpetuity, the divine ways to the people cannot prove unfaithful; the divine anger cannot endure for ever; the paradise lost can be regained, provided Israel removes the obstacles from the path. The mention of the fulfilment of God's unconditional promises in the past is dictated by the compiler's desire to show where the source of hope for Israel in her present distress lies. Thus, we have here the same basic argument as in Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 40–55): Creation and Exodus provide the crucial case for believing that God will never abandon the chosen people.

What role is, then, attributed to obedience or righteousness?

It can be taken for granted that they are not the *cause* of Israel's gaining the Promised Land but an appropriate response to the God who is the sole ground of Israel's existence. God's absoluteness, resulting in divine faith-

fulness, is the only real foundation of life that transcends the possibility of human merit and hence the only justification of total obedience. This is implied also in the paradoxical explanation of God's fighting on the side of the Israelites against the Canaanites (11:20), matched by the striking exposition of why some Canaanites escaped doom: they were saved by their belief in a God whose decisions are beyond human intelligence and power. The harlot Rahab declares: "... for the Lord your God is he who is God in heaven above and on earth beneath" (2:11; cf. 9:24–25). Since promises and fulfilment of promises by God transcend all human capacity for righteousness, it must be clear that Israel "cannot serve the Lord; for he is a holy God" (24:19). Here lies the explanation of why God resolutely denies forgiveness for apostasy and obstinacy yet never ceases to manifest the grace of mercy to faithful and penitent people.

CHAPTER IX

PUNISHMENT AND FORGIVENESS IN THE FIRST BOOK OF SAMUEL

The tremendous diversity of material and of literary genres within the books of Samuel bears witness to the length of its transmission history. Different sources or traditions, diverse in origin, concern, and function, are combined and interwoven in a manner that no modern critical theories can satisfactorily explain. The variety of indications of internal thematic tensions and duplications sometimes gives the impression that there are even contradictions between individual narratives. According to the fragmentary hypothesis, the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings constitute an independent and unified historical work, composed in the sixth century by a Deuteronomistic author out of older independent units—some larger, some smaller—but the redactional stamp on the material is much less evident in Samuel than in other books. Some scholars consider that there were two or more successive revisions of earlier traditions.[1]

[1] In addition to standard introductions to the Old Testament, consult especially the following commentaries and studies: C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Die Bücher Samuels* (BC II/2; Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1875); H. P. Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1899); K. Budde, *Die Bücher Samuel* (KHC 8; Tübingen / Leipzig: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1902); P. Dhorme, *Les livres de Samuel* (EB; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1910); S. R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913); W. Caspari, *Die Samuelbücher* (KAT 7; Leipzig: A. Deichertsche Verlagsbuchhandlung Dr. Werner Scholl, 1926); G. B. Caird, J. C. Schroeder, and G. Little, *The First and Second Books of Samuel* (IntB 2; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1953), 852–1040; D. A. Bruno, *Die Bücher Samuel: Eine rhythmische Untersuchung* (Stockholm: Almquist & Wiksell, 1955); H. W. Hertzberg, *Die Samuelbücher* (ATD 10; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956); English translation by J. Bowden, *I and II Samuel: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1964); D. G. Bressan, *Samuele* (SB; Turin / Rome: Marietti, 1960); L. Schmidt, *Menschlicher Erfolg und Jahwes Initiative: Studien zu Tradition, Interpretation und Historie in Überlieferungen von Gideon, Saul und David* (WMANT 38; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970); P. R. Ackroyd, *The First Book of Samuel* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971); J. Mauchline, *1 and 2 Samuel* (NCB; London: Oliphants, 1971); H. J. Stoebe, *Das erste Buch Samuelis* (KAT VIII/1; Gütersloh: G. Mohn, 1973); D. M. Gunn, "Narrative Patterns and Oral Tradition in Judges and Samuel," *VT* 24 (1974), 286–317; J. Kegler, *Politisches Geschehen und theologisches Verstehen: Zum Geschichtsverständnis in der frühen israelitischen Königszeit* (CThM 8; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1977); P. K. McCarter, *I Samuel* (AB 8; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980); F. Stolz, *Das erste und zweite Buch Samuel* (ZBK.AT 9; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1981); R. W. Klein, *1 Samuel* (WBC 10; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1983); L. M. Eslinger, *Kingship of God in Crisis: A Close Reading of 1 Samuel 1–12* (BLS 10; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1985); J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analysis*, vol. 2: *The Crossing Fates (I Sam. 13–31 and II Sam. 1)* (StSN 23; Assen / Dover: Van Gorcum, 1986); R. P. Gordon, *1 and 2 Samuel: A Commentary* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1986); W. Dietrich, *David, Saul und die Propheten: Das Verhältnis von Religion und Politik nach den prophe-*

It is all the more important to determine what might have been the common denominator of the early strand of Samuel and the point of view that informed the process by which the older materials were brought together in a series of redactional links and editorial expansions. It seems justifiable to claim that the pre-Deuteronomistic stratum was marked by the prophetic interpretation of history, and this principle was not only preserved but became dominant in the final canonical shape and substance of Samuel. The narratives dealing with Samuel, Saul, and David were encompassed within a universal history dating from the creation of the world, thus making understandable the focus on David as God's chosen and anointed king for ever. From the universal and theocentric viewpoint of this history, which sees all events in the light of a divine purpose, God's acts of judgment and mercy provide prominent unifying themes. The overarching prophetic perspective of the history had no need to suppress the integrity of distinct and originally independent sources.

1. *The Story of Samuel (1:1–7:1)*

The obvious purpose of this section is to exemplify and glorify the ideal of prophetic and theocratic leadership in Israel. Like Moses, Samuel acts as a heavenly emissary, and his historical importance explains the author's interest in the remarkable story of his birth, his youth at Shiloh and his prophetic call. His character and good offices are contrasted with the wickedness of Eli's sons (2:12–36). The prophetic tale is interrupted by the ark narrative (4:1b–7:1) which belongs to an older stratum of the book and shows how dramatic were the days when Samuel walked the earth.

1.1 *Eli's House and Samuel (1:1–4:1a)*

The first passage relevant to our theme is the Song of Hannah (2:1–10), which

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tischen Überlieferungen vom frühesten Königtum in Israel (BWANT VII/2; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1987); K. L. Chafin, *1, 2 Samuel* (CC 8; Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1989); V. P. Long, *The Reign and Rejection of King Saul: A Case for Literary and Theological Coherence* (SBL 118; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1989); M. Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel: A Literary Study of Comparative Structures, Analogies and Parallels* (Jerusalem: R. Mass, 1990); D. V. Edelman, *King Saul in the Historiography of Judah* (JSOT.S 121; Sheffield: JSOT Pres, 1991); G. Robinson, *Let Us Be Like the Nations: A Commentary on the Books of 1 and 2 Samuel* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans; Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1993); S. Brock, *The Recensions of the Septuagint Version of I Samuel* (with a foreword by N. Fernández Marcos Turin: Zamorani, 1996); K. L. Noll, *The Faces of David* (JSOT.S 242; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997); R. Couffignal, "Le récit du règne de Saül (1 Samuel 9–31): Étude de structures," *EThR* 73 (1998), 3–20; T. S. Večko, "Saul—the Persecutor or the Persecuted One?," *Interpretation of the Bible* (ed. J. Krašovec; Ljubljana: Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti JSOT.S 289; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 201–216.

is obviously inserted into this section. It exhibits the thematic and prosodic traits of an independent composition, but its exposition of God's universal justice is well suited to the context of the books of Samuel. The burden of the song is a meditation upon the exaltation of the meek through reversal of fortune (2:4–5). The preceding warning to the arrogant (2:3) makes it clear that such elevation in condition is a result of God's judgment—a fact confirmed by the antithetic declaration in 2:9a: "He will guard the feet of his faithful ones; but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness."

The passage 2:11–26 interweaves the Samuel and Eli traditions to point the contrast between the young Samuel who was an attendant at the shrine in Shiloh and proved himself an exemplary servant of God, and the depravity of Eli's impious sons Hophni and Phinehas, who were nominally priests there. The description of conditions at the Shiloh shrine paves the way "for the fall of the house of Eli and, with equal certainty, for a corresponding rise in the fortunes of Samuel."[2] *Genesis Rabbah* 58:2 puts the relation between the two thus: "Before the sun of Eli set the sun of Samuel rose." The failure of Eli's sons (2:12–17) is summarized as follows: "Thus the sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the Lord; for the men treated the offering of the Lord with contempt *(kî nī'ăṣû hā'ănāšîm 'ēt minḥat yhwh)*" (2:17).

The paragraph 2:18–21 returns to the story of Samuel, but v. 22 logically follows directly on v. 17 and introduces Eli's rebuke of his sons: "Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. No, my sons; it is no good report that I hear the people of the Lord spreading abroad. If a man sins against a man, God will mediate for him *(ûpīlĕlô 'ĕlōhîm);* but if a man sins against the Lord, who can intercede for him *(mî yitpallēl-lô)?*" (2:23–25a). The exact meaning of the stem *pll* in both conditional sentences (in Pi'el and Hithpallel) and of the word *'ĕlōhîm* in the first conditional sentence is contested.[3] The Septuagint keeps the same meaning for the verb in both sentences but changes the subject: "If a man should at all sin against another, then shall they pray for him to the Lord *(kaì proseúxontai hupèr autoû pròs kúrion);* but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall intreat for him *(tís proseúxetai hupèr autoû)?*" Targum Jonathan has an extending interpretative paraphrase: "If a man will sin against a man, *will he not come before the judge, and he will hear their words, and he will decide between them?* And if the man will sin *before the Lord, from whom will he seek and it will be forgiven to him?*"[4]

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[2] See P. K. McCarter, *I Samuel,* 85.

[3] See S. H. Blank, "Jeremiah and the Meaning of Prayer," *HUCA* 21 (1948), 337; A. E. Draffkorn, "ILANI/ELOHIM," *JBL* 76 (1957), 216–224, esp. pp. 218–219; E. A. Speiser, "The Stem Pll in Hebrew," *JBL* 82 (1963), 301–306; E. F. de Ward, "Superstition and Judgment: Archaic Methods of Finding a Verdict," *ZAW* 89 (1977), 1–19; B. Janowski, "Psalm CVI 28–31 und die Interzession des Pinchas," *VT* 33 (1983), 237–248.

[4] See D. J. Harrington and A. J. Saldarini, *Targum Jonathan of the Former Prophets* (AB

The basic meaning of the interrogative didactic sentences is clear: when two men quarrel there is always the possibility of an appeal to a divine arbiter (cf. Judg 11:27);[5] but if anybody sins against God, the highest authority, he comes directly under his judgment (cf. Job 9:32–33). This fact does not in principle exclude the possibility of divine forgiveness following penitential prayer, but Eli's admonition relates to his sons' guilt in despising the Lord's offering, which implies the absence of any penitential disposition and consequently of any possibility of forgiveness (cf. Mt 12:31–32; Heb 10:26–31).[6]

This situation is fully compatible with the fact that Eli's rebuke proved ineffectual; 2:25b reads: "But they would not listen to the voice of their father; for it was the will of the Lord to slay them *(kî-ḥāpēṣ yhwh lahămîtām)*"—a statement reminiscent of God's declaration that he has hardened (or will harden) Pharaoh's heart (Exod 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17), of other similar passages (1 Sam 16:14; 2 Sam 24:1–2; 1 Kgs 22:20; Isa 6:9–10), and of Aeschylus' saying quoted by Plato: *Theòs mèn aitían phúei brotoîs, hótan kakôsai dôma pampéden thele,* "A god implants the guilty cause in men when he would utterly destroy a house."[7] The reason given for the sons' disobedience by the author is taken literally by many exegetes; they consider incitement of stubborn men to be God's explicit intention.[8] But such conclusions are, within the framework of basic Hebrew theological ideas, untenable. Interpretation of such passages should take general psychological, theological and literary factors more seriously into consideration. The key to proper understanding is the wider purpose of God's actions in particular situations.[9] In the Pharaoh narrative the overall view of that purpose is the

10; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987). We follow this translation also in what follows.

[5] Passages like Exod 21:6; 22:8; and Ps 58:2 make it possible to see in the *'ĕlōhîm* of the first conditional sentence not God but some outstanding person functioning as arbiter. See A. E. Draffkorn, *JBL* 76 (1957), 216–224, esp. pp. 218–219; E. F. de Ward, *ZAW* 89 (1977), 1–19.

[6] For various views about the sentences, see A. E. Draffkorn, *JBL* 76 (1957), 216–224; C. Houtman, "Zu 1 Samuel 2,25," *ZAW* 89 (1977), 412–417; E. F. de Ward, *ZAW* 89 (1977), 1–19.

[7] See the *Republic* 380a3–4. See also Theognis' fragment 401–406 in *Greek Elegy and Iambus*, vol. 1 (LCL 258; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: W. Heinemann, 1982), 277: "Be not over-eager in any matter; due measure's best in all human works; and often a man is eager of virtue in his pursuit of gain, only to be misled into great wrong-doing by a favouring Spirit, which so easily maketh what is evil seem to him good, and what is good seem evil."

[8] See P. K. McCarter, *I Samuel,* 84: "Yahweh, as controller of destinies, would not permit Eli's sons to heed their father's good advice because it was his (Yahweh's) intention that they sin and die ..." D. G. Bressan, *Samuele*, 89, recognizes that the hardening of Eli's sons was "voluntary *(volontario)*"; nevertheless he insists: "Ma bisogna dire che l'induramento dell'uomo è davvero *voluto* da Dio, non solo *permesso.*" See further especially F. Hesse, *Das Verstockungsproblem im Alten Testament* (BZAW 74; Berlin: A. Töpelmann, 1955), 40–60: "Jahwe als Urheber der Verstockung."

[9] See P. R. Ackroyd, *The First Book of Samuel,* 37: "The writers look beyond the stubbornness and see that in the light of subsequent experience there was a wider purpose to be seen."

knowledge of God gained through signs and wonders; in the story of Eli and Samuel the establishment of a true and lasting priesthood. The more the grace of liberation and election is emphasized, the more the reason for rejection seems mysterious. It is generally recognized that all are sinful and that many are rebellious and stubborn. God obviously has no direct intent to incite anyone to sin, but he may use an existing sinful disposition in order to make plain one's blindness and to move him or her to penitence, or to manifest his own absolute lordship by crushing human arrogance and stubbornness. Such themes are best dealt with in the language of paradox.

This trend of interpretation is clearly confirmed by the oracle of doom (2:27–36) uttered to the old priest Eli by an anonymous holy man.[10] After having brought an accusation against the house of Eli (2:27–29), he introduces the threat by the messenger formula:

> Therefore *(lākēn)* the Lord the God of Israel declares: "I promised that your house and the house of your father should go in and out before me for ever"; but now the Lord declares: "Far be it from me; for those who honour me I will honour, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed. Behold, the days are coming, when I will cut off your strength and the strength of your father's house, so that there will not be an old man in your house ..." (2:30–34).

Strikingly enough, this foretelling of judgment is followed by the promise of a new priestly line: "And I will raise up for myself a faithful priest *(kōhēn ne'ĕmān),* who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind; and I will build him a sure house *(bayt ne'ĕmān),* and he shall go in and out before my anointed for ever" (2:35). The juxtaposition of doom and promise is strongly reminiscent of Samuel's words to Saul in 13:13–14 concerning the royal house. It is obvious that rejection and election are determined by man's corresponding disposition and behaviour: he may despise God or revere him. Especially noteworthy is the quoting of a traditional maxim in 2:30b: *kî mĕkabbĕday 'ăkabbēd ûbōzay yēqallû,* "for those who honour me I will honour, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed." The antithesis *kbd* in Pi'el and *bāzāh* (which is reminiscent of the verb *n'ṣ* in Pi'el in v. 17) suggests corresponding consequences in God's attitude: honour // esteem lightly. The context provides, however, good reason to understand the Niph'al stem of the verb *qll* as "will be accursed." The Septuagint renders the proverb as follows: "For I will only honour them that honour me, and he that sets me at nought shall be despised." Targum Jonathan interprets it: "*My judgments are truth, for those who act honorably before me I will honor, and those who act*

[10] For the question of the origin of this passage and 3:11–14, see especially T. Veijola, *Die ewige Dynastie: David und die Entstehung seiner Dynastie nach der deuteronomistischen Darstellung* (AASF B/193; Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1975), 38–45; for interpretation, see M. Tsevat, "Studies in the Book of Samuel, I: Interpretation of I Sam. 2:27–36: The Narrative of *Kareth*," *HUCA* 32 (1961), 191–216.

despicably against my name will become demented."

According to 3:1–4:1a Samuel is called to be a prophet. The comment on an earlier period "... the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him" (3:7) serves to highlight the present. Now he perceives the message of doom for the house of Eli without mentioning a possible survivor (in contrast to 2:27–36):

> *bayyôm hahû' 'āqîm 'el-'ēlî 'ēt kol-'ăšer dibbartî 'el-bêtô hāḥēl wĕkallēh; wĕhiggadtî lô kî-šōpēṭ 'ănî 'et-bêtô 'ad-'ôlām ba'ăwôn 'ăšer-yāda' kî-mĕqalĕlîm lāhem*[11] *bānâw wĕlō' kīhāh bām; wĕlākēn nišba'tî lĕbêt 'ēlî 'im-yitkappēr 'ăwôn bêt-'ēlî bĕzebaḥ ûbĕminḥāh 'ad-'ôlām,* "On that day I will fulfil against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. And I tell him that I am about to judge his house for ever, for the iniquity which he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be expiated by sacrifice or offering for ever" (3:12–13).

Here two examples of the stylistic device of merism are of importance. The first is the pair of adverbial infinitives *hāḥēl wĕkallēh,* "a beginning and ending," which express the completeness of the punishment.[12] The second is *bĕzebaḥ ûbĕminḥāh,* "sacrifice and offering" (cf. Isa 19:21; Amos 5:25; Ps 40:7; Dan 9:27), which represents *all* kinds of offerings.[13] The strong oath used in 3:14 implies that expiation of sin is normally possible (cf. the ritual for the expiation of priestly sins in Lev 4:3–12). But the "blaspheming" is the reason for denying any possibility of expiating the guilt of Eli's house. In Isa 22:14b there is a similar pronouncement of doom upon Jerusalem: *'im yĕkuppar he'āwôn hazzeh lākem 'ad-tĕmutûn,* "Surely this iniquity will not be forgiven you till you die." It is striking that in Targum Jonathan the word "iniquity" is changed into "sins" *(ḥwb')* and the word "expiate" into "forgive" *(šbq)* in both passages. The combination *kipper 'āwôn,* "to cover over iniquity, to be expiated," is elsewhere found in both the negative and positive senses. In Jer 18:23 the prophet demands of God: *'al-tĕkappēr 'al-'āwônām,* "Do not cover over their iniquity." But according to Isa 6:7c one of the seraphim touches the prophet's mouth with a burning coal and assures him: ... *wĕsār 'āwônekā wĕḥaṭṭa'tĕkā tĕkuppar,* "... and thy iniquity will pass away,

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[11] MT's "to them" *(lāhem)* is probably a "scribal emendation" *(tiqqûn sôpĕrîm),* i.e., a change of the word for God *('ĕlōhîm)* by omission of some letters. The reason for the correction was the desire to avoid the idea of blaspheming God. Septuagint has the rendering *hoti kakologoûntes Theòn huioì autoû,* "because his sons spoke evil against God."

[12] See E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), § 113h; S. R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text,* 43.

[13] See H. P. Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel,* 28, observes correctly: "The expression seems to be made very general in order to emphasize the impossibility of placating the offended deity by any of the methods known to the ritual." See also B. Janowski, *Sühne als Heilsgeschehen* (WMANT 55; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1982), 136–137.

and thy sin will be expiated." In Isa 27:9 we find the statement: *lākēn bĕzō't yĕkuppar 'ăwôn ya'ăkōb,* "Therefore by this the guilt of Jacob will be expiated" (cf. Neh 3:37). In Ps 78:38 the poet asserts: *wĕhû' raḥûm yĕkappēr 'āwôn,* "Yet he, being compassionate, covered over iniquity" (cf. Ps 65:4). Dan 9:24 mentions seventy weeks of years as the time of mercy, *lĕkappēr 'āwôn,* "to cover over iniquity."

1.2 *The History of the Ark (4:1b–7:1)*

The ark narrative (4:1b–7:1) contains the themes of punishment by plague and expiation in connection with the Philistines' capture and detention of the ark. There are repeated statements that God's hand fell (very) heavily *(kābad, qāšāh)* upon the people of Ashdod, the city of Dagon (5:6, 7, 11). The outcome was not what the Philistines expected: the God of Israel has demonstrated his power in their land and triumphed over their god, and this meant punishment for them. They sought a religious rather than a political solution and decided to return the ark to its proper keepers. The priests and the diviners urged appeasement of God: "If you send away the ark of the God of Israel, do not send it empty, but by all means return him a guilt offering *(kî hāšēb tāšîbû lô 'āšām).* Then you will be healed, and it will be known to you *('āz tērāpē'û wĕnôda' lākem)* why his hand does not turn away from you" (6:3; for the phrase "return a guilt offering" see also 6:4, 8, 17).

The use of the verb *šwb,* 'to return, restore' (in the infinitive absolute) implies giving back something that was taken wrongfully (cf. Gen 20:7; 2 Sam 9:7). The noun *'āšām* ranges in meaning from 'offence, trespass, fault, guilt' to 'compensation, trespass offering, guilt offering, gift of restitution, gift of atonement.' In this context *'āšām* obviously means primarily a gift of restitution and atonement, but also implies a guilt offering. The claim that this word "is not necessarily concerned with sin at all. In the present passage the *'āšām* is compensation paid as protection against further suffering,"[14] does not properly reflect human natural consciousness of guilt whenever his actions are oriented against divine order and authority. Human attitudes to the deity could never become a purely political matter. Men of piety cannot accept any attempt to subordinate one divine being to another, for they remain (in polytheistic religions too) uncertain about the mysterious question of who is the true God who guides the events of history. And it is most natural for them to ask themselves whether a given disorder or misfortune has been conditioned by their own conduct.

The expected result of restoration is healing. But the Septuagint has a different version of 6:3b: "And then shall you be healed, and an atonement

[14] See P. K. McCarter, *I Samuel,* 133.

shall be made for you *(kaì exilasthésetai humîn);* should not his hand be stayed from off you?" In discussing the guilt offering the Philistines are to return to the Lord, the priests and diviners urge and warn: "... and give glory *(kābôd)* to the God of Israel; perhaps he will lighten his hand *('ûlay yāqēl 'et-yādô)* from off you and your gods and your land. Why should you harden *(lammāh tĕkabbĕdû)* your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened *(kibbĕdû)* their hearts? After he had made sport of them, did not they let the people go, and they departed?" (6:5b–6). There are a number of allusions or references to the Exodus narrative, but an important difference between the two stories is the evidence that in contrast to the Pharaoh the Philistine rulers accepted good counsel and did not harden their hearts.

2. *Samuel and Saul (7:2–15:35)*

The Deuteronomistic account of Samuel's victory over the Philistines (7:2–17) presents him as a judge over all Israel. It was composed in the light of what preceded it, but is so organically connected with chapter 8 that it functions as an introduction to the composite Saul Cycle. The charming folk-tale of the lost asses of Kish (9:1–10:16) differs in all respects from the preceding chapters; nevertheless, it offers a clue to the theological concern of the whole section—that history is primarily a matter of God's providence. The account of Saul's election by lot in Mizpah (10:17–27) continues the prophetic narrative of chapter 8. The election is confirmed in Gilgal after Saul has proved his kingly qualities by delivering Israel from the Ammonites (11:1–15). Samuel's farewell address (12:1–25), containing comment on Israel's history of apostasy and warning and exhortation for the future, bears some resemblance to chapters 7, 8, and 10:17–24 and at the same time interprets the whole section consisting of chapters 1–11.[15] Chapters 7–12 are held together by the prophetic urge towards a theocratic ideal of kingship in Israel.[16] In this framework the themes of blessings or punishments—pronounced as principle or applied to action—come to the fore.

The thematic unity of chapters 13–15 is provided by the conflicts between Saul and Samuel on the one hand and Jonathan on the other. The king failed in critical historical situations and was judged blameworthy by both Samuel and Jonathan, and finally abandoned and rejected by God.

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[15] See L. M. Eslinger, *Kingship of God in Crisis,* 49: "The narrative extending through chs. 1–12 should be interpreted as a coherent theological-political exploration of human and divine leadership in Israel. This exploration is presented in the form of a literary representation of the events leading to the establishment of a monarchy in Israel."

[16] See A. Weiser, *Samuel: seine geschichtliche Aufgabe und religiöse Bedeutung: Traditions-geschichtliche Untersuchungen zu 1. Samuel 7–12* (FRLANT 81; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962).

2.1 *Samuel and the Monarchy (7:2–12:25)*

The passage 7:2–15 presents the Deuteronomistic theology of history according to the well-established pattern of the book of Judges: apostasy, punishment, repentance, and deliverance. In this context Samuel acts as theocratic ruler and intercessor on behalf of Israel—like Moses in his day (cf. esp. Exod 17:8–13; 32:11–13, 30–32; 33:12–20; 34:8–9). This explains the mention of Samuel as intercessor in Jer 15:1 and Ps 99:6; in the former case God's mercy being denied, in the latter accorded. Since the people are afflicted by the Philistines, in 1 Sam 7:2–15 the emphasis is not on determination of apostasy and punishment but on mourning, confession of sins, prayer, and deliverance.

Samuel exhorts the people: "If you are returning to the Lord with all your heart *('im-bĕkol-lĕbabkem 'attem šābîm 'el-yhwh),* then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you, and direct your heart to the Lord, and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines" (7:3). In v. 4 the narrator states that the persuasion was successful. In 7:5–6 he reports: "Then Samuel said, 'Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray *(wĕ'etpallēl)* to the Lord for you.' So they gathered at Mizpah, and drew water and poured it out before the Lord, and fasted on that day, and said there, 'We have sinned against the Lord *(ḥāṭā'nû layhwh).*' And Samuel judged *(wayyišpōṭ šĕmû'ēl)* the people of Israel at Mizpah." The association with fasting and confession of sins suggests that the drawing and pouring out of water was a repentance rite. Such rites are known only from postbiblical sources.[17] There seems, however, to be an allusion to such a ceremony in the metaphorical call for penitent appeal to God in Lam 2:19b: "Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord!" It is noteworthy that the Targum Jonathan renders the statement in 1 Sam 7:6 by the same simile: "And they gathered themselves to Mizpah and *poured out their heart in repentance like water before the Lord* ..."

The intercessory role is essential in a prophetic and theocratic view of leadership. It is striking that the verb *šāpaṭ* is used four times to designate Samuel's priestly, prophetic, and administrative leadership within the passage 7:2–15 (vv. 6, 15, 16, 17). The response of Samuel and of his God to the Philistine threat illustrates most clearly what it means to be a "judge": not to demonstrate man's power and justice, but to administer God's justice and righteousness in confidence and patience. When the Philistines invaded Israel the people said to Samuel: *'al-taḥărēš mimmennû mizzĕ'ōq*[18] *'el-yhwh 'ĕlōhênû wĕyōšī'ēnû miyyad pĕlištîm,* "Do not keep silent from us, from crying out to

[17] For references, see P. K. McCarter, *I Samuel,* 144.

[18] For the form of pregnant expression, see E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar,* § 119 y and ff.

the Lord our God, that he may save us from the hand of the Philistines" (7:8). The people demanded unceasing intercession, and the narrator reports: "So Samuel took a sucking lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the Lord; and Samuel cried to the Lord for Israel, and the Lord answered him" (7:9). God responded, in fact, with thunder, which caused disarray among the Philistines (cf. vv. 10–11).

The account in 7:2–15 is based on the belief that it is God who gives victory over Israel's enemy, provided that the people are confident and faithful. In a time of mourning and of Samuel's intercession, *Eben-hā'ēzer,* the 'Stone of Help,' which in chapter 4 is the sign of defeat, became the seal of victory (7:12). The restoration of the former state of affairs was possible only after the people's penitent return to their God.

Chapter 8 reflects a completely different situation. Samuel is by now an old man and his sons, whom he made judges over Israel, "did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after gain; they took bribes and perverted justice" (8:3). The elders therefore challenged Samuel at Ramah with the demand: "Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint for us a king to govern us like all the nations" (8:5). The charismatic leader realized that their primary motivation was not the default of Samuel's sons, but Israel's failure to acknowledge the supreme divine authority and leadership. After having prayed, Samuel received God's explanation of the demand: "Hearken to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them ..." (8:7–9). The prophet attempted to unnerve the elders with an enumeration of the burdens that might flow from an exercise of the "right of the king" (8:10–18), but got nowhere: "No! but we will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles" (8:19b–20).

What have chapters 7 and 8 in common, and where do they differ? The obvious common ground is the beliefs and values of Samuel himself. His understanding of the nature of God and of the role of Israel is unfaltering. He knows that the obligation of a ruler and of the people as a whole is constant: no matter whether one is priest, prophet, judge, or king, one must act in accordance with the spirit of the supreme kingship of God. The attitude of the people, however, changes with the situation. In distress they mourn, penitent and self-critical; in prosperity they become presumptuous. Eli's and Samuel's sons are almost paradigms of Israel's depravity. But perversity reaches its nadir with the urge to become "like all the nations." God cannot then promise mercy to alleviate distress: his verdict is: "And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the Lord will not answer you in that day" (8:18). The creature of Israel's own choice will become unavoidably the agent of her punishment.

So the attitude of God described in chapter 8 cannot be as it was in chap-

ter 7. In the latter the narrator could report that the Lord answered Samuel's prayer (8:9), but in the former God himself denies an answer. But the reason is not the question of Israel's human leadership—shall it be judge or king. The social framework is not of essential importance; what matters is the motivation of man's attitude towards divine and human authority. The people should not *demand* a judge or a king, but *pray* to God—like Moses, Samuel, and so many other prophets—that he may grant them a ruler according to his own choice. Such was the understanding of the true prophets and of God himself in regard to any human administration, and some leaders were ultimately able to adopt this ideal. Gideon, for instance, answered those who offerred him rule over them: "I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the Lord will rule over you" (Judg 8:23). The higher one's authority, the greater the danger of his rising above himself and denying God's rule. So the *demand* for "a king to govern Israel like all the nations" emerges from the same perverse motivation as man's primeval temptation to become "like God" (cf. Gen 3:5).

Does this mean that the idea of a king was wrong in principle? Are pro- and anti-monarchic tendencies in genuine opposition in their attitudes and sources? Many exegetes think so. But how is one to evaluate, then, God's demand to Samuel: "Hearken to their voice, and make them a king" (8:22) and the many prophetic and especially messianic texts proclaiming or implying the ideal of a just king? Again, the issue at stake is not the office as such but the motivation in administering a given office. False motivation is the true cause of controversy. It is obvious that God has acted since the creation of humankind according to the principle: *Abusus non tollit usum.* If it were otherwise, the world would never have been created, and Saul never appointed king. The belief in God's kingship means that God's providence is finally based on the experienced paradox that his grace is greater than the possibility of human abuse. And even more: God's administration of justice turns human abuse to good purpose. Here lies the explanation why God accedes to the people's demand even though he castigates their motivation.[19]

It is generally recognized that chapter 8 was originally continued by the account of the public choice by sacred lot and of the anointing of Saul at Mizpah (10:17–27), logically followed by the narrative of the proving of Saul by the delivering of Israel from the Ammonites, and of proclaiming him king at Gilgal (11:1–15). The event of the royal lottery shows that Saul was the king whom God had chosen, exercising his characteristic righteousness in exalting the meek (cf. 2:1–10). The "taking" of the tribe of Benjamin and the family of the Matrite is reminiscent of Saul's exclamation during his

[19] See P. K. McCarter, *I Samuel,* 161: "Chapters 7 and 8, therefore, stand in a reciprocal relationship. Together they present the case, positively and then negatively expressed, for the theocratic ideal of the kingship of Yahweh as it was cherished in prophetic circles."

first meeting with Samuel: "Am I not a Benjaminite, from the least of the tribes of Israel? And is not my family the humblest of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then have you spoken to me in this way?" (9:21). In the event, the people were impressed not by God's criterion of paradox, but by Saul's appearance: "when he stood among the people, he was taller than any of the people from his shoulders upward" (10:23).

This contrast can be perceived as the indicator of a multiple irony. Samuel describes the demand of the people primarily as rebellion against their God: "... You have this day rejected your God, who saves you from all your calamities and your distresses; and you have said, 'No! but set a king over us'" (10:19). Once the choice is made by lot, he presents Saul to the people: "Do you see him whom the Lord has chosen? There is none like him among all the people"; and the people greet him: "Long live the king!" (10:24; cf. 9:2). The underlying contrast between God's providence and the people's exigency has to be taken into consideration in any attempt to fill many of the gaps in the Saul Cycle narratives. Since elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (Josh 7 and 1 Sam 14:38–44) the casting of lots is reported to be used only to unmask an offender, we may ask whether the choice of Saul by lot was not in itself considered as punishment for the people's importunacy: ultimately they did not want a ruler according to God's will but according to their own desire.[20] In view of this controversy between Samuel and the people, Saul's attitude at the moment of his election is mysterious. It is said that "he has hidden himself among the baggage" (10:22). Many exegetes think that he did this out of modesty. There may, however, be one or more other reasons that were never directly revealed.

The same is true of the conclusion of the folk-tale of the lost asses (9:1–10:16) which stands between the two controversies about the establishing of a monarchy (8:1–21 and 10:17–27). The narrative witnesses to an old tradition concerning Saul's election: Saul was looking for lost asses, but—guided by God's providence—he found a kingdom. After he returned from Samuel, his uncle wanted to know what the prophet had said to him (10:15). The reply was: "He told us plainly *(haggēd higgîd lānû)* that the asses had been found" (10:16a). The narrator adds: "But about the matter of the kingdom, of which Samuel had spoken, he did not tell him anything *(lō' higgîd lô)*"

[20] See the statement by P. K. McCarter, *I Samuel,* 196: "The formal similarities among the three passages are striking, but in the other examples the purpose of the lot casting is to discover an unknown guilty individual, in the one case Achan and in the other Jonathan. While it is certainly true that lot casting was used for other purposes than the exposure of a criminal (including, indeed, the designation of individuals for office), the combination of features that appears here—an oracle of judgment followed by the injunction to cast the lots—casts a shadow over Saul's election. Again it would be overstating the case to say that all of this means Saul is guilty of something—that will come later—but there is a clear if subtle implication that he is an offending party by virtue of the election itself."

(10:16b). It is obvious that the narrator must have had special reason for emphasizing both Saul's news that the asses had been found and his concealment of his election and anointing.

Samuel's farewell in chapter 12 is the longest speech in the book and is a composite of Samuel's address, responses by the people, and stories. The final form shows the characteristic Deuteronomistic touch: evidence of editorial reworking of underlying older historical material. The nearest parallel is Joshua's farewell in Josh 24; both sermons show elements parallel to those of the covenant structure.[21] The basic structure of 1 Sam 12 shows that the drama unfolds in three main acts: Samuel's giving up his office to a king, while protesting his past rectitude (vv. 1–5); a historical retrospect on Israel's apostasy (vv. 6–15); and a demonstration of Samuel's prophetic power and his willingness to continue to serve by interceding with God and instructing the people (vv. 19–25).

The attestation of Samuel's rectitude (12:1–5) at the moment of installation of a king clearly implies admonition and exhortation for the future. The more it is recognized that Samuel has been the true, divinely designated leader, the higher the justification for great expectations of the king. This is indicated by Samuel's comparison between "now" and "once": "And now *(wĕ'attāh),* behold, the king walks before you *(mithallēk lipnêkem);* and I am old and grey, and behold, my sons are with you, and I have walked before you *(wa'ănî hithallaktî lipnêkem)* from my youth until this day" (v. 2).[22] The vindication of Samuel's righteousness is contrasted with *mišpāṭ hammelek,* "the right of the king," a spectre raised in 8:11–18, suggesting that the people must expect from the king selfish cruelty. Samuel's protestations of judicial honesty conclude: "Testify against me and I will restore *(wĕ'āšîb)* it to you" (v. 3). This indicates that Samuel's desire that his innocence be declared before God and the anointed king is essentially linked with an awareness that there must be reparation for injustice.

The Deuteronomistic composition of the second act (12:6–15) contrasts *ṣidqôt yhwh,* "the saving deeds of the Lord" (12:7; cf. Judg 5:11) with Israel's requital of ingratitude. The narrator employs the cyclical pattern of apostasy, subjugation to an enemy, a repentant cry to God, and deliverance characteristic of the book of Judges. The Ammonite threat had provoked the

[21] See especially J. Muilenburg, "The Form and Structure of the Covenantal Formulations," *VT* 9 (1959), 347–365; K. Baltzer, *Das Bundesformular* (WMANT 4; Neukirchen Kreis Moers: Neukirchener Verlag, 1960); English translation, *The Covenant Formulary* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1971); D. J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant* (AnBib 21A; 2nd ed.; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981), esp. pp. 206–242: "Samuel, Joshua."

[22] See the statement by R. W. Klein, *1 Samuel,* 114–115: "... the word 'walk' in Samuel's case refers to his moral or ethical conduct in his public life rather than his leadership. Perhaps the word 'walk' used of the king refers both to leadership and his moral character. Then the author would mean that the king's behavior was yet to be tested; Samuel's was already known ..."

demand for a king: "No, but a king shall reign over us" (12:12). So the faulty motivation of this request, indicated by the following clause "when the Lord your God was your king," implies a repentant petition by the people. This explains why God delivered them by appointing a king—thus condescending to their wicked demand—when there were reasons for punishing them by delivering them to the enemy. There are hidden reasons for the supremacy of God's mercy over the arguments for punishment. All the more important is the address both to the people and their king, beginning with *wĕ'attāh,* "And now" (12:13) and concluding with the antithetical presentation of contrasting fates: "If you will fear the Lord and serve him and hearken to his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then you and the king who reigns over you will follow the Lord your God;[23] but if you will not hearken to the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then the hand of the Lord will be against you and your king" (12:14–15). Quite often in the Hebrew Bible a statement in the form of antithetical parallelism concludes a literary segment (cf. Judg 5:31; Pss 1:6; 73:27–28; 145:20; 146:9; Prov 1:32–33; 2:21–22; 8:35–36).

The third act (12:16–25), beginning with *gam-'attāh,* "And (Also) now," opens the door even more widely on the future. In order to confirm his prophetic authority and to bring the people to confess their sin, Samuel calls upon God to send a thunderstorm, his argument being: "And you shall know and see that your wickedness is great, which you have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking for yourselves a king" (12:17). The expected effect is achieved, for the people urge Samuel: "Pray *(hitpallēl)* for your servants to the Lord your God, that we may not die; for we have added to all our sins this evil, to ask for ourselves a king" (12:19). In exhorting Israel to faithfulness Samuel discloses several theologically important points: in spite of this sin the people have a good chance to be saved, provided they will faithfully follow their God; "for his great name's sake" God will not forsake the people he has chosen for himself; Samuel excludes sinning by ceasing to pray for his people and to instruct them "in the good and the right way"; persistence in wickedness despite God's goodness would mean perdition for Israel. The final sentence is emphatic: *wĕ'im hārēa' tārē'û gam-'attem gam-malkĕkem tissāpû,* "But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king."

This final declaration is the key to understanding the assurance in 12:22: "For the Lord will not cast away his people, for his great name's sake *(ba'ăbûr šĕmô haggādôl),* because it has pleased the Lord to make you a

[23] See S. R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text,* 94: "The whole verse consists of the protasis, ending with aposiopesis." Septuagint and Vulgate accord with MT. Targum Jonathan has: "If you will *fear from before the Lord and worship before him and accept his Memra* and do not rebel against *the Memra* of the Lord, both you and the king who will rule over you will *follow eagerly after the service of the Lord* your God." Most modern exegetes, however, demand an apodosis expressing well-being or blessing and assume corruption of MT.

people for himself." God who has created and chosen his people forgives "all" sins, provided that the people do not fall away totally, thus becoming incapable of repentance and making ineffective all intercession. In this conclusion of chapters 1–12 the fundamental tenet of Samuel's farewell underscores the importance of all direct or indirect appeals to fidelity and repentance in this great section. The issue at stake is not the question of judge or king, but whether God or human authority shall rule over Israel.

2.2 *The Failings and Rejection of Saul (13:2–15:35)*

Chapters 13–14 comprise several anecdotes about Saul's Philistine wars which are unified on a profounder theological rather than on a literal level: the threat of the Philistines gives occasion to sharp conflict between Samuel and Saul (13:2–15); Jonathan acting under divine inspiration turns the tide of battle at Michmash Pass (13:16–14:23a); Saul's inadvertent solemn curse upon Jonathan (14:23b–46); and a summary of Saul's activity (14:47–52). After depicting the invading forces of the Philistines and the trembling Israelites gathered around Saul at Gilgal, the narrator turns his attention to Saul: "He waited seven days, the time appointed by Samuel; but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people were scattering from him. So Saul said, 'Bring the burnt offering here to me, and the peace offerings.' And he offered the burnt offering. As soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him and salute him" (13:8–10).

This short narrative involves some conspicuous gaps. There is no explanation of when and how the period of seven days was chosen; of how strict was the prohibition against the king performing distinctively priestly services; or of why Saul felt that a burnt offering had to be offered in order to ensure God's saving help. These gaps may be deliberate in order to concentrate the reader's attention on the underlying realities—i.e., on a deeper, indeed the deepest, concealed meaning of the conflict in Saul's consciousness and between Samuel's accusation and his own self-defence. Saul discloses his dilemma: "Now the Philistines will come down upon me at Gilgal, and I have not entreated the favour of the Lord" (13:12). This is an explanation of his contended decision : "So I forced myself *(wā'et'appaq),* and offered the burnt offering." It is obvious that there were two different layers in Saul's consciousness dealing with the same issue: on one an evaluation of the importance of a burnt offering in securing God's favour was taking place, on the other the importance of the general law concerning the offering of sacrifice was being weighed in the balance.

Saul failed on both levels. First, burnt offering is not solely a way of entreating God's favour; it can be considered purely as a symbol of man's devotion. What counts is man's total trust in the mysterious ways of God's providence which leaves all doors open for the divine liberty to operate.

Once it is conceived as an independent and reliable method of gaining God's favour it introduces a spirit of presumptuous idolatry. It is not by chance that Jonathan succeeds by trust alone without any need of an offering (13:16–14:23a), arguing: "It may be that the Lord will work for us; for nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by many or by few" (14:6b). This is probably intentionally contrasted with Saul's attitude to the same theological issue. Secondly, the more it is clear that offering cannot possess autonomous force, the more it is obvious that Saul should respect the general law. The report in 13:8–10 is directly related to Samuel's command in 10:8: "And you shall go down before me to Gilgal; and behold, I am coming to you to offer burnt offerings and to sacrifice peace offerings. Seven days you shall wait, until I come to you and show you what you shall do." We may assume that at that time only a priest was allowed to officiate at the sacrifice. All the more is it clear that Samuel's purpose is to put to the test both Saul's obedience and his patience—a decisive mark of faith.

In the final result, Saul's disobedience to the general law has the same roots as his misunderstanding of the role of an offering: lack of faith, manipulation of God's purposes through cultic formality, self-will and self-deception. A tale of a broken *appointment* turns into a story of *disbelief*.[24] Only against this background does the sharp condemnation uttered by Samuel in 13:13–14 (cf. 2:35) become understandable:

> *niskāltā lō' šāmartā 'et-miṣwat yhwh 'ĕlōhêkā 'ăšer ṣiwwāk kî 'attāh hēkîn yhwh 'et-mamlaktĕkā 'el-yiśrā'ēl 'ad-'ôlām; wĕ'attāh mamlaktĕkā lō'-tāqûm biqqēš yhwh lô 'îš kilbābô wayĕṣawwēhû yhwh lĕnāgîd 'al-'ammô kî lō' šāmartā 'et 'ăšer-ṣiwwĕkā yhwh*, "You have done foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which he commanded you; for now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel for ever. But now your kingdom shall not continue, the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart; and the Lord has appointed him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you."[25]

The authority of Samuel's judgment is based on a strictly theocratic view of rule over Israel.[26] The "foolishness" of Saul implies the wisdom of him whom God has sought out "after his own heart." Both the rejection of Saul and the

[24] See the conflict between Isaiah and Ahaz in a similar situation, presented in Isa 7. Ahaz rejects Isaiah's proposal to ask a sign of God because he had his own plans in mind.

[25] See the presentation of the structure of this passage in V. P. Long, *The Reign and Rejection of King Saul*, 91.

[26] See the statement by V. P. Long, *The Reign and Rejection of King Saul*, 90: "Ideologically, monarchy in Israel was acceptable only insofar as it was *not* 'like (that of) all the other nations,' that is, only insofar as the king was willing to acknowledge his subordination to the Great King and his designated spokesman. The command of 10:8, that Saul should await Samuel's arrival in order to consecrate battle and receive instructions, was designed to safeguard this theocratic authority structure, and Saul's failure, or refusal, to recognize that point formed the basis for the announcement of judgement."

election of David involve not only God's freedom but also Saul's failings on the one hand and David's righteousness on the other. Neither rejection of the one nor election of the other, however, can be adequately "justified" on the basis of one short passage. Nearly all the following passages of 1 Samuel provide evidence of Saul's deficiency and David's wholehearted loyalty, thus justifying God's contrasting ways of dealing with them. The difference between the two men is already manifest in the moments of their election: Saul was chosen (1 Sam 10:24) in response to the request of the people (1 Sam 8:5, 19–20; 12:13), whereas David was truly God's choice (1 Sam 16:12; 2 Sam 6:21). Nor should we forget that David's righteousness is implicit in many narratives and explicitly stated in 1 Kgs 3:6; 9:4; 11:4; 14:8; 15:3.[27]

The account of Saul's disobedience in 13:2–15 has an exemplary thematic parallel in chapter 15. But between the two prophetic verdicts on Saul's behaviour comes the story of his laying a solemn curse upon anyone who eats food before sundown (14:23b–46) which may at first give an impression of Saul's piety: he is, it seems, scrupulous in matters religious. Since the motivation of his decisions is often wrong, however, they can have an opposite effect. At the climax of his decisive battle with the Philistines he allowed himself a mistaken gesture; as the narrator puts it: "And the men of Israel were distressed *(niggaś)* that day; for Saul laid an oath on the people, saying, 'Cursed be the man *('ārûr hā'îš)* who eats food until it is evening and I am avenged on my enemies'" (14:24). Septuagint renders the first statement: "And Saul committed a great trespass of ignorance in that day."[28] Saul's arbitrary gesture had a series of dire effects: "But Jonathan had not heard his father charge the people with the oath; so he put forth the tip of the staff that was in his hand, and dipped it in the honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth; and his eyes became bright" (14:27). Immediately we are faced with a discrepancy between the binding nature of the Saul-imposed fast and the beneficial effect of Jonathan's unwitting infringement of the oath the second consequence of Saul's vow was, however, negative: after sundown, when the prohibition was no longer in force, the people inadvertently neglected the fundamental cultic prohibition on eating meat with blood (cf. Gen 9:4; Lev

[27] However, it is not justified to consider David's election independently of his character. P. K. McCarter, *I Samuel,* 229, overstates the meaning of the phrase *biqqēš yhwh lô 'îš kilbābô* when he translates it "Yahweh will seek out a man of his own choosing" and comments as follows: "This has nothing to do with any great fondness of Yahweh's for David or any special quality of David, to whom it patently refers. Rather it emphasizes the free divine selection of the heir to the throne (*nāgîd,* 'prince'), as the alternative to the endurance of Saul's 'kingship (dynasty!) over Israel forever.'" See also H. P. Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel,* 98, and D. M. Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul,* 33–40, who tend to ascribe arbitrariness to Samuel's verdict in 13:13–14.

[28] P. K. McCarter, *I Samuel,* 245, assumes that MT is corrupt and proposes the reading in accordance with the Septuagint's rendering: *wš'wl šgh* (or *šgg*) *šggh gdwlh bywm hhw'*. However, Targum Jonathan and Vulgate do not follow the Septuagint's rendering.

17:11; 19:26; Deut 12:23–27; Ezek 33:25); while extremely exhausted, they acted in haste, falling on the plundered beasts (14:31–33). The third consequence concerned Saul directly: "And Saul inquired of God, 'Shall I go down, after the Philistines?' But he did not answer him that day" (14:37).

What are the reactions of the people, Jonathan and Saul to the consequences of Saul's adjuration? Strikingly enough, the people accepted his charge without complaint: "So none of the people tasted food" (14:24). On the other hand, Jonathan allowed himself to be critical after being informed of Saul's vow by one of the people: "My father has troubled the land; see how my eyes have become bright, because I tasted a little of this honey. How much better if the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they found; for now the slaughter among the Philistines has not been great" (14:29–30). Saul's reaction to the report "Behold, the people are sinning against the Lord, by eating with the blood" (14:33) reveals his formal piety: "Let every man bring his ox or his sheep, and slay them here, and eat; and do not sin against the Lord by eating with the blood" (14:34). Noteworthy, too, is the next report: "And Saul built an altar to the Lord; it was the first altar that he built to the Lord" (14:35). But most striking of all is Saul's reaction to God's silence: "Come hither, all you leaders of the people; and know and see how this sin has arisen today. For as the Lord lives who saves Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die" (14:38–39). The people again seem compliant: "But there was not a man among all the people that answered him" (14:39). Their reply to his decision to cast a sacred lot was: "Do what seems good to you" (14:40).

Now the irony is complete, as Saul takes measures to discover the guilty party: *hābāh tāmîm,* "Give a perfect lot" (14:41), he demands. Targum Jonathan renders this phrase "we are in truth," whereas the Septuagint has a striking expansion: "O Lord God of Israel, why hast thou not answered thy servant this day? If this guilt is in me or in Jonathan my son, O Lord, God of Israel, give Urim; but if this guilt is in thy people Israel, give Thummim."[29] In the first casting of the sacred lot Saul with his house was "taken," whereas the people "escaped"; in the next Jonathan was "taken." At Saul's insistence Jonathan confesses his guilt and is willing to die (14:43), and his father remains consistent and condemns him: "God do so to me and more also; you shall surely die, Jonathan" (14:44). But the people spontaneously revolted against the decision: "Shall Jonathan die, who has wrought this great victory in Israel? Far from it! As the Lord lives, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground; for he has wrought with God this day" (14:45). Their intervention was successful: "So the people ransomed Jonathan, that he did not die" (14:45).

It is noteworthy that Saul is implacably serious and consistent in his be-

[29] For the procedure of lot casting see J. Lindblom, "Lot-casting in the Old Testament," *VT* 12 (1962), 164–178.

haviour, whereas Jonathan and the people are not. Consequently a number of questions arise about their attitudes. Concerning Saul it must be asked: What was the motivation of his vow, of building the altar, of demanding God's answer "that day," of his lot-casting ceremony, of his persistence in delivering his son to death? Concerning Jonathan: Why is he so ready to die even though he could not justify Saul's oath and his infringement of it was unwitting? Concerning the people: Why are they obedient to a king who acted foolishly?—for it is generally recognized that Saul's vow was rash, ill-advised, and presumptuous. We may assume that the building of an altar to the Lord must have been motivated by the desire to have full control over the cultic performance of the people rather than by a need to make atonement for guilt committed. Saul's divination seems to have been motivated by his desire to obtain confirmation for his covert plans rather than by his willingness to comply with the hidden ways of God's providence. He was capable of using for his ends even the most delicate methods of sacral investigation; in casting the sacred lot he swore "though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die" (v. 39), because he was overconfident that something of the sort could not happen. There is no sign of his recognizing that his adjuration was mistaken and therefore of his feeling a need to beg God's forgiveness. Since he was *not* "willing to do all that is right,"[30] but only what suited his self-righteous will, he was "unable to avoid the coming disaster."[31]

Jonathan on the one hand and the people on the other stand in contrast to Saul's thought and action. Jonathan was right in criticizing his father's ill-advised gesture. His noble willingness to die in consequence of a mistaken decision does not conflict with his reasons for his verdict on his father's gesture. On the contrary. The more one is aware that a vow taken before God is an extremely serious matter, the more he or she is capable of bearing the consequences involved. From this it logically follows that an oath should not be taken at all (cf. Matt 5:33–36). The contrast between the people's obedience until the critical moment of revolt and what happened then indicates that they disliked Saul's vow and lot casting; compliance was dictated by fear.[32] Once the contrast was complete between a Jonathan "who has wrought this great victory *('āśāh hayĕšû'āh haggĕdôlāh hazzō't)*" (14:45) and a Saul who had bound the people by oath to a fast without good reason, their protest was made spontaneously.

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[30] We have to turn the positive statement by P. R. Ackroyd, *The First Book of Samuel,* 119, into a negative one.

[31] See P. R. Ackroyd, *The First Book of Samuel,* 119.

[32] Septuagint however, has, an expanded rendering of v. 42, thus pointing to the people's disagreement regarding lot casting: "And Saul said: 'Cast between me and my son Jonathan; whomsoever the Lord shall cause to be taken by lot, let him die.' And the people said to Saul: 'This thing is not to be done.' And Saul prevailed against the people, and they cast between him and Jonathan his son, and Jonathan was taken by lot."

Which position is supported by the narrator or compiler? Putting the story between two classical narratives of Saul's disobedience that resulted in his rejection shows that the final compiler obviously wanted to underscore the king's failings in order to persuade his readers that Saul was not an appropriate ruler. Jonathan's verdict on his father on the one hand and the people's protest against Saul's condemnation of his son on the other are certainly shared by the writer. This implies that Jonathan's unwitting infringement of the oath is not true guilt; consequently there must have been some solution for him. It is most noteworthy that in Targum Jonathan the argument of MT for requesting Jonathan's deliverance "for he has wrought with God this day" (14:45) is rendered as follows: "for *before the Lord it was revealed that in carelessness he acted this day.*" How "the people ransomed Jonathan" (v. 45) is in this context of little or no importance. It may be assumed that silence about this and other issues was motivated by the main purpose of the story, which shows that Saul's presumptuous manipulation proved fatal to himself: his self-righteousness was the father of his condemnation. And that must have been why God "did not answer him that day" (14:37), for divine favour can not be gained by any kind of human demand or dictate.[33]

The story of the great battle against the Amalekites (15:1–35) discloses Saul's various failings in his attitude to the will of the Lord and his servant Samuel.[34] In his address to Saul the latter says: "It was I whom the Lord sent *('ōtî šālaḥ yhwh)* to anoint you king over Israel; now therefore hearken to the words of the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts, 'I will punish *(pāqadtî)* what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way, when they came up out of Egypt. Now go and smite *(lēk wĕhikkîtāh)* Amalek, and utterly destroy *(wĕhaḥărāmtem)* all that they have; do not spare them *(wĕlō' taḥmōl 'ālâw),* but kill both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass'" (15:1–3). It is important to realize that Saul's duty to ensure that the Lord received his due is underlined by the reference to his anointing; Saul must obey God's instructions as transmitted through Samuel. The imposition of the ban or "devotion" *(ḥērem)* applied to the Amalekites had its origin in Amalek's failings during the years in the desert (see Exod 17:8–16; Deut 25:17–19; cf. Judg 6:3–6), for normally it was restricted to the residents of Palestine (cf. Deut 20:10–18). The triumph over Amalek was a

[33] We cannot agree with the view of H. P. Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel,* 120: "The older commentators were much exercised by the question whether Jonathan was really bound by an adjuration of which he was ignorant. In the sense of the Biblical writer, he was so bound. Nor can we seriously question that, to the Biblical writer, the reason for Yahweh's refusal to answer Saul was his anger at Jonathan's transgression—though the commentators have ingeniously avoided this conclusion, and have tried to shift the guilt from Jonathan to Saul."

[34] For a close "literary" analysis of this passage, see especially M. Sternberg, "The Bible's Art of Persuasion: Ideology, Rhetoric, and Poetics in Saul's Fall," *HUCA* 54 (1983), 45–82 = *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (ISBL; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 482–515.

victory of prayer by means of Moses' uplifted hands, and the story in Exodus concludes: "The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation" (17:16). Deuteronomy, however, points to Amalek's unforgivable failure to spare the weak and defenseless in order to justify the verdict: "... when the Lord your God has given you rest from all your enemies round about, in the land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; you shall not forget" (25:19). Now it is Saul's duty and privilege to revenge Amalek's aggression.

When inflicting retribution elsewhere, Saul showed a remarkable grasp of the spirit of such actions. When he spared Kenites who deserved to be rewarded his argument was: "for you showed kindness *(ḥesed)* to all the people of Israel when they came up out of Egypt" (15:6). But now he surprisingly spared those who should have been the prime object of total destruction: "And Saul smote *(wayyak)* the Amalekites, from Havilah as far as Shur, which is east of Egypt. And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed *(heḥĕrîm)* all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag *(wayyaḥmōl šā'ûl wĕhā'ām 'al-'ăgāg),* and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them *(wĕlō' 'ābû haḥărîmām);* all that was despised and worthless they utterly destroyed *(heḥĕrîmû)*" (15:7–9). It is obvious that the emphasis is on the contrast between destroying "all the people," "all that was despised and worthless," and sparing "Agag and the best of the sheep ..." The divine commandment of total destruction (15:1–3) contrasts glaringly with Saul's partial completion of the task.[35] There is no mention of motives for this selectivity, but it is evident that he was not guided by humanitarian motives but rather by vanity and greed, for he did not spare the weak and helpless—like the infant and suckling named in the command—but the king and the best of the livestock.

God then delivers a grave verdict in his address to Samuel, shifting the weight of doom from the Amalekites to Saul: "I repent *(nīḥamtî)* that I have made Saul king; for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments *(kî-šāb mē'aḥăray wĕ'et-dĕbāray lō' hēqîm)*" (15:11), a regret echoed in 15:35; so this theme underscores the gravity of God's verdict. Samuel "was angry; and he cried to the Lord all night"

[35] See the statement by M. Sternberg, *HUCA* 54 (1983), 54 = *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative,* 489: "Consider the present case of sequential shift in focus. Only when his hero falls into sin does the narrator show his hand. It is (we now discover) Saul's crime, not Amalek's, that forms the real theme, and his punishment that raises the moral-ideological question marks and thus calls for justification ... The point is that as soon as Saul emerges as the real centre of interest and judgment, all that has gone before appears in a new light and acquires new significance in relation to him. The whole normative weight of the tale's opening, seemingly designed to crush the Amalekites or any pity their fate may evoke, now recoils upon Saul."

(15:11b), supposedly either to save Saul by persuading God to change his mind or else to procure from him additional instructions. Now a chain of irony is forged. When Saul encounters Samuel in Gilgal he greets him: *bārûk 'attāh layhwh hăqîmōtî 'et-dĕbar yhwh,* "Blessed be you to the Lord; I have performed the commandment of the Lord" (15:13). This enthusiastic claim is contradicted by God's announcement to Samuel that "he has not performed my commandments." Asked by Samuel to explain the noise of the animals, Saul replies: "They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice to the Lord your God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed" (15:15). The most striking feature of his self-defence is the attempt to redistribute blame and credit by choosing his pronouns: when the question is one of guilt he shifts from "I" to "they"—even though in v. 9 it is explicitly stated that "Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep ..."; when the divine will has been complied with, he uses "we."

In this respect what he says in 15:20–21—in reply to Samuel's reproach that he disobeyed God's voice—is a similar evasion of the truth; concerning Agag, however, Saul admits, "I have brought Agag the king of Amalek." Samuel asks the rhetorical question: "Why did you not obey the voice of the Lord? ... (15:19), thus expressing his bitterness and inviting the king to repentance. Saul, however, was not prepared to answer such a question because he did not expect Samuel to know about the matter; so he allowed himself a revised version of events that departed from the objective truth, claiming: "I have obeyed the voice of the Lord ..." (15:20–21).[36]

In both instances Saul claims a pious motive for sparing the best of the spoil: "to sacrifice to the Lord your God," but his evasiveness leaves the impression that his true reason for doing so was pure self-interest. Even if Saul's defence at that point had been sincere, it would have remained theologically unacceptable, for the regulations governing sacrifice and the ban are completly different.[37] Thus it is obvious that Saul's misconduct is es-

[36] See M. Sternberg, *HUCA* 54 (1983), 73 = *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative,* 506: "This countershow of innocence launches a complex play of viewpoints and levels of awareness, with Saul as its ironic target. Although actually invited to make a moral response—a full confession of guilt being the only gesture that might save him—Saul delivers a factual report. Having misinterpreted the present state of affairs, Saul now misrepresents the past and thus leaves himself no future. And blind to his own informational disadvantage, he seeks to take advantage of his addressee's."

[37] See the statement by H. W. Hertzberg, *I and II Samuel,* 127: "Saul has not only a plausible but also a pious answer ready for Samuel's question about the significance of the cattle round about. Is it not the same thing for him to set aside the cattle for sacrifice and to offer them now at this holy place as to put them to the 'ban' in the place where they were taken? But sacrifice and the 'ban' are not the same thing; the 'ban' is complete destruction, the surrender of the whole, whereas sacrifice *(zābaḥ)* usually presupposes a portion for men as well. Above all, however, Saul, by bringing the plunder undestroyed from the place of the 'ban,' has thereby introduced it into the profane sphere of life, where it is exposed to the usual contamination."

sentially a matter of disobedience, and his self-defence is self-incriminatory. The sentence pronounced by Samuel (15:22–23) is couched in poetry; it is prophetic as well as proverbial in style:

> Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices
> as in obeying the voice of the Lord?
> Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,
> and to hearken than the fat of rams.
> For rebellion is as the sin of divination,
> and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.
> Because you have rejected *(ya'an mā'astā)* the word of the Lord,
> he has also rejected you *(wayyim'oskā)* from being king.

This verdict is reminiscent of other passages where sacrifice and other religious observances are disparaged by the preference given to a right relationship towards God and one's fellow-men (cf. Isa 1:10–11, 13; 66:2b–4; Jer 7:21–26; Hos 6:6; Amos 5:21–24; Mic 6:6–8; Pss 50:9; 51:18; Mark 12:28–34). There is a gradation of accusation, and Saul is presented as hardened in sin. Consequently, God's punishment must fit the crime according to the *lex talionis:* measure for measure—or in this case, rejection for rejection (cf. also 15:26). It is noteworthy that in a similar context of *ḥērem* violation by Achan in Josh 7:25 a like reciprocity is found: "Why did you bring trouble on us? The Lord brings trouble on you today." Samuel's declaration of punishment echoes the threat in 1 Sam 12:15: "If you will not hearken to the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then the hand of the Lord will be against you and your king."

Samuel's announcement is followed by Saul's confession of sin: "I have sinned *(ḥāṭā'tî);* for I have transgressed *('ābartî)* the commandment of the Lord and your words, because I feared *(yārē'tî)* the people and obeyed their voice. Now therefore, I pray, pardon my sin *(śā' nā' 'et-ḥaṭṭā'tî),* and return with me, that I may worship the Lord" (15:24–25). Saul reverses the defence put forward in vv. 13 and 20, recognizing that he obeyed the voice (mouth) of the people instead of God and admitting that he also transgressed against Samuel's words. But his confession of sin is not prompt and direct as in the case of Achan after the Jericho battle (Josh 7:20), Jonathan after his unwitting transgression (1 Sam 14:43), and David after the Bathsheba affair (2 Sam 12:13; cf. 24:17). The most aggravating circumstance is the reason for his disobedience to God's commandment: "because I feared the people and obeyed their voice."[38] Saul's confession of sin and his plea for forgive-

[38] See the statement by M. Sternberg, *HUCA* 54 (1983), 80–81 = *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative,* 513: "If any reader has a lingering doubt about the justice of Saul's rejection, the newly fabricated account will banish it for good. Saul indeed starts by confessing his sin, at long last. But he immediately relapses and, blind to the implications of his argument, throws the blame on others. He thus disqualifies himself on all possible grounds. In social terms, the blatancy of his lie ('I feared the people') exceeds all previous limits; and even if this were the

ness are reminiscent of Pharaoh's confession and plea for mercy (Exod 9:27–30; 10:16–20; cf. 8:4–7, 21–28). Unlike his predecessor, however, Samuel is not willing to pardon or to pray for his adversary. Instead, he repeats his verdict in v. 26, and after Saul's attempt to detain him, tears his clothes and interprets the apparent accident as a symbolic act of sentence: "The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day, and has given it to a neighbour of yours, who is better than you. And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or repent *(lō' yĕšaqqēr wĕlō' yinnāḥēm),* for he is not a man, that he should repent *(kî lō' 'ādām hû' lĕhinnāḥēm)*" (15:28–29; cf. 28:17–18).[39] After Saul's renewed confession of sin, Samuel grants his request to return with him and thus leave him with at least a pretence that the judgment has not yet taken full effect.

After his confrontation with Saul is completed, Samuel calls for Agag, whom Saul had made his brother in crime.[40] Then he carries out the proscription on him before the Lord by applying the principle of *lex talionis: ka'ăšer šikkĕlāh nāšîm harbekā kēn-tiškal minnāšîm 'immekā,* "As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women" (15:33). With this execution of judgment the contrast between king and prophet becomes total. The crown of pride that evoked Saul's pity is itself condemned to ruthless extinction. Agag's illusion of survival—"Surely the bitterness of death is past"—ended by Samuel's sword. Only by this action could the consequences of Saul's crime be nullified. Samuel's judgment is fully in line with the promise given concerning the nations, their kings, and their gods : "... And he will give their kings into your hand, and you shall make their name perish from under heaven, not a man shall be able to stand against you, until you have destroyed them ... And you shall not bring an abominable thing into your house, and become accursed like it; you shall utterly detest and abhor it; for it is an accursed thing" (Deut 7:17–26).

The narrative concludes with a renewed declaration of God's repentance: "And the Lord repented *(nīḥām)* that he had made Saul king over Israel" (15:35b; cf. 15:11).

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whole truth, what better proof would one need of his unfitness for kingship? And in religious terms, he in effect admits that he fears the people more than he fears God ..." It is strange, therefore, that D. M. Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul,* 56, takes—at the end of his evaluation of interpretations of chap. 15—an opposite stand: "The story thus forces us to re-examine, not Saul's conduct and motives, but those of Samuel and Yahweh. Why do they hold such a rigid pose? Why is Saul's penitence disregarded? *Why is Saul rejected?*"

[39] See M. Sternberg, *HUCA* 54 (1983), 67 = *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative,* 500: "Saul comes all the way from the exulting 'I have performed the commandment of the Lord' to the about-facing 'I have sinned'; and Samuel, from the mild query about the bleating of the sheep to a brutal statement of rejection."

[40] Some commentators assume that the original continuation of the narrative is found in 15:32–35, and they think that vv. 24–31 are an interpolation.

3. *Saul's Decline and David's Ascendancy (16:1–31:13)*

In the prophetic story of Saul (chaps. 7–15) Samuel is presented as protagonist, Saul—and occasionally the people—at most as secondary figures. In the account of David's rise (chaps. 16–31) there is a glaring contrast between him and Saul: David is protagonist and his fortunes are rising, whereas Saul is deuteragonist and his are declining. The great change is announced to Saul in 15:28: "The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day, and has given it to a neighbour of yours, who is better than you" (cf. 28:17). Saul's rejection is illustrated against the background of his many failings and of David's righteousness. God can accept only a man who thinks and acts in his Spirit. When Samuel is sent to Bethlehem to anoint David in Saul's place he is instructed: "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" (16:7). No doubt "height" alludes to Saul's appearance: "From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people" (9:2; cf. 10:23), while David was "the youngest" *(haqqāṭān)* of eight sons of Jesse (16:6–13; 17:12). The account of his anointing concludes: "And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward" (16:13).

Saul's end was bizarre. Driven by self-will, he "put the mediums and the wizards out of the land" (28:3). The grave threat posed by the Philistines made it clear that Saul's repudiation was complete: "the Lord did not answer him either by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets" (28:6). In this stressful situation Saul plays an ironic role and turns to one of the few remaining mediums at Endor seeking contact with the ghost of Samuel, who duly appears, castigates Saul's disobedience, and foretells his death: "Why then do you ask me, since the Lord has turned from you and become your enemy? The Lord has done to you as he spoke by me; for the Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hand, and given it to your neighbour, David. Because you did not obey the voice of the Lord, and did not carry out his fierce wrath against Amalek, therefore the Lord has done this thing to you this day. Moreover the Lord will give Israel also with you into the hand of the Philistines; and tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me; the Lord will give the army of Israel also into the hand of the Philistines" (28:16–19). The decisive battle that followed on Mount Gilboa (cf. chap. 31) sealed the fate of Saul and of his three sons; Saul himself committed suicide.

Sections 16:14–22:29 and 24:1–26:25, however, disclose profounder reasons for Saul's decline and David's rise.

3.1 *Saul Tormented by an Evil Spirit, God's Favour Bestowed on David (16:14–23:29)*

The following passage (16:14–23) paves the way for an encounter between Saul and David on various levels. The narrator depicts Saul's miserable situation: "Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him. And Saul's servants said to him, 'Behold now, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you. Let our lord now command your servants, who are before you, to seek out a man who is skilful in playing the lyre, and when the evil spirit from God is upon you, he will play it, and you will be well'" (16:14–16). The musician chosen to provide this therapy was David.

The course of events ending with the death of Saul and his sons on Mount Gilboa (chap. 31) makes it clear that God guides history by promise and exaction, continually taking into account what has happened earlier and elsewhere. The clash between Saul and David tests them both by sounding the depths of their thoughts and feelings. Their response to various challenges always makes it clear in the end that the ways of God's rule are hidden but perfectly righteous. Since God is not acting alone but uses both the rebellious and obedient characters of his human agents, his judgment is usually more in accordance with the verities of the human situation than foreground happenings indicate. So the first encounter between the two is rich in irony. The intentions of Saul's servants were perfectly good, and David proved that "the Lord was with him" (16:18) so clearly that "Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armour-bearer" (16:21). But the relief he brought was only temporary, for Saul was plagued not by illness of body or psyche but by a malaise of the soul. The "evil spirit" resulted from a fundamentally distorted attitude to God and man.[41] How else can we explain the later mutation of Saul's love into a persecution mania towards David, once his ambitions had been challenged?

Before presenting this drama of darkness, the compiler reconciles the popular legend of David's victory over the Philistine champion Goliath (17:1–18:5) with the central concern: David's rise to power. The emphasis is placed on the blatant contrast between the Philistine, the Israelites, and David: Goliath is his people's most experienced and well-equipped warrior, self-confident and consumed by hate and defiance towards Israel. Saul and his people are terrified and helpless, and the king promises to the man who kills Goliath great riches, one of his daughters as a wife, and freedom for his house. When David offers himself, Saul replies: "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are but a youth, and he has been a man of war from his youth" (17:33). David rejects the armour he is offered,

[41] See H. W. Hertzberg, *I and II Samuel*, 141: "Saul's suffering is described theologically, not psychopathetically or psychologically."

saying "I cannot go with these; for I am not used to them" (17:39) and appears before Goliath with his shepherd's weapon—a sling. Goliath, boasting of his strength, "cursed David by his gods" (17:43), but David challenges him with absolute confidence in the power of God: "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand ... that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly *(kol-haqqāhāl hazzeh)* may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hand" (17:45–47; cf. 16:26, 37; Isa 31:1–3; Zech 4:6; Ps 20:8–9). David, revealing a basic law of the kingdom of God, executes God's justice as his chosen instrument; after striking the Philistine with amazing accuracy on his one vulnerable spot—his forehead—he kills him with Goliath's own sword (17:51; cf. 2 Sam 23:21). So were Goliath's taunts and curses turned upon him. This unexpected end prompted the flight of the Philistines, just as the appearance and taunts of the Philistine had moved the Israelites to retreat. At the end of the story the implications of all the speeches become manifest.

In contrast to chapter 16, the narrator of chapter 17 ignores Saul's earlier encounter with David (cf. vv. 55–58) but provides a lyrical description of Jonathan's affection and loyalty towards David (18:1–5): "Then Jonathan made a covenant *(bĕrît)* with David, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his armour, and even his sword and his bow and his girdle" (18:3–4; cf. 18:1; 19:1; 20:8, 17; 23:18). As we are shown in several passages, the proverbial friendship between David and Jonathan is understandable against a background of the outstanding personal qualities that both possessed. After Jonathan's death David sang: "... your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women" (2 Sam 1:26). David must have been a man of many attractive characteristics, for Saul too "loved him greatly" (v. 16:21; cf. 18:22); moreover, "all Israel and Judah loved David" (18:16; cf. v. 22); and finally "Saul's daughter Michal loved David" (18:20.28). But the most important of the tributes is the observation that "David had success in all his undertakings; for the Lord was with him" (18:14; cf. vv. 5 and 28). Since David was chosen and loved by God, his success was an obvious mark of God's blessing.

David's success, however, very soon became a serious challenge to Saul. "When David returned from slaying the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing ... And the women sang to one another as they made merry, 'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.'" (18:6–7). This tactlessness aroused Saul's feeling of inferiority and fear for his throne, which resulted in jealousy and a rising mistrust towards David. Saul "was very angry" (18:8) and he "eyed David from that day

on" (18:9); seized by "an evil spirit from God" he tried twice to pin David to the wall (18:10–11) and "was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him but had departed from Saul" (18:12; cf. vv. 15 and 29). In an attempt to remove him, he sent him into battle with the Philistines, first promising him his elder daughter Merab (18:17), and later his younger daughter Michal, "that she may be a snare for him" (18:21–22). But after David returned safely, he showed his duplicity by giving Merab to another man. When, however, the younger man brought the required bride-price for Michal—a hundred Philistines' foreskins—"Saul gave him his daughter Michal for a wife. But when Saul saw and knew that the Lord was with David, and that all Israel loved him, Saul was still more afraid of David. So Saul was David's enemy continually" (18:27–29). Four distinct incidents (19:1–7, 9–10, 11–17, 18–24) chart the escalation of the conflict.

Saul's failure to do away with David by indirect methods increased his jealousy, mistrust, and fear. Now he "spoke to Jonathan his son and to all his servants, that they should kill David" (19:1). Ironically, Saul disclosed his plans to the man who "delighted much in David" (19:1; cf. 18:1, 3; 20:17) and whose goodness now moved him to intercede for David by "speaking well" of him. Jonathan's argument is of a theological and moral nature: "Let not the king sin against his servant David, because he has not sinned against you, and because his deeds have been of good service to you; for he took his life in his hand and he slew the Philistine, and the Lord wrought a great victory *(tĕšû'āh gĕdôlāh)* for all Israel. You saw it, and rejoiced; why then will you sin against innocent blood by killing David without cause *(lammāh teḥĕṭā' bĕdām nāqî lĕhāmît 'et-dāwîd ḥinnām)?*" (19:4–5). The reasoning is so lucid and impeccable that it should have convinced Saul—and indeed he relented and swore: "As the Lord lives, he shall not be put to death" (19:6). This gesture was a clear mark of reconciliation with David; in 18:13 we are told that "Saul removed him from his presence," but in 19:7 we read: "And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence as before."

David's restoration to a close relationship with Saul's family did not last, for his military success warped the king's mind; "an evil spirit from the Lord came upon Saul" so that he "sought to pin David to the wall with the spear" (19:9–10; cf. 18:10–11). When this manoeuvre failed, Saul sent his watchmen to David's house to kill him there (19:11–17), but the irony persisted: Saul's daughter Michal, who had become David's wife through Saul's duplicity—"that she may be a snare for him" (18:20–27)—herself used duplicity in order to save the man who now commanded her primary loyalty. Asked by her father: "Why have you deceived me thus, and let my enemy go, so that he has escaped?" she fabricated a lie to match her father's guile: "He said to me, 'Let me go, why should I kill you?'" (19:17). Meanwhile David had fled to Ramah to meet Samuel; there he was miraculously protected from Saul's persecution (19:18–24).

The true tragedy of Saul's life was the recoil produced by his hostility to David. The more he tried to impede David's success or to destroy him, the more the younger man was successful and loved. His malice and machination even produced the opportunity for David to become Saul's son-in-law, although he could only ask: "Who am I, and who are my kinsfolk, my father's family in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?" (19:18).[42] Disappointing her father's expectation, Michal became the instrument of David's escape from his persecuting animosity. Indeed, the unconscious actions of the characters foreshadow future events, thus bearing witness to God's righteousness and justice. The more human malice erupts darkly, the more brightly the glory of the divine justice shines. The contrast between the two men's characters and between their corresponding fates is a classic example of double causality in the Hebrew Bible.[43] Is not the main purpose of the prophetic interpretation to vindicate the rightness of God's direction of history?

Chapter 20 forms an introduction to the period of David's departure from the royal court and his fugitive life. Nevertheless it looks forward to David's future kingdom, which will be based on the ideal of loyalty. He complains to Jonathan: "What have I done? What is my guilt *('ăwônî)?* And what is my sin *(ḥaṭṭā'tî)* before your father, that he seeks my life?" (20:1). Jonathan, abounding in affectionate friendship, replies: "Whatever you say, I will do for you" (20:4). David suggests that Jonathan should sound out his father's ideas and intentions and begs: "Now deal kindly with your servant *(wĕ'āśîtā ḥesed 'al-'abdekā),* for you have brought your servant into a covenant of the Lord with you *(kî bibrît yhwh hēbē'tā 'et-'abdekā 'immāk).* But if there is guilt in me *(wĕ'im-yeš-bî 'āwôn),* slay me yourself; for why should you bring me to your father?" (20:8). The plea shows that David acknowledges Jonathan's higher position; the only basis for David's hope in relation to Jonathan is his innocence and Jonathan's "covenant of the Lord" (cf. 18:3), i.e., a covenant ratified before God. Jonathan affirms his willingness to carry through the pro-

[42] P. K. McCarter, *I Samuel,* 318, puts it: "Everything Saul does to thwart David's rise works ironically to David's advantage, every opportunity Saul attempts to seize for himself turns in the end into an opportunity for David. It must also be pointed out that David's marriage to Michal, though at one level just another example of Saul's machinations turned to David's advantage, has a special significance of its own. Marriage to the king's daughter gives David a certain claim to membership in the royal house of Israel, which he will later, when already king of Judah, use to justify his succession to the northern throne as well."

[43] See I. L. Seeligmann, "Menschliches Heldentum und göttliche Hilfe: Die doppelte Kausalität im alttestamentlichen Geschichtsdenken," *ThZ* 19 (1963), 385–411. P. K. McCarter, *I Samuel,* 314, argues: "David's success is divinely given and, as we shall see, cannot be thwarted by his own lack of selfishness or excessive ambition any more than by Saul's opposition. In other words, both men are caught up in something larger than themselves, in events in which they must participate but cannot finally control." There is no evidence in the book as a whole for such views. It is true that God's is the rule over mankind; but it is equally true that God—in the final analysis—acts against the plans of the wicked and in favour of the hope of the righteous.

posed test, but at the same time points to the mutual validity of the sacred covenant; in a clear reference to David's future kingdom he begs: "... May the Lord be with you, as he has been with my father. If I am still alive, show me the loyal love of the Lord *(ta'ăśeh 'immādî ḥesed yhwh),* that I may not die; and do not cut off your loyalty *(wĕlō' takrēt 'et-ḥasdĕkā)* from my house for ever. When the Lord cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth, let not the name of Jonathan be cut off from the house of David. And may the Lord take vengeance on David's enemies" (20:12–16). The narrator concludes: "And Jonathan made David swear again by his love for him; for he loved him as he loved his own soul" (20:17). Both pleas clearly show that innocence and fidelity or loyalty—motivated by love—are the only real theological warrant of safety, and all the more do they imply the exigency of retribution for those who are guilty and disloyal. When David became king, he did not forget Jonathan's loyalty; according to 2 Sam 9:1 he asked: "Is there still any one left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake *(wĕ'e'ĕśeh 'immô ḥesed ba'ăbûr yĕhônātān)?*" And according to 2 Sam 21:7 David "spared *(wayyaḥmōl)* Mephibosheth, the son of Saul's son Jonathan, because of the oath of the Lord which was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul."

The outcome of Jonathan's probing of his father's thinking—on the second day of the new-moon feast—was terrifying: "Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan, and he said to him, 'You son of a perverse, rebellious woman, do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame, and to the shame of your mother's nakedness? For as long as the son of Jesse lives upon the earth, neither you nor your kingdom shall be established *(lō' tikkôn 'attāh ûmalkûtekā).* Therefore send and fetch him to me, for he shall surely die'" (20:30–31). Even though Jonathan was well aware that his own succession to the throne was at stake, he was not impressed by Saul's outburst. But the principal reason was obviously not his friendship with David—as most commentators claim—but the foundation and motivation of that friendship: their shared sensitivity to righteousness and loyalty. That strictly theological and moral axiom explains the wonderful depth and endurance of the friendship between them. Against this background it becomes understandable that the only thing of concern to Jonathan was the question: "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" (20:32; cf. 26:18; 29:8–9). The same is true of the answer given by the priest Ahimelech at Nob to the persecuting Saul: "And who among all your servants is so faithful as David ...?" (22:14). This explains the confirmation of the covenant in the Wilderness of Ziph at Horesh when Jonathan attested his loyalty to David: "Fear not; for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you; you shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you; Saul my father also knows this" (23:17). In this context the narrator reports: "And the two of them made a covenant before the Lord" (23:18). This background is re-

flected in the way of presenting David's innocence and mercy towards his persecutor in chapters 24 and 26. According to both passages David spared Saul when he could have killed him, in the consciousness of his being "the Lord's anointed"; and Saul in return recognized David's righteousness by confessing his own wickedness. Such happenings would have been unthinkable had they not been *cum fundamento in re.*

3.2 *David, Relenting and Vengeful (24:1–26:25)*

Chapters 24 and 26 contain very similar accounts of David's magnanimity in his dealings with Saul. We may conclude either that both narratives are later expansions and elaborations of the same original or that the narrative of chapter 24 (A) is derived from the account contained in chapter 26 (B). The fact that two versions of the same acts of generosity are preserved witness to their extraordinary importance in the context of David's rise to power. All the more is it obvious that the lovely tale of the encounter between David and Nabal's beautiful and intelligent wife Abigail, standing between the two accounts, springs from the same soil: the message is that no human actor on the world's stage should take vengeance with his own hand. A neat contrast is made, however, between the two stories with their expansive and flowery speeches depicting David's refusal to lay hands upon a Saul who persecutes him continually, and his immediate decision to take vengeance on the churlish Nabal, who assaulted him. The point of the pivotal episode in chapter 25 is that David is prevented from incurring fatal blood guilt by the intercession of an exceptional woman who is destined for him. So he learns that he has to leave his cause in the hands of God.[44]

According to both versions of the encounter, Saul took "three thousand chosen men" and went to seek David and his men in the wilderness (24:3; 26:2). Version A says that Saul fell into David's power in the very cave where David was hiding (24:4), while according to version B David went into Saul's camp by night when Abner and the army lay around Saul (26:3–7) and "a deep sleep from the Lord had fallen upon them" (26:12). In both versions David's men tempt their master; in 24:5 they urge him: "Here is the day of which the Lord said to you, 'Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it shall seem good to you'"; in 26:8 Abishai, later commander of David's army, exhorted him: "God has given your enemy into your hand this day; now therefore let me pin him to the earth with one stroke of the spear, and I will not strike him twice." The proposed pinning of Saul to the earth is reminiscent of the king's attempts to

[44] For evaluation of the three chapters, cf.—in addition to the works already cited—especially R. P. Gordon, "David's Rise and Saul's Demise: Narrative Analogy in 1 Samuel 24–26," *TynB* 32 (1980), 37–64.

pin David to the wall (18:11; 19:10), and suggests resort to the *lex talionis.* David refuses to take the matter into his own hands and refers to Saul as the "Lord's anointed" (24:7; 26:9–12). In 24:5b–6 we are told that, having cut off the skirt of Saul's robe, "afterward David's heart smote him *(wayyak lēb-dāwīd 'ōtô),* because he had cut off Saul's skirt." There may be various reasons for David's twinge of conscience—for example the symbolic meaning of the robe. It is noteworthy that in 2 Sam 24:10 the same phrase is used in the context of a census: "But David's heart smote him after he had numbered the people." In 26:10 the narrator reports how David complies with the will of God and leaves judgment upon Saul in God's hands: "As the Lord lives, the Lord will smite him; or his day shall come to die, or he shall go down into battle and perish." It is important to recognize that David's reluctance is not merely a matter of his generous nature but of his respect for the divine will, i.e., his profound belief that God chooses and judges the people: the king is, because of his anointing, sacrosanct and should not be touched by anyone (cf. 26:9, 11, 16, 23; 2 Sam 1:14, 16); vengeance belongs to God; and the righteous can hope for God's protection. This threefold belief debars David from laying violent hands upon Saul.

The sparing of Saul is followed by an evaluation of the deed (24:9–16; 26:13–20). David calls to the king or his guard, protests his loyalty, and substantiates his innocence by producing objects (the skirt of Saul's robe, his spear, and the jar of water) that are tangible evidence that David had declined an opportunity to kill him. His motives and hopes are best expressed by his calling on God to judge between Saul and himself: "May the Lord therefore be judge, and give sentence between me and you, and see to it, and plead my cause, and deliver me from your hand" (24:16). According to version B David characterizes Saul's men—calling them from a distant hilltop—as "sons of death" because of their failure to keep watch over the king, instead of complaining (as one would have expected) about Saul's threatening him—an ironical way and subtle method of reminding the king of his mistaken attitude to their relationship.

In both versions (24:17–22; 26:21–25) Saul ends by acknowledging that David is in the right, and that his own conduct has been indefensible. Especially noteworthy is his declaration in 24:18: *ṣaddîq 'attāh mimmennî kî 'attāh gĕmaltanî haṭṭôbāh wa'ănî gămaltîkā hārā'āh,* "You are more righteous than I; for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil" (cf. 25:21 relating to Nabal). David expresses his sense of injustice by challenging Saul: "If it is the Lord who has stirred you up against me, may he accept an offering; but if it is men, may they be cursed before the Lord *('ărûrîm hēm lipnê yhwh),* for they have driven me out this day that I should have no share in the heritage of the Lord, saying, 'Go, serve other gods'" (26:19). He goes on to profess his belief that he will be safe under God's protection and asks for his help: "The Lord rewards every man for his right-

eousness and his faithfulness; for the Lord gave you into my hand today, and I would not put forth my hand against the Lord's anointed. Behold, as your life was precious this day in my sight, so may my life be precious in the sight of the Lord, and may he deliver me out of all tribulation" (26:23–24). Then Saul invokes a blessing on David: "Blessed be you, my son David! You will do many things and will succeed in them" (26:25; cf. 18:14). According to version A Saul acknowledges David's future kingship—like Jonathan in 23:17. Then he exacts from him a solemn oath of protection for his descendants: "Swear to me therefore by the Lord that you will not cut off my descendants after me, and that you will not destroy my name out of my father's house" (24:23; cf. Jonathan's plea in 20:14–16). David agrees, thus confirming his policy of refusing to take advantage of the position and seek vengeance on his persecutor.

The romantic story of David's confrontation with the immensely wealthy sheep owner Nabal and his wife Abigail in Carmel (chap. 25) is of high literary quality and displays amazing insights into the divine prerogative of exacting retribution. The first feature that strikes us is the antithetical presentation of the two characters: "Now the name of the man was Nabal, and the name of his wife Abigail. The woman was of good understanding and beautiful *(ṭôbat-śeqel wîpat tō'ar),* but the man was churlish and ill-behaved *(qāšeh wĕra' ma'alālîm);* he was a Calebite" (25:3). The tale as a whole discloses the sapiential connotation of the name Nabal: foolish, silly senseless, a simpleton, (cf. Isa 32:6; Jer 17:11; Ps 14:1 = 53:1; Prov 17:21; 30:22).[45] On the feast day of sheep-shearing (cf. 2 Sam 13:23) David sent ten young men to Nabal with a message: "Peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that you have. I hear that you have shearers; now your shepherds have been with us, and we did them no harm, and they missed nothing, all the time they were in Carmel. Ask your young men, and they will tell you. Therefore let my young men find favour in your eyes; for we come on a feast day. Pray, give whatever you have at hand to your servants and to your son David *(la'ăbādêkā ûlĕbinkā lĕdāwīd)*" (25:6–8). This designation of his young men as "your servants" and his self-designation as "your son" (cf. Saul's designation of David in 24:16; 26:17, 21, 25) is reminiscent of David's respectful relationship to Saul. In contrast to Jonathan and Saul, however, who conceded David's future kingship (cf. 23:1; 24:2) Nabal rejected the request, covering his callousness with a pious generalization and offending David by calling him a rebellious slave: "Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants nowadays who are breaking away from their masters ..." (25:10–11). As soon as David was told by his messengers what had happened, Nabal's doom was sealed: "Every man gird on his sword! ..." (25:13).

[45] See J. D. Levenson, "I Samuel 25 As Literature and As History," *CBQ* 40 (1978), 11–28.

The true point of the story now emerges, paving the way to a series of ironies ending in a dramatic climax. One of Nabal's servants reports Nabal's rashness to Abigail (25:14–16) in the hope of averting retribution: "Now therefore know this and consider what you should do; for evil is determined against our master and against all his house, and he is so ill-natured *(wĕhû' ben-bĕliyya'al)* that one cannot speak to him" (25:17). As prompt as David's decision to repay Nabal's insult is Abigail's resolution to meet David, with a substantial present as a sweetener (25:18–19), obviously hoping to appease his justified anger and to obtain mercy for her husband. The narrator reports: "But she did not tell her husband Nabal" (25:19; cf. 14:1b: "But he [Jonathan] did not tell his father"). After the meeting takes place, David makes explicit the intentions at which he had only hinted with his order for the girding on of swords (25:13): "... he has returned me evil for good *(wayyāšeb lî ra'āh taḥat ṭôbāh)*. God do so to David and more also, if by morning I leave so much as one of all he has who piss against a wall!" (25:21–22). The vulgar phrase "those who piss against a wall" (cf. 1 Kgs 14:10; 16:11; 21:21; 2 Kgs 9:8) indicates that the sentence applied to all male members of Nabal's household.

In acute contrast to her husband's arrogance, Abigail addresses David with extreme humility and courtesy: "she fell before David on her face, and bowed to the ground" (25:23). Her speech is a masterpiece of the art of persuasion, weaving God's prerogative of retribution into the argument:

> Upon me alone, my lord, be the guilt *(he'āwôn)*; pray let your handmaid speak in your ears, and hear the words of your handmaid. Let not my lord regard this ill-natured fellow *('el-'îš habbĕliyya'al)*, Nabal; for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him *(nābāl šĕmô ûnĕbālāh 'immô)*; but I your handmaid did not see the young men of my lord, whom you sent. Now then, my lord, as the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, seeing the Lord has restrained you from bloodguilt, and from taking vengeance with your own hand *(mibbô' bĕdāmîm wĕhôšēa' yādĕkā lāk)*, now then let your enemies and those who seek to do evil to my lord be as Nabal. And now let this present which your servant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who follow my lord. Pray forgive the trespass of your handmaid *(śā' nā' lĕpeša' 'āmātekā)*; for the Lord will certainly make my lord a sure house *(bayīt ne'ĕmān)*, because my lord is fighting the battles of the Lord; and evil shall not be found in you so long as you live. If men rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living in the care of the Lord your God; and the lives of your enemies he shall sling out as from the hollow of a sling. And when the Lord has done to my lord according to all the good that he has spoken concerning you, and has appointed you prince over Israel, my lord shall have no cause of grief, or pangs of conscience, for having shed blood without cause *(lišpok-dām ḥinnām)* or for my lord taking vengeance himself *(lĕhôšîa' 'ădōnî lô)*. And when the Lord has dealt well with my lord, then remember your handmaid (25:24–31).

By her astonishing generosity in taking the guilt for everything that has gone

wrong upon herself, Abigail disarms David without disclaiming Nabal's guilt. The foundation of that generosity is intelligence; she knows that Nabal's conduct towards David springs from foolishness, and implies that the execution of retribution on a fool would involve even greater foolishness. The only way for David to show his superiority and thus his fitness to become king is by leaving judgment to God. The narrator attributes to Abigail a prophetic vision of David's future kingdom, in poignant contrast to Nabal's misconception of David's position and the resulting disrespect shown towards him. There is even mention of "a sure house" (25:28) which recalls the crucial promise of 2 Sam 7:16. Abigail's words also point forward to Nabal's death and her marriage to David.

David's reply (25:32–35) shows that he was sensitive and intelligent enough to be moved by Abigail's noble gesture and extraordinary theological acumen:

> Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! Blessed be your discretion, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodguilt and from avenging myself with my own hand *(mibbô' bĕdāmîm wĕhôšēa' yādî lî)!* For as surely as the Lord the God of Israel lives, who has restrained me from hurting you, unless you had made haste and come to meet me, truly by morning there had not been left to Nabal so much as one male ... Go up in peace to your house; see, I have hearkened to your voice, and I have granted your petition *(wā'eśśā' pānāyīk).*

When Abigail reached home Nabal "was holding a feast in his house, like the feast of a king"; because he was "very drunk" (cf. 2 Sam 13:23–28), she waited until morning before she spoke. It is impossible to miss the contrast between Nabal's foolhardy denial of David's request for hospitality to a future king and his men in spite of an abundance fit for "the feast of a king", the impending danger of destruction, and the unremarked absence of Abigail on her mission of intercession. Nabal's reaction to the truth proved fatal: "And his heart died within him, and he became as a stone. And about ten days later the Lord smote Nabal; and he died *(wayyiggōp yhwh 'et-nābāl wayyāmōt)*" (25:37b–38). We can only guess the reason for the fatal stroke: loss of the foodstuffs presented to David by Abigail, perhaps, or the meeting of the two without Nabal's permission, or a trauma of conscience resulting from a belated awareness of how foolishly he had acted, or shock in the face of David's terrible plan of retribution. Probably all these factors were jointly responsible for Nabal's sudden demise.

David duly accorded full recognition to God's providence and justice:

> *bārûk yhwh 'ăšer rāb 'et-rîb ḥerpātî miyyad nābāl wĕ'et-'abdô ḥāśak mērā'āh wĕ'ēt ra'at nābāl hēšîb yhwh bĕrō'šô,* "Blessed be the Lord who has avenged the insult I received at the hand of Nabal, and has kept back his servant from evil; the Lord has returned the evil-doing of Nabal upon his own head" (25:29).

Then David wooed Abigail, who received his overtures with her notable

courteous humility: "Behold, your handmaid is a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord" (25:41). This climax of contrast between Nabal and Abigail shows that the whole sequence of events was directed by God's providence to this end, for "Abigail is as well matched with David as she is mismatched with Nabal."[46] David's impetuous decision to avenge Nabal's insult and his later lack of scruple over Bathsheba (cf. 2 Sam 11) clearly show that Abigail was nobler even than her new husband. The point of God's providence was her mediation to save David from unnecessary shedding of blood and to act as his worthy counsellor in matters of divine justice.

The placing of this romantic tale between chapters 24 and 26 clearly identifies the primary interest of the final compiler: the two versions of David's rejection of violence against Saul demonstrate how he was saved from taking vengeance upon the king *in spite of* his tempters, while chapter 25 shows how David was prevented from exacting retribution from a fool *because of* the intercession of his righteous spouse.[47] In both cases the course of events is guided by God's providence. David's decision to wreak immediate vengeance upon Nabal and his later conduct towards Uriah the Hittite (2 Sam 11) demonstrate that his character was not impeccable.[48] Yet the spirit of the Lord never totally departed from him as it did from Saul, because David had an extraordinary fear of God. So he was open to an influence to which Saul was closed: *education* for final reliance on God. The intercession of Nabal's wife was successful in averting David's retaliation. Therefore the beautiful and intelligent Abigail was given him by God's providence. The nature of David's encounter with Bathsheba was different because she was singled out not by God but by his own lust.[49] However, Nathan's intervention after the crime had been committed was successful in moving him to recognize his guilt and atone for it (2 Sam 12:1–25). Against this background it is understandable why David was capable of refraining from violence against Saul, "the Lord's anointed"; theological considera-

[46] See J. D. Levenson, *CBQ* 40 (1978), 18.

[47] It is to the point what H. W. Hertzberg, *I and II Samuel,* 204, says: "The main concern of the compiler makes itself felt here. Through Abigail, the Lord saves David from a danger different from that in the cave with Saul, but none the less great. It consists ... in the possibility that David may take matters into his own hand and thus make himself master of his fate, instead of letting it be guided by the Lord."

[48] See J. D. Levenson, *CBQ* 40 (1978), 23: "The David of chaps. 24 and 26 is the character whom we have seen since his introduction in chap. 16 and whom we shall continue to see until 2 Sam 11, the appealing young man of immaculate motivation and heroic courage. But the David of chap. 25 is a man who kills for a grudge. The episode of Nabal is the very first revelation of evil in David's character. He can kill. This time he stops short. But the cloud that chap. 25 raises continues to darken our perception of David's character."

[49] See the statement by P. R. Ackroyd, *The First Book of Samuel,* 199: "We may detect a contrast with the story of David and Bathsheba; then, to get the woman he wants, David stops at nothing and retribution comes on him (2 Sam. 11–12). Nabal's death offers him the chance to marry Abigail, and his proposal of marriage is speedily accepted."

tions, and not his personal generosity, were decisive. David was a man who strove after absolute obedience to the will of God.

4. *Conclusion*

The book of 1 Samuel preserves an exceptional diversity of original materials. Nevertheless, its composition bears witness to editorial activity impelled by a particular point of view. The book as a whole is thematically unified by the prophetic evaluation of God's overruling purpose, and within this there is a framework of antithesis between those who recognize God's absolute authority and act in accordance with his commandments (Samuel, David, Jonathan, Abigail) and those who are driven by their own interests and passions (Eli's sons, the people in their demand for a king, Saul, Nabal). The portrayal of these opposing characters facilitates recognition of their corresponding fates which, however, do not necessarily imply final damnation. The most striking and for many interpreters the most controversial question is the radical solution of the problem: ruthless rejection of Saul and his house and their supersession by David and his line. Does the theological interpretation correspond to the actual state of affairs? Why should forgiveness not be possible for Eli's house and for Saul? (cf. 3:12–14; 13:14; 15:11, 23–31).[50]

It is obvious that not only the final form of the book but also its component ancient narratives represent prophetic interpretation of what happened in earlier days. All the narratives carry the veneer of a retrospective glance down the centuries. The writers were interested in the question of why Eli's priesthood and Saul's monarchy came to nothing, whereas the kingship of David prospered and his house endured. They were not concerned with socio-political factors but only with theological norms for Israel's ruler. Their main theological concern was the relationship between the obedience or disobedience of the nation's rulers and its corresponding consequences. They were occupied with the apologetics of God's justice. In view of the great variety of literary forms and the many gaps in the narratives we may conclude: first, the chronicles of 1 Samuel do not touch on all the theological questions related to the principle of justice;[51] secondly, every interpretation should take into consideration the literary devices employed;[52] thirdly, it may be as-

[50] With such questions many Jewish and Christian exegetes were concerned. See, for instance, The Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Yoma* 22b.

[51] Saul's tragedy does not imply total damnation; his final personal fate in relation to his God remains a mystery, since there is no explicit statement about this question in I Samuel.

[52] Overstatements by D. M. Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul,* and by many other exegetes result from their literal interpretation even of such statements as "I repent that I have made Saul king" (1 Sam 15:11; cf. v. 35) and "an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him" (1 Sam 16:14; cf. 16:15, 23; 18:10; 19:9).

sumed that judgment of Saul and praise of David are based not only on the episodes described in this book and elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible but also on other sources known to the writers but not included here.

From the opposing portrayal of the characters concerned we may conclude that God's dealings with humankind are not arbitrary. In the final analysis, election and rejection by God are not explicable solely on the basis of God's freedom to act as he sees fit.[53] No one is rejected without cause; there are more than enough episodes showing Saul's unfitness for kingship, and he virtually invited condemnation for his stand against God and men. No wonder, then, that Samuel chose a particular occasion to deliver God's verdict of rejection.[54] Election may give the impression that it is independent of human qualities because it takes place before the chosen one is put to the test of experience; it is a matter of divine and human freedom, so it implies God's trust in the person elected. It is, however, essentially conditional. It is true that David was not selected by people like Saul but was sought out by God as "a man after his own heart" (13:14; 18:14). But free election by God does not mean that David did not run the risk of disobedience and consequent rejection. Most dangerous was the temptation to take vengeance into his own hands, but David, unlike Saul, was loyal enough to pass that crucial test. When Saul was losing his kingship, he strove unscrupulously to keep it for himself and his house, and his desperate jealousy and contriving actually permitted events to follow an opposite course to that which he sought.[55] Finally, he did not accept the death intended for him.[56] The later Chronicler

[53] See *The Babylonian Talmud*, tractate *Mo'ed Katan* 16b.

[54] D. M. Gunn, however, sees the situation in a different way; in *The Fate of King Saul*, 124, he ventures to argue: "Yahweh takes a surprisingly superficial look at Saul's actions before 'repenting' and rejecting him. Saul's rejection is not intrinsically and inevitably the outcome of his actions. Rather, God, given the opportunity (or perhaps better, having provided it for himself?), *chooses* to find Saul guilty. He is, so to speak, predisposed to reject him as king." Even more horrifying is Gunn's judgment on p. 129: "If we are to condemn Saul for his jealous persecution of David, how much more is Yahweh to be condemned for his jealous persecution of Saul! And the question is one that lies before us in the story not only in our puzzlement (not to speak of Saul's!) at the judgement scenes but repeatedly, from then on, in the striking disparity of treatment between Saul and David. Yahweh manipulates Saul mercilessly, and he does so for what, on most people's terms, must count as less than honourable motives. He is insulted, feels jealous, is anxious to justify himself. It is tempting to say that this is the human face of God—but to say that would be perhaps to denigrate humankind, which is not something this Old Testament story does; rather we might say that here we see the dark side of God."

[55] See the good judgment by D. V. Edelman, *King Saul in the Historiography of Judah*, 321: "... he eventually failed to rely on inward, divinely inspired perception and trusted instead in his own human perception. The writer is emphasizing the need for the king to align his perception with that of his heavenly regent, Yahweh, to be a successful ruler. Such alignment is the source of all wisdom and good judgment, without which natural character traits will become skewed and used for nonproductive purposes ..."

[56] See D. V. Edelman, *King Saul in the Historiography of Judah*, 320: "Failing to grasp the death sentence he was passing on his weapons-bearer by his request, he finally commits suicide, thereby surrendering to his fate while at the same time defying Yahweh by dying in a way

makes the following conclusion in 1 Chr 10:13–14: "So Saul died for his unfaithfulness; he was unfaithful to the Lord in that he did not keep the command of the Lord, and also consulted a medium, seeking guidance, and did not seek guidance from the Lord. Therefore the Lord slew him, and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse."

David found blessing because he never seized prematurely what had been promised him. His noble character won him the support, respect, and affection of all the people and Saul's house. When he was fleeing from his own son, he accepted God's judgment in full readiness to surrender his kingship (2 Sam 15:25–26; cf. 16:10–12).[57] And when he sinned gravely, he was saved by sincere repentance (cf. 2 Sam 12:13; cf. 24:17). Consequently, prophetic writers could recognize David's loyalty to God's absolute authority (1 Kgs 3:6; 9:4; 11:4; 14:8; 15:3). This fact points to the answer to the question of why forgiveness was possible for David but not for Saul. And this is a sufficient explanation why David could become—in later writings—a subject for idealization and his line a framework for messianic expectations.

other than was intended. Realizing the hopelessness of his situation now that he was Yahweh's declared enemy, he nevertheless defied Yahweh in his very act of dying."

[57] See also Eli's stand after Samuel communicated to him God's verdict on his house: "It is the Lord; let him do what seems good to him" (1 Sam 3:18).

CHAPTER X

PUNISHMENT AND FORGIVENESS IN THE SECOND BOOK OF SAMUEL

Modern literary criticism of 2 Samuel acknowledges three main generic strands: historical writing, wisdom literature, and narrative. There is inevitably some tension between the genres, but it would be an exaggeration to speak of serious opposition. Traditional scholarship has been primarily interested in identifying original narrative sources and the editorial framework of the book.[1] The prevailing view is that 2 Samuel, especially the "Succession Narrative" (chaps. 13–20 + 1 Kgs 1–2), contains a great deal of ancient historical material, often assigned to the Solomonic period; but the conclu-

[1] See especially the highly influential studies by L. Rost, *Die Überlieferung von der Thronnachfolge Davids* (BWANT III/6; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1965); English translation by M. D. Rutter and D. M. Gunn, *The Succession to the Throne of David* (HTIBS 1; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1982); M. Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien* (2nd ed.; Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1957); English translation, *The Deuteronomistic History* (JSOT.S 15; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981, 1991); R. A. Carlson, *David, the Chosen King: A Traditio-Historical Approach to the Second Book of Samuel* (Stockholm / Göteborg / Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1964); G. von Rad, "The Beginnings of Historical Writing in Ancient Israel," *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (Edinburgh / London: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), 166–204; R. N. Whybray, *The Succession Narrative: A Study of II Sam. 9–20 and I Kings 1 and 2* (SBTh II/9; London: SCM Press, 1968); T. Veijola, *Die ewige Dynastie: David und die Entstehung seiner Dynastie nach der deuteronomistischen Darstellung* (Annales acad. scient. Fennicae B/193; Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1975). For further discussion and bibliography, see esp. commentaries and other studies: H. P. Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1899); S. R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913); H. W. Hertzberg, *Die Samuelbücher* (ATD 10; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956); English translation by J. Bowden, *I and II Samuel: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1964); D. G. Bressan, *Samuele* (SB; Turin / Rome: Marietti, 1960); J. Mauchline, *1 and 2 Samuel* (NCB; London: Oliphants, 1971); P. R. Ackroyd, *The Second Book of Samuel* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); P. K. McCarter, *II Samuel* (AB 9; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984); R. P. Gordon, *1 and 2 Samuel: A Commentary* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1986); A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel* (WBC 11; Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1989); J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analysis,* vol. 1: *King David (II Sam. 9–20 & I Kings 1–2)* (StSN 20; Assen / Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1981); idem, *Narrative Art ...,* vol. 3: *Throne and City (II Sam. 2–8 & 21–24)* (StSN 27; Assen / Maastricht, 1990); J. Burton and T. B. Coffman, *Commentary on Second Samuel* (Abilene, Tex.: ACU Press, 1992); H. J. Stoebe, *Das zweite Buch Samuelis* (KAT 8,2; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verl.-Haus Mohn, 1994); A. Caquot and T. de Robert, *Les livres de Samuel* (CAT 6; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1994); G. Hentschel, *2 Samuel* (NEB 34; Würzburg: Echter, 1994); G. Keys, *The Wages of Sin: A Reappraisal of the "Succession Narrative"* (JSOT.S 221; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); H. S. Pyper, *David As Reader: 2 Samuel 12:1–15 and the Poetics of Fatherhood* (BIS 23; Leiden / New York / Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1996); K. L. Noll, *The Faces of David* (JSOT.S 242; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

sions reached on the contributions of pre-Deuteronomistic editors and of the Deuteronomistic history are not unanimous. In spite of their predominant interest in historical sources and editorial layers, these scholars generally recognize the high literary quality of 2 Samuel. They do not regard the narratives as "history" in its strict, modern sense. Their use of expressions like "political propaganda" for passages supporting Solomon's claim to the throne, or "court apologetic," indicates a strong emphasis on interpretation from a certain point of view.

Scholars who devote special attention to literary devices endeavour to achieve an intrinsic understanding of the text by virtue of careful reading. A literary approach cannot avoid the question of the relationship between history and invention or fiction. On the other hand, it allows great flexibility in determining the time of composition, the correspondence of form and content, the interplay between political and personal interests, and the relationship between seeming contradictions. It takes into account a multiplicity of written and oral traditions, ambiguity in presentation of character, differences between human affairs and God's all-embracing purpose, etc. In the final analysis, the literary approach welcomes and appreciates the "dramatic interest" of the narrative; it uncovers its most intimate aspects and strives to read the text in a deeper and more comprehensive sense.[2]

The division of the subject matter in 2 Samuel is fairly clear: chapter 1 completes the story of Saul's doom and downfall reported in I Samuel (chaps. 13–31); chapters 2–8 cover the opening period of David's kingship "under the blessing"; and chapters 9–24 depict his life "under the curse."[3] Nathan's oracle in 7:1–17 plays a crucial role within the history of David as a whole, and is therefore treated in a separate chapter. On the other hand, chapters 21–24 are appendices to the book, comprising in six sections a miscellany of materials pertinent to the reign of David. We can ignore them

[2] For literary considerations, see especially H. Gressmann and others, *Narrative and Novella in Samuel: Studies by Hugo Gressmann and Other Scholars 1906–1923* (JSOT.S 116; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1991); C. C. Conroy, *Absalom Absalom! Narrative and Language in 2 Sam 13–20* (AnBib 81; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1978); D. M. Gunn, *The Story of King David: Genre and Interpretation* (JSOT.S 6; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978); J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analyses,* vol. 2: *King David (II Sam. 9–20 & I Kings 1–2)* (StSN 20; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1981); vol. 3: *Throne and City (II Sam. 2–8 & 21–24)* (StSN 27; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1990). Reading of the texts in a deeper and more comprehensive sense is characteristic of the explicitly theological approach of G. von Rad. See *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (ThB 8; Munich: C. Kaiser, 1958), 148–188: "Der Anfang der Geschichtsschreibung im alten Israel"; English translation by E. W. T. Dicken, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (Edinburgh / London: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), 166–204.

[3] R. A. Carlson, *David, the Chosen King,* uses the definitions "David under the Blessing" for chaps. 2–7 and "David under the Curse" for chaps. 9–24. Taking into consideration the contrast between David and Saul in 1 Sam 13:1–31:13 we may conclude that the whole section from 1 Sam 16:1 to 2 Sam 8:18 presents David "under the blessing."

here, because they are dealt with in appropriate contexts.

1. *David under the Blessing (1:1–8:18)*

This section clearly falls into three parts: 1:1–27; 2:1–5:5; and 5:6–8:18. Chapter 1 gives evidence of David's loyalty towards Saul even after his death, 2:1–5:5 relates to David's temporary residence in the ancient city of Hebron in Judah, and 5:6–8:18 promotes him and his new and long-lasting capital of Jerusalem. The main theme of the section is David's moral strength and God's blessing.

1.1 *David's Loyalty to Saul after His Death (1:1–27)*

David's loyalty to Saul, shown especially by his refusal to take vengeance or exact satisfaction for Saul's attempts upon his life (cf. 1 Sam 16:1–31:13), persisted to the last. The older man's death resulted in a dramatic encounter between two men: an Amalekite and David. After the unsuccessful battle on Mount Gilboa the Amalekite came to David at Ziklag, "fell to the ground and did obeisance" (1:2), and told of Saul's death. He went on to recount a story that did not tally with that of 1 Sam 31: "... I slew him, because I was sure that he could not live after he had fallen, and I took the crown which was on his head and the armlet which was on his arm, and I have brought them here to my lord" (1:10).

There is a wide diversity of opinion about the reasons for the conflict between 1 Sam 31 and 2 Sam 1 concerning Saul's death. Until recent times the prevailing view was that either different documents or independent traditions underlie the two versions. But today it is generally assumed that the Amalekite's version of events was fabricated, in spite of the assertion that he came to David "with his clothes rent and earth upon his head" (1:2). The view that the Amalekite's story was fictitious is persuasive because of two circumstances: Saul's well-known enmity towards David, and the opportunist element that permeates human nature. It would be normal to expect the news of Saul's death to give a potential successor covert joy. On the other hand, a "neutral" messenger would probably have hidden his hopes of procuring David's favour and receiving his due reward behind a façade of grief. No wonder, then, that David could easily discern the motivation of the Amalekite's news. In 4:10 he sets it forth: "... when one told me, 'Behold, Saul is dead,' and thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and slew him at Ziklag, which was the reward I gave him for his news."[4]

[4] The assertion by H. P. Smith is surprising, therefore, in *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel*, 254: "The easiest hypothesis is that the Amalekite fabricated

This view of the event shows that 2 Sam 1:1–16 is a bit of dramatic irony; the outcome for the Amalekite was sadly contrary to his expectations, and he "fatally misjudged David,"[5] applying ordinary standards to him and not knowing that he was remarkably different from other men of power. An unscrupulous rival would probably have rejoiced—if decorously—and rewarded the messenger, but David took an immediate and opposite decision: "How is it you were not afraid to put forth your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed? ... Your blood be upon your head; for your own mouth has testified against you, saying, 'I have slain the Lord's anointed'" (2 Sam 1:14–16). David's reaction was dictated by his characteristic belief that the Lord's anointed was sacrosanct and therefore inviolable (cf. 1 Sam 24:11; 26:9, 11, 23; cf. also 2 Sam 19:22). This strictly theological argument has little or nothing to do with legality or secular considerations. The Lord's anointed is fundamentally inviolable; not only in the physical but also in a moral sense. The Amalekite deserved his punishment irrespective of whether he was telling the truth or not—and indeed, his case was even worse if he was lying for personal gain. The very idea of killing the Lord's anointed could be held to justify David's verdict: "your own mouth has testified against you." God's providence, however, also used this way of promoting David's kingdom.[6] Beyond human expectation, the royal insignia brought to David by an alien indicated the theocratic nature of a royal administration of "justice and equity to all his people" (cf. 8:15).

The narrative of 1:1–16 is followed by a noble and plangently beautiful lament for Saul and Jonathan (1:17–27). David's alleged authorship and the occasion of the poem's composition are wholly consistent with his loyalty to Saul in spite of the latter's enmity. Only a man of the highest integrity could put aside his *Schadenfreude* and utter such words as the refrain: "How are the mighty fallen ...!" (vv. 19, 25, 27). Language of such overwhelming force flows spontaneously from the deepest emotions of a genuine soul. There is no need here for allusion to a religious vocabulary. Such faith is best expressed by total trust in the hidden plan of God's providence and in true magnanimity towards one's enemies. We should, however, not overlook the fact that the special emphasis is on David's affection towards Jonathan: "I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant have you been to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women" (1:26). The profundity of the friendship between David and Jonathan on one occasion debarred the latter from acquiescence in his father's

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his story. But the whole narrative seems against this. David has no inkling that the man is not truthful, nor does the author suggest it."

[5] See P. K. McCarter, *II Samuel*, 63.

[6] See A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel*, 10: "The man's actions were, most likely, motivated by a hope for reward and yet, unintentionally, he was the instrument by means of which Yahweh proleptically 'crowned' the future king of Israel."

evil plans. Now David's final tribute to him precludes any dwelling on his distressing private experience with Saul. What he expresses is a deep sense of public loss: "Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you daintily in scarlet, who put ornaments of gold upon your apparel" (1:24).

1.2 *Legitimation of David's Kingship Through a "Test of Right" (2:1–5:5)*

The section 2:1–5:5 has a chiastic pattern. It is rounded off by a concentric ring composition consisting of seven units, which show that David is the protagonist, even if he stands mainly in the background: (A) David is anointed in Hebron king over the house of Judah (2:1–7); (B) Abner, commander of Saul's army, declares in Mahanaim Saul's son Ishbosheth king over Israel (2:8–11); (C) the outbreak of civil war at Gibeon is decided to the advantage of Joab, commander of David's army; Abner slays Joab's brother Asahel, who had pursued him (2:12–32); (B') Ishbosheth charges Abner with improper behaviour towards Saul's concubine Rizpah; offended, Abner goes over to David (3:6–21); (C') Joab avenges his slain brother Asahel by killing Abner treacherously (3:22–39); (B') Ishbosheth's two commanders of raiding bands murder him in his house during his noonday rest (4:1–12); (A') elders of Israel anoint David king over Israel (5:1–5).[7] The outcome of the whole section is summarized in 3:1: "There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David; and David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker" (cf. 5:10).

Why did David emerge victorious in the end in spite of his passive attitude towards the civil war? The ordinary reader may conclude that he was cleverer or luckier, or preferred building diplomatic bridges in the background rather than toiling in the battle-field *vi et armis*. But the narrator prefers a theological leitmotif: "... for the Lord was with him" (cf. 1 Sam 16:18; 18:14, 28; 2 Sam 5:10). This retrospective interpretation reveals, mainly implicitly but sometimes explicitly, that success and failure follow from God's will and providence working themselves out. But the narrator knows that God always considers the human side and collaborates with those who work with him and not against him. David's rise to power is marked by an undivided faithfulness that implies a seeking of guidance from God. In 2:1 we are told how he inquired whether he should go up into any of the cities of Judah; "And the Lord said to him, 'Go up.' David said, 'To which shall I go up?' And he said, 'To Hebron.'" One can justifiably claim that David was rewarded for his exemplary trust in God, his righteousness, and his impressive magnanimity towards his adversaries. The more the other actors in this drama were seized by their ambitions and passions and showed themselves

[7] See J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*, vol. 3, 20–21.

ruthless, treacherous and cruel, the more David displayed patience and delicacy. His decisions were not inspired or directed by passion and personal ambition but by obedience to the universal moral order, although his actions often had clear political implications. This explains why he could win the people's hearts.

After David was anointed king over the house of Judah, his first recorded act was to send a delegation to the lords of Jabesh-gilead with the message: "May you be blessed by the Lord *(bĕrukîm 'attem layhwh),* because you showed this loyalty *('ăšer 'āśîtem haḥesed hazzeh)* to Saul your lord, and buried him! Now may the Lord show steadfast love and faithfulness to you *(wĕ'attah ya'aś-yhwh 'immākem ḥesed we'ĕmet)!* And I will do good *(haṭṭôbāh)* to you because you have done this thing. Now therefore let your hands be strong, and be valiant, for Saul your lord is dead, and it is I whom the house of Judah have anointed over them as king" (2:5b–7). This message is consistent with David's theocratic understanding of Israel's kingship. The basic meaning of *ḥesed* is determined by a reciprocal relationship between subjects, and therefore implies the rights and duties of the persons or parties involved. It is noteworthy that David links both God's *ḥesed* and his own *ṭôbāh* with the *ḥesed* the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead showed to Saul (cf. 1 Sam 31:11–13). He is sure that they deserve to be beneficiaries of God's "steadfast love and faithfulness." To bury the dead is an act of piety, and it is natural to believe that God abundantly rewards all such acts, although his response cannot be understood merely as a formal or legal duty. The ultimate motivating force of divine "steadfast love and faithfulness" is God's primordial and inherent obligation to display "sympathy" for everything that is good. God has bound himself to manifest his *ḥesed wĕ'ĕmet* towards men, which, it follows, surpass their recipients' possible merit. Since David is a pious man, both his call for the manifestation of God's "steadfast love and faithfulness" and his own offer of "good" to Jabesh-gilead are motivated by his appreciation of the *ḥesed* shown to Saul. He desires to reward a demonstration of allegiance, which is the foundation of any society or community.[8]

Both the Jabesh-gileadites and David were loyal to Saul to the last, but obviously for different reasons. The loyalty of the former was both a matter of fealty and of a response to what he had done for them—he had delivered their city at the beginning of his reign from Nahash, the king of the Ammonites (1 Sam 11:1–11). David's loyalty had, however, deeper reasons; his overriding theological argument was the sacrosanct nature of the Lord's

[8] For various meanings of the word *ḥesed,* see especially N. Glueck, *Das Wort ḥesed im alttestamentlichen Sprachgebrauche als menschliche und göttliche gemeinschaftsgemäße Verhaltungsweise* (BZAW 47; Gießen: A. Töpelmann, 1927); English translation by A. Gottschalk, *Ḥesed in the Bible* (ed. E. L. Epstein; Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1967); K. D. Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of ḥesed in the Hebrew Bible: A New Inquiry* (HSMS 17; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1978).

anointed (cf. I Sam 24:11; 26:9, 11, 23; 2 Sam 1:14, 16). After Saul's death it seemed likely that the Jabesh-gileadites would wish to establish a new relationship with his legitimate heir. David expressed his awareness that he can legitimately claim succession to the throne: "... and it is I whom the house of Judah have anointed over them as king" (2:7). He recognized that his first task was to persuade them of the legitimacy of his succession. The narrator's point is that David's arguments should not be regarded as a manifestation of force, a stirring up of rebellion in the regions beyond Judah, but as an attempt to do good to those who had done good to his predecessor.[9] Such sentiments do not allow distortion of historical truth.

David's assumption of kingship in Judah and his diplomatic activity elsewhere seriously challenged the position of Ishbosheth and eventually open war broke out in Gibeon. We are told that "Abner and the men of Israel were beaten before the servants of David" (2:17), who pursued them until sunset. Then the opposing commanders, Abner and Joab, negotiated a cease-fire. The well-unified narrative 2:12–32 implicitly confirms the legitimization of David's kingship, and the decisive advantage gained by David's army could be regarded as "a divinely sanctioned test of right."[10] After the quarrel concerning Saul's concubine Rizpah, Abner rebukes Ishbosheth: "God do so to Abner, and more also, if I do not accomplish for David what the Lord has sworn to him, to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul, and set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan to Beer-sheba" (3:10). Abner takes the opportunity to make a covenant with David (3:12–25) and goes "in peace" (vv. 21, 22, 23) after coming with twenty men to meet him at Hebron (3:20). Joab, however, rebukes David: "What have you done? Behold, Abner came to you; why is it that you have sent him away, so that he is gone? You know that Abner the son of Ner came to deceive you *(lĕpattōtkā),* and to know your going out and your coming in, and to know all that you are doing" (3:24–25). Joab then sends messengers after Abner to bring him back, the narrator thinking it important to add: "but David did not know about it" (3:26). He continues:

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[9] D. R. Hillers, "A Note on Some Treaty Terminology in the Old Testament," *BASOR* 176 (1964), 46–47, thinks that *'āśāh ṭôbāh* may refer to the establishment of friendship by treaty. "Since treaties did not automatically continue in force when a new king took the throne, it was necessary for David actively to seek a renewal of the pact" (p. 47). See W. L. Moran, "A Note on the Treaty Terminology of the Sefîre Stelas," *JNES* 22 (1963), 173–176; M. Fox, "Tôb As Covenant Terminology," *BASOR* 208 (1973), 41–42; T. N. D. Mettinger, *King and Messiah: The Civil and Sacral Legitimation of the Israelite Kings* (CB.OT 8; Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1976), 147; I. Johag, "טוב – Terminus Technicus in Vertrags- und Bündnisformularen des Alten Orients und des Alten Testaments," *Bausteine biblischer Theologie* (ed. H.-J. Fabry; BBB 50; Cologne / Bonn: P. Hanstein, 1977), 3–23; T. Ishida, *The Royal Dynasties in Ancient Israel: A Study on the Formation and Development of Royal-Dynastic Ideology* (BZAW 142; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1977), 71.

[10] See P. K. McCarter, *II Samuel,* 98.

"And when Abner returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside into the midst of the gate to speak with him privately, and there he smote him in the belly, so that he died, for the blood of Asahel his brother" (3:27).

Since Joab's treachery is directly linked with the death of Asahel (cf. the editorial note in 3:30), attention is turned to the event reported in 2:18–23, when Joab's brother Asahel, who was "as swift of foot as a wild gazelle," (v. 18) pursued Abner. After unsuccessful attempts to dissuade him, the quarry "smote him in the belly with the butt of his spear, so that the spear came out at his back; and he fell there, and died where he was" (v. 23). The underlying idea is that Abner's killing of Asahel created bloodguilt, avenged only by Joab's killing of Abner. David, however, could not accept such an attitude to the question of right and wrong. His response is a pitiless curse: "I and my kingdom are for ever guiltless before the Lord for the blood of Abner the son of Ner. May it fall upon the head of Joab, and upon all his father's house; and may the house of Joab never be without one who has a discharge, or who is leprous, or who holds a spindle, or who is slain by the sword, or who lacks bread!" (3:28b–29).[11]

David's avowal of innocence is followed by his commandment to mourn "before Abner" (3:31), by his following the bier, weeping at the grave, grief expressed in a dirge, and fasting until sunset (3:31–35). It must have been natural for the people to suspect David's involvement in Abner's death, and the narrator feels obliged to insist on his innocence: "So all the people and all Israel understood that day that it had not been the king's will to slay Abner the son of Ner" (3:37). The narrative closes with David's words to his servants: "Do you not know that a prince and a great man has fallen this day in Israel? And I am this day weak, though anointed king; these men the sons of Zeruiah are too hard for me. The Lord requite the evildoer according to his wickedness!" (3:38–39). MT of 3:39a accentuates the contrast between the weakness of David and the harshness of the sons of Zeruiah, which makes good sense: *wĕ'ānōkî hayyôm rak ûmāšûaḥ melek wĕhā'ănāšîm hā'ēlleh bĕnê ṣĕrûyyāh qāšîm mimmennî.* We may deduce that the contrast points a dramatic irony: David is ineffective in applying the law of rough justice because he is strong in his belief in and obedience to the divine law of justice, whereas the sons of Zeruiah are harsh because they lack inner conviction and wisdom. The Septuagint has a different version: "And that I am this day a kinsman and officer of a king, but these men the sons of Saruia are too hard for me." Targum Jonathan has: "I this day am *common and anointed for kingship* ..."[12]

[11] See S. W. Holloway, "Distaff, Crutch, or Chain Gang: The Curse of the House of Joab in 2 Samuel III 29," *VT* 37 (1987), 370–375.

[12] For this and other places, see D. J. Harrington and A. J. Saldarini, *Targum Jonathan of the Former Prophets* (AramB 10; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987).

After Abner's death David was soon confronted with an appalling (if self-confessed) crime committed by two sons of Rimmon on Ishbosheth (4:1–12), followed by a claim reminiscent of that made by the Amalekite concerning the death of Saul. The sons of Rimmon, who were captains of raiding bands, came treacherously to Ishbosheth's house, slew and beheaded him, and brought his head to David at Hebron: "Here is the head of Ishbosheth," they said, "the son of Saul, your enemy, who sought your life; the Lord has avenged my lord the king this day on Saul and on his offspring" (4:8). The underlying assumption—that one must avenge himself with his own hand—is a fatal misjudgment of David's understanding and exercise of his prerogative, and his response gives the episode an ironic twist: "As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my life out of every adversity, when one told me, 'Behold, Saul is dead,' and thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and slew him at Ziklag, which was the reward I should give him for his news *('ăšer lĕtittî-lô bĕśōrāh).*[13] How much more, when wicked men have slain a righteous man in his own house upon his bed, shall I not now require his blood at your hand, and destroy you from the earth?" (4:9b–11). It is striking that the change against the sons of Rimmon differs from that laid against the Amalekite; they are not guilty of slaying "the Lord's anointed" (cf. 1:14, 16) but of murdering "a righteous man in his own house upon his bed." This does not mean that Ishbosheth was not anointed. The emphasis is simply on an aggravating circumstance: whereas Saul ordered his own mercy killing, the sons of Rimmon slew Ishbosheth "in his own house upon his bed." They therefore deserve a severer punishment (see 4:12).

To sum up, David was kind and usually left judgment to God when ordinary matters of justice were at stake. But he was quick and resolute in condemning direct affront to what was sacrosanct and to the divinely determined order. His administration of justice, contrasting and sometimes ironical, is consistent with his general attitude to questions of authority, right, and power. David's verdicts in 1:14–16; 3:28–29, 38–39, and 4:9b–11 and his gesture of reward in 2:5b–7 make clear his unusual character; David dissociated himself from cold-blooded crimes committed by persons involved in his rise to the kingship of all Israel. God's providence and David's righteousness or innocence are expressed, however, mainly in implicitly apologetic tones. There are no convincing reasons for assigning 3:28–29, 38–39 to a later hand, as some interpreters do.

[13] For the use of the infinitive construction with *Lamed* expressing obligation, see E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), § 114 l. S. R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel,* 256, explains the meaning correctly: "The clause can hardly express *David's* view of the transaction: he could not think that the Amaleqite really deserved a reward for his tidings: it must express what David ought to have done in the judgment of the Amalequite himself, or of men in general unable to appreciate David's regard for Saul."

1.3 *The Establishment of the Kingdom in Jerusalem (5:6–8:14)*

The section 5:6–8:14 comprises the following themes: the capture of Jerusalem and the defeat of the Philistines in two battles (5:6–25); the transference of the ark to Jerusalem and the clash with Michal (6:1–23); God's promise and David's prayer of thanksgiving (7:1–29); David's military successes and a list of his officials (8:1–18). Chapters 6 and 7 are of great relevance to the subject of this book.

Chapter 6 consists of three sections: the transfer of the ark was interrupted by what might be called a numinous incident (vv. 1–10); a second attempt succeeded (vv. 11–19); Michal made some sarcastic comment on David's behaviour and was rebuked (vv. 20–23). There are good reasons for assuming that the account of bringing up the ark to Jerusalem is a natural continuation of 1 Sam 4:1b–7:1. That passage and 2 Sam 6:1–15, 17–20a probably constitute "an independent, self-contained source which has been preserved in its entirety. It relates the fate of the ark from its removal from Shiloh up until its installation in Jerusalem."[14] The compiler has placed the later section of the ark narrative (2 Sam 6:1–15, 17–20a) in its present context in order to point to the theological foundations of the establishment of David's kingdom. The Michal episode (vv. 16 and 20–23) seems to have originally formed the beginning of the great complex of the succession narrative. The narrator discloses only a limited interest in historical detail; his main concern is the theological interpretation of historical events.

The description of the procession in 2 Sam 6:1–10 reports a serious mishap: "And when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there because he put forth his hand to the ark; and he died there beside the ark of God" (vv. 6–7; cf. 1 Chr 13:9–10). It is noteworthy that the Chronicler's version of this report is almost identical. Both versions specify that the immediate cause of Uzzah's punishment was: "because he put forth his hand to the ark," an explanation that points to the awesome objective sacredness of the ark. In connection with the return of the ark from the Philistines a similar explanation is given for a greater calamity: "And he slew some of the men of Beth-shemesh, because they looked into the ark of the Lord ..." (1 Sam 6:19) Uzzah's death, however, occasioned further etiological explanations. In connection with the second attempt to transfer the ark the Chronicler attributes Uzzah's death to his failure to observe the provisions of the law concerning the role of the priests and Levites (cf. Num 4:5b, 15); in his ad-

[14] See L. Rost, *The Succession to the Throne of David*, 26. For a more detailed discussion on the issue, see R. Gelio, *L'ingresso di Davide in Gerusalemme capitale: Studio letterario, storico e teologico su II Sam 5,6–8, 6,1–23* (SBA 3; Cinisello Balsamo / Milan: San Paolo, 1997).

dress to them David adduces the argument: "Because you did not carry it the first time, the Lord our God broke forth upon us, because we did not care for it in the way that is ordained" (1 Chr 15:13). Josephus Flavius has a similar argument in *Jewish Antiquities* 7.81–82: "... because he had touched it though not a priest, God caused his death."

The report of 2 Sam 6:6–7 should be considered, however, from a more fundamental theological point of view. First of all, why did the oxen stumble? The mishap could have been regarded as a sign of God's displeasure concerning David's decision to bring the ark to Jerusalem, about which he does not seem to have been consulted. Uzzah's death recalls the plagues that overtook the Philistine conquerors in response to their self-will (1 Sam 5). God's sanctity stands in contrast not only to overt manifestations of human power but also to hidden plans for self-assertion. God cannot allow himself to become subject to human manipulation, and the faultiness of David's attitude on that point may be deduced from his reaction: "And David was angry because the Lord had broken forth upon Uzzah ..." (6:8). Anger cannot be considered as an appropriate response to divine decisions.

Uzzah's blunder prevented David from implementing his decision. "How can the ark of the Lord come to me?" he asked (6:9; cf. 1 Sam 6:20), and diverted it to the house of the Gittite Obed-edom. A reversal of fortunes followed that implies a reversal of attitude; we are told that "the Lord blessed Obed-edom and all his household" (6:11; cf. v. 12). The blessing conferred upon Obed-edom encouraged David to renew his efforts to bring the ark to Jerusalem, and he played a particularly active part in its progress by exercising his priestly functions and by dancing. These goings on, however, provoked the contempt of his wife Michal: "As the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal the daughter of Saul looked out of the window, and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart" (6:16). She came out to meet David and to leave him in no doubt of her opinion (6:20b–21), but David crushed her with a prophetic reply: "It was before the Lord, who chose me above your father, and above all his house, to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the Lord—and I will make merry before the Lord. I will make myself yet more contemptible than this, and I will be abased in your eyes ..." (6:21–22). The narrator concludes: "And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death" (6:23).

What are we to understand from this statement? There is no indication of divine judgment or of a cessation of marital relations between David and Michal, so it cannot be taken for granted that Michal was stricken with barrenness by God or shunned by David. It is likely that the enigma can be resolved only within the entire story of Saul's decline and David's rise. Of Saul it was true that, in essence, he did not act with God but against God. Michal's withering comment on her husband's conduct shows that she was a

true daughter of Saul; she not only despised David but actually rejected God. "Thus it is ironical that Michal, the proud one, is finally disgraced by Yahweh, making complete the rejection of the house of Saul."[15] In sharp contrast to her attitude and fate, David's behaviour during the transfer of the ark and his response to her disclose his basic attitude to God and the universal moral order. He adheres to the maxim: Whoever humbles himself shall be exalted. Herein lies the key to his success, as summarized in 5:10: "And David became greater and greater, for the Lord, the God of hosts, was with him." The transfer of the ark to Jerusalem was the zenith of David's rise, for it became from then on not only the political but also the religious focal point of the people.

On arrival in Jerusalem the ark was set "in its place, inside the tent which David had pitched for it" (6:17). This circumstance gives rise to Nathan's oracle in 7:1–17, which faces crucial theological issues concerning God's freedom and the nature of his promises. The oracle is followed by David's response—a long prayer of thanksgiving (7:18–29). That chapter is treated separately in this book.

2. *David under the Curse (9:1–20:25)*

The classical theory of a "Succession Narrative" is based on the view that 2 Sam 9–20 + 1 Kgs 1–2 forms a coherent, self-contained whole. The proponents of the literary approach can only confirm this. There are no great differences concerning the division of the whole into sections. Leonhard Rost suggests the following: the story of the successor David in the framework of his wars with the Ammonites (2 Sam 10–12); the background to the succession (2 Sam 9 and 13:1–20:22); the conclusion and Solomon's accession to the throne (1 Kgs 1–2).[16] Some exegetes consider 2 Sam 13–14 an independent story, but the Tamar episode more probably provides the background of Absalom's revolt against his father and functions, therefore, as a prologue to the main account in chapters 15–20.[17]

2.1 *David's Crimes and Repentance (10:1–12:31)*

Chapters 10–12 constitute a complete unit. The account of the Ammonite wars serves as a background for the story of David and Bathsheba (11:1–27a), followed by Nathan's rebuke (11:27b–12:25). The narrator turns to the private life of the king, and uses contrast, irony and deception to describe

[15] See A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel*, 107.
[16] See L. Rost, *The Succession to the Throne of David*, 84.
[17] See C. C. Conroy, *Absalom, Absalom! Narrative and Language in 2 Sam 13–20*, 92.

the successive stages of David's sin, his attempts at concealment, and Nathan's way of exposing it.[18]

2.1.1 *David's Affair with Bathsheba (11:1–27a)*

The account of David's affair with Bathsheba begins with a description of the setting: "In the spring of the year, the time when kings go forth to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained *(yôšēb)* at Jerusalem" (11:1). The reader is immediately struck by the contrast between the dangerous travail of the troops and their king's decision to remain in safety in his capital. One afternoon David "saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful *(wĕhā'iššāh ṭôbat mar'eh mĕ'ōd)*" (11:2b). After ascertaining that she was "the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite" (11:3) he "sent messengers, and took her *(wayyiqqāhehā);* and she came to him, and he lay with her ... Then she returned to her house" (11:4). The terseness of "and took her" helps to contrast this event with the account of 1 Sam 25, which narrates how the ideal woman Abigail was given to David by Providence. In this later encounter David behaves like a despot who takes what he will.[19] His conduct recalls Samuel's warning about the "ways of the king" in 1 Sam 8:11–17; here the verbal form *yiqqāḥ,* 'will take,' appears four times.

What follows is equally unpalatable to David. After a time Bathsheba sends an intermediary to the king to inform him that she is pregnant (11:5),[20] and the putative father's response to this "natural" punishment instances primordial human tendency to conceal sin; it is in fact reminiscent of the behaviour of Adam and Eve after their transgression of God's commandment. David chooses the simplest way out. On the pretext of obtaining news of Joab, the army, and the war (11:7), he summons Uriah from the field of battle in order to give him an opportunity to sleep with his wife, thus making

[18] Along with commentaries and studies already cited, see H. Hagan, "Deception As Motif and Theme in 2 Sam 9–20; 1 Kgs 1–2," *Biblica* 60 (1979), 301–326, esp. pp. 303–308; R. C. Bailey, *David in Love and War: The Pursuit of Power in 2 Samuel 10–12* (JSOT.S 75; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990); G. H. Jones, *The Nathan Narratives* (JSOT.S 80; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 93–117 + 165–170: "Condemnation of David's Affair with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 12.1–25)"; M. Garsiel, "The Story of David and Bathsheba: A Different Approach," *CBQ* 55 (1993), 244–262; G. Arackal, *David's Fall and Redemption: A Study of 2 Samuel 10–12 As a Unit of Biblical Narrative Literature* (Rome, Pont. Universitas Gregoriana, Dissertation, 1996).

[19] See the observation by J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel,* vol. 1, 51: "He finds himself far above her, which carries the connotation of his being in the position of a despot who is able to survey and choose as he pleases. The ensuing occurrence shows the pitfall that goes together with such might, and David falls very deep."

[20] The remark "And she was purifying herself from her uncleanness" (v. 4b) seems to indicate "that Bathsheba's menstrual period was recently over—that is, that the seven days of ritual impurity prescribed in Lev 15:19 were just past—and that therefore her intercourse with David took place at a propitious time for conception" (see P. K. McCarter, *II Samuel,* 286). This implies that Uriah could not have been the father of the child which Bathsheba had recently conceived.

him appear a credible father for the expected child. Things, however, went awry: instead of following David's order, "Go down to your house, and wash your feet" (11:8), he "slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house" (11:9). When asked by the frustrated monarch: "Why did you not go down to your house?" (11:10), he staunchly refused to choose what today we would call the soft option: "The ark and Israel and Judah dwell in booths; and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field; shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing" (11:11). Uriah's reply ironically echoes David's similar attitude to the contrast between the king's comfortable house and the place where the ark resided (2 Sam 7; Ps 132:3–5), making the distinction between his faithfulness and David's unfaithfulness complete, and implicitly rounding off the condemnation of devious David's dealing. The king now tries to break his resolution by inviting him to dinner in order to make him drunk. But even an excess of alcohol fails to shake Uriah's spartan code; he spends the next night also in the open air, "and he did not go down to his house" (11:13).

David's failure to drive Uriah into Bathsheba's bed impels him to murder most foul. He writes to Joab, telling him: "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down, and die" (11:15). He sends this letter by the hand of Uriah, so that he becomes the carrier of his own death warrant.[21] After having executed David's orders, Joab sends him a report regretting the unavoidable casualties—and mentioning Uriah's death in particular (11:18–24). David is visibly relieved by the news (11:25), even though the messenger also has to report that "some of the king's servants are dead" (11:24). What follows is by now predictable: "When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she made lamentation for her husband. And when the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son" (11:26–27a).

The whole story is brilliantly and excitingly told, but the gaps and uncertainties are all the more striking.[22] Why, for instance, did David remain in Jerusalem, a sort of rear headquarters? (11:1);[23] was Bathsheba deliberately

[21] For the device of the messenger carrying his own death warrant, see especially Homer, *Iliad* 6.168–190 and W. Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 5.2; see also H. Gunkel, *Das Märchen im Alten Testament* (RV 2; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1921); D. M. Gunn, "Traditional Composition in the 'Succession Narrative,'" *VT* 26 (1976), 228.

[22] For the question of gaps, see especially the exciting explanation by M. Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 190–222: "The Story of David and Bathsheba."

[23] P. K. McCarter, *II Samuel*, 285, thinks that "David's decision not to accompany the army is not disgraceful in itself: It may have been made in the spirit of 21:15–17 or for other reasons. It was the author of 11:2ff. who saw the ironic potential in the decision and exploited it."

bathing in a place where she could be seen? did she commit adultery without resistance?; did Uriah know or suspect what had happened, and did he surmise the content of David's letter to Joab?; again, did Bathsheba ever learn the manner of her husband's death? There has been much speculation, but little certainty has emerged. The mention of "messengers" (11:4) who shuttled between David and Bathsheba suggests that the affair could hardly have remained secret; at the least, public suspicion must have stirred in its lair. So Uriah's refusal to accede to David's wishes may have been his ironical means of revenge. Active participation by Bathsheba in the affair would have diminished David's quantum of guilt, but she appears to have been completely passive. The narrator is obviously not interested in mitigating circumstances; he lays the blame squarely on David's shoulders and makes it evident that his appalling activities were intolerable.[24]

2.1.2 *Nathan's Rebuke (11:27b–12:25)*

The narrator concludes the story by saying: "But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord" (11:27b). This remark is the beginning of a new scenario, which consists of the following elements: a "juridical parable"[25] of a rich man robbing a poor man (12:1–6); its application to David (12:7a); Nathan's oracular accusation and threat of punishment (12:7b–10); his second oracular threat of punishment (12:11–12); David's cry of repentance, and the mitigation of his punishment (12:13–15a). The parable comprises an introduction (12:1a), the account of a despicable offence (12:1b–4), and a pronouncement of judgment (12:5–6). After the contrast betveen the flocks and herds of the rich man and the poor man's solitary and treasured possession, one ewe lamb, the scene changes to the arrival of a traveller. The rich man outwardly conforms to his obligation to offer hospitality, but he "spared taking *(wayyaḥmōl lāqaḥat)* one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took *(wayyiqqaḥ)* the poor man's lamb, and prepared it for the man who had come to him" (12:4). David apparently takes the story as factual and reacts as a conscientious judge would. His "anger was greatly kindled" and prompted him to pronounce the death sentence upon the rich man: "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die *(kî ben-māwet hā'îš hā'ōśeh zō't);* and he shall restore *(yĕšallēm)* the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he did not spare *(lō'-ḥāmāl)!*" (12:5–6).

David's reaction to the parable plainly reflects his quick temper and his feeling for fair dealing (cf. 1:14–16; 4:9–12; 13:21). Further, his genuine

[24] It is noteworthy that the rabbis were nevertheless able to find excuses for David; see the Babylonian Talmud, tractates *Shabbat* 56a; *Qiddushin* 43a.

[25] See U. Simon, "The Poor Man's Ewe-Lamb: An Example of a Juridical Parable," *Biblica* 48 (1967), 207–242; G. H. Jones, *The Nathan Narratives* (JSOT.S 80; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 93–117 + 165–170: "Condemnation of David's Affair with Bathsheba."

sense of justice could never be fundamentally impaired by the crimes he had committed. Given this involvement, however, we may conclude that David was moved to anger partly—or even primarily—by his troubled conscience. This inner unsoundness drives his sub-conscious to excuse his own conduct.[26] This is the climax in a veritable sequence of ironies. Nathan's relation of the parable is well-timed, and the prophet points his finger directly at David: "You are the man" (12:7a). The stratagem of bringing a parallel case to David's attention made the king conscious of the weight of his own case, even though the parable differed in some of the detail and did not entirely elicit the gravity of David's crimes. So the chastened king has to listen to the explication of the application, and his misdeeds emerge nakedly into view. The prophetic messenger formula "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel" signals the severity of the accusation:

> I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul; and I gave you your master's house *(wā'ettĕnāh lĕkā 'et-bêt 'ădōnêkā)*, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah *(wā'ettĕnāh lĕkā 'et-bêt yiśrā'ēl wîhûdāh)*, and if this were too little, I would add to you as much more. Why have you despised *(bāzîtā)* the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have smitten Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife *(wĕ'et-'ištô lāqaḥtā lĕkā lĕ'iššāh)*, and have slain him with the sword of the Ammonites (12:7b–9).

The striking feature of the accusation, dressed out in a typical prophetic form comparable to 1 Sam 15, is the contrast between God's giving, which should have moved David to grateful reverence, and David's taking, which provides obvious proof that he despises God. The central place of the word "house" in Nathan's oracle in 7:1–17 suggests that this word is chosen deliberately in 12:7b–17.

The accusation is followed by the pronouncement of a punishment (12:10) that fits the transgression:

> Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house *(wĕ'attāh lō'-tāsûr ḥereb mibbêtkā 'ad-'ôlām)*, because you have despised me *(bĕzītānî)*, and have taken *(wattiqqaḥ)* the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.

Thus David has aroused the curse over his house, which was supposed to stand under a sign of blessing. The sword, used for the killing of Uriah, will turn on David's house. It is likely that we have here a *vaticinium post eventum.* In 11:25 are reported David's words to Joab regarding the murder of Uriah: "Do not let this matter trouble you, for the sword devours now one and now another." And in fact, the sword later comes back to David and devours three of his sons: his firstborn Amnon (13:23–29), the rebellious Absalom (18:15), and Adonijah (1 Kgs 2:25). It is possible that the threat of

[26] See J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*, vol. 1, 76–77.

punishment recalled later bloody events in the house of David. Given the fact that the sources and the date of the final composition of the section cannot be determined with any certainty, the question of what is retrospective and what prospective must remain open.

After repeating the messenger formula, the prophet pronounces a further threat of punishment:

> I will raise up evil against you out of your own house *(mibbêtekā);* and I will take your wives *(wĕlāqaḥtî 'et-nāšêkā)* before your eyes, and give *(wĕnātattî)* them to your neighbour, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun (12:11–12).

David's "taking" does not imply "giving" the same to others, although the reason for the punishment can suggest this association. Here the punishment by taking is reinforced by giving what is taken to the offender's "neighbour." The essence of God's punishment lies in taking what he graciously gave as a gift, and herein lies the ground for his retributive punishment. The mention of the wives given to David (12:8) recalls primarily his marriages to Michal and Abigail; it also suggests "that David took over Saul's harem (from Ishbaal?) along with the kingdom."[27] This time the punishment of taking refers to Absalom's appropriation of his father's concubines (16:21–22); Absalom entered David's harem in order to assert publicly his claim to the throne.

David's reaction to Nathan's two oracles of doom is as laconic as the prophet's application of the parable to the king: *ḥāṭā'tî layhwh,* "I have sinned against the Lord" (12:13a). Nathan replies: "The Lord also has transferred your sin; you shall not die *(gam-yhwh he'ĕbîr ḥaṭṭā'tkā lō' tāmût).* Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child that is born to you shall die" (12:13b–14). Given the gravity of David's sin and the death of the son conceived in adultery (cf. 12:16b–23), we may safely conclude that "the Lord also has transferred your sin" does not mean simply a degree of forgiveness—as the verb *'br* (Hiph'il) suggests in view of 2 Sam 24:10 = 1 Chr 21:8; Zech 3:4; Job 7:21 (Mic 7:18 and Prov 19:11 Qal transitive)—but also the transfer of the death sentence to his son.[28] When God struck the child, David cried for mercy, saying: "Who knows whether the Lord will be gracious to me *(yĕḥannanî),* that the child may live?" (12:22). But his supplication was not granted. It is justifiable, nevertheless, to think of forgiveness in a limited sense: David's own death sentence had been mitigated and that is enough to honour the promise made in

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[27] See P. K. McCarter, *II Samuel,* 300.

[28] See G. Gerleman, "Schuld und Sühne: Erwägungen zu 2 Sam 12," *Beiträge zur alttestamentlichen Theologie: Festschrift für Walther Zimmerli* (ed. H. Donner, R. Hanhart, and R. Smend; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 133; P. K. McCarter, *II Samuel,* 301.

Nathan's oracle (7:1–17). The birth of Solomon is taken as a true sign of forgiveness, for "the Lord loved him, and sent a message by Nathan the prophet; so he called his name Jedidiah, because of the Lord" (12:24–25).[29]

David's limited punishment could not excuse him from the duty to atone for his sin. Punishment imposed in accordance with the two oracles of doom is one way of atonement, provided David accepts it humbly. The value of his terse confession of sin in 12:13 can be properly evaluated only within the framework of all the information we have about David, which makes it evident that he never lost his genuine sense of submission. The fundamental traits of David's character saved him in a situation when similar words of contrition could not save Saul (1 Sam 15:24). And what is equally important, they made him capable of learning from his mistakes. The ruthlessness displayed in his attempts to conceal his affair with Bathsheba and the experience of limited forgiveness may have influenced his dealings with his own violent sons much more strongly than the narrators could—or wanted to—express explicitly. David's powerlessness, demonstrated in the "Succession Narrative" (chaps. 13–20), is usually judged one-sidedly and negatively: David is a gentle king and doting father, and is therefore vulnerable to exploitation. But such characteristics have their advantages: the appearance of powerlessness in a situation of conflict can conceal strength. Finally, we have to bear in mind that God himself is most vulnerable to human exploitation; this is the paradoxical element in God's trust of human beings, as shown in divine revelation and the covenant offer. *It follows that David's striving to submit himself to God's judgment implies vulnerability to this sort of abuse.* His humiliating confrontation with his own sin must have made him more merciful to those who offended against him. Moreover, the after-effects of an uneasy conscience probably troubled him until the end of his life, and made a beneficial impact on his future character in terms of penitence. If that were not so, penitential Psalms such as Psalm 51 could not possibly have been attributed to him.

The tale of David and Bathsheba, and therefore Nathan's rebuke, are omitted from the First book of the Chronicles. We can only assume that this happened because the affair clashed with a reputation that had been growing since David had become the type of the Messiah. But its presence in 2 Samuel shows that God's plans and promises for the whole of his people are in the last resort not bound to the righteousness of a chosen race; in essence they are unconditional.[30]

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[29] See the comment of G. von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays,* 199: "... here is a note of the quite irrational love of God for this child, and at the end of the long story when Solomon is left in command of the field after untold complications, the reader will recall this sentence and understand that it is not human merit and virtue which have made the throne secure, but a paradoxical act of election on the part of God."

[30] See H. W. Hertzberg, *I and II Samuel,* 309.

2.2 *David Suffers Punishment to Be Saved (13:1–20:26)*

The "Succession Narrative" consists of two main episodes: the violation of Tamar and its consequences (chaps. 13–14); and Absalom's rebellion and its consequences (chaps. 15–20). The latter falls into the following thematic parts: deception and counter-deception (15:1–17:23); David's victory and his return (17:24–19:43); Sheba's Revolt (20:1–22). The whole section abounds with vivid dialogue, and the speeches are often concentric in composition. The common feature of the section is an unveiling of individual characters in a setting of increased tension, bringing into focus Amnon, Absalom, Joab, and David. The Tamar episode apparently reflects an existing stress between Amnon and Absalom which, after Amnon's offence against Tamar, becomes intolerable. Absalom's revenge on Amnon shifts the tension to the relationship between David and Absalom. The chain of events culminating in Absalom's revolt against his father shows that the son's excessive ambitions were the main reason for the strain within the royal family. The bone of contention was ultimately the throne. Since the Tamar episode has already thrown much light upon Absalom's character, and is indeed centred on him, it must obviously form a prologue to an account of his rebellion.

2.2.1 *Violation, Revenge, and Reconciliation (13:1–14:33)*

The Tamar episode contains three main sections: the violation of Absalom's sister Tamar by her half-brother Amnon (13:1–22);[31] Absalom's revenge by killing Amnon and his flight (13:23–37); Absalom's return to court (13:38–14:33). The first section deals, in concentric form, with Amnon's lovesickness for his sister Tamar. Pretending illness, the crown prince deceives his father, who provides unwitting help to bring the two together. Her reply to Amnon's overtures is a counsel of wisdom: "No, my brother, do not force me; for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do this wanton folly. As for me, where could I carry my shame? And as for you, you would be as one of the wanton fools in Israel ..." (13:12–13).[32] Blinded by his secret passion, he brushes aside her cogent argument and rapes her. Thereafter he "hated her with very great hatred; so that the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her" (13:15).

This sudden change from passionate love to virulent hatred has attracted

[31] See I. Müllner, *Gewalt im Hause Davids: Die Erzählung von Tamar und Amnon* (2 Sam 13,1–22) (HBS 13; Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1997).

[32] For a broader framework and the meaning of the outcry, see U. Bail, *Gegen das Schweigen klagen: Eine intertextuelle Studie zu den Klagepsalmen Ps 6 und Ps 55 und der Erzählung von der Vergewaltigung Tamars* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1998). See also the appropriate statement by H. Hagan, *Biblica* 60 (1979), 310: "Her words function in much the same way as Uriah's monologue on faithfulness, for both are a moment of grace which set the evil into its proper perspective, and both are rejected."

the attention of most exegetes. Many explanations bury rather than uncover the root of the evil—namely, that Amnon's emotion was not love but the excessive sensuality of an egocentric man. The fact that he was susceptible to the proposal of Jonadab that he plot a deception against his own father and sister, but totally regardless of the grievous consequences for his sister, demonstrates that the core of his personality must have been warped. And the essence of his trauma is a mania to possess everything. This mania turns him into a hunter who oversteps even the boundaries of an ingrained taboo.[33] So lovesickness must have turned lethal, and when he brutally abandoned her, Tamar could only cry, before she ran home in the ashes of mourning: "No, my brother; for this wrong in sending me away is greater than the other which you did to me" (13:16). In spite of the similarity of the sin, David did nothing of the kind to Bathsheba.

The account of Absalom's and David's reactions is strikingly short. Absalom consoles his sister: "Has Amnon your brother been with you? Now hold your peace, my sister; he is your brother; do not take this to heart" (13:20). But the narrator's comment (13:22) and what followed (13:23–37) show that his words of consolation have strong ironical undertones. In 13:22 we find: "But Absalom spoke to Amnon neither good nor bad *(lĕmērā' wĕ'ad-ṭôb),* for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had forced his sister Tamar" (13:22). The phrase "neither good nor bad" (cf. Gen 31:24) is a clear example of merism; the opposing words express totality. The meaning is that Absalom said nothing whatever to Amnon.[34]

The description of David's reaction is even more abrupt. We learn only: "When King David heard of all these things, he was very angry" (13:21). There is no mention of punishment and no hint of castigation. Most exegetes do not look for possible reasons for this, but the question is crucial: "the fact that the king does not even begin to take any appropriate legal action confirms the thesis that what is not told in 13:21 is yet more important than what *is* told."[35] It is probably correct to assume that David's anger masks powerlessness, attributable to Amnon's shocking deeds: deception and rape testify to his general depravity.[36] But beyond this must lie another, even more cogent reason for a display of weakness: his own affair with Bathsheba and its after-effects. After having heard Nathan's parable, "David's

[33] H. Hagan, *Biblica* 60 (1979), 310, possibly hints at this flaw when he comments: "Amnon is driven not by love but by love/hate which destroys what it tries to possess."

[34] This figure of speech is correctly interpreted by A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel,* 176.

[35] See J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel,* vol. 1, 113.

[36] J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel,* vol. 1, 112, argues: "The rage masks powerlessnes. In this case, his powerlessness can be explained on the basis of awkwardness and embarrassment aroused in David by the discovery that he had been misled when he did Amnon a favour in sending Tamar to visit him. But below this lies an even more fundamental embarrassment and powerlessness, that of a father who cannot be a match for his spoiled and/or ambitious sons."

anger was greatly kindled against the man," and he pronounces a death sentence upon him (12:5–6). Nathan's arrow from the blue: "You are the man" (12:7) leaves him, however, in total disarray. His death sentence is "transferred"; David is thrown upon God's mercy. How could he now, when faced with a similar situation by his son, insist on a death sentence? This embarrassment will trouble David's sub-conscious anew when faced with the crime and fate of Absalom. Only a corrupt hypocrite could act without some sense of mercy. For a righteous ruler the only hope is that God's power will restore the right.

All the more striking is Absalom's subsequent conduct. Two years later he approaches his father with a play that will enable him to take his revenge on Amnon. He deceives David by persuading him that Amnon should be invited to the feast of sheep shearing, during which the servants, on Absalom's order, murder him. Absalom flees the country (13:23–37). The long period of delay before taking revenge arouses the suspicion that the real reason for the fratricide was not Absalom's wish to avenge his sister but his desire for the throne. We should not forget that Amnon was the crown prince. A man who is capable of revolting against his own father would not have been so concerned about restoring the rights of his sister. Moreover, taking the law into his own hands and, thus making the existing situation worse, is the most obvious proof that Absalom cared neither for the rights of God nor those of humans.

Amnon's offence could, of course, serve to disguise Absalom's true motive even two or more years after Amnon's crime had been committed.[37] This connection is insinuated in Absalom's argument used in his aggressive pressure upon Joab in order to be received at court: "... let me go into the presence of the king; and if there is guilt in me *(wĕ'im yeš-bî 'āwôn),* let him kill me" (14:32). Of course, to most people the fratricide would not appear justifiable—especially not to David, who became responsible for revenging Amnon's death. The issue at stake is whether the execution of strict justice was an inescapable duty. Being his father and king, he was certainly entitled to find a way of escape by mitigating punishment. The story of Cain and Abel in Gen 4 suggests that blood revenge was not the only possible response. God protects the fratricidal Cain by imposing a sevenfold sanction against any blood avenger and putting a mark on him (v. 15). Knowing David's character, we cannot be surprised that he was willing to allow Absalom to return to Jerusalem (14:1–24). It is true that this dispensation of mercy took place after the intervention of Joab and the wise woman of Te-

[37] G. von Rad is a very rare exegete who sees what is the actual motive for Absalom's dealing with Amnon. See *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays,* 181: "For the ambitious Absalom the rape of Tamar was no doubt merely a convenient pretext for the removal of the heir to the throne, for now Absalom became the heir apparent."

koa, involving the use of a well-prepared "deception." Their disguise could only succeed, however, because "the spirit of the king longed to go forth to Absalom; for he was comforted about Amnon, seeing he was dead" (13:39).

Since Joab did not join in Absalom's revolt against David, we may assume that his endeavour to bring the evildoer back from exile was well meant. This conclusion is supported by the fact that Joab decided, in spite of David's explicit order not to harm him (18:5, 12), to revenge Absalom's later rebellion by killing him (18:14). It follows that his use of the wise woman of Tekoa for a disguise was not truly a deception. David could not have acceded to the appeal, once he had realized the correlation between the case of the woman of Tekoa and Absalom, if there had been no moral ground for doing so. The argument of the woman of Tekoa is persuasive because "she is also appealing to David to act as God acts."[38] This is exactly the point that makes the fictitious tale of the woman of Tekoa radically different from the case of the rich man in Nathan's parable. It is impossible to justify his crime or David's transgression, but it is possible to see good reasons for granting grace to criminals who have suffered at least partial punishment. We should not forget that mercy was granted only after Absalom had passed three years in exile, and that two more were added before he was allowed to return to court.

Of course, David's kiss of mercy and reconciliation (14:28–33) is a notable gesture of trust. But David was again to be deceived by Absalom, this time in a most despicable fashion—although that does not mean that David's gesture was inherently wrong and against the moral law.[39] Such a view cannot be sustained even if we accept the idea that Absalom's perfidy was a consequence of David's sin (cf. 12:9–10). David is not God and could not foresee his son's future misdeeds. And finally, this and other narratives imply that God permitted deception even though he knew what would happen. God has in general good reason for doing such a thing, but his right can be fully manifested only after all those who deceive others, thus undermining the very foundations of moral order, fall victim to self-deception. Nathan's pronouncement of punishment upon David (12:9–10) suggests, however, that Absalom's perfidy was permitted by Providence for a particular reason: it was meant as the *grace* of punishment, for it provided David with a crucial opportunity to submit himself to God's judgment and to atone for his sins.

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[38] See H. Hagan, *Biblica* 60 (1979), 313.

[39] P. K. McCarter, *II Samuel*, 351–352, argues that Absalom "should not have gone unpunished ... he certainly should not have been permitted to return to court, a parlous flaw in the fabric of Israelite society" (p. 351). As for Joab's good intent he thinks that "he remains nonetheless indifferent to the moral issues involved and, in any case, his efforts lead to disaster ... Thus David, though not free of blame, is presented as a king sincerely interested in the welfare of his people (14:13–14 + 18–21) but unable to control the reckless sons of Zeruiah (cf. 3:39) and, as always, sentimental and vulnerable where his own sons are concerned" (p. 352).

2.2.2 *Deception and Counter-deception (15:1–17:23)*

Absalom carefully prepared his rebellion by deceitfully posing as a man of justice who would grant everybody his entreaty had he the power to do so. Like some latter-day politician, he canvassed at the city gate (15:1–6) and "stole the hearts of the men of Israel" (15:6). His gesture of kissing his potential supporters suggests ironical mimicry of David's kiss of reconciliation (14:33). The next step along the valley of deception follows four years after Absalom's return to court (cf. 15:7–12), when he asks his father for permission to go to Hebron in order to sacrifice to the Lord in accordance with the vow made during his exile in Geshur. David accedes, saying: "Go in peace" (v. 9), but Absalom has quite other matters in mind: when he reaches Hebron he anoints himself king and builds up his conspiracy *(haqqešer);* David's counsellor Ahithophel appears to be at its heart (15:12).[40]

Once David realizes that "the hearts of the men of Israel have gone after Absalom" (15:13), he engages in counter-deception (15:13–16:14). He orders his supporters to fly from Jerusalem, but leaves ten concubines to keep the house. A foreigner, Ittai the Gittite, although free from any obligation of loyalty, paradoxically and symbolically binds himself to total commitment to David: "As the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king shall be, whether for death or for life, there also will your servant be" (15:21). After all the people had left the city, David addressed the priests Abiathar and Zadok, who bore the ark of the covenant: "Carry the ark of God back into the city. If I find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me back and let me see both it and his habitation; but if he says, 'I have no pleasure in you,' behold, here I am, let him do to me what seems good to him" (15:25–26). So Zadok with his son Ahimaaz and Abiathar with his son Jonathan also remained in Jerusalem in order to relay information to David, who intended to climb the Mount of Olives and wait at the edge of the wilderness.

Especially noticeable is David's reaction to the news that his counsellor Ahithophel was among the conspirators: *sakkel-nā' 'et-'ăṣat 'ăḥîtōpel yhwh,* "Make Ahithophel's counsel foolish, O Lord!" (15:31). The narrator continues: "When David came to the summit, where God was worshipped, behold Hushai the Archite came to meet him with his coat rent and earth upon his head" (15:32). Since this happened at a place "where God was worshipped," the meeting was considered part of God's providence. David commissions him to attempt the most hazardous part of the counter-deception, which

[40] John Dryden's couplet in his famous satire in its day, "Absalom and Achitophel," although applied to a politician in 17th century England (Absalom being Lord Shaftesbury), is not inapt:

> Of these the false Achitophel was first.
> A name to all succeeding ages curst.

would soon bring about the reverse of Absalom's advance and his downfall: "If you go on with me, you will be a burden to me. But if you return to the city, and say to Absalom, 'I will be your servant, O king; as I have been your father's servant in time past, so now I will be your servant,' then you will defeat for me *(wĕhēpartāh lî)* the counsel of Ahithophel" (15:33–34).

David's flight from Jerusalem reveals the most remarkable facet of his character: his total submission to God's will and his caution in exercising the law of retribution. His statement in 15:25–26 showed that he was prepared to sacrifice his kingdom. Later, when he comes to Bahurim, he is cursed by Shimei, a man of the house of Saul: "Begone, begone, you man of blood, you worthless fellow! The Lord has avenged upon you all the blood of the house of Saul *(hēšîb 'ālêkā yhwh kōl dĕmê bêt-šā'ûl),* in whose place you have reigned; and the Lord has given the kingdom into the hand of your son Absalom. See, your ruin is on you, for you are a man of blood" (16:7–8). This insult may help to explain why so many passages in I and 2 Samuel concerning David's dealings with Saul and the members of Saul's house bear the marks of apologetic. Possibly there was a general suspicion that David might somehow have been involved in the death of Saul and his sons; indeed we have here a direct accusation of as much. The loyal Abishai says to David: "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and take off his head" (16:9); but David's reply manifests a strong sense of being in the hands of God: "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the Lord has said to him, 'Curse David,' who then shall say, 'Why have you done so?' ... Behold, my own son seeks my life; how much more now may this Benjaminite! Let him alone, and let him curse; for the Lord has bidden him. It may be that the Lord will look upon my affliction, and that the Lord will repay me *(hēšîb yhwh lî)* with good for this cursing of me today" (16:10–12). The answer implies rejection of any "magical" view of the curse. This attitude is reminiscent of the wisdom sentence in Prov 26:2: "Like a sparrow in its flitting, like a swallow in its flying, a curse that is causeless does not alight." David's argument makes clear two points: first, a pronouncement of punishment or curse is effective only when there is ground for it; secondly, accepting the humiliation of cursing without any apparent ground can be good reason for the exercise of God's grace.

It follows that the law of retribution invoked by a son of Zeruiah is not the only appropriate response to an offence. David's choice of penitence instead of accession to the demands of the strict law of retribution is suggested not only by reflection on theological principles but also by the situation. It is justifiable to conclude that "David—and the narrator—understood his exile from the city as a situation to which a penitential response was somehow

appropriate."[41] Moreover, David's attitude may reflect such a profound consciousness of his own guilt and that of his son that penitential atonement appeared to him the only possible way out of the curse. The emphasis lies, finally, on the consternation: "Behold, my own son seeks my life ..." How harmless must have appeared the offence of foreigners in such a mirror!

In the section 16:15–17:23 the attention of the narrator turns to Absalom who has just reached Jerusalem in the company of "all the people, the men of Israel ... and Ahithophel with him" (16:15). When David's friend Hushai greets him: "Long live the king! Long live the king!" (16:16), Absalom is suspicious: "Is this your loyalty *(zeh ḥasdĕkā)* to your friend? Why did you not go with your friend?" (16:17). By reminding Hushai that he must remain faithful to David, Absalom implicitly admits the gravity of his own treacherous dealings with his father. So we are faced with a striking irony: Hushai is truly faithful to his friend David and must, therefore, defeat David's disloyal son and his friends by using the dishonest devices of counter-deception.

Ahithophel becomes Absalom's best "friend" in his treachery. He gives to the self-proclaimed king two "diabolically good" pieces of advice.[42] The first is: "Go in to your father's concubines, whom he has left to keep the house; and all Israel will hear that you have made yourself odious to your father *(kî nib'aštā 'et-'ābîkā),* and the hands of all who are with you will be strengthened" (16:21). Since the advice given by Ahithophel "was as if one consulted the oracle of God" (16:23), it is not surprising that Absalom accepted it and we are told: "So they pitched a tent for Absalom upon the roof; and Absalom went in to his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel" (16:22). There is no allusion here to Nathan's announcement of punishment for David's adultery in 12:11–12. The thought behind Ahithophel's proposal is obviously that the appropriation of the concubines would symbolize the taking possession of the kingdom. Ironically, the bridal tent upon the roof is reminiscent of David's seeing: "he saw from the roof a woman bathing" (11:2). On the other hand, the offence aimed at David recalls the misdeed of Jacob's firstborn. In Gen 35:22 we find: "While Israel dwelt in that land Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine; and Israel heard of it." Ahithophel argues that Absalom's actions will make him "odious" to his father and consequently strengthen the hands of his supporters. The underlying idea is probably that

[41] See P. K. McCarter, *II Samuel,* 376. However, McCarter's speculation on the reason for David's curse – that it could be in line with precipitable traits of human nature on the one hand and the correlation of biblical theological presuppositions on the other—is too "magical": "... All of this began with the 'sacrilege' *(nĕbālâ)* committed by Amnon. As in Joshua 7 and elsewhere, the result of such a sacrilege is general disaster. The disaster might have been averted if the king had punished the perpetrator of the sacrilege, but the just king yielded to the devoted father (13:21). In consequence, the incestuous rape was complicated by fratricide, and the disastrous sequence of events began" (p. 376). Fortunately, McCarter is not so sure about his theory, so he does not try to argue: "The disaster might have been averted if ..."

[42] See H. W. Hertzberg, *I and II Samuel,* 350–351.

Absalom's supporters will have no choice other than to follow him, once they have assisted in his making so total a break with his father.

The profoundly theological point of this irony is, however, that by setting himself above human and divine law Absalom chose the road to disaster. Decent people must consider such behaviour reprehensible, as Jacob's blessing suggests: "Reuben, you are my first-born, my might, and the first fruits of my strength, pre-eminent in pride and pre-eminent in power. Unstable as water, you shall not have pre-eminence because you went up to your father's bed; then you defiled it—you went up to my couch!" (Gen 49:3–4). The view that Absalom's act of defilement was part of the divine punishment imposed on David implies that by the curse which Absalom brought upon himself David's sin was at least partly expiated. In the event, Absalom's sin was a tragedy for the unhappy concubines. When David returned to Jerusalem his first act was to imprison them: "And the king took the ten concubines whom he had left to care for the house, and put them in a house under guard, and provided for them, but did not go in to them. So they were shut up until the day of their death, living as if in widowhood" (20:3).[43] Their fate is strongly reminiscent of the doom of Tamar hinted at in the statement: "So Tamar dwelt, a desolate woman *(wĕšōmĕmāh),* in her brother Absalom's house" (13:20). In view of Absalom's acceptance of Ahithophel's "diabolical counsel" regarding the treatment of David's concubines, through which he surpassed his brother Amnon in venery, it would be ridiculous to believe that his revenge on Amnon was motivated by care for his sister's pride and honour.

The second item of diabolical counsel offered by Ahithophel was his proposal to overtake David immediately and kill him when his supporters had fled (17:1–3). The plan "pleased Absalom and all the elders of Israel" (17:4). Nevertheless, Absalom ordered that Hushai should also be consulted, and he naturally used his best endeavours to gain time for David by delaying Absalom's move. The narrator suggests that Absalom's treachery provoked intervention by God; "all the men of Israel," he said, preferred the counsel of Hushai to that of Ahithophel, "For the Lord had ordained to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the Lord might bring evil upon Absalom" (17:14–15). The narrator thus makes explicit what is implied in the chain of cause and effect—namely, that God is working for David's salvation. It is not clear whether this information corresponds to the original state of affairs.[44] Since, however, the aim of the counter-deception was to inform David in time

[43] The reason for isolation of the concubines is evidently of a moral rather than a judicial character. P. K. McCarter, *II Samuel,* 423, argues: "Now that these women have been illegally claimed by Abishalom (16:21–22), they must be put away." But the point of the case is not just Absalom's claiming the royal harem but his offence against the father/son relationship.

[44] See the discussion on sources and transmission of the text in commentaries and special studies.

about the perilous nature of Ahithophel's proposal, it is possible to claim in any case that Hushai's counter-intelligence (15:34) succeeded. Jonathan and Ahimaaz brought the news to David so that David could cross the Jordan before daybreak (17:15–22). This was indeed the turning-point.

Ahithophel's end was cold-blooded: "When Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his ass, and went off home to his own city. And he set his house in order, and hanged himself; and he died, and was buried in the tomb of his father" (17:23).[45] This summary report prompts speculation as to why and when Ahithophel decided to indulge in self-judgment. But the sequence of events makes it clear that he despaired for himself from the moment when he realized that Absalom's cause was lost. He must have seen that for him there was no room for mercy, and at least one exegete shows a kind of sympathy for the "dignity" of Ahithopel's decision.[46] All the more is it understandable that David's way of dealing with offenders after the victory of his army should have caused divisions among his supporters. His reaction to the news of the death of his treacherous son Absalom and his dealing with the repentant Shimei were not consistent with personal pride and a self-righteous claim to be a dispenser of justice.

2.2.3 *Absalom's End and David's Treatment of the Rebels (17:24–19:43)*

Absalom followed David east of Jordan and "had set Amasa over the army instead of Joab" (17:25). At Mahanaim David found reliable supporters in the leading men of Gilead (17:27–29) and appointed three military commanders: Joab, Abishai, and Ittai (18:2). He himself was persuaded by his officers to remain behind (18:3–4), but he enjoined his commanders: *lĕ'aṭ-lî lanna'ar lĕ'abšālôm,* "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom" (18:5). The battle flared up in the forest of Ephraim, where Absalom's party was defeated, and "Absalom was riding upon his mule, and the mule went under the thick branches of a great oak, and his head caught fast in the oak, and he was left hanging between heaven and earth, while the mule that was under him went on" (18:9).

This bizarre end was an occasion of temptation for Joab. When someone told him: "Behold, I saw Absalom hanging in an oak" (18:10) he replied: "What, you saw him! Why then did you not strike him there to the ground? I would have been glad to give you ten pieces of silver and a girdle" (18:11). His informant reminded him of David's explicit order, but Joab rejected that argument out of hand: "I will not waste time like this with you"; then "he took three darts in his hand, and thrust them into the heart of Absalom, while he was still alive in the oak" (18:14). Joab's armour-bearers then fin-

[45] Suicide is a rare phenomenon in the Hebrew world (cf. Judg 9:54; 1 Sam 31:4–5; 1 Kgs 16:18; 2 Macc 10:13; 14:41). A similar case of committing treason and executing self-judgment is seen in Judas Iscariot in the New Testament (Matt 27:5).

[46] See J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*, vol. 1, 229–231.

ished him off (18:15). Absalom's death in effect ended the battle (18:16–18), but the task of informing David turns an antithesis of attitudes (the young soldier and his commander) into a personal clash (Joab and David).

The process of transmitting the "tidings" to David has its own irony. Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok, offers himself as messenger: "Let me run, and carry tidings *(wa'ăbaśśĕrāh)* to the king that the Lord has delivered him from the power of his enemies" (18:19), but Joab referred the Cushite for this task, and his argument reflects his clear awareness that the king will be grieved at the news of his son's death: "You are not to carry tidings today; you may carry tidings another day, but today you shall carry no tidings, because the king's son is dead" (18:20). Ahimaaz persists, however: "Come what may, let me also run after the Cushite" (18:22), and Joab yields: "Run" (18:23). Ahimaaz gets there first, in fact, and cries to the king: "All is well! ... Blessed be the Lord your God, who has delivered up the men who raised their hand against my lord the king" (18:28). David is uneasy, however, and asks: "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" (18:29). While Ahimaaz is still prevaricating, the Cushite arrives and says: "Good tidings for my lord the king! For the Lord has delivered you this day from the power of all who rose up against you" (18:31). David puts to him the same question as to Ahimaaz: "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" and the messenger gives an unambiguous answer: "May the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise up against you for evil, be like that young man" (18:32). David bursts out in uncontrollable grief: "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (19:1).

Joab's reaction to the news of David's "weeping and mourning for Absalom" (19:2) is consistent with his action and with the retributive strain in the "tidings" uttered by both messengers. He rebukes the king: "You have today covered with shame the faces of all your servants, who have this day saved your life, and the lives of your sons and your daughters, and the lives of your wives and your concubines, because you love those who hate you and hate those who love you *(lĕ'ahăbāh 'et śon'êkā wĕliśnō' 'et-'ōhăbêkā)* ..." (19:6–8).

The opposing attitudes of Joab and David to Absalom's death reflect their fundamentally opposing situations, but both are in part defensible. Joab was obviously not without a sense of mercy, for it was he who devised a way to persuade David to pardon Absalom's fratricide and allow him ultimately to return to the court (14:1–33). But the young man's abuse of this gesture of generosity must have been extremely disgusting to a loyal commander. His determination to exact the death penalty from Absalom appears to have been the spontaneous reaction of a lord of wounded honour. It may be viewed as an act of personal revenge, and indeed his notorious fondness for revenge paved the way to his own end in accordance with the same principle (cf. 3:39; 19:14; 20:7–10; 1 Kgs 2:5–9, 28–35). David, on the other

hand, as Absalom's father, has to struggle between the demands of justice and his paternal feelings. This inner struggle explains why David so pointedly commanded the protection of Absalom (18:5; cf. v. 12). He was not implying that Absalom should escape unpunished, but certainly indicated that as his father he could not deal with him *sans merci.* All the more is it evident that Joab's rebuke, "... you love those who hate you and hate those who love you," misses the point, for paternal love of a rebellious son does not imply approval of all his deeds. The ultimate motive behind David's lament is his profound perception of tragedy, and this must overshadow the satisfaction of his victory. David remained inconsolable, although he was destined to become the greatest of Israel's kings. Moreover, his weeping and mourning for Absalom are reminiscent of God's unconditional commitment to the chosen people—in spite of their persistently rebellious attitudes.

David's dealings with another offender confirm this conclusion. When he was returning to Jerusalem in order to reclaim the throne, Shimei came to him at Jordan to beg pardon for his cursing (19:17–21). Abishai would have applied the principle of retribution: "Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the Lord's anointed?" (19:22). But David replied: "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah, that you should this day be as an adversary to me? Shall any one be put to death in Israel this day? For do I not know that I am this day king over Israel?" (19:23). So he turned to Shimei with the assurance: "You shall not die" (19:24).

3. *Conclusion*

It is almost customary in modern exegesis to assume that behind the narratives of 2 Samuel lies the apologetic aim of exculpating David from any suspicion of involvement in the killings of Saul, Abner, Ishbosheth, and Absalom. It is questionable, however, whether this can be considered the main point of the book. The intrinsic ideological and artistic force of the narratives extends far beyond historical circumstance. Individual stories are presented against the background of a universal moral order and the ultimate motivations of human decisions and actions. It is natural, therefore, that gaps should be endemic to the narratives. Nevertheless, there is more than enough evidence for the consistency of the book as a whole: intrinsic judgment of individual characters by the inherent moral order is the incontestable unifying force of all the narratives. Deception undermines the very foundation of the actors' plans by stirring up a natural reaction, and is very often defeated by counter-deception. In the end it becomes evident that the fruit corresponds to the quality of the seed. This law is so dependable that

only rarely is God's direct intervention necessary. God's providence functions covertly behind a façade of human history.[47]

The main point of the book, however, transcends by far the issue of recompense or retribution. The scenes disclosing opposing attitudes to the law of morality—the Amalekite // David (1:1–16), Joab // David (3:6–39; 18:9–15; 19:2–9), David // Uriah (11:1–27a), Amnon // Tamar (13:1–22), Absalom // David (13:23–19:1), Shimei // David (16:5–14), Abishai // David (16:5–14; 19:17–24), Ahithophel // Hushai (16:15–17:23)—illustrate on the one hand the opposition between self-interest or self-will and a moral integrity that implies reliance on the divine moral order and obedience, and on the other an intrinsic way of judgment. The challenge of evil requires of the human actors confidence in Providence and an attitude of patience—the surest marks of wisdom. This attitude presupposes restraint in taking the law into one's own hands and in exacting vengeance. Acknowledgment of this principle implies leniency in dealing with offenders, which means above all the hope that the fruit of their aberration and the persuasion of a protesting generosity will move them to retreat.

The most dramatic event in 2 Samuel is the conspiracy of David's son Absalom. His deception and rebellion reflect "the root sin, denounced by Isaiah and the other prophets, the sin of Job, even of Adam and the men who built the Tower of Babel; the sin of the man who is his own master or behaves as though he is his own master."[48] His character is, then, strongly reminiscent of that of Saul, and neither the punishment of exile nor pardon could reform him. His complete ruin was unavoidable. *The Mishnah* illustrates the law of retribution—"With what measure a man metes it shall be measured to him again" (*Sotah* 1:7)—with Absalom's fate: "Absalom gloried in his hair—therefore he was hanged by his hair; and inasmuch as he came in upon the ten concubines of his father, therefore they thrust ten spear-heads into his body" (*Sotah* 1:8).[49]

It is striking that David was the only one who fully adopted the ultimate rule of the wisdom of patience by placing full reliance upon God's providence.[50] This explains why he was critical of himself and of the temptations

[47] G. von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays,* 201, recognizes very well that the historian "depicts a succession of occurrences in which the chain of inherent cause and effect is firmly knit up—so firmly indeed that the human eye discerns no point at which God could have put it in his hand. Yet secretly it is he who has brought all to pass, all the threads are in his hands; his activity embraces the great political events no less than the hidden counsels of human hearts. All human affairs are the sphere of God's providential working."

[48] See H. W. Hertzberg, *I and II Samuel,* 378.

[49] See H. Danby, *The Mishnah: Translated from the Hebrew with Introduction and Brief Explanatory Notes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933, 1977).

[50] See the statement by L. Rost, *The Succession to the Throne of David,* 103: "He is, incidentally, also the one who most often refers to the divine background of human action and interaction—indeed he is almost the only one who does so. True piety and strong sensuality,

arising from the advocates of vengeance. He fell deeply, but his need to atone for his sin lay even deeper. It is remarkable how his withdrawal from Jerusalem after Absalom's rebellion took the form of a penitential procession. Since David remained ultimately rooted in the knowledge of God's universal providence, his sin never became a "root sin." In many ways David's treatment of offenders signalled his extraordinary vulnerability, which was sometimes clearly disadvantageous to him in the short term. Consciousness of his own flaws was certainly one of his inner reasons for believing that the law of retribution cannot be regarded as the only way of dealing with evil. The other side of the argument is his profound awareness of his own paternity, reminiscent of the rights of God's paternal sensibility in regard to his creation. David's vulnerability reflects his deep certainty that God alone is Lord and the righteous Judge. So he was fortunate enough to be saved even when his kingdom was overshadowed by the lowering clouds of his own sin and that of his family. Against a background of the extremes, the abysses and ascents, of the trials that David had to undergo, the celebrated promise in Nathan's oracle (7:1–17) displays the full force of God's unconditional commitment to David's house within the people of the covenant; and this is the pivotal message of 2 Samuel.[51]

weakness with people he loves and strength in adverse circumstances, winning magnanimity and burning hatred, all struggle for his soul; a sense of reality, an eye for what is possible and a calculating acuteness characterize him."

[51] See the statement by G. von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays,* 202: "The underlying theme of the whole work is the succession to the throne of David. At the outset we were told of the promise of God that the Davidic throne should endure for ever. Then we saw the appalling vicissitudes into which it fell, until at last the divinely appointed heir assumed the crown and the problem of the succession to the throne was solved. If, however, it was the purpose of the historian to show how God preserved the Davidic throne through all the vicissitudes of history, then theologically speaking his theme was a messianic one."

CHAPTER XI

THE UNCONDITIONAL DAVIDIC COVENANT WITHIN THE UNCONDITIONAL COVENANT WITH ISRAEL

Alongside various forms of the Sinaitic covenant, which is conditional by definition, we find in Nathan's oracle, 2 Sam 7:1–17, an unconditional promise: that a Davidic dynasty will be established to endure for all time. The importance of this pericope is attested not only by its position in this particular context but also by the existence of a closely parallel integral version in 1 Chr 17:1–27 and a poetic counterpart in Ps 89:20–38. It has become the prevailing view that this last version is a later interpretation of that found in 2 Sam 7.[1] The promise of an everlasting Davidic dynasty is generally designated as the Davidic covenant, even though the word *bĕrît,* 'covenant,' appears only in the version of Ps 89 (vv. 29 and 35).

An analysis of the structure of the pericope and its evaluation in the light of the underlying forms of the Sinaitic and Davidic covenants provide the necessary basis for dealing with the main question: is the unconditional Davidic covenant in fact different from the Sinaitic covenant, which is generally regarded as conditional? Extra-biblical parallels can certainly throw some light on this issue, but a comparative study also gives rise to the question of how far the legal and political patterns of the treaty can serve as an appropriate basis for evaluating biblical forms of covenant against the background of their distinctive theological presuppositions.

The crucial issue raised by biblical scholars is this: in which senses are the Davidic and Sinaitic covenants unconditional or conditional? Available studies fail to answer this question satisfactorily, first because the relationship between the whole of the people (or mankind) and its parts is not considered, and secondly because the correlation between the immanent and transcendent aspects of the covenant, on the one hand, and the role of poetry and rhetoric in their statements on the other, are not sufficiently taken into consideration.

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[1] See especially N. M. Sarna, "Psalm 89: A Study in Inner Biblical Exegesis," *Biblical and Other Studies* (ed. A. Altmann; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), 29–46. Sarna summarizes his account of vv. 20–38 on p. 45: "The second of the three natural divisions of the psalm constitutes an exegetical adaptation, not another recension, of Nathan's oracle about the House of David, and this oracle is certainly Davidic." It is noteworthy that a fragment of Nathan's oracle is preserved in Solomon's conversation with Bathsheba concerning his elder brother Adonijah in 1 Kgs 2:24; there are similarities even in the wording to 2 Sam 7:11b. The similarity between the texts available gives, however, good ground for the assumption that all of them developed from an older tradition. See also E. Gleßmer, "Das Textwachstum von Ps 89 und ein Qumranfragment," *BN* 65 (1992), 55–73.

1. *The Structure of 2 Samuel 7:1–17 and Its Parallels*

The pericope of 2 Sam 7 is not homogeneous but consists of disparate components. Its present version is probably derived from ancient shorter and longer narrative units.[2] It is, however, integrated into its immediate literary context so as to form an editorial unity. In its present form the pericope bears marks of Deuteronomistic redaction. Both Nathan's oracle (7:1–17) and David's long prayer, presented as his response to the divine decree of the oracle (7:18–29), are framed in the Deuteronomistic language. It seems justifiable to state "that the text operates with ideas that are important and special to the Deuteronomistic work, that it is closely integrated into its immediate literary context, and finally that, in part in virtue of the very foregoing factors, it has key position in the scheme of the whole massive work which extends from Deuteronomy to Kings."[3] All the more is it difficult to establish the literary history of Nathan's oracle with any certainty. But whatever its genesis, we have to interpret the meaning of the passage as it stands in its final form and functions within its context.[4]

Three personae play their parts in Nathan's oracle: David, Nathan, and God. The point of departure is David's reflection communicated to the prophet: "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent" (7:2). Nathan perceives the implied intention and approves it: "Go, do all that is in your heart; for the Lord is with you" (7:3). But this, as it transpired, was not so; we are told: "That same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan" (7:4). David's reaction to God's indignant refusal resulted in the theme of the passage shifting from "house of God" to "house of David" (7:5–17). The oracle uses the familiar messenger formula: "Thus says the Lord: Would *you* build *me* a house for me to dwell in *(ha'attāh tibneh-lî bayit lĕšibtî)?* I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up

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[2] According to L. Rost, *The Succession to the Throne of David* (trans. from German by M. D. Rutter and D. M. Gunn; HTIBS 1; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1982), 35–56, which has attracted a wide following, it may be assumed that the original materials are embedded in vv. 1–7 together with vv. 11b and 16, and 18–21, 25 (26), 27–29. F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Mass. / London: Harvard University Press, 1973), 254, divides the oracle of 7:1–17 into three parts: the "old oracle" of Nathan (vv. 1–7); the oracle of the eternal divine decree (7:11b–16); and the Deuteronomistic linkage (vv. 8–11a). T. Veijola, *Die ewige Dynastie,* 68–80, esp. pp. 72–78, assumes in Nathan's oracle two older sources: a proscription of the temple plan (7:1a, 2–5, 7), and a promise of offspring to David (7:8a, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 17). See T. N. D. Mettinger, *King and Messiah: The Civil and Sacral Legitimation of the Israelite Kings* (CB.OT 8; Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1976), esp. pp. 51–52; G. H. Jones, *The Nathan Narratives* (JSOT.S 80; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 59–92 + 157–165: "Oracles concerning the Temple and the Dynasty (2 Sam. 7.1–17)."

[3] See D. McCarthy, "II Samuel 7 and the Structure of the Deuteronomistic History," *JBL* 84 (1965), 132.

[4] On awareness of this fact is based the study by G. Gentschel, *Gott, König und Tempel: Beobachtungen zu 2 Sam 7,1–17* (EThS 22; Leipzig: Benno-Verlag, 1992).

the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?'" (7:5–7). This opening rhetorical question is obviously the key to understanding the point of the oracle. The particle *ha* is used as a rhetorical form instead of a negative assertion,[5] both personal pronouns are emphatic, and the end of the sentence corresponds to this basic syntactic structure: *bayit lĕšibtî,* "a house for me to dwell in."

It follows that the stress is on the subject rather than on the object of proposal. To build a temple for God is not wrong in itself, but David's intention sounds presumptuous, because it implies that he would become God's benefactor. The following Deuteronomistic linkage (7:8–11a), and especially the oracle of the eternal divine decree (7:11b–16), emphasize that the reverse is the case: "Moreover the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house *(wĕhiggîd lĕkā yhwh kî-bayit ya'ăśeh-lĕkā yhwh).* When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever *(hû' yibneh-bayit lišmî wĕkōnantî 'et-kissē' mamlaktô 'ad-'ôlām)* ..." (7:11b–13). Thuses a difference emerge between David and God on the question of a "house": "You" (David) will not build a house (temple) for me (7:5b); rather "I" (God) will build a house (dynasty) for you (7:11b). But this illuminating contrast is clouded by the statement in 7:13a relating to Solomon: "*He* shall build a house for my name." The present form of the oracle suggests that the reason for the rejection of David's pious intent lies in its timing: the time was not yet ripe (cf. 1 Kgs 8:17–21). It seems likely, however, that 7:13a is an editorial insertion, for the whole argument in 7:5–7 suggests that "the negative verdict on a temple was originally intended as final and fundamental."[6] If this view is correct the force of the divine decree in 7:11b–16 is impressive: the dynastic promise implies that God has, independently of David's adherency—i.e., by his free will, by grace—established David's house "for ever."

The declaration that God's promise is independent of David's merits does not necessarily imply that it could not lapse in reaction to the later demerits of his dynasty—although the present oracle seems to exclude even this possibility; it concludes:

> I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men *('ăšer*

[5] See E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press).

[6] See P. K. McCarter, *II Samuel* (AB 9; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984), 197.

> *bĕha'ăwôtô wĕhōkaḥtîw bĕšēbeṭ 'ănāšîm ûbĕnig'ê bĕnê 'ādām),* but I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before you *(wĕne'man bêtĕkā ûmamlaktĕkā 'ad-'ôlām lĕpānêkā),*[7] your throne shall be established for ever (7:14–16).

The parallel version in 1 Chr 17 differs considerably here. There is no mention of sin and its correction: "I will be his father, and he shall be my son; I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from him who was before you, but I will confirm him in my house and in my kingdom for ever and his throne shall be established for ever" (1 Chr 17:13–14). In 1 Kgs 2:24 we find similar wording to 2 Sam 7:11b only when Solomon says of his elder brother Adonijah: "Now therefore as the Lord lives, who has established me, and placed me on the throne of David my father, and who has made me a house, as he promised, Adonijah shall be put to death this day." All the more is it noteworthy that the punishment theme echoes in the expanded poetic elaboration of the promise in Ps 89:20–38.[8]

There are no further documents in the Hebrew Bible relating to such a promise, but we can find some notable parallels to Nathan's oracle in the provisions governing extra-biblical "grants." In contrast to numerous suzerainty treaties, which impose particular obligations on vassals, the "grant" declarations confer gifts of "land" and "house" upon high officials or vassals who had shown exceptional loyalty to their suzerains. The Hittite treaty of King Hattušiliš III with Ulmi-Tešup of Dataša embodies a "grant" formula of this sort: "After you, your son and grandson will possess it, nobody will take it away from them. If one of your descendants sins *(uaštai-)* the king will prosecute him at his court. Then when he is found guilty ... if he deserves death he will die. But nobody will take away from the descendant of Ulmi-Tešub *either his house or his land* in order to give it to a descendant of somebody else." A similar formula is employed by Tudhaliyaš IV and Puduhepa to protect a Hittite high official named Šahurunuwaš: "Nobody in the future shall take away this house from U-manava (or Tesup-manava), her children, her grandchildren and her offspring. When anyone of the descendants of U-manava provokes the anger of the kings ... whether he is to be forgiven or whether he is to be killed, one will treat him according to the wish of his

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[7] The form *lĕpānêkā* in MT is challenged by the context, some Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, and Peshitta, which surmise the first person suffix.

[8] For the discussion about the meaning of the psalm as a whole, see especially the studies by J. M. Ward, "The Literary Form and Liturgical Background of Psalm LXXXIX," *VT* 11 (1961), 321–339; R. J. Clifford, "Psalm 89: A Lament over the Davidic Ruler's Continued Failure," *HThR* 73 (1980), 35–47; V. Ravanelli, "Aspetti letterari del Salmo 89," *SBFLA* 30 (1980), 7–46; T. Veijola, *Verheißung in der Krise: Studien zur Literatur und Theologie der Exilszeit anhand des 89. Psalms* (STTAASF B/220; Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1982), 11–46; M. H. Floyd, "Psalm LXXXIX: A Prophetic Complaint about the Fulfillment of an Oracle," *VT* 42 (1992), 442–457; A. Caquot, "Observations sur le Psaume 89," *Semitica* 41–42 (1993), 133–158.

master but his house they will not take away and they will not give it to somebody else." Another example comes from so-called *tuppī šīmti* (testaments) documents from Nuzi. In a will we find the provision about obedience to the adoptive father: "Tablet of Zigi ... in favor of his wife and his sons. ... All my lands ... to my wife Zilipkiashe have been given ... and Zilipkiashe shall be made parent of the sons. As long as Zilipkiashe is alive the sons of Zigi shall serve/respect her *(ipallahšunuti).* When Zilipkiashe dies the sons of Zigi shall receive their inheritance portions, each according to his allotment. Whoever among my sons will not obey Zilipkiashe, Zilipkiashe shall put him in the house of de[tention], their mark (on the head) shall be affixed and (they) will be put in (their) fetters, but (their) right shall not be annulled ... and Zilipkiashe shall not give away anything to strangers."[9]

One would expect a ruler to be insistent that such gifts to his vassals or officials should never be recalled. But will his successors honour such an assurance when the loyalty of later generations falters? The Hittite treaty of Muršiliš II with his nephew Kupanta-Kal suggests that the grant was usually taken away from the son of a disloyal father even though his son remained faithful. The wording of the stipulation indicates that rulers who did not punish innocent heirs as well as guilty fathers must have been exceptionally generous.[10]

2. *The Dynastic Promise As a* quid pro quo *for David's Righteousness*

The dynastic promise to David is based on the father/son relationship (cf.

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[9] For the examples quoted, see M. Weinfeld, "The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East," *JAOS* 90 (1970), 189–190. See also M. Weinfeld, "Addenda to JAOS, XC (1970), p. 184," *JAOS* 92 (1972), 468–469; idem, "Covenant, Davidic," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1976), 188–192.

[10] See J. Friedrich, *MVAG* 31 (1926), 112–115, treaty no. 3, § 7–89 in German translation: "... Weil aber seinerzeit dem Mašhuiluwaš kein Erbsohn gewesen war und er dich, Kupanta-Kal, den Sohn seines Bruders, in Erbsohnsstellung angenommen hatte, — weißt du, Kupanta-Kal, nicht, (daß), wenn in Hattušaš ⟨jemand?⟩ irgendein Vergehen von Aufruhr begeht und (wenn), wessen Vater sündigt, der Sohn nicht zugleich(?) auch sündigt (ist), (daß) man ihm (trotzdem) das Haus seines Vaters wegnimmt und es entweder irgeneinem anderen gibt oder in den Palast(besitz) einzieht? Und weil jetzt dein Vater Mašhuiluwaš gesündigt hat, weil du aber, Kupanta-Kal, des Mašhuiluwaš Sohn warst, hätte man nicht, obwohl du keineswegs(?) sündig wars[t,] dir das Haus deines Vaters und dein Land wegnehmen (und) es irgendeinem anderen geben können? (Auch) hätte ich im Lande irgendeinen anderen zum Herrn machen können. Nun aber habe ich, die Sonne, dir, Kupanta-Kal, nichts zu leide getan und habe dich nicht verstoßen und habe dir nicht das Haus deines Vaters, ja nicht einmal dein Land weggenommen; und ich habe das Haus deines Vaters und dein Land gerade dir zurückgegeben und habe im Lande gerade dich in die Herrschaft eingesetzt und habe dir das Land Mirā und das Land Kuwalija gegeben; wie aber die Grenzen in der früheren Zeit des Mašhuiluwaš waren, so sollen sie jetzt auch für dich sein." The same content is repeated in similar wording in §§ 21–22 (pp. 134–137).

2 Sam 7:14a; Ps 89:27–28), but unlike 2 Samuel 7, Psalm 89 uses also the vocabulary of *bĕrît,* 'covenant' (vv. 29 and 35). Both versions imply a very special divine commitment to David and his dynasty. For the sake of David, his successors can indeed suffer punishment but never outright rejection. But why should God sustain his faithfulness in face of possible backsliding by those who will later sit on David's throne?

The two passages that affirm the dynastic promise stand in sharp contrast to various forms of the Sinaitic covenant, which links fulfilment of promises with obedience. This fact has led Matitiahu Tsevat to the conclusion that 2 Sam 7:13b–16 is a gloss. His argument is based on the constancy of conditional pronouncements on Israel's existence in the prophetic teaching: "These prophetic ideas, however, have nothing in common with the blank check of unlimited validity made out to the house of David, as we find it in II Sam 7:13b–16. This is the salient point. For if the existence of the confederacy, which is the body, is conditional, kingship, which is an organ, cannot be unconditional. There are, then, in this chapter two mutually exclusive concepts of the Davidic kingship and dynasty, and we are forced to the conclusion that the short passage that contains one of them, vss. 13b–16, is a gloss."[11] But the supposed gloss was inserted by someone who must have had his reasons for doing so. And finally, the "gloss" is now a part of the Bible!

It is noteworthy that the promise concerning David's dynasty sometimes appears in conditional form: 1 Kgs 2:4; 8:25; 9:4–5; Isa 7:9; Ps 132:11–12; while the statements in 2 Sam 23:5 and 2 Chr 21:7 are ambiguous. The following pericopes are regarded as explicitly or implicitly unconditional: 2 Sam 7:14–16; Jer 33:17, 19–22; Ps 89:20–38; 2 Chr 13:5.[12] In Deutero-Isaiah the Davidic covenant is applied to the whole nation in a conditional form: "Incline your ear, and come to me, hear, that your soul may live, and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David *(bĕrît 'ôlām ḥasdê dāwīd hanne'ĕmānîm)* ..." (Isa 55:3–5).

Some scholars do not find it possible to resolve the seeming conflict between the two types of covenant.[13] Jon D. Levenson believes there are two groups: "integrationists" and "segregationists," whom he defines thus: "The integrationists are those who see the Davidic Covenant as at least compatible with the Sinaitic or even as an extension or adaptation of it. The segre-

[11] See M. Tsevat, "Studies in the Book of Samuel II. The Steadfast House: What Was David Promised in II Sam. 7:11b–16?," *HUCA* 34 (1963), 73. On this point M. Weinfeld is explicit about his disagreement with Tsevat; see *JAOS* 90 (1970), 196, n. 107.

[12] See especially M. Tsevat, *HUCA* 34 (1963), 71–82; F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic,* 229–273; J. D. Levenson, "The Davidic Covenant and Its Modern Interpreters," *CBQ* 41 (1979), 205–219.

[13] For the controversy concerning the antiquity and significance of the Sinaitic and Abrahamic/Davidic covenants, see especially E. W. Nicholson, *God and His People: Covenant and Theology in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 44–55.

gationists, by contrast, believe they detect a tension between the two, which they may view even as antithetical."[14] Aligning his thought with the work of Moshe Weinfeld, Jon D. Levenson adduces the characteristics of ancient Near Eastern "treaties" and "grants." Weinfeld makes clear the distinction between the two types of documents:

> The structure of both types of these documents is similar. Both preserve the same elements: historical introduction, border delineations, stipulations, witnesses, blessings and curses. Functionally, however, there is a vast difference between these two types of documents. While the "treaty" constitutes an obligation of the vassal to his master, the suzerain, the "grant" constitutes an obligation of the master to his servant. In the "grant" the curse is directed towards the one who will violate the rights of the king's vassal, while in the treaty, the curse is directed towards the vassal who will violate the rights of his king. In other words, the "grant" serves mainly to protect the rights of the *servant,* while the treaty comes to protect the rights of the *master.* What is more, while the grant is a reward for loyalty and good deeds already performed, the treaty is an inducement to future loyalty.[15]

This account of the matter should help to solve the basic structural problem of the relationship between the Davidic and the Sinaitic covenants. It is generally recognized that the Sinaitic covenant is a formal analogue to the Hittite suzerainty treaties, while the Davidic covenant is typologically reminiscent of extra-biblical evidence of the provisions of "grants." Another point of consensus is the view that the Davidic covenant belongs to the same category as the Abrahamic covenant recorded in the Yahwistic version in Gen 15:7–21 and in the Priestly account in Gen 17:1–19.

The poetic counterpart of Nathan's oracle in Ps 89 begins: "Of old thou didst speak in a vision to thy faithful one *(laḥăsîdêkā)* ..." Because David was faithful he could enjoy God's *ḥesed,* 'steadfast love' (vv. 25, 29, 34) and *'ĕmûnāh,* 'faithfulness' (vv. 25 and 34). Frank More Cross is certainly right when he states: "The crucial event in Judah, comparable to the sin of Jeroboam, was the faithfulness of David ... David in Kings is the symbol of fidelity, Jeroboam the symbol of infidelity."[16] There are a number of pas-

[14] See *CBQ* 41 (1979), 207. Among "integrationists" Levenson mentions G. Widengren, "King and Covenant," *JSS* 2 (1957), 1–32; A. H. J. Gunneweg, "Sinaibund und Davidsbund," *VT* 10 (1960), 335–341; C. Schedl, "Die heilsgeschichtliche Funktion der Propheten," *BK* 19 (1964), 9–12; R. de Vaux, "Le roi d'Israël, vassal de Yahve," *Mélanges Eugene Tisserant,* vol. 1 (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1964), 119–133; K. Seybold, *Das davidische Königtum im Zeugnis der Propheten* (FRLANT 107; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972), 44. J. Bright and G. Mendenhall are exposed as "segregationists." Bright tackles the question several times in his basic works *A History of Israel* (2nd ed.; Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster, 1972), and in *Covenant and Promise* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster, 1976); Mendenhall deals with the matter in *The Tenth Generation* (Baltimore, Md.: J. Hopkins, 1973).

[15] See *JAOS* 90 (1970), 185.

[16] See *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic,* 282. See also p. 283: "While the kings of Israel were always condemned, each having done 'that which was evil in the eyes of Yahweh,' judgment does not come automatically upon the kings of Judah. Certain kings, Asa, Jehoshaphat,

sages which state that God's dynastic promise is based on David's faithfulness (cf. 1 Kgs 3:6; 9:4; 11:4, 6; 14:8; 15:3). Similarly Abraham is promised the land and abundant descendants after he proved to be totally obedient to God's will (cf. Gen 18:19; 22:15–18; 26:2–5).

The psalm of 2 Sam 22 (= Ps 18) offers a key to understanding David's special position within the history of Israel. Verses 26–28 assert God's righteous dealing with the "loyal, blameless, pure, and humble" on the one hand and with the "crooked and haughty" on the other. But this only to underline the reason for David's success. It seems to be most convincing to claim that this psalm "is a theological commentary on the history of David. The history of David is to be read and heard in the light of this psalm."[17]

This view is confirmed by the fact that in the Deuteronomistic history we find running like a rondo theme through it the assurance that the Davidic dynasty will survive "for the sake of David ..." Solomon hears God's verdict: "Since this has been your mind and you have not kept my covenant *(bĕrîtî)* and my statutes which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant. Yet for the sake of David your father *(lĕma'an dāwīd 'ābîkā)* I will not do it in your days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However I will not tear away all the kingdom; but I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem *(lĕma'an 'abdî ûlĕma'an yĕrûšālayim)* which I have chosen" (1 Kgs 11:11–13). In the oracle of Ahijah of Shiloh addressed to Jeroboam we read: "Take for yourself ten pieces ... But he shall have one tribe, for the sake of my servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel ... Nevertheless I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand; but I will make him ruler all the days of his life, for the sake of David my servant whom I chose, who kept my commandments and my statutes ... Yet to his son I will give one tribe, that David my servant may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem, the city where I have chosen to put my name ... And if you will hearken to all that I command you, and will walk in my ways, and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did, I will be with you, and will build you a sure house, as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you. And I will for this afflict the descendants of David, but not for ever" (1 Kgs 11:31–39).

In 1 Kgs 15:3–5 we read in relation to Abijam: "And he walked in all the sins which his father did before him; and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father. Nevertheless for David's sake the Lord his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, setting up his son after him,

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Joash, Hezekiah, and above all Josiah 'did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh, as did David his father.'"

[17] See H. W. Hertzberg, *I and II Samuel*, 393.

and establishing Jerusalem; because David did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, and did not turn aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite." In 2 Kgs 8:18–19 there is a similar verdict concerning Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat: "And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as the house of Ahab had done, for the daughter of Ahab was his wife. And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. Yet the Lord would not destroy Judah, for the sake of David his servant, since he promised to give a lamp to him and to his sons for ever." It is noteworthy that the next similar assurance refers to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In the context of the account of Hazael's oppression of Israel the historian claims: "But the Lord was gracious to them and had compassion on them, and he turned toward them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them; nor has he cast them from his presence until now." In connection with the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib king of Assyria God declares: "By the way that he came, by the same he shall return, and he shall not come into this city, says the Lord. For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David" (2 Kgs 19:34 = Isa 37:35). When Hezekiah became seriously sick he prayed: "Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in thy sight" (2 Kgs 20:3); but God's answer is: "I will heal you ... I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city for my own sake and for my servant David's sake" (2 Kgs 20:5–6). Also noteworthy is the statement about Josiah in 2 Kgs 22:2: "And he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, and walked in all the way of David his father, and he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left."

In view of this multiplicity of statements about the divine commitment to David it is appropriate to argue that God is somehow bound to him because of his singular attachment to God; as Leonhard Rost puts it in his explanation of 2 Sam 7: "Only people who have an unbroken, complete confidence in their God, who know that they are led and sustained by him, can be addressed thus; it would never occur to them that Yahweh could withdraw his favour from them. The pledge of Yahweh's favour is the unreserved continuance of their present place of honour."[18]

3. *Both the Sinaitic and the Davidic Covenants Are Ultimately Unconditional*

In spite of all the emphasis on Abraham's and David's obedience or righteousness, these qualities cannot be regarded as the main reason for the un-

[18] See L. Rost, *The Succession to the Throne of David*, 50.

conditionality of the promises given concerning either land or dynasty. Their righteousness may well be simply the reason why God chose them rather than others; the rejection of Saul in the context of David's election makes this clear enough. Past and present obedience or faithfulness to God can be regarded as a firm ground for hope that the members of the dynasty will never become so disloyal that its existence will be endangered, for the history of various communities and of mankind as a whole clearly shows that *all* the members of a community or *all* its generations were never radically unfaithful. The theology of the "remnant" is based on this historical fact. But unconditional promises can be valid "for ever" only if their maker remains immutable and when the gift infinitely transcends both human possible merit and possible destructive mania of human beings. It would be extremely unsound to argue that the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants have to be understood simply as *rewards* for righteousness. The unconditionality of divine promises to Abraham and David has the same roots as the unreservedness of God's commitment to the creation as a whole.

The Deuteronomistic history is based on the awareness that God was saving Israel—despite the persistence of its apostasy and subsequent punishment—by calling into service faithful charismatic leaders: Moses, Joshua, the judges, Samuel, David, Josiah ... The Deuteronomistic history, although conscious of the threat of destruction, is also assured that a renewed covenant is available to a repentant people (cf. Deut 4:27–31; 30:1–10). As Deut 4:31 puts it: "... for the Lord your God is a merciful God; he will not fail you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers which he swore to them." The Deteronomistic passage in 1 Sam 12:22 regards Samuel as affirming: "For the Lord will not cast away his people, for his great name's sake *(ba'ăbûr šĕmô haggādôl),* because it has pleased the Lord to make you a people for himself. "Elsewhere the claim is quite often made that God spares his people "for the sake of his name" and creates a new beginning (Isa 48:9; Jer 14:7, 21; Ezek 20:9, 14, 22, 44; Pss 25:11; 79:9; 106:8; 109:21). Mention may be made also of 2 Kgs 14:27 where we find in the context of extreme distress the statement: "But the Lord had not said that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, so he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash."

In the framework of Hebrew theology, which is based on creation, the unconditionality of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants must have a "cosmic" foundation of the kind provided for the universal Noachic covenant in the Priestly record (cf. Gen 9:1–17; cf. J in 8:21–22). The hymn of Ps 89:2–38 shows that "the frame of the election (vv 29–30 + 37–38) surrounds the later rulers of the dynasty ('his sons') with the promise of divine

fidelity linked to the founding of the cosmos."[19] God's power over the whole of the universe is the best evidence that the covenant must be in principle unconditional. Another reason for the unconditionality of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants must lie in God's purpose for the chosen people as a whole and the history of salvation; but divine design is not fully revealed in advance. The mark of unconditionality should not, however, erode the force of the threat of punishment held out to unfaithful representatives of the dynasty. This threat must be taken just as seriously as that made in the context of the Sinaitic covenant. Is chastisement "with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men" (2 Sam 7:14) really different from the terrifying menaces of the Sinaitic covenant? In the Bible nearly all punishment is represented analogically, often anthropomorphically as the "rod of men." It seems reasonable to conclude that the difference is not so much a matter of content as of rhetoric. When the main emphasis is on the promise of a "grant," the aspect of punishment is necessarily subordinate. But when the main emphasis is on obedience, the writer feels it his duty to point to the dire possibilities of misfortune should there be disobedience. The goal of threatening is not destruction, however, but inducement to faithfulness or repentance.

In the end, of course, the Davidic dynasty disappeared, like all formal institutions. Many thought and still think that this happened because of Israel's sin. But this is not an acceptable explanation within the canon of biblical belief. If that were so, the whole of history would be ultimately a one-way street leading to destruction. The opposite, however, is the case: the framework of all statements of election and all threats of punishment is the history of salvation, which has a strongly positive bent. Beyond good and evil, merits and demerits, there is ground for hope "against hope" for a new beginning. God's plans are much vaster than human capacity to impede their realization in forms ever new.

It can safely be said that both the Sinaitic and Davidic covenants are in principle conditional and unconditional, but not in the same sense. Perhaps we can put it this way: the Sinaitic covenant is ultimately unconditional despite its conditionality, while the Davidic covenant is unconditional by definition. But this is possible only within the unconditionality of the covenant with Israel as a whole. The Sinaitic covenant has the general validity that applies especially to cases relating to communities and to history in its larger or abiding perspectives. It does not imply any previous merits or de-

[19] See R. J. Clifford, *HThR* 73 (1980), 46. See also the statement by M. H. Floyd, *VT* 42 (1992), 444: "It can scarcely be denied that Ps. LXXXIX associates the founding of the Davidic dynasty with the commemoration of Yahweh's cosmogonic victory over the chaos monster, or that it predicates its prayer for the defeated Davidic heir on an association of the founding of the dynasty with the creation of the world."

merits; its forms of exhortation and threat are oriented to the future. Statements that are explicitly conditional may pronounce explicitly—or at least imply—a threat that total destruction will follow disobedience. But *de facto,* the final verdict has to be passed on identifiable individuals and particular groups, and the final damnation of the whole of the nation or of mankind is unthinkable within the framework of the history of salvation.[20]

On the other hand, the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants bear special marks of election, intended to emphasize the choosing of Israel as a whole. The threat of final destruction lacks prominence, because earlier righteousness, and especially the specific aims of unique privilege, imply that God will prevent total apostasy. It is sound to argue that *the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants mean election within election of the whole of Israel.* Once it is recognised that the whole nation is a chosen people with a particular purpose it becomes easy to understand that some of the righteous—Abraham, David, and others—could be chosen to achieve special aims. On the grounds of election there was achieved what religions with cosmological foundations and suffering from legalistic distortions could never bring about: *Israel adapted the language of the treaty to the theology of the grant; therefore, she could adapt "the language of the grant to the theology of the treaty."*[21] In the end, the two types of covenant converge, even though their structure is divergent.[22]

The dignity of Israel's election—on an expressed condition—finds re-

[20] It is important to note that even in extreme cases of rejection or damnation hardly anyone would presume to conclude that rejected individuals or groups are totally and in every respect rejected—that is to say, annihilated. The common Jewish-Christian tradition sustains the view that God as creator is always in some sense "unconditionally" bound to his creation. Philosophically we could argue that every criminal preserves a core of decency—see J. G. Murphy and J. Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy* (CSPhL; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 161, n. 40, on unconditionality in this sense.

[21] J. D. Levenson, *CBQ* 41 (1979), 210, mentions only as a possibility the second part of our assertion: "It is possible that Israel adapted the language of the grant to the theology of the treaty." However, his evaluation of opposing views is based on a sound vision of the issue, so that the first part is somehow implied. On p. 212 we find his most important statement in the context of his criticism of Bright: "... Bright is caught in a contradiction. If the prophets, deeply influenced by the traditions of the Sinaitic Covenant, believed that punishment was coming but that God would not ultimately abandon Israel, then their theology is of the same shape as that underlying the Davidic Covenant, which held that the king could be punished but not his dynasty deposed. Each tradition includes the possibility of punishment for sin, but reserves the last word for an undeserved divine promise of hope after catastrophe."

[22] M. Weinfeld, *JAOS* 90 (1970), 190, says: "The phrase 'I will be his father and he shall be my son' is an adoption formula and actually serves as the judicial basis for the gift of the eternal dynasty." The "judicial basis" is an appropriate typological framework for presenting the basis for God's gift. However, the distinctive Hebrew theological presuppositions and personal experience of relationship between God and man constitute much firmer foundations than merely a judicial one. They make it plain that terminology is not of crucial importance. The question of whether this or any other writer uses the word "covenant" or not is not decisive. What matters is the inner ground of relationship between God and human beings.

markable expression in God's words to Moses in Exod 19:5–6: "Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel." Another striking passage is God's pronouncement in Isa 61:5–6: "... you shall be called the priests of the Lord, men shall speak of you as the ministers of our God; you shall eat the wealth of the nations, and in their riches you shall glory." All the more is the special position of David within the chosen people of Israel one of peerless dignity.

It is crucial to note that the two types of covenant converge in two important points: first, their terms include the possibility that individual links in the chain can be rejected; and secondly, they provide grounds for hope that after punishment there will be a new beginning. The personal failings of members of the Davidic dynasty did not mean that it would not continue after a fashion. When the Deuteronomistic historians were still hesitating about uttering a message of restoration after the fall of Jerusalem,[23] in the time of the Babylonian Exile the Priestly source put forward the idea of return and an eternal covenant, Deutero-Isaiah salvation oracles proclaimed a glorious new exodus, and Ezekiel a vision of a new allotment of the land, a new temple, and a new scion from the Davidic line.[24]

Paradoxically and yet credibly, the most important chapter in the history of the Davidic dynasty seems to have been its physical disappearance, for after that the point of Nathan's oracle came fully into focus: David may not build a house for God, but God will build for David "a sure house for ever."[25] Thereafter its meaning became at once deeper and broader—no

[23] See M. Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (JSOT.S 15; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981, 1991), 142–145. On pp. 143–144 we read: "The possibility of the destruction of the people, already envisaged by the Deuteronomic law as punishment for disobedience, was now for Dtr. an accomplished historical reality. Thus he thought that the order of things as put forward in the Deuteronomic law had reached a final end, an end which his whole history is intent upon explaining as a divine judgment." D. J. McCarthy, "The Wrath of Yahweh and the Structural Unity of the Deuteronomistic History," *Essays in Old Testament Ethics (J. Philip Hyatt, In Memoriam)* (ed. J. L. Crenshaw and J. T. Willis; New York: Ktav, 1974), 97–110, however, finds the way to the following conclusion: "The 'rhetoric of wrath' itself even points to a final hope. The cycle: anger, penalty, repentance, salvation, is not an accidental element in the story of the judges. It is an iron law which must take its course. ... But is this law not also an opportunity? Precisely because it is a law whose parts *always* hang together it means that salvation on condition of repentance is still an open possibility after 587 B.C. ..."

[24] See F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 288–289.

[25] Here it is appropriate to keep in mind what M. Tsevat, *HUCA* 34 (1963), 76–77, remarks in connection with the Hebrew meaning of eternity: "The Hebrew words for 'everlasting' or 'steadfast' and related notions do not by and in themselves connote infinitude and absoluteness. Eternal duration is not bestowed on a covenant by the qualifier 'everlasting' ... This expression and others of its kind qualify a thing within its proper limits, physical limits in the one case—the span of a human life—religious, legal, or social limits in the other—the intrinsic suppositions of a covenant. The conception that the absolute can be attributed to any one thing, including time and eternity, but God and His freely set norms is alien to the Bible."

longer predominantly immanent but transcendental and messianic in nature.[26] The gradual expansion of the meaning from the mainly immanent to a marked transcendentalism is a subject in its own right.

God's commitment to the chosen people gains its greatest force from the profoundly personalist background of the covenant. It is unsound to define the concept of the biblical covenant too aphoristically: "Covenant means contractuality and conditionality."[27] Such a definition casts no light on the underlying distinctive feature of the biblical concept of covenant: the father/son relationship finds decisive expression in sense of adoption in 2 Sam 7:14a and Ps 89:27–28: "I will be his father, and he shall be my son" (cf. Ps 2:7). This typology is based on the same personalist theological presuppositions as the paradoxal marriage of Hosea or the "new covenant" in Jer 31:31–34.[28]

4. *Conclusion*

The present structure of Nathan's oracle in 2 Sam 7:1–17 shows that its main emphasis lies on the contrast between the intention of David to build a "house" for God and the latter's decision to build a "sure house" for him. Evaluation of the pericope and consideration of its biblical (Ps 89:20–38) and extra-biblical parallels make it plain that, as in the extra-biblical "grant" transactions, the unconditional dynastic promise is a special privilege conferred because of David's extraordinary loyalty. Thanks to biblical theological presuppositions, however, both its motive and aim necessarily transcend David's merit. The same applies to the Abrahamic covenant (cf. Gen 15:7–21; 17:1–19). Nevertheless, these two covenants do not truly contrast with, or even contradict the Sinaitic covenant, which is formulated in conditional

[26] See the statement by G. von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexteuch and Other Essays* (Edinburgh / London: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), 202, concerning the significance of the history of the Succession to the Throne of David: "At the outset we were told of the promise of God that the Davidic throne should endure for ever. Then we saw the appalling vicissitudes into which it fell, until at last the divinely appointed heir assumed the crown and the problem of the succession to the throne was solved. If, however, it was the purpose of the historian to show how God preserved the Davidic throne through all the vicissitudes of history, then theologically speaking his theme was a messianic one."

[27] See M. Tsevat, *HUCA* 34 (1963), 73.

[28] It is true what E. W. Nicholson, *God and His People,* 216, says concerning the promise of the new covenant in Jer 31:31–34: "So imbued is the author with the idea that the covenant was a two-sided affair with no built-in guarantees that he is constrained to produce a paradoxical theory according to which God himself promises to make possible the very response which he inexorably demands." This paradoxical theory is possible, however, because it underlies God's paradoxical will to keep his "ontological" faithfulness in spite of Israel's failure to make the expected moral response: God "will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah," even though "their fathers" broke the Sinaitic covenant. This fact sustains, then, the consciousness that the covenant with Israel is ultimately unconditional.

form; for in the final analysis, the Sinaitic covenant, too, is ultimately unconditional, being based on God's unconditional commitment to the chosen people of Israel.

It is likely that the duality of conditional and unconditional promises concerning the people in general or the Davidic dynasty in particular is due to laying emphasis on differing theological and pedagogical aims rather than to differing historical situations resulting in matching visions of God's dealings with Israel. Conditional promises are expressed emphatically in a sustained effort to persuade the people to obedience, while unconditional ones point instead to the ultimate purposes of God's dealing with Israel in general and with its representatives in particular. Literary and rhetorical means of expression play an important part in placing emphasis on this or that aspect.

It follows that the question of conditionality or unconditionality of the covenant relationship with the people of Israel or specific individual personalities is ultimately a matter of the divine nature and providence rather than of legal or literary models. Extra-biblical suzerainty treaties or "grant" stipulations are useful guidelines in the understanding of biblical texts if interpreters bear in mind that the testimony of God's providence as perceived within the span of history from creation to completion must remain open, always and everywhere. This testimony manifests explicitly or implicitly the crucial point of Israel's distinctiveness: God remains committed to the people of Israel in spite of their rebellious attitude, and the divine works are always greater than human capacity to merit them or human power to destroy them.[29]

[29] J. D. Levenson declares in *CBQ* 41 (1979), 219: "In conclusion, we see that it is possible to move beyond the impasse between integrationists and segregationists when we recover a healthy sense of the plurality of theological stances within ancient Israelite tradition. Both approaches suffer from a tendency towards excessive generalization and schematization. There is no one statement which is definitive for the relationship of these two covenants throughout the Hebrew Bible. Only with a consciousness of the theological polydoxy of ancient Israel can the scholar do justice to the historical materials." However, the pericope of 2 Sam 7:1–17 and its parallels is too short to allow us to reach a substantial conclusion without combining analytic and synthetic approaches in an interpretation that takes into consideration other statements concerning the Sinaitic and Abrahamic/Davidic covenants on the one hand, and against the background of basic theological presuppositions on the other.

CHAPTER XII

THE HOLY WAR AS PUNISHMENT AND PROTECTION

The scope of this study, its comprehensiveness, and the comparisons and contrasts that have been made with the ancient Near East, have unavoidably led to some systematization and harmonization of historically and even theologically diverse material. But it has still been possible for much of the time to avoid a propositional style of biblical theology that would not have done justice to the particularity of the texts considered. In analyzing individual passages or sections we have taken account of their historical setting and literary features in order to allow for the experienced event on the one hand and for the focus of reflection on the other. The role of Israelite particularism is conspicuous, not only because the Hebrew Bible says far more about Israel's election and covenant than about nations and human beings in general, but also because the issue of the universal moral order is most often illustrated in the stories and thinking of individual historical personalities, in the typology of historical situations, and especially in the practices of ritual events.

It is impossible to review all the territory covered in various studies about the issue of holy war. Our principal concern at this stage must be to point out the connotations of the most significant divine epithets and corresponding metaphorical expressions, similes, stereotyped attributives and formulas, and typologies of a cosmic or historical nature. Such features recur throughout the Hebrew Bible, in prose and poetry, in early and late material alike, and so constitute the most reliable key to the theological dimensions involved and the scope of the relationship between myth and history. In dealing with fundamental divine epithets and symbols we enter into the great common cultural tradition of the entire ancient Near East. Most striking are the common characteristics shared by the Canaanite literary tradition and biblical literature: the same epithets, motifs and theological imagery, the same idioms and literary expressions, the same or similar words, forms and usages. The Hebrew Bible bears witness to a natural and spontaneous literary continuity achieved by integration and assimilation. All the more striking is its discontinuity in terms of content and spirit with the religious world of which it was a part. Comparisons of corresponding divine epithets, symbols, and actions in various contexts show most clearly how far-reaching are the implications of contrasting religions for the concepts of reward, punishment, and forgiveness. Everything depends on manifestations of the divine authority, might, and attitude to the world and the human race in general and to Israel in particular.

1. *Conflict between God and Other Forces*

Historical and religious documents of the ancient Near East reflect extraordinarily realistic views on the structure of the universe and the authorities that govern it. The central model to be used in understanding the nature of the world and the meaning of this tradition is conflict between opposing tendencies or forces. Heraclitus underlined the importance of the conflict motif thus: "One must know that war is common and right is strife and that all things are happening by strife and necessity."[1] The traditional mythology and imagery of divine war must be understood against a background of experience and belief that there is a cosmic conflict between the forces of order and chaos and a moral conflict between just and unjust rational beings. God or gods are warlike in character and act as warriors against opposing forces. This suggests two crucial questions: what is the motivation or reason for conflict? And what correspondence is there between the form and function of the motifs of divine war in particular cases? These issues are at the heart of any consideration of the religions concerned, and their contrasting ways of justifying divine war are exactly what makes manifest the radical difference between non-biblical and biblical documents.

1.1 *Wars of the Gods in the Cosmic Realm and the Role of a Divine Assembly*

The cosmic elements that occasionally characterize the activities of the God of Israel are often strongly reminiscent of the stories of cosmogonic battles found in ancient neighbouring cultures. Cosmogonic myths recount a purely mythical, primordial struggle between cosmic order and chaos, both personified in various divine beings. The issue at stake is: who will emerge as supreme authority, control the forces of chaos and other gods, and establish dominance in heaven and earth? In this context we find the best ground for evaluating reasons for the conflict, and therefore present (in summary form) two examples of material from the non-biblical field that probably exerted a direct or indirect influence on biblical literature: the Akkadian "Epic of Creation" *(Enūma Elish)*[2] and the Ugaritic cycle of Baal myths.[3]

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[1] See fragment 80 (62B) in H. Diels and W. Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker,* vol. 1 (18th ed.; Zurich / Hildesheim: Weidmann, 1989), 169; G. S. Kirk, *Heraclitus: The Cosmic Fragments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954, 1986), 238.

[2] *Enūma Elish* is by some scholars assigned to the 1st Babylonian dynasty (1894–1712 B.C.) and by others to the Kassite period (c. 1750–1171). Ugaritic documents, unearthed from the archives and libraries of the ancient trading city of Ugarit on the North Phoenician coast in eleven campaigns between 1929 and 1939, must have been written down between c. 1400 and 1350 B.C. It is generally recognized, however, that the legends and myths may go back in some form or other to a much remoter antiquity. Mythical and epic texts are of the utmost significance for the history of religion in ancient Canaan and Israel. For translation and bibliography of the epic, see

The Akkadian "Epic of Creation" envisages the primordial situation as a watery chaos called Tiamat (the undifferentiated primal ocean), personified as a goddess, and Apsu (the primal deep of fresh waters), personified as a god; from the union of this couple the gods are born. The younger gods raise a disruptive clamour, however, and Apsu resolves to annihilate them in order to restore quiet. But in the battle that follows, the all-wise Ea (god of the waters and also of wisdom and magic) despoils him of his kingship and kills him. Tiamat prepares to take vengeance and only Marduk, the son of Ea, dares to engage in combat with the formidable hosts at this monster's command. But he succeeds: he slays Tiamat, creates the world out of her body, and from the blood of Kingu, Tiamat's first-born and the commander of her divine assembly, he makes men to be servants of the gods. After conquering Tiamat, Marduk becomes "lord of the gods of heaven and earth." In gratitude, the gods build him the terraced temple of Esagila in the city of Babylon. Enlil, the former ruler of the gods, finally bestows on him lordship over the universe.

The Ugaritic corpus of myths about the god Baal, which is a title meaning "lord" (with the personal name Hadad), presents its protagonist in his capacity as the universal god of life, rain and fertility. As personified divine power, Baal plays the leading role as a warrior god in conflict with alien forces of nature who appear in deified dress. There is also El (a general term for "deity"), who functions as the titular head of the pantheon, husband of Asherah, father of all other gods (except Baal), and creator of the world and of mankind. El decides to bestow the royal power on Yam (the deified sea), who is also called "judge" Nahar (or river). Yam is the chief Ugaritic counterpart of the Babylonian Tiamat, and El informs him that in order to secure his power he will have to battle with his rival Baal. On this and other occasions the rivalry between El and Baal is plain to see. The young and vigorous Baal finds support in Kothar-and-Khasis, who threatens Yam's destruction by a magic

especially E. A. Speiser, "Akkadian Myths and Epics," *ANET*, 60–72; B. R. Foster, "Epic of Creation (1.111)," *The Context of Scripture*, vol. 1: *Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World* (ed. W. W. Hallo; Leiden / New York / Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1997), 390–402.

[3] For the original text and (or) translation see C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Literature: A Comprehensive Translation of the Poetic and Prose Texts* (Rome: Pontificium institutum biblicum, 1949); A. Herdner, *Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques découvertes à Ras Shamra-Ougarit de 1929 à 1939* (MRS 10; Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1963); J. Aistleitner, *Die mythologischen und kultischen Texte aus Ras Schamra* (BOH 8; 2nd ed.; Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1964); C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* (AnOr 38; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965); H. L. Ginsberg, "Ugaritic Myths, Epics, and Legends," ANET, 129–155; W. W. Hallo (ed.), *The Context of Scripture*, vol. 1: *Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*, 239–375: "West Semitic Canonical Compositions"; A. Caquot, M. Sznycer, and A. Herdner, *Textes ougaritiques*, vol. 1 (LAPR 7; Paris: Cerf, 1974); J. C. L. Gibson, *Canaanite Myths and Legends* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1977). For the question of ideology, see especially N. Wyatt, *Myths of Power: A Study of Royal Myth and Ideology in Ugaritic and Biblical Tradition* (UBL 13; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1996).

weapon and slays the monster of old in a fierce battle. But even then Baal's dominant position in the pantheon is not secured. In order to exercise his kingship over the gods he has to get permission from El to build himself a palace (or temple). His sister and consort, the ruthless warrior-goddess Anat, proves a formidable ally and persuades El to agree. Once the building is ready, Baal invites Mot (personification of death), the ultimate enemy, to acknowledge his sovereignty, and challenges him twice: in the first battle Baal is defeated and is obliged to descend into the underworld, being finally rescued by the combined efforts of Anat and Shapash; in the second Mot surrenders only after the supreme god El takes Baal's side.

The Ugaritic myths of cosmogonic battles exercised a strong influence on later religious beliefs in Canaan and the surrounding cultures. Strong evidence of this is provided by the ancient Phoenician cosmogony as reported in *The Phoenician History.* This work was written by Sanchuniathon in the Phoenician language, and translated by Philo of Byblos (2nd century C.E.) into Greek in eight books. Sanchuniathon's work was most probably the basis of Hesiod's *Theogony,* but is known to us only in Greek fragments transmitted by later writers on the basis of Philo's version.[4]

Cosmogonic and similar myths strongly reflect the underlying ideological presuppositions or related cultures and religions, and evince a more or less clear connection with the processes of nature. There are no true theological foundations for the establishment of divine mastery over the universe and human history or for a pure morality. Gods battle against one another for the control of order, kingship, and fertility. If any divine name appears as primordial, it none the less fails to transcend nature and the collegial basis of its authority within a divine assembly or the council of gods. The senior deity functions as leader of an indeterminate host but often sits in plenary session with the gods and consults with them. The military might of the divine warrior who is acting as protagonist depends on the size of his host. The Ugaritic literature seems to indicate, however, that the battles of Baal did not have the cosmogonic significance of the clash between Marduk and Tiamat: "the challenge of the Sea in those texts is best seen as a rebellion from within the created order. The rebellion, however, if such it be, does represent an interruption of the positive and beneficent ordering that is creation in the broader sense. In short, if Baal does not create, he does renew creation."[5]

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[4] For a comprehensive presentation of this issue, see especially A. I. Baumgarten, *The Phoenician History of Philo of Byblos: A Commentary* (EPRO 89; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981). According to Philo's work *The Phoenician History,* Sanchuniathon must have lived before Hesiod. Porphyry (c. 234–c. 305 C.E.), *On Abstinence,* dates him at the time of the Trojan War, and Eusebius (c. 260–c. 340), *Preparation for the Gospel,* before the Trojan War. For the myth of cosmic battle, see H. R. Page, *The Myth of Cosmic Rebellion: A Study of Its Reflexes in Ugaritic and Biblical Literature* (VT.S 65; Leiden / New York / Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1996).

[5] See J. D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine*

In the Hebrew Bible the imagery of the divine assembly, including the heavenly host, has special affinities to non-biblical mythical documents. This fact is probably the most conspicuous piece of evidence that from earliest times Israel's religion was strongly influenced by Mesopotamian and Canaanite mythology. In the Hebrew Bible we find occasional mythic sections dealing with familiar imagery: the surging Sea, the dismemberment of Rahab, and the defeat of the monster Leviathan (Isa 27:1; 51:9–11; Pss 74:12–17; 89:6–14; 104:26; Job 40:25–32). In the exultant praise of the creator God in Psalm 104, Leviathan is said to have been created in order to delight his maker (v. 26). This fact may help to explain the appearance of various kinds of divine assembly in the Bible, but the crucial question is: what is the *function* of the assembly in the Hebrew Bible? Biblical accounts of the divine assembly show that "sons of God/gods" are subordinate and not individualized; but they are real and sometimes important. Attention is focused upon the God of Israel, who has no origin and reigns supreme over all gods, other heavenly hosts, and the universe—which gives occasion for mortal combat with surrounding cultures.[6] The mastery of Israel's God is inherent; and that Being's ascendancy over all other gods implies supreme divine might and benevolence. It is not by chance that not only are historical accounts but also the narrative of Creation closely associated with the promise of an unconditional covenant. The main emphasis of the Creation story in the Priestly stratum of Genesis (1:1–2:4a) is on God's tender concern for the ordered world. The story of the Flood declares the universal corruption of primeval humanity, i.e., of its rebellion against the divine order. God's judgment by flood involved reversion of creation to chaos by divine command, but at the end of it God made a covenant with Noah and promised that never again would virtually every living creature be destroyed (Gen 8:21; cf. 9:9–17). There are many other cases of rebellion against the Creator's just will, and divine mastery and benevolence may at times appear to have ceased to carry conviction; but in the final analysis, God defeats the adversarial forces and restores the order that has been interrupted. Its continuance is possible only because of the eter-

Omnipotence (London / San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 10.

[6] P. D. Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel* (HSM 5; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 73, is right in pointing out: "At the heart of the matter lies the distinction between a polytheistic development and a basically monotheistic thrust, a distinction expressed in the fact that in Mesopotamia and Canaan the council existed as a 'primitive democracy,' whereas in Israel, Yahweh was the absolute ruler. In Mesopotamian theology each member of the council had a voice, and decisions were made by the whole body or by subgroups within the body ... Israel's religion knew no pantheon of ruling deities in competition with one another. The members of her divine assembly were nebulous, anonymous beings who enjoyed no independent status, ministers *(mĕšārētîm)* and servants *('ăbādîm)* of Yahweh; all decisions and judgments were made by Yahweh and imposed upon the rest of the council as well as upon Israel and other earthly powers." See also G. Fuchs, *Mythos und Hiobdichtung: Aufnahme und Umdeutung altorientalischer Vorstellungen* (Stuttgart / Berlin / Cologne: W. Kohlhammer, 1993).

nal vigilance of the faithful and beneficent master of the world. Between creation and chaos stands God's covenantal faithfulness, which found expression in that solemn pledge to Noah.[7]

In the Hebrew Bible there is a nebulous array of divine beings with many names: *'ădat-'ēl,* "the divine council" (Ps 82:1); *bĕnê 'ēlîm,* "sons of god" (Pss 29:1; 89:7); *'ĕlōhîm,* "gods" (Ps 82:1, 6); *bĕnê (hā)'ĕlōhîm,* "the sons of God" (Gen 6:2; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7); *bĕnê 'elyôn,* "sons of the Most High" (Ps 82:6); *kĕrubîm,* "the cherubim" (Gen 3:24); *har-mô'ēd,* "the mount of (divine) assembly" (Isa 14:13); *sôd 'ĕlôah,* "the council of God" (Job 15:8); *sôd yhwh,* "the council of the Lord" (Jer 23:18; cf. v. 22); *sôd-qĕdōšîm,* "the council of the holy ones" (Ps 89:8); *ṣĕbā' hammārôm bammārôm,* "the host of heaven in heaven" (Isa 24:21); *(kol) ṣĕbā' haššāmayim,* "all the host of heaven" (Deut 4:19; 17:3; 1 Kgs 22:19; 2 Kgs 17:16; 21:5; 23:4, 5; Isa 34:4; Jer 8:2; 19:13; 33:22; Zeph 1:5; Dan 8:10; Neh 9:6; 2 Chr 18:18; 33:5); *qĕhal qĕdōšîm,* "the assembly of the holy ones" (Ps 89:6); *śĕrāpîm,* "the seraphim" (Isa 6:2–6). The eschatological vision of Dan 7:9–10 is of particular interest. God sits in judgment and prepares to deliver a verdict on the oppressors of Israel: "... a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened."

Some of these terms occur in statements or exhortations to worship the Lord as the only God (Pss 29:1; 89:7–8; Job 38:7; Neh 9:6). The heavenly beings are not independent and self-sufficient, but always subject to the will of God. To worship them amounts to apostasy (Deut 4:9; 2 Kgs 21:5 [= 2 Chr 33:5]) and therefore calls for ruthless judgment (Deut 17:3; 2 Kgs 17:16; Jer 8:2; 19:13; Zeph 1:5). The biblical faith does not permit any overstepping of appointed boundaries or rebellion on the part of these heavenly beings. According to Gen 6:2 the "sons of God/gods" committed sin by taking "the daughters of man" in marriage. The essence of that sin was a grasping at immortality by transgressing a boundary set by the Lord. The punishment is made to fit the crime: the utter destruction of humanity by flood. Psalm 82, which is an imitation of a prophetic utterance, manifests the centrality of the concern for justice and the ultimate authority of the Lord. The poem is a drama of judgment on divine rulers who form God's heavenly court and have been entrusted with jurisdiction over mankind. Because they have neglected their duties and have failed to defend the weak, the Lord stands in "the divine council" and sentences them to death, a destiny of *mortal* creatures. The so-called Isaianic apocalypse (Isa 24–27 and 34–35)

[7] See the statement by J. D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil,* 12–13: "Two and a half millennia of Western theology have made it easy to forget that throughout the ancient Near Eastern world, including Israel, the point of creation is not the production of matter out of nothing, but rather the emergence of a stable community in a benevolent and life-sustaining order ... the positive order of things associated with creation is not held to be *intrinsically* irreversible, as if the elements that threaten it, human evil or the sea dragon, have been definitely eradicated ..."

deals with the imminent war and final judgment on human and superhuman offenders who have infringed God's sovereign rights (Isa 24:21; 34:4).

The divine court or council has a special function in the context of the prophetic ministry. The prophet Micaiah the son of Imlah transmits his vision to Ahab, king of Israel, and Jehoshaphat, king of Judah: "I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left" (1 Kgs 22:19 = 2 Chr 18:18). In this situation God sends a "lying spirit" to entice Ahab to his doom at Ramoth-gilead. Again, Isaiah has a vision of the Lord sitting upon a throne, surrounded by seraphim who call to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa 6:2–6). Isaiah's mouth is cleansed by divine holiness and he then offers to be sent to proclaim judgment on Israel for her rebellious attitude.[8] Jeremiah for his part perceives that the true prophet can obtain his commission only in the council of the Lord: "For who among them has stood in the council of the Lord to perceive and to hear his word, or who has given heed to his word and listened? ... But if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people ..." (23:18–22). Deutero-Isaiah, too, implies the concept of a divine court or council when he uses the plural form in the series of active imperatives in the pronouncement of consolation (Isa 40:1–3). It was a mark of the prophets that they should stand in the divine council; the language of judicial verdict and consolation shows that it was crucial for them to be its messengers.[9]

All the more is it understandable that angels and Satan have roles in the Hebrew Bible. Whereas the divine beings who constitute the divine assembly are largely anonymous and function as a whole, the phrases *mal'ak yhwh,* "the angel of the Lord," and *mal'ak (hā)'ĕlōhîm,* "the angel of God," occur in many passages and situations that specify a nameless single messenger; "angels" (in the plural) are mentioned sometimes as a general designation. In all such passages the angels act totally in conformity with the divine will, which is often identifiable with God. Belief in the conformity of the divine assembly with God's will is evident throughout. This is reflected in the plea at the end of Ps 103. In contrast with the phenomenon of the angels, *śāṭān,* "satan, accuser," is mentioned only in a few passages (Job 1–2; Zech 3:1–2; 1 Chr 21:1). Satan is God's subordinate, not an antagonist or

[8] F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Mass. / London: Harvard University Press, 1973), 187, is certainly right in stating: "Thus the prophet becomes in effect the *mal'āk* or herald of Yahweh's council, and like a supernatural ambassador mediates the divine pronouncement."

[9] See F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic,* 189: "The oracle of judgment properly carries overtones of a judicial decree or verdict, and rests upon a basic legal metaphor. More concretely, the prophet is the messenger of the divine court or council, and his authority rests upon the absolute authority of the council, its great Judge or great King who pronounces the judgment which the prophetic messenger is to transmit."

the chief of a rival dominion, and can act only with divine consent. It is only in the later Jewish religious documents that Satan begins to emerge as a distinctive personality, the direct antithesis of God.

1.2 *Historical Memory of Divine Wars in the Ancient Near East and in Israel*

Mythic presentations of cosmic war between gods and other forces are motivated by a definite purpose: establishment of a kingdom and a sanctuary on earth. The deity that prevails is considered the supreme ruler not only over gods and nature but also over humans and their history. The primordial, purely mythical wars between gods served later as a paradigm for battles that they fought on behalf of their human agents, usually kings. It was expected that gods would intervene in battle, provide protection against external enemies of a particular nation or kingdom, and maintain prosperity and order internally. Consequently, every earthly kingdom was theocratic by definition. Here is the ideological foundation of the divine (holy) war as a historical reality. In non-biblical as well as in biblical documents virtually all wars are regarded as holy wars. It was essential, therefore, for human commanders to view war as a divine mission, to be guided in battle by the divine will, favour, and power, and after battle to dedicate some of the spoils to the divine combatants.

What was the justification of divine war in non-biblical cultures of the ancient Near East? In most cases hostilities followed violation of a treaty or other kinds of guilt.[10]

The ultimate raison d'ętre of war was that it could remedy the wrong committed by breaking an oath. The defeat of an enemy indicated that the gods had abandoned the guilty party, although major disasters like the fall of a kingdom might not be attributable to human sin, but simply the consequence of an independent divine decree. The gods of non-biblical cultures acted basically through nature, and the final outcome of events might take the form of a destiny determined by immutable divine or cosmic laws—a view supported by the cyclic concept of time and history, which has no room for true progress, let alone messianic or eschatological expectations. A polytheistic background can accommodate many divine warriors; in Mesopotamia there were over fifty of them from the third millennium to the first millennium B.C.E.

The Hebrew Bible, in contrast, is founded upon historical modes of religious expression and cultic celebration of notable divine deeds. Its view of history is linear and progressive through the long span of time from the pri-

[10] It is obvious that guilt could become the reason for war in any period of human history. For this issue, see M. Sievernich, "Sünde als Kriegsgrund in der frühen Neuzeit: Francisco de Vitoria (+ 1546) zum 450. Todestag," *ThPh* 71 (1996), 547–565.

mordial events of creation to the eschatological milestones of the new creation. The basically monotheistic foundation of Hebrew belief and a lengthy experience of divine intervention have resulted in certain basic historical traditions, which provide befitting material for confessional recitation in worship and the ground for various typological reinterpretations. Historical memory in cultic celebration is the most distinctive feature of the Israelite faith. The Lord is exalted as supreme ruler of the universe and is alone regarded as the divine warrior. The principal term used here is *yhwh ṣĕbā'ôt,* "the Lord of hosts," which occurs 285 times in the Hebrew Bible, predominantly in the prophetic literature (251 times). Sometimes the two-word name is extended into *yhwh 'ĕlōhê(hîm) (haṣ)ṣĕbā'ôt,* "the Lord, the God of hosts" (2 Sam 5:10; 1 Kgs 19:10, 14; Jer 5:14; 15:16; 35:17; 38:17; 44:7; Hos 12:6; Amos 3:13; 4:13; 5:14, 15, 16, 27; 6:8, 14; Pss 59:6; 80:5, 20; 89:9; 94:9). Other military epithets are *yhwh 'izzûz wĕgibbôr,* "the Lord, strong and mighty" (Ps 24:8a), *yhwh gibbôr milḥāmāh,* "the Lord, mighty in battle" (Ps 24:8b), *'ēl gibbôr,* "the mighty God" (Isa 9:5; 10:21), *hā'ēl haggādôl haggibbôr (wĕhannôrā'),* "the great and mighty (and terrible) God" (Deut 10:17; Jer 32:18; Neh 9:32), and the strikingly anthropomorphic designation *'îš milḥāmāh,* "a man of war" (Exod 15:3). It is unsurprising that the divine assembly is sometimes described in language borrowed from the battlefield.

The Israelites were at all times and seasons exposed to the influence of foreign myths dealing with cosmic conflicts and wars. The prophets and sages did not hesitate to use popular mythopoeic imagery in depicting the historical pattern of the Exodus from Egypt, the Covenant at Sinai, and the Conquest of Canaan. But in doing so they consciously or unconsciously transformed the mythic material they adopted, using it singlemindedly to support the assertion that the God of Israel alone is ruler of the universe, judge over all forces earthly and heavenly, and the Being who will complete creation's story. Thus in Deutero-Isaiah the theme of creation begets the argument that God will create something new in the imminent future. The sages, especially the writer of Job, depict the incomparable divine power in this way so as to prepare the way for a confession of faith that God alone is the basis of human hope. And in the development of eschatological and apocalyptic literature, the imagery of the divine warrior grows out of earlier theological formulations and depicts the universal divine judgment over all the powers of evil. The myths are transformed by the impact of formative historical events and their interpretation; they are combined with historical themes in order to formulate an eschatology in the drama of salvation.[11]

[11] It is crucial to take into consideration both the centrality of historical memory and the perennial resurgence of mythic forms and language in biblical religion. F. M. Cross is right in opposing both the tendency of the myth and ritual school to delineate the movement from dominantly mythical to dominantly historical patterns and the view of the history-of-redemption

The main emphasis of the Bible is not, however, on God's warfare against other divine beings and the forces of chaos, or on cosmic judgment upon the powers of darkness. What is distinctive and normative in Israel is the continuous appearance of the Lord and the heavenly armies in the world to fight the adversaries of Israel. There is a fusion of the cosmic and the historical, but the latter dominates. The first creation acquires its full meaning in the light of the new creation and all the other events that fill the history of redemption from start to finish. The Lordship of God over the world in manifesting the divine plan and power is the first and basic proposition of the Bible. The cosmic dimension of history is only a framework for the history of humanity in general and of Israel in particular. Because Israel experienced God as mighty and as having a positive purpose covering the whole of history, she could claim election and the gift of the Promised Land. Within the framework of universal history, Israel's role transcends all cosmic, geographical and ideological boundaries. Consequently, Israel's election, the Exodus, and the Conquest could never be seen as the products of her own power or excellence, or as independent of the divine plan and providence.

It is true that the Hebrew Bible does not affirm without qualification God's active embroilment in Israel's wars. It treats variously the relationship between divine and human persons in warfare, and the help given to the people in the vicissitudes of their history. Some heroic poetry confines itself to exalting human deeds. In other instances human actors play an important role, but divine intervention is decisive. Sometimes, however, any human contribution is explicitly denied. It would be unjustifiable to attempt to identify a historical movement from purely secular heroics to a totally theocentric understanding of Israelite history, for it seems likely that even the former implies a belief that the victory was, ultimately, the gift of God: in all ancient religions we can find evidence of double causality in historical interpretation.[12] The basic difference between the biblical and non-biblical attitudes is that non-biblical ancient documents seem to reflect a "natural" belief in a cosmic, inbuilt moral order, whereas the Bible acknowledges direct divine intervention as well. A crucial question in all religions is not how

school that historical events in the Bible are not history but constructs of the *Heilsgeschichte*. See his article "The Divine Warrior in Israel's Early Cult," *Biblical Motifs: Origins and Transformations* (ed. A. Altmann; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), 11–30 = *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 79–111. Note esp. p. 16 (87) concerning the reason for failure to acknowledge this relationship properly: "The reason for this failure or inability lies in the refusal of many form-critics or historians of tradition to raise the question of actual historical memory lying behind the cultic pattern: Exodus, Covenant at Sinai, Conquest. The thrust of historical events, recognized as crucial and ultimately meaningful, alone had the power to displace the mythic pattern. Even then we should expect the survival of some mythic forms and the secondary mythologizing of historical experiences to point to their cosmic or transcendent meaning."

[12] See I. L. Seeligmann, "Menschliches Heldentum und göttliche Hilfe: Die doppelte Kausalität im alttestamentlichen Geschichtsdenken," *ThZ* 19 (1963), 385–411.

much should be attributed to divine or human agency, but whether the latter counts at all in the eyes of the former and whether humanity tries to act in conformity with the divine will. The basic reason for conflict in the world is human self-assertion and self-will. Once Hebrew monotheism prevails, the exigency of human obedience is absolute.

A notable example of human self-assertion is the tendency to regard divine gifts as rewards for human merit. The Hebrew prophets therefore make it clear that Israel's election, the Exodus and the gift of the land cannot be so considered (cf. Pss 20:8; 33:16–17; 44:4). All the more cogent is the conclusion that rejection is due to wickedness on the part of the person or nation concerned. In Deut 9:4–5 Israel is warned against boasting: the vices of the Canaanites and the validity of ancient divine promises explain what happened rather than the virtues of their supplanters:

> Do not say in your heart, after the Lord your God has thrust them out before you, "It is because of my righteousness that the Lord has brought me in to possess this land"; whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is driving them out before you. Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land; but because of the wickedness of these nations the Lord your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

Israel's confessional literature of the Exodus and Conquest preserves the general flavour and even some details of the institutions of holy war.[13] It is uncertain whether Israel's wars were always entirely defensive,[14] but it is absolutely clear that the purview of the biblical historians was to exalt *magnalia Dei:* divine power as manifested in carrying out saving acts on behalf of a covenanted people, in countering the folly of humans and their conflicts of self-will, and in conferring mercy in spite of Israel's stubbornness. At the centre of the picture stand the wonders performed by Yahweh in breaking down the forces of Israel's opponents. Defeat of the enemy is always, in the final analysis, divine victory.

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[13] For the details of the question of holy war in a broader sense, see especially G. von Rad, *Der Heilige Krieg im alten Israel* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958); English translation by M. J. Dawn, Introduction by B. C. Ollenburger, Bibliography by J. E. Sanderson, *Holy War in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 1991); P. C. Craigie, *The Problem of War in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 1978); S.-M. Kang, *Divine War in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East* (BZAW 177; Berlin / New York: W. de Gruyter, 1989); A. Ruffling, *Jahwekrieg als Weltmetapher: Studien zu Jahwekriegtexten des chronistischen Sonderguts* (SBB 24; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1992); T. Longman and D. G. Reid, *God Is a Warrior: Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1995); G. A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1997); S. M. Pigott, "The Kingdom of the Warrior God: The Old Testament and the Kingdom of Yahweh," *SWJTh* 40 (1998), 5–20.

[14] It is noteworthy that G. von Rad virtually relegates biblical documents relating to holy war to Israel's defensive operations, but this view is subject to general criticism.

1.3 *An Ally: the God of Israel in Conflict with the Nations and Their Gods*

An observation by Gerhard von Rad on the conflict between Yahweh and other nations is illuminating: "In the holy wars Israel did not arise to protect faith in Yahweh, but Jahweh came on the scene to defend Israel, for the members of the amphictyony were sheltered under his protection, Israel was Yahweh's possession."[15] This property of holy war in Israel is reflected in various biblical passages that use the theme and form, language and imagery of the divine warrior. Especially noteworthy are the poems of the Pentateuch, some sections of the historical books, and a number of the psalms. Such passages often function as summaries of the Israelite faith. Von Rad thinks that Deut 6:20–24; 26:5b–9; and Josh 24:2b–13 represent a single ancient form—"the small historical credo," which forms a nucleus or an outline for the Hexateuch.[16] In spite of their heavily Deuteronomic language and character, dissimilar cultic occasions, and differently related genres, these passages may in fact contain the basic themes of an authentically ancient recital of the redemptive events.

Here the archaic Song of the Sea in Exod 15:1b–18 is particularly illuminating.[17] The song is a hymn to the Lord that recounts the basic stages of Israel's history: deliverance, the defeat of the Egyptians at the Red Sea, the march through the wilderness, the conquest of the Promised Land, the building of a sanctuary on the "mountain of inheritance" (which could apply to any Yahwistic sanctuary), and the establishment of God's "eternal" kingship. One cannot overlook the centrality of divine sovereignty as expressed in the cry: "Who is like thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, majestic in holiness, terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders?" (v. 11). In the present context it is reminiscent of the earlier significant conflict between Moses, who represents the will of God, and Pharaoh, who fails to surrender in spite of the sequence of plagues. So we have the divine command on the one hand, and the earthly ruler's extreme obstinacy on the other. Even though Pharaoh claims divine prerogatives, there is no question here of a mythological combat between two gods; Pharaoh is a historical, human enemy, and his forces are defeated by God's might and justice. The song reflects a theological un-

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[15] See *Der Heilige Krieg im alten Israel,* 32; English translation, *Holy War in Ancient Israel,* 72–73.

[16] See *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (ThB 8; Munich: C. Kaiser, 1971), 9–86: "Das formgeschichtliche Problem des Hexateuch"; English translation by E. W. Trueman Dicken, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (Edinburgh / London: Oliver & Boyd, 1965), 1–78: "The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch."

[17] There are many different views regarding the date of the song, but a detailed comparative study by F. M. Cross, "The Song of the Sea and Canaanite Myth," *JThC* 5 (1968), 1–25 = idem, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic,* 112–144, points to a premonarchic date (the late twelfth or early eleventh century B.C.E.) for the song; the poem should be regarded as the primary source for the Exodus-Conquest event.

derstanding of the redemptive history seen in a teleological light.

The Song of the Sea was composed in celebration of historical events in various festivals, especially the covenant renewal festivals of the tribal league. On such occasions Israel reaffirmed her life as a historical community. There are several poems that show how the Exodus and other epic events of the past were re-enacted in festivals, such as Deut 33:2–5, 26–29 and Judg 5. The focus is once again on God's sovereignty and might in saving the people of Israel. In Deut 33:26 we find: "There is none like God, O Jeshurun, who rides through the heavens to your help, and in his majesty through the skies." The framework of the victory song of Deborah (Judg 5) is the conflict between the coalition of the Canaanite kings plus the Israelites who failed to rally, and those Israelites who participated willingly (cf. vv. 2, 9) in a sacral war. The centre of attention is on the *ṣidqôt yhwh,* "the triumphs of the Lord" (v. 11).

The conquest of Canaan must have involved a long period of aggressive warfare. The accounts of sacral wars are, however, primarily concerned with fundamental questions: the reason for and justification of holy war. All the narratives reflect the belief that the land was promised and given to the Israelites regardless of their merit or righteousness, which continued to be deficient. But the sovereign divine plan clashed with the vain imaginations of the nations. Their resistance is not judged against the background of ordinary human passions. The prophetic writers penetrate behind such factors to the ultimate motivation: the blind rebellion against the divine will. Thus the biblical holy wars do not reflect primarily a conflict between Israel and the nations, but rather a clash between the prerogatives of divine authority and human self-assertion. The divine "council" rejects unlimited human rights but affirms divine freedom and sovereignty. In the last analysis, the narratives, especially the Deuteronomic history, deal with the fundamental question of obedience or disobedience. The reaction of the nations is motivated by self-will and virtually invites divine response and judgment. The king of Moab encroaches on the divine prerogative when he attempts to curse the advancing tide of Israelites (Num 22–24). The Amorite king Sihon obstinately rejects the petition of the Israelites to pass in peace through his land—hence the paradoxical statement of divine judgment: "But Sihon the king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him; for the Lord your God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, that he might give him into your hand, as at this day" (Deut 2:30). The narratives of the warfare conducted by Joshua are summarized in Josh 11:20: "For it was the Lord's doing to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle, in order that they should be utterly destroyed, and should receive no mercy but be exterminated, as the Lord commanded Moses." It is no coincidence that the reaction of all Israel's principal enemies is characterized as the worst form of rebellion: obstinacy or stubbornness.

All the more striking are the few examples of total obedience among the Canaanites. Balaam is doing only what the Lord commands; instead of cursing the Israelites he blesses them, citing divine sovereignty and trustworthiness: "God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should repent. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfil it?" (Num 23:19). Rahab, the Jericho harlot, confesses to Joshua's spies: "I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites that were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. And as soon as we heard it, our heart melted, and there was no courage left in any man, because of you; for the Lord your God is he who is God in heaven above and on earth beneath" (Josh 2:9–11).

The narratives of the Conquest reflect the belief in an unconditional divine promise concerning the land. This is the fundamental reason why human actors can never play a decisive part in the drama of events. It is all the more understandable that various vicissitudes of Israelite history should fill the heart of the faithful with distress: how could God abandon Israel, in spite of promises of old that divine faithfulness would endure for ever? The *locus classicus* is Psalm 89, which expresses the sad disappointment of the people following the humiliation of the Israelite king. What is now to be made of God's unconditional promise concerning the house of David ? (cf. 2 Sam 7:13–15; Ps 89:20–38). The poet has no definite answer. In the moment of trial there is only anguish. Nevertheless, his main theme is God's faithfulness, based on a knowledge of divine might reflected in the first major part of the psalm (89:6–19). The emphasis is still on adoration: "... For who in the skies can be compared to the Lord? Who among the heavenly beings is like the Lord, a God feared in the council of the holy ones, great and terrible above all that are round about him? O Lord God of hosts, who is mighty as thou art, O Lord, with thy faithfulness round about thee?" (89:7–9). The lament and the celebratory language are reminiscent of Psalm 74, which similarly deplores the defeat inflicted by a historical enemy who has blasphemed the divine name. When the general collapse of divine overlordship renders belief in divine mastery most difficult, God's primordial victory is recalled in support of an appeal for imminent intervention.[18]

When the people groan in their Babylonian Exile, the anonymous prophet re-enacts the primordial event of creation, the elements of cosmogonic myth (Isa 51:9–11), and the historical theme of Exodus in order to assure them that God will never forsake the people of the covenant. In 54:7–10 he recalls

[18] Cf. J. D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 18–19.

the divine promise given to Noah in order to emphasize the perpetual validity of the divine covenant of peace.

1.4 *A Taskmaster: the God of Israel in Conflict with the Rebellious People of Israel*

Since the ultimate goal of the entire biblical message is proclamation of God's sovereignty it follows, finally, that the God of Israel is in conflict not only with all other divine forces and Israel's historical enemies, but also with Israel herself, whenever she is unfaithful or disobedient. The Deuteronomic testament declares: "Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all people; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel" (Exod 19:5–6). The crucial nature of the expectation of Israel's obedience is manifest in several historical narratives and prophetic speeches: when it lapses, God turns to Israel's enemies and calls on her foes to punish her. During the Exodus Israel committed her gravest sin: apostasy (Exod 32–34). The essence of the punishment is God's decision to withdraw from among the people and no longer to lead them into the land. The purview of Moses' supplications is, therefore, not only general forgiveness but the ultimate approximation of the godhead to Israel in order to act as divine warrior: "If thy presence will not go with me, do not carry us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favour in thy sight, I and thy people? Is it not in thy going with us, so that we are distinct, I and thy people, from all other people that are upon the face of the earth?" (33:15–16). Rebellion against the divinely appointed leaders Moses and Aaron (Num 16) and neglect of the sacral institution of holy war (Josh 7; 1 Sam 15) is followed by the severest retribution, collective or individual.

The ultimate reason for the clash between prophets and secular lords was the question of divine sovereignty. Most rulers ignored the radically theocratic nature of the Israelite community and preferred religious syncretism, especially in the form of Baalism. It was in this situation that the classical tradition of Israelite prophecy emerged in the 9th century. The critical point is signalled by the appearance on the scene of the giant figure of Elijah, who engaged in a momentous conflict with the apostates supported by King Ahab and his wife Jezebel (1 Kgs 18–19). Elijah plays the role of the new Moses and the crisis on Mount Carmel parallels the pattern of covenant making with the twelve tribes of Israel (cf. Exod 24:4; Josh 4:3; 1 Kgs 17:31). The moment of truth comes with the challenge to decide between Yahweh and Baal: "How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him" (1 Kgs 18:21; cf. Exod 32:26; Josh 24:14–15). After slaying the prophets of Baal,

Elijah flees before the vengeful Jezebel, and under divine guidance is led to Sinai. At the entrance to the cave God confronts him, seemingly following the pattern of the traditional storm theophany (1 Kgs 19:9–14; cf. Exod 33:17–23; 34:6–8). But the narrator signals a new phase in the mode of God's self-disclosure: "And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake, and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice *(qôl dĕmāmāh daqqāh)* ..." (1 Kgs 19:11–12). Later classical prophetic testimonies show that the hallmark of Israelite prophetism is not the divine revelation in the storm but imperceptibility in terms of exterior manifestation; the emphasis is on perceptibility in human hearts, which involves total obedience.

The switch from an immanent cosmic to an intimate personal mode of divine revelation reverberates with the strongly prophetic concept of holy war. Such a shift is reflected, for instance, in the ancient cry: "My father, my father! the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" It is reported that Elisha used this shout at Elijah's translation to heaven in Transjordan opposite Jericho (2 Kgs 2:12), and the exact words are repeated by king Joash at the death-bed of Elisha (2 Kgs 13:14). The precise meaning of the cry is unclear. It is most likely, however, that it has a polemical connotation; the deliberately chosen military image is linked to Elijah and Elisha in order to emphasize that they represented the invisible forces that were Israel's true defence.[19] A polemical attitude in dealing with the relationship between secular power and faith is especially characteristic of Isaiah. His advice to king Ahaz in time of danger is: "Take heed, be quiet, do not fear ..." (Isa 7:4). When the rulers would rely on force of arms he stresses: "In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength" (30:15). Of their attempt to find allies in Egypt against Assyria he says: "Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the Lord! ... The Egyptians are men, and not God, and their horses are flesh, and not spirit ..." (31:1–3). Similar examples of opposing military power by trust in God are found in Zech 4:6; Pss 33:16–18; 44:7–9;

[19] See the interpretation by Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 9.179: "Because of him, he said, they had never had to use arms against the foe, but through his prophecies they had overcome the enemy without a battle. But now he was departing this life and leaving him unarmed before the Syrians and the enemies under them" (translation by R. Marcus; LCL 326; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: W. Heinemann, 1987). See also G. von Rad, *Der Heilige Krieg im alten Israel,* 55 = *Holy War in Ancient Israel,* 100: "In any case, it is a polemic expression, a very radical slogan, which concerns the most elementary question of the very existence of Israel. It must stem from circles representing a certain patriarchal opposition to the transformation of the waging of war by new techniques. Protection and help for Israel are guaranteed only by the prophet."

60:13 = 108:13; 147:10–11; Prov 21:30–31.

An especially significant occasion of conflict is provided by those who risk making claims upon God in matters of justice and mercy: Abraham in his dramatic intervention on behalf of Sodom (Gen 18:16–33), the elders of Israel in the Babylonian exile (Ezek 20), Job, and Jonah. Abraham contends that God ought to spare the whole city of Sodom because of the innocence of a minority of its citizens: "Wilt thou indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; wilt thou then destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from thee to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from thee! Shall not the Judge *(šōpēṭ)* of all the earth do right *(mišpāṭ)?*" (Gen 18:23–25). The argument is based on the premise that God is bound by certain generally accepted norms of justice and generosity. God accepts Abraham's principle, but closes the auction when the 50 have shrunk to 10, indicating that humans cannot exercise an independent critical judgment on the issue of divine justice—which elucidates the profound meaning of the definitive example of a test of human attitudes to God, the narrative in Gen 22:1–19. In it Abraham demonstrated absolute and unconditional obedience to an inscrutable command of God that contradicted his sense of justice.

Ezekiel tells in chapter 20 how the elders of Israel came to inquire of God why they had to suffer the exile. The divine reaction to their presumption is uncompromising: "Is it to inquire of me that you come? As I live, says the Lord God, I will not be inquired of by you. Will you judge them, son of man, will you judge them? Then let them know the abominations of their fathers ..." (Ezek 20:3–4). The whole story of Israel's unfaithfulness is then recounted, and God's answer is even more steely: "... And shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live, says the Lord God, I will not be inquired of by you" (Ezek 20:31). Nevertheless, God cannot reject the chosen people but prefers to bring them into the bond of the covenant: "I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will enter into judgment with you face to face. As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you, says the Lord God: I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant" (Ezek 20:35–37; cf. Hos 2:16).

Job lodges a protest against the dubious counsels of God in a situation of extreme suffering. His friends try in vain to persuade him that suffering implies sin, and only God suggests where to look for a satisfactory answer, speaking out of the whirlwind as creator of the universe (Job 38:2–5). After having asked a series of rhetorical questions underlining the grandeur of creation, God attacks Job: "Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be justified?" (Job 40:8). Job desists from making claims on his divine master and confesses: "... I despise myself, and repent in

dust and ashes" (Job 42:6). Perhaps we can see here recognition of an inherent limitation upon the right of human beings to question divine justice.

The book of Jonah is an acute satire on Jewish bigotry towards pagans, which at the same time discloses the dominant characteristics of human nature in contrast to the essence of God's relationship with humanity. "I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and repentest of evil" (Jonah 4:2b), cries Jonah, submerged in grief because God has ordered him to announce a divine call for repentance to the people of Nineveh; he would much prefer the conditional threat of destruction to be unconditional, and valid in absolute terms. In the plant episode God invokes creation as the ultimate reason for mercy: "You pity the plant, for which you did not labour, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night, and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?" (Jonah 4:10–11).

2. *The Universal Moral Order and Israelite Particularism*

A typological or phenomenological reading of the ancient Near Eastern texts and especially of the Hebrew Bible clearly shows that the issue of divine mastery or kingship is fundamental. The supreme deity claims mastery over all other divine beings and humanity alike. The most crucial point of distinction between non-biblical and biblical documents is the shift from the realm of myth to that of history, and particularly to the history of Israel. The mastery of the God of Israel becomes in principle absolute; creation and election are its foundation and basic justification. Through creation God establishes cosmic and spiritual-moral order and imposes limitations on all other beings. God's mastery has, then, ontological foundations. The same is true of all fundamental qualities like justice, faithfulness, and love. Here is the actual ground of the covenant with mankind and Israel, resulting in an assurance that God will remain unconditionally faithful to the created world and the covenantal people. At the same time, everything at the disposal of humanity and of Israel must be considered as God's gift and rebuts, therefore, any claims based on their own rights or merits. The issue of reward or punishment must be considered chiefly against this theological background.

In spite of the divine sovereignty, in all ages human and super-human forces of evil arise and rebel in various modes against God. The first imperative of divine punishment is therefore the manifestation of divine power and sovereignty on the one hand, and the re-establishment of order and right on the other. The principle of divine sovereignty does not affect freedom of choice. But since salvation is possible only in radical relationship with the

Creator and Master of history there are good reasons for threats of total alienation and destruction of all, some, or specified individuals. Human beings as a whole, Israel as the elected people, and also individual persons will subsist only if they freely make the *right* choice. In the light of creation it is fully justified to claim that Israel "already owes her freedom and her life to the God with whom she has always been in an eternal covenant that was only announced and never negotiated."[20]

The dialectical tension between the mastery of God and the rebellious attitude of created beings is the basis of the evaluation of punishment and forgiveness in the light of the relationship between God and the universe, the nations, and particularly the people of Israel.

2.1 *Universal Moral Order and Interpersonal Relationship*

The discussion on retribution has so far shown that the perception and interpretation of punishment essentially depend on our understanding of the link between the physical-material and personal-spiritual realms. In all religions based on cosmological and collectivist social foundations the understanding of punishment is very simple. It is essentially reduced to the operation of the law of causality: bad actions automatically and inevitably produce bad consequences. It is easy to grasp that the destructive results of wrongdoing can affect not only the wrongdoer but others also. In this sense it is justifiable to speak of collective punishment or retribution. Naturally, this is not a pathway to forgiveness, nor does it touch on anything characteristic of interpersonal relationships. No wonder, then, that cosmological cultures and religions tend to fatalism and a collectivist view of humankind. The depth dimensions of the human being remain essentially untouched.

In contrast to the surrounding cosmological ancient cultures, the Hebrew Yahwistic religion is based on personalist understanding of a God who is one and absolute in every respect. Therefore, God can either abandon humans to the destructive results of their behaviour without intervening or respond to sin personally and directly. This particular cross-roads is the most important in the history of religions, for after it the emphasis shifts from the physical or collectivist social sphere to the personal-spiritual realm. Consequently, Hebrew theologians become not only systematic analysts of exterior events, but also—and primarily—men of vision: prophets. They are chiefly interested in looking into the depth, in divine intervention in the human soul, in God's guidance dispensed through charismatic leaders who have absolute trust in their Creator, in an interpersonal relationship between God and the covenantal people, and in community among souls. Accord-

[20] See J. D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 147.

ingly, the currency of their thought and expression is rich in such fundamental anthropological, theological and ethical semantic coinage as covenant, faithfulness, righteousness, and love. Naturally, human beings are not conceived as a simple paradigm, and human society is not regarded merely as a system of values. All human beings are unique and surprise is endemic in the human situation. In many respects, the behaviour of the human race is irrational or "unnatural," but the most astonishing phenomenon is human pride or self-assertion, instead of humility, before the exalted God. The prophets are consistently amazed that the people do not act rationally, but in opposition to "natural" law, always tending to overstep the boundaries of their allotment and competence. Their "unnatural" behaviour is animated by *hubris*, and this is the essence of their idolatry.[21]

Nevertheless, the prophets are no less sensitive to the laws of the physical world than the sages and magicians of surrounding cultures. On the contrary, since they are seized by the desire to save their people, to lead them to a genuine relationship with their God and their fellow men, they have unusual moral and practical insight and so are capable of seeing most clearly shortcomings in relation to the universal moral order. Their great achievement is to hold in correct balance and perspective the interior and exterior worlds. Their vision of realities is so total that they can never judge the physical world in separation from the spiritual one, or vice versa. And especially striking is their consciousness that God can work in the world both directly and indirectly by intervening with miracles, influencing human events through direct address with oracles, or bringing divine plans into being through secondary causes. One of the best examples of this combination is the so-called "Succession Narrative" in 2 Sam 9–20 and 1 Kgs 1–2. It is characteristic of this great work of history that God operates in the lives of individuals and in the course of events by permitting the universal moral order to carry out judgment through its intrinsic power. But when human behaviour provokes God with crimes as David did with the Bathsheba affair (2 Sam 11:1–17a), God intervenes resolutely through a prophet (2 Sam 11:27b–12:25).

Wisdom literature plays a special part within the Hebrew Bible; it possesses the closest links with the cosmological foundations of neighbouring cultures. The sages are primarily concerned with the laws of the physical world and human dealings with it, although their statements are not so narrowly specialized as individual sentences, taken by themselves, may suggest. It is evident that even short wisdom sentences are illumined against the background of the synthetic vision of Yahwistic religion. For example, those sages who are primarily interested in material prosperity apply the law of

[21] See especially illuminating reflections by J. Barton, "Natural Law and Poetic Justice in the Old Testament," *JThS*.NS 30 (1979), 1–14; "Ethics in Isaiah of Jerusalem," *JTHS*.NS 32 (1981), 1–18.

retribution in its most general sense in the light of a synthetic vision of reality. And their general statements were finally complemented by profound reflections on various antinomies beyond the merits and demerits of mankind's record. When wisdom and prophetism met in the book of Job, the emphasis shifted from the traditional partial evaluation of reality to a synthetic judgment of the human phenomenon in its unlimited span of memory and presentiment of possible new realities. The greatest discovery there is the speechless confession of faith in the inscrutable wisdom of God.

Whenever the emphasis is on the principle of faith or total obedience, the generic variety of the Bible's narratives, emotion-laden poems, and wisdom statements are full of gaps that call for extension into the depths of the human soul. So the human being as a person, as a soul with its abysses and infinite potential, comes to expression. For the first time in human history the value of a human being has become incalculable—so much so that salvation is the only motive for God's dealings with the human race and the people of Israel. Punishment never deteriorates into revenge in the ordinary sense; its goal is always education leading to a better community. From this foundation obviously stems the dominance of God's forgiveness over the motives of wrath. God shows a total faithfulness and a compassionate solidarity with the whole creation. On the other hand, the divine compassion is intimately and passionately involved with the people of Israel. This is especially well illustrated by Deut 4:30–31: "When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the Lord your God and obey his voice, for the Lord your God is a merciful God; he will not fail you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers which he swore to them" (cf. Lev 26:40–45; Deut 30:1–10).

God's absoluteness and demand for unfaltering loyalty, and human fluctuation between desperate rebellion and hopeful expectation inevitably create extreme tensions and oppositions. What may seem compatible in a cosmic and collectivist social context is totally unacceptable in a covenant relationship between an infinite personal God and a limited humanity. Instead of purely rational accounts of God's absoluteness, we find many analogies and symbols that play an important part in expressing the relation between a personal God and the people of Israel both in concord and discord. There is a rich use of analogy between visible and invisible, material and spiritual, infinite and limited, universal and particular or individual. Transcendent realities are most often expressed in metaphorical or anthropomorphic terms. Theological and moral demands imply complete polarization between the concepts of bad and good, obduracy and contrition, anger and compassion.

2.2 *The Prerogative of Israel's Election*

The framework of Yahwistic monotheism, which embraces the universal

moral order and the universal family of nations, also accommodates a most challenging idea: that of Israel's election by God, which implies a special role for her among the nations. According to Num 23:9 Israel is "a people dwelling alone, and not reckoning itself among the nations" (cf. Deut 7:6–7; 26:18–19; 33:29; Isa 49:7; Ps 33:12). This idea leads to a disparity between God's attitude to other nations and the special treatment accorded to Israel. So the themes of reward, punishment, and forgiveness are presented in a context of the polarity between the universal features of mankind and the particular traits of Israel. Wisdom literature and many of the psalms deal with general issues and do not consider Israel as a people apart. The primeval history (Gen 1–11) deals with mankind as a whole or with nations, but the appearance of Abraham inaugurates the story of the chosen people. The prophets apply most of their universal theological and moral principles both to Israel and to other nations. The book of Jonah parodies Israel's particularism in the light of the universal prophetic teaching on God's mercy towards others.

It is most important to realize that the duality regarding the universality of mankind and the particularity of Israel does not involve differing criteria; fundamental theological and moral presuppositions are applied to both the nations and to Israel. On the other hand, the behaviour of the two is essentially similar; humanity as a whole, the nations, and Israel as the chosen people reveal the same negative tendency in their history. *Hubris* is everywhere and in all ages the chief sin, and is castigated not only in the Bible but also in other writings and religions. Discrepancies between the universal moral order and various human deviations from it explain why the primeval history is presented as a sequence of ever increasing aberration. Nations usually assert their supremacy by overstepping their authority and divinely appointed boundaries, and Israel's record is blotted by a tendency to be like all the others. It follows that the history of salvation is not sustained by human righteousness but by God's goodness and compassion. Etiological narratives record for the most part an unhappy experience with men, and messianic promises arise from situations of misery. Eschatological expectations embody the cry for justice uttered by the humble and meek, who could not assert their rights before human rulers. In the final analysis, the history of salvation is a record of God's "ontological" adherence to mankind in spite of its digressions.

It follows that the election of Israel by God cannot be considered as a response to merit but as an act of divine grace. All the more is it obvious that this kind of preference should not be understood in a collectivist sense: the election of Israel has a similar or identical role among the nations as the choosing of charismatic leaders or prophets among its people. On the other hand, such events as the choosing of David and the celebrated divine promise that his dynasty will be established for ever (cf. 2 Sam 7:1–17; Ps 89:20–

38) require the context of creation theology and the election of Israel as a whole. Since God is unconditionally bound to mankind as a whole by his decree of creation, he adheres all the more unconditionally to the chosen people, and within it to righteous individuals, because of the decree of election resulting in a covenant relationship. Since all are called to salvation, an individual is selected by special divine grace to teach, enlighten, admonish, and lead those who are entrusted to him. The prophetic judgment of Israel's history confines her greatness to a tiny minority of righteous leaders, prophets and humble people. Not Israel as a whole but only those who responded properly became the light to lighten the Gentiles, and the part played by remarkable individuals became ever more important in later periods: in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Abraham was transformed into a universal prototype of faith; David and his dynasty became the ideal of messianic expectations; and the New Testament claims the fulfilment of promises regarding the Davidic line in Jesus Christ.

The most illuminative of these relationships is that between the primeval history and the story of Abraham (Gen 11:27–25:11). The creation narratives are followed by reports of the spread of iniquity; mankind tends to destroy what God has created good: "There is a movement from disobedience to murder, to reckless killing, to titanic lust, to total corruption and violence, to the full disruption of humanity ... Nevertheless, these are also stories of divine grace. God not only punishes Adam and Eve, but also withholds the threatened penalty of death; he not only drives out Cain, but also puts his mark of protection upon him; not only sends the Flood, but saves the human race alive in preserving Noah and his family. Only in the case of the Babel narrative does it appear that the element of 'grace' is lacking."[22] Why this solitary exception? Because the emphasis in this case is on mankind's arrogating to itself what are essentially divine prerogatives: "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (Gen 11:4). The divine judgment on human pride and folly is just that—mankind's dispersal over the globe. When a people unite in depravity, destruction of the universal moral order follows. According to the typical etiological story, God himself disperses the single people of human cultural history in order to frustrate their perverse and self-destructive urge to get above themselves. God's verdict is preceded by the statement: "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them" (Gen 11:6).

The dispersal of the nations is, however, only the first move in the divine

[22] See D. J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (JSOT.S 10; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 65.

response to human depravity. The second is the call of Abraham (Gen 11:27–12:9), which constitutes both the true conclusion of the primeval history and the universal preface to the history of salvation. The passage Gen 12:1–3 sums up God's call to Abraham: "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse, and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves." The following statement is highly apposite: "All at once and precipitously the universal field of vision narrows; world and humanity, the entire ecumenical fullness, are submerged, and all interest is concentrated upon a single man. Previously the narrative concerned humanity as a whole, man's creation and essential character, woman, sin, suffering, humanity, nations, all of them universal themes. In v. 1, as though after a break, the particularism of election begins."[23] Abraham's election and blessing for the sake of the nations are confirmed in the context of the test of his obedience (Gen 18:19; 22:15–19; 26:2–5). The same applies to David; the divine decree that his dynasty will be established for ever is sometimes explicitly related to his righteousness (cf. 1 Kgs 3:6; 9:4; 11:4, 6; 14:8; 15:3).

Abraham's exodus from Mesopotamia was motivated by an urge to counter the perverse tendencies of the great nations. The prophetic and wisdom interpretation of history well understood that he could become a blessing for the nations after abandoning Babylon's culture for the sake of his total trust in God and a divine covenant.[24] No wonder Abraham became a paradigm of Israel's faith in God and the search for the Promised Land in all ages. The exodus from Egypt was the first action carried out with a similar motivation. To reach the Promised Land Israel had to undergo the test of faith in the desert.[25] Return from exile presupposes faith in the purpose of the Lord of history in the face of suffering. The call and commission of Deutero-Isaiah comprises the solemn words: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God" (Isa 40:3). To this day it is customary among the Jews of the dispersal to cherish the ideal of returning to the Promised Land.

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[23] See G. von Rad, *Das erste Buch Mose: Genesis* (ATD 2/4; 11th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981), 117; English, *Genesis* (OTL; 9th ed.; London: SCM Press, 1991), 154.

[24] Cf. Sir 44:19–21. For the recent interpretation of the issue, see S.-T. Sohn, *The Divine Election of Israel* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 1991); J. G. Butler, *Abraham: The Father of the Jews* (BBS 9; Clinton, Iowa: LBC Publ., 1993); H. Gossai, *Power and Marginality in the Abraham Narrative* (Foreword by J. G. Janzen; Lanham: University Press of America, 1995); A. Ségal, *Abraham: Enquête sur un patriarche* (in collaboration with A. Ségal; Paris: Plon, 1995); D. Jaffin, *Abraham und die Erwählung Israels* (Bad Liebenzell: Verlag der Liebenzeller Mission, 1996); G. Lafon, *Abraham ou l'invention de la foi* (Points: Sagesse 115; Paris: Seuil, 1996).

[25] For the role of the desert in a purifying process, cf. Hos 2:16.

2.3 *The Temptation to Be Like Other Nations*

Possession of the Land did not bring the exodus process to a close. The threat of strife was no less there than elsewhere. The tribes of Israel faced a long period of struggle with various nations, and in the days of full sovereignty from David on they were in danger of enslavement to the customs of surrounding nations. In fact, the decisive test of Israel's faith took place in the Land: international, political, and trade relations, marriages of Israel's rulers to wives from foreign countries, and cultural and religious contacts all entailed a process of syncretism. Especially disastrous was Israel's temptation to rely on the political power of Egypt or Mesopotamia (cf. Isa 30:1–5; 31:1–3; Jer 2:18; Hos 8:9–10). In the Promised Land the prophets played a similar role to that of Abraham or Moses in the time when it lay shrouded in future promise: it was their part to carry through an exodus from perverse ideologies.[26] There was a clash between the demands of Yahwism and the cultural religions of other nations, and Deut 18:9–14 counsels: "When you come into the land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations ..."

The negative tendency is best exemplified by the motivation that inspired the elders of Israel to demand from Samuel that he should appoint "a king to govern us like all the nations" (1 Sam 8:5; cf. v. 20; 10:19; 12:12, 17, 19). The prophet was instructed by God: "Hearken to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them" (1 Sam 8:7). The crucial point here is the people's desire to be precisely what they were not intended to be: "like all the nations." This desire resulted in Israel's striving to exceed divinely appointed boundaries—the hallmark of *hubris*. The people should have approached their God on bended knee seeking decision on how they were to be ruled (cf. Deut 17:14–16).

Deuteronomy warns that Israel must not give her allegiance to the gods of the peoples who were her neighbours, and should not mingle with the nations (6:14; 12:2, 30; 13:7; 18:9, 14; 29:16–18; cf. Josh 23:7). 1 Kgs 11:1–3 criticizes Solomon for being seduced by his foreign wives, and 1 Kgs 14:24 states: "They did according to all the abominations of the nations which the Lord drove out before the people of Israel" (cf. 2 Kgs 16:3; 21:2, 9; 1 Chr 5:25). In Hos 7:8 and Ps 106:35–36 we find the reproach that the Israelites mingled with the nations. Fear of contamination with religious corruption dictated extermination of the peoples in the Promised Land (cf. Deut 20:15–18; cf. Ps 106:34).

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[26] E. W. Nicholson, *God and His People: Covenant and Theology in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 210, defines well the essence of Israel's election: "Israel's election is understood as Israel's vocation, that is, something which had to be realized in Israel's life as a society."

All the more understandable, then, that Israel's tenure of the Promised Land is dependent on her fulfilment of covenant obligations. Blessing and curse in Lev 26 and Deut 28 + 30:1–10 are meant to apply directly to Israel and indirectly to all nations. If Israel is a blessing for all nations it can also be a curse for all. In the end the move that takes place may be in quite the opposite direction to that anticipated: "And the Lord will bring you back in ships to Egypt, a journey which I promised that you should never make again; and there you shall offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but no man will buy you" (Deut 28:68; cf. 17:17). Deuteronomy is presented as a testament of exhortation and admonition, but in fact it reflects history.

The task of the prophets was first of all to call for reform. At the penultimate climax of the poem 3:1–4:4 Jeremiah offers a conditional promise: "If you return, O Israel, says the Lord, to me you should return. If you remove your abominations from my presence, and do not waver, and if you swear, 'As the Lord lives,' in truth, in justice, and in uprightness, then nations shall bless themselves in him, and in him shall they glory" (4:1–2; cf. Gen 12:1–3; 22:15–18; 26:2–5). In Gen 12:3 God's promise is that in Abraham "all the families of the earth shall bless themselves," and according to Gen 22:18 and 26:4 the enabling factor will be Abraham's descendants, and the beneficiaries the nations. Jeremiah, however, says that by Israel's returning to God, nations shall bless themselves and glory in the Lord.

The warnings of the prophets were not, of course, efficacious, and Deuteronomistic historians of the postexilic period could trace to Israel's religious and moral corruption the cause of various calamities and the fall of both Israel and Judah. The "pragmatic introduction" of the book of Judges (2:11–23) finds in the fact that the tribes of Israel "went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were round about them" (Judg 2:12) the explanation of the distress caused by mighty adversaries. In 2 Kgs 17:7–23 we find a homily upon the fall of Israel associated with statements that Israel had absorbed the customs of the nations. Once the punishment of exile was a fact, the only solution was repentance and a renewed polarization between Israel and the nations. According to Ezekiel the exile was a shock designed to call Israel to repentance. In 20:32 he says: "What is in your mind shall never happen—the thought, 'Let us be like the nations, like the tribes of the countries, and worship wood and stone.'" In the final analysis, Israel can never become "like the nations."

2.4 *Identity of Nations and Individuals Established through Opposition of Right and Wrong*

Within this framework arises the question of identity, since election implies it. Nations and individuals cannot find their identities in the scheme of a

collectivist ideology—which is the surest way to all kinds of fascism—but only against the background of the universal moral order. Yahwistic basic beliefs and the prophetic interpretation of history show most clearly that true election and a sense of identity do not evoke nationalistic particularism or the "splendid isolation" of individualism, but rather greater sensibility to universal truths or values; for election and identity are not a matter of race or culture but of ethics. Identity can be established only by interaction between the universal moral order, a personalist perception of God and man, and concrete geographical and historical realities. A profound belief that God is one and personal, while humans are many, personal and unique, elicits instinctive appreciation of freedom, equality and brotherhood among peoples in spite of geographical, historical and cultural differences. At the opposite pole, rationalistic talk about an ideal world community without boundaries, based on cosmological and collectivist social considerations, can easily lead to authoritarianism and bloody revolution, however sonorous the declarations on human rights. Babylon is the archetype of collectivist unifying slavery. Therefore the diversifying of languages is a symbol of liberation through individualization, even though it may be considered a punishment for human *hubris*. This duality proceeds from the absolute supremacy of the ethical foundation of human life in individuals and in all kinds of communities over all other considerations and interests. Ethics based on personalist human traits involves opposition to one-sided cosmic and collectivist social models, which tend to degrade individuals to the status of mere objects. The inherent identity of the individual person is the only adequate model for communities and nations. All the more does it seem persuasive that God is at once one, all-powerful, absolutely righteous, creator and father of all, and the only ontological foundation of human identity. The essence of Justice and its only unifying power is universality, just as the essence of individual persons is their separation from plurality.

The personalist prophetic spirit of ancient Israel distanced itself from the predominantly cosmological and collectivist approaches of surrounding cultures and religions, as is reflected in the words of Mic 4:5: "For all the peoples walk each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever." However, Israel's distinctiveness was not embodied simply in Israel as a national entity but in her prophets, who were rare but remarkable. Individuals are the building bricks of nations and of history as a whole, and the truly inspired among them know that without their opposition to all forms of obscurity there can be no clarity for others. Jeremiah heard God's voice at a critical moment in his ministry: "... They shall turn to you, but you shall not turn to them. And I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you to save you and deliver you, says the Lord" (15:19–20).

The prophets perceived that the unconditional obedience and undivided faithfulness to the one God and the divine commandments is the only possible way out of confusion, and that this necessitates a continuous process of reform. In earlier periods the call to repentance was consistently spurned. Nevertheless, the clarity of Yahwistic monotheism with all its implications was unimpaired. In the Exilic and post-Exilic periods consciousness of absolute monotheism, with its implied emphasis on the universality of God's goodness and mercy, grew ever stronger. This trend resulted in absolute ethical and social universality: all nations are called to one God that they may be saved, and Israel was regarded as a symbol of blessing for all nations. Ps 47:9–10 declares: "God reigns over the nations; God sits on his holy throne. The princes of the peoples gather as the people of the God of Abraham" (cf. Isa 2:2–4; Mic 4:1–5). Deutero-Isaiah exclaims in 45:22: "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other." Isa 55:3–5 expands the dynastic promise once given to David for the benefit of the people and all nations: "... I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. ... Behold, you shall call nations that you know not, and nations that knew you not shall run to you ..." (cf. Isa 56:1–8; 60:1–22). In Zech 8:13 we read: "As you have been a byword of cursing among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so will I save you and you shall be a blessing"; and in 14:16: "Then every one that survives of all the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of booths." To the prophecy concerning Egypt in Isa 19:1–15 a series of supplements was added (Isa 19:16–25). Egypt will return to God and will be healed (Isa 19:22); "In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, 'Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hand, and Israel my heritage'" (Isa 19:24–25).

Ps 86:5–10 lays emphasis on God's forgiving mercy: "For thou, O Lord, art good and forgiving *(sallāḥ)*, abounding in steadfast love to all who call on thee ... There is none like thee among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like thine. All the nations thou hast made shall come and bow down before thee, O Lord, and shall glorify thy name. For thou art great and doest wondrous things, thou alone art God." The book of Jonah is especially universalist in this respect; it consists of reflections upon the role of Israel in its relationship to the nations. Israel is called to carry the word of God's judgment and mercy to Nineveh.

Finally, there is the apocalyptic vision. To the Son of Man, who is identified with "the saints of the Most High," is given "dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him ..."; and this kingdom "shall not pass away" (Dan 7:14; cf. vv. 26–27). This will be the final result of God's judgment upon evil dominions and godless king-

doms of all kinds. In the last analysis, the universality of God's justice destroys what is evil and throws open the door to infinite vistas of good—not only in messianic terms but also in unfathomable eschatological directions. The New Testament with all its implications is the ripe fruit of the revelation of the one righteous and merciful God who calls all nations to salvation.

CHAPTER XIII

CONFESSION OF SIN IN THE HEBREW BIBLE AND IN THE EARLY JEWISH TRADITION

There are a number of phrases of a confessional nature in the Hebrew Bible and in extra-biblical documents whose similarity is such as to justify further inquiry. Two main types of penitential passage occur: the individual confession, which appears to be freely composed in accordance with particular life situations, and the communal confession, which arises out of a particular, momentary need. Of interest here is the arrangement of the verbs, nouns and other linguistic elements, in the light of their function within their immediate and wider contexts.

In most cases, the first person form ("I, We") is used in the confession of sin. In passages containing a single verb to denote sin, the subject appears both in the singular and in the plural, while in passages with three or more verbs for sin, the subject is always in the plural. There are several cases of confession made by one person using a single verb for sin in the first person singular (Exod 9:27; 10:16; Josh 7:20; 1 Sam 15:24, 30; 26:21; 2 Sam 12:13; 24:10 [= 1 Chr 21:8], 17; cf. 1 Chr 21:17; Ps 51:6; Luke 15:18). On the other hand, there are a good many penitential confessions containing a single verb for sin in the first person plural (Deut 1:41; Judg 10:10, 15; 1 Sam 12:10; Isa 42:24; 53:6; Jer 2:35 [denial of guilt]; 3:25; 8:14; 14:20; Neh 1:6; 9:33; Bar 1:13, 17; 2:5; 3:2); as well as a passage containing two verbs for sin in the first person plural (Dan 9:15). Of particular interest, however, are certain passages in which the subject appears in the first person plural, and the sin is expressed by means of three synonymous verbs. These passages are found in the Hebrew Bible (1 Kgs 8:47 [= 2 Chr 6:37]; Ps 106:6; Dan 9:5); in some extra-biblical Hebrew documents (the *Rule of the Community* 1:24–26; the *Damascus Document* 20:28–30; the Mishnah tractate *Yoma* 3:8; 4:2; 6:2); and in the Greek book of Baruch (2:12). This threefold repetition of the confessional phrase is a phenomenon which provokes inquiry into its origin, into its development, and into its eventual liturgical setting.

In addition to the passages where sin is expressed via the use of one or more verbs, there are various others containing noun forms—either one noun (Prov 28:13); two nouns (Jer 14:20; Pss 32:5a; 51:5; Job 7:21; 22:5; Ezra 9:6–7; Neh 9:2); or three nouns (Exod 34:7; Lev 16:21; Ps 51:3–4; 1QS 1:23; 11:9).

The aim of this study is to establish which form of confession was appropriate to which particular occasion and to examine the setting of confessional formulae and their liturgical standardization. The passages surveyed

in the present study may open a window onto the prehistory of confessional formulae, enabling us to trace the various stages of their development and to find independent sources for reconstructing their patterns, until we see one form fixing itself as the unmistakable standard of Jewish confession on the Day of Atonement. I shall analyze biblical and extra-biblical documents from the earlier period until the second century after Christ, but in the final discussion I shall also consider later Jewish sources.

1. *The Use of a Single Verb in the Confession of Sin*

In order for this enquiry to proceed in a logical fashion, those passages containing verbs expressing sin in the singular form will be examined separately from the ones in which the plural form is used.

1.1 *Confession of Sin Using a Single Verb in the First Person Singular*

The account of the plagues of Egypt (Exod 7:8–11:10) tells of Pharaoh's obstinate struggle with God for lordship. It is only after the plagues have come that Pharaoh becomes increasingly doubtful about his own divine status. According to the J sections of the accounts of hail (9:8–12) and locusts (10:1–20), Pharaoh tries to act in a conciliatory manner. After the destruction caused by the hailstorm he sends for Moses, confesses his fault and asks him to intercede with God: *ḥāṭā'tî happa'am yhwh haṣṣaddîq wa'ănî wĕ'ammî hārĕšā'îm ha'tîrû 'el-yhwh* ..., "I have sinned this time; the Lord is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. Entreat the Lord ..." (9:27–28). After the locusts have devastated Egypt, Pharaoh once again admits his sin, declaring: *ḥāṭā'tî layhwh 'ĕlōhêhem wĕlākem wĕ'attāh śā'*[1] *nā' ḥaṭṭā'tî 'ak happa'am wĕha'tîrû layhwh 'elōhêkem wĕyāsēr mē'ālay raq 'et-hammāwet hazzeh* ..., "I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you. Now therefore, forgive my sin, I pray you, only this once, and entreat the Lord your God only to remove this death from me ..." (10:16–17). Since Pharaoh's remorse is short-lived, it is obvious that he has not come to submissive repentance or any real reverence for the God of Israel. It is not possible to be certain what Pharaoh thinks he means, when he admits to being in the wrong, but it is obvious that his aim is pragmatic, rather than based on any coherent dogmatic theology or morality. His confession, "I have sinned against the Lord ...," and supplication, "Now therefore, forgive my sin ...," is theologically and morally admissible only if accompanied by sincere repentance. As a result of his previous experience of Pharaoh, Moses feels a distrust which

[1] The Samaritan Recension reads the verb in the imperative plural: *śĕ'û*, 'forgive you.'

he expresses: "... I know that you do not yet fear the Lord God" (9:30). Nevertheless, he gives Pharaoh another chance by condescending to intercede with God, evidently motivated by one clear aim: "... that you may know that the earth is the Lord's" (9:29). Moses' great patience demonstrates God's and his own righteousness; but Pharaoh "sinned yet again *(wayyōsep laḥăṭō')*, and hardened his heart, he and his servants" (9:34), thus showing the truth of his previous acknowledgment, and broadening its scope: "The Lord is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong" (9:27).

In the book of Joshua the confessional formula is pronounced by Achan after the casting of lots reveals that he has violated the *ḥērem* laid on Jericho (7:1–26). This episode dramatically emphasizes that God will help Israel only on condition that she remain obedient. God declares to Joshua: *ḥāṭā' yiśrā'ēl* ..., "Israel has sinned ..." (v. 11). After Achan of the tribe of Judah has been "taken" as the guilty person by the casting of lots, Joshua exhorts him: "My son, give glory *(kābôd)* to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession to him *(wĕten-lô tôdāh)* ..." (v. 19). The phrase *ten-lô tôdāh* is strongly reminiscent of Ezra 10:11: "Now then make confession *(tĕnû tôdāh)* to the Lord the God of your fathers, and do his will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives." What follows from the mouth of Achan is a real confession, which confirms the meaning of the word *tôdāh* indicated above. Achan says: *'omnāh 'ānōkî ḥāṭā'tî layhwh* ..., "Of a truth I have sinned against the Lord ..." (v. 20). There is no mention of penitence, and the gravity of the sin admits of no mercy. Joshua delivers sentence in a tit-for-tat form that matches crime with punishment: *meh 'ăkartānû ya'korĕkā yhwh bayyôm hazzeh,* "Why did you bring trouble on us? The Lord brings trouble on you today."

In 1 and 2 Samuel the confessional formula is pronounced by two totally contrasting characters, Saul (1 Sam 15:24, 30; 26:21) and David (2 Sam 12:13; 24:10 [= 1 Chr 21:8], 17). The first passage is part of the account of the rejection of Saul that arises from his cultic offence in neglecting the divine command, as mediated by Samuel, concerning the "things devoted to destruction" *(ḥērem).*[2] Samuel takes the role of a prophet and makes in 1 Sam 15:10–31 a speech containing an introduction (vv. 10–13), an accusation (vv. 14–21), an oracular passage (vv. 22–23), and an announcement (vv. 24–31). He puts Saul to the test by asking him various questions. After his covert invitation to repentance has completely failed, he pronounces the sentence: "Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king" (v. 23b). Saul responds to the charges made against him: "I have sinned *(ḥāṭā'tî);* for I have transgressed the command-

[2] It seems most reasonable to accept the view of those modern scholars who assign this chapter to the middle phase of the development of 1 Samuel, i.e., to a pre-Deuteronomistic prophetic edition.

ment of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice. Now therefore, I pray, pardon my sin *(wĕ'attah śā' nā' 'et-ḥaṭṭā'tî),* and return with me, that I may worship the Lord" (vv. 24–25). Saul's attempt to throw the blame on the people is a clear indication that he has not made a full and honest confession. He does not show the courage needed to examine his own behaviour impartially. Consequently, Samuel ignores his request for forgiveness. Saul, however, repeats his confession and plea for mercy: "I have sinned *(ḥāṭā'tî);* yet honour me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may worship the Lord your God" (v. 30). After this plain avowal of guilt, Samuel returns to Gilgal with Saul to worship, but Saul remains in disgrace. We may share the view that "Saul must finally confess in proper form, too late to escape punishment but just in time to seal its vindication."[3]

When the self-serving and unscrupulous Saul persecutes David and yet the latter spares his life, Saul declares: "I have sinned *(ḥāṭā'tî);* return, my son David, for I will no more do you harm, because my life was precious in your eyes this day; behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly" (1 Sam 26:21). This confession only serves to confirm David's stated attitude to Saul, as expressed in 24:12: "I have not sinned against you *(lō' ḥāṭā'tî lāk),* though you hunt my life to take it." It is especially noteworthy that the verb *ḥṭ'* does not occur in Saul's avowal of guilt, but is used in David's statement of innocence, in relation to a human subject.

In sharp contrast to David's declaration of innocence in 1 Sam 24:12, the prophetic section of Nathan's "juridical parable" in 2 Sam 11:27b–12:15a spurs him to an avowal of guilt in connection with Bathsheba. This section consists of three main parts: the parable (11:27b–12:7a); the denunciation (vv. 7b–12); and David's repentance (vv. 13–15a). David listens to Nathan's denunciation and at once confesses his fault: *ḥāṭā'tî layhwh,* "I have sinned against the Lord" (v. 13a). The prophet approves David's penitence and assures him of his survival: "The Lord also has remitted your sin *(he'ĕwîr*[4]*ḥaṭṭā'tĕkā);* you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child that is born to you shall die" (vv. 13b–14). The Hiph'il form *he'ĕwîr* should not be taken as indicating that the guilt is beng *transferred* to a "scapegoat." The point of Nathan's reassurance of David is rather a general appeal to God to dispel the sin, leav-

[3] See M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1985), 514.

[4] Translations do not always reflect the basic meaning of the Hiph'il form of the verb *'br.* The Targum retains the same verb, whereas the Septuagint replaces it with the verb *parabibádzo,* 'to put aside, remove': *And the Lord has removed your sin.* This version is also followed by the RSV. By contrast, the Vulgate has a literal translation: *Dominus quoque transtulit peccatum tuum* ... The NEnglB offers the paraphrase *has laid on another the consequence of your sin.*

ing the means and the methods to him alone. However, particular events within a family, like the death of David's child, might nevertheless justify us in concluding that the guilt is indeed being transferred to another.[5] If we are correct in drawing such a conclusion, we can only do so, in this case, by taking into account the well-established concept of corporate responsibility. This is the light in which David's request in 2 Sam 24:17b must be understood: "Let thy hand, I pray thee, be against me and against my father's house." In the context of the beliefs of the Hebrew people, the conclusion that "Repentance could produce a reprieve for David, but could not undo the sin" is justified.[6] Sin must be atoned for in some way. Often it is wholly or partly borne by the sinner, sometimes the consequences are borne by another or atoned for by the vicarious suffering of the righteous.

David appears great in pronouncing his guilt, which he does after taking a census, for reasons which are unclear (2 Sam 24:1–25). The account can be divided into three sections: the census (vv. 1–9); the plague (vv. 10–17); and the purchase of the threshing floor (vv. 18–25). The narrator opens the account with the strange statement: "Again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, 'Go, number Israel and Judah.'"[7] In v. 10 he reports the stirring in David's heart after the census has been taken: "But David's heart smote him after he had numbered the people. And David said to the Lord, 'I have sinned greatly *(ḥāṭā'tî mĕ'ōd)* in what I have done. But now, O Lord, I pray thee, remit the guilt of thy servant *(ha'ăber-nā' 'et-'ăwôn 'abdĕkā);* for I have done very foolishly.'" (cf. the almost identical version in 1 Chr 21:8). It seems most likely that the sinfulness of taking a census consisted of pride in the national strength of arms. Such a motive is wrong from the outset and punishment is bound to follow. The statement that God "incited David" signals God's reaction to human sinful nature. Once his evil intention has turned into action, "David's heart smote him" in order to save him from the ultimate disaster. Having realized that his sin has affected the people, David makes a generous request: "Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly *(hinnēh 'ānōkî ḥāṭā'tî*

[5] A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel* (WBC 11; Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1989), 163, argues with good reason: "It may well be that this and similar ideas were essentially deductions from real-life experiences. Thus, e.g., David had clearly sinned and the child died, while David himself lived on. Consequently, in the existing religious setting, it would be quite reasonable to argue that the sin had been 'transferred' to the child, and that therefore the sinner could be regarded as forgiven. If vv. 7b–12 are a Deuteronomistic addition, then they would imply that at a later time it was seen in retrospect that the child's death was not the sum total of David's punishment (as suggested by v. 14) but that the whole unseemly succession struggle was part of the divine judgment." In the same sense P. K. McCarter, *II Samuel* (AB 9; New York: Doubleday, 1984), 276, assumes that the final author "affixed the whole (chaps. 10–12) to the account of Abishalom's rebellion (chaps. 13–20) as a kind of theological preface. It was his belief that the turmoil described in the latter document was a direct result of David's sin with Bathsheba."

[6] See G. Little, *II Samuel* (IntB 2; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1953), 1104.

[7] The Chronicler, by contrast, ascribes the provocation to Satan (1 Chr 21:1).

wĕ'ānōkî he'ĕwêtî); but these sheep, what have they done? Let thy hand, I pray thee, be against me and against my father's house" (2 Sam 24:17). In 1 Chr 21:17 David's request is expressed in a slightly different way: "Was it not I who gave command to number the people? It is I who have sinned and done very wickedly *(wa'ănî-hû' 'ăšer-ḥāṭā'tî wĕhārēa' hărē'ôtî).* But these sheep, what have they done? Let thy hand, I pray thee, O Lord my God, be against me and against my father's house; but let not the plague be upon thy people." David's explicit appeal to the principle of individual, or better, "corporate" retribution, clearly shows that his request in 24:10b (= 1 Chr 21:8b) *ha'ăber-nā'* does not imply the *transferral* of the guilt to someone or something else.

In Ps 51:6b the psalmist pronounces a confession which is entirely consistent with David's confession in 2 Sam 12:13 and with other expressions of repentance that he makes: *lĕkā lĕbaděkā ḥāṭā'tî ...,* "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned ..."[8] It is not clear whether the writer is thinking of an offence or offences against persons believed to have sinned against God, or of one particularly grievous offence against God, like disobedience to God's law. In any case, the Hebrew Bible contains a number of passages which clearly support the idea that serious offences against fellow human beings are regarded as offences against God (cf. Gen 39:9; 2 Sam 12:9, 10, 13; Prov 14:31; 17:5). David himself exclaims in relation to his adultery and to his murder of Uriah the Hittite: *ḥāṭā'tî layhwh,* "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Sam 12:13). And in Gen 39:9 Joseph replies to Potiphar's wife, when tempted by her to commit the sin of adultery: "... how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God *(wĕḥāṭā'tî lē'lōhîm)?*

In the New Testament a new version of the confessional formula appears in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32). Having dissipated his share of his father's property in a foreign land, the younger son comes to himself and decides to return. When he meets his father he exclaims: *páter, hémarton eis tòn ouranòn kaì enópión sou ...,* "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you ..." (v. 18). It may be helpful to examine the confessional formula in the Septuagint in order to find the source of Luke's version of the story. Exod 9:27: *hemárteka tò nûn,* "I have sinned this time"; Exod 10:16: *hemárteka enantíon Kuríou toû Theoû humôn, kaì eis humâs,* "I have sinned before the Lord your God, and against you"; Josh 7:20: *alethôs hémarton enantíon Kuríou toû Theoû Israél,* "Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel"; 1 Sam 15:24, 30; 26:21: *hemárteka,* "I have sinned"; 2 Sam 12:13: *hemárteka tô Kurío,* "I have sinned against the Lord"; 2 Sam 24:10: *hémarton sphódra,* "I have sinned grievously"; 1 Chr 21:8:

[8] The title ascribes the psalm to David: "A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba." The question of how far this information is reliable, at least for the core of the psalm, will probably never be resolved.

hemárteka sphódra, "I have sinned grievously"; 2 Sam 24:17: *Idoù egó eimi edíkesa,* "It is I that have done wrong"; 1 Chr 21:17: *kai egó eimi ho hamartón, kakopoiôn ekakopoíesa,* "And I am the sinner; I have greatly wronged"; Ps 51:6: *Soì móno hémarton,* "Against thee only have I sinned." Luke's version of the confession is clearly closest to Pharaoh's confession in Exod 10:16: *ḥāṭā'tî layhwh 'ĕlōhêkem wĕlākem,* "I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you." In Luke, "Heaven" is obviously a periphrasis for "God." Since the prepositions are not identical we can only conclude that the formula is not strictly bound to a particular variant.

1.2 *Confession of Sin Using a Single Verb in the First Person Plural*

Collective confession is characteristic of Deuteronomic history and theological reflection. The brief Deuteronomic survey of Israel's journey in the wilderness in Deut 1:9–46 mentions the unreliable confession of the Israelites: *ḥāṭā'nû layhwh,* "We have sinned against the Lord." In the Deuteronomistic introduction to the long story of the Gileadite Jephthah (Judg 10:6–16), the confessional formula is used to express Israel's repentance in the period of oppression at the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites: "We have sinned against thee *(ḥāṭā'nû lĕkā),* because we have forsaken our God and have served the Baals" (v. 10; *ḥāṭā'nû* is repeated in v. 15). In 1 Sam 12:10 we find an almost identical wording of the confession within the Deuteronomic presentation of Samuel's farewell: "We have sinned *(ḥāṭā'nû),* because we have forsaken the Lord, and have served the Baals and the Ashtaroth; but now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, and we will serve thee."

Deutero-Isaiah expresses the confession of sin in new ways: once in a retributional sense (42:24) and once in the sense of vicarious suffering incurred by the servant of God (53:6). In 42:24 the statement about sinning provides the answer to the question of who delivered Israel into the hands of its enemies: "Was it not the Lord, against whom we have sinned *(hălô' yhwh zû ḥāṭā'nû lô)* ..." In 53:6 the astonished community admits the guilt of the nation in relation to the servant of God: "All we like sheep have gone astray *(kullānû kaṣṣō'n tā'înû);* we have turned every one to his own way: and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all *('et 'ăwôn kullānû).*"

The book of Jeremiah reflects the view that the misfortunes of Israel were not something that just happened but have their roots in the most basic sin: the act of turning away from God. Hence Jeremiah's constant attempts to induce the people to confess their sins and to turn to God. There is one passage expressing denial of guilt (2:35) and a number of passages in which confession of sin is expressed in a retributional sense, characteristic of Deuteronomistic theology (3:25; 8:14; 14:7, 20). In 2:34–35 the prophet accuses the people of Israel and threatens them with judgment: "... In spite of

all these things you say, 'I am innocent; surely his anger has turned from me.' Behold, I will bring you to judgment for saying, 'I have not sinned *(lō' ḥāṭā'tî).*'" In Jer 3:25 the people's confession turns into supplication: "Let us lie down in our shame, and let our dishonour cover us; for we have sinned against the Lord our God, we and our fathers *(kî layhwh 'ĕlōhênû ḥāṭā'nû 'ănahnû wa'ăbôtênû),* from our youth even to this day ..." In Jer 8:14 we find a poetic expression of Israel's mourning: "Why do we sit still? Gather together, let us go into the fortified cities and perish there; for the Lord our God has doomed us to perish, and has given us poisoned water to drink, because we have sinned against the Lord *(kî ḥāṭā'nû layhwh).*" According to Jer 14:7, Judah mourns and asks for God's mercy by confessing her sin: "Though our iniquities testify against us *('im-'ăwônênû 'ānû bānû),* act, O Lord, for thy name's sake *(lĕma'an šĕmekā);* for our backslidings are many, we have sinned against thee *(lĕkā ḥāṭā'nû).*" In Jer 14:20 the confession of sin again includes generations past:

> *yādā'nû yhwh riš'ênû*
> *'ăwôn 'ăbôtênû kî ḥāṭā'nû lāk*
> We acknowledge our wickedness, O Lord,
> the iniquity of our fathers, for we have sinned against thee.

It is obvious that the verb *yd'* has the same meaning here as the verb *ydh* elsewhere.

The two penitential prayers found in the book of Nehemiah (1:5–11a; 9:6–37) provide a broader context for confessional utterances. The first prayer, made while Nehemiah is in Susa, is his response to the devastating news from Jerusalem. The pericope has a simple structure: an expanded and elaborate invocation of God (v. 5; cf. Dan 9:4); an appeal for a hearing (v. 6a; cf. 1 Kgs 8:28–29; 2 Chr 6:40; 7:15; Isa 37:17; Ps 130:2); a confession of Israel's sin, using the Hithpa'el form *mitwaddeh* (vv. 6b–7); an appeal to Israel to repent, with a reference to God's conditional threat (vv. 8–9); a reference to the divine redemption of the past (v. 10); and, finally, an appeal to God to be attentive to the prayer and to grant mercy *(raḥămîm)* to his servant (v. 11a). The beginning of Nehemiah's prayer is very similar to that of Daniel's prayer (9:4–6), but in contrast to Dan 9:5 we now find only the first of the traditional three terms *(ḥṭ', 'wh, rš')* expressing Israel's failure: "O Lord God of heaven, the great and terrible God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments; let thy ear be attentive, and thy eyes open, to hear the prayer of thy servant which I now pray before thee day and night for the people of Israel thy servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against thee. Yea, I and my father's house have sinned *(ûmitwaddeh 'al-ḥaṭṭō't bĕnê-yiśrā'ēl 'ăšer ḥāṭā'nû lāk wa'ănî ûbêt-'ābî ḥāṭā'nû).* We have acted very corruptly against thee *(ḥăbōl ḥābalnû lāk),* and have not kept the com-

mandments ..." It is noteworthy, however, that in addition to *ḥṭ'*, in the continuation the emphatic form of the verb *ḥbl* is used, while in Dan 9:5 the verbs *mrd* and *swr* appear in addition to the three traditional terms.

Since the prayer of Neh 9:6–37 will be discussed elsewhere (section 4.1) at this point mention need only be made of the confession occurring in v. 33 where God's faithfulness is contrasted with Israel's wickedness: "Yet thou hast been just in all that has come upon us, for thou hast dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly *(wa'ănahnû hiršā'nû)*."

Within the prose section of the book of Baruch (1:1–3:8), which mainly consists of Baruch's prayer (1:15–3:8), confession of sin in the plural occurs repeatedly in a formulaic style: in the first person plural (1:13, 17; 2:5, 12; 3:2) and in the third person plural in connection with the "fathers" (2:33; 3:4, 7; cf. 3:8).

2. *The Biblical Formula for Confession Using Three or More Verbs for Sin*

There are a considerable number of confessions within the Hebrew Bible containing three or more verbs for sin (Ps 106:6; 1 Kgs 8:47 [= 2 Chr 6:37]; Dan 9:5). A Greek example can be found in the book of Baruch (2:12). These passages may be viewed as confessional formulae, and are of the utmost significance for this study, because they take a set form, which expresses Israel's confession of sin. They occur within the survey of history in Ps 106 and within three very similar confessional prayers (1 Kgs 8:22–53 [= 2 Chr 6:12–39]; Dan 9:4–19; Bar 1:15–3:8). These prayers are highly reminiscent of a number of similar penitential prayers in canonical books of the Old Testament (Jer 32:17–25; Ezra 9:6–15; Neh 1:5–11a; 9:6–37), although in these passages the terms of confession do not appear in formulaic fashion. At Qumran, a similar prayer, *Words of the Heavenly Luminaries,* has also been found. However, this passage does not include a basic formulaic confession.[9]

2.1 *Psalm 106:6*

The entire Psalm 106 represents a confession by the community, looking back through history and sharply contrasting two main aspects of the relationship between God and his people: God's mighty and wonderful acts of salvation and Israel's ingratitude and disobedience on the one hand; and

[9] In this text, by means of an historical account that displays some affinity with other examples, the suppliants make use of a fairly varied vocabulary, in order to describe the rebellious behaviour of the "fathers" and God's patience, righteousness and mercy towards them, owing to the election of Israel from among all the nations; but they move to a plea for restoration by referring to their own fidelity. For the text, see especially M. Baillet, "Un receuil liturgique de Qumrân, grotte 4: 'Les paroles des luminaires,'" *RB* 68 (1961), 195–250.

punishment by God and his merciful forgiveness on the other (cf. vv. 8, 44–46). God's forgiveness is the basis on which Israel may appeal for mercy and request full restoration of the covenant relationship. In this respect, the psalm is closely related to the lengthy penitential prayer of Neh 9:5–37. The survey of the history of God's dealings with Israel and Israel's dealings with the God of the covenant is also reminiscent of the historical content of Psalm 78. The confession of Israel's perversity and the request for restoration is only to be found in Psalm 106 and at the centre of Neh 9:5–37, where it serves to instruct. It is only by examining these passages together that we can properly assess the role of the terms expressing confession of sin.[10]

Psalm 106 forms a coherent structure: the opening verses, comprising a hymnic call to praise (vv. 1–3); a personal supplication (vv. 4–5); a historical passage (vv. 6–46); and a concluding corporate prayer for deliverance from subjection to the nations (v. 47). The historical passage may be outlined as follows: the Exodus story (vv. 7–12); the wilderness story (vv. 13–33); and the intermingling with other nations, as well as human sacrifices and idolatry in the Promised Land (vv. 34–46). The key to understanding the main purpose of the psalm is the concluding prayer, where the psalmist expresses the painfulness of the dispersion of the Israelite community:

> Save us, O Lord our God,
> and gather us from among the nations,
> that we may give thanks to thy holy name *(lĕhōdōt lĕšēm qodĕšekā)*
> and glory in thy praise (cf. the opening verses).

Since the Deuteronomistic theology permits of only one conclusion as to the reason for the tribulation, i.e., Israel's rebellious attitude towards God, the psalmist sees return to God as the only way out of the situation. Repentance would bring restoration to the Promised Land, just as defection had led to dispersal among the nations. At the beginning of the historical survey he makes the basic three-verb confession of sin:

> *ḥāṭā'nû 'im-'ăbôtênû*
> *he'ĕwînû hiršā'nû*
> We have sinned with our fathers;
> we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly.

It is important to note that in this introductory confession, a close link is made between the present generation and generations past. It is possible fully to accept the view that "Israel had learned that sin is intergenerational and social. If any penitence does not comprehend that, it fails to grasp the profundity and tragedy of the sinful predicament."[11] The corporate percep-

[10] For a more detailed analysis of the Psalm, see especially W. Beyerlin, "Der nervus rerum in Psalm 106," *ZAW* 86 (1974), 50–64; G. J. Brooke, "Psalms 105 and 106 at Qumran," *RdQ* 14 (1989), 267–292.

[11] See J. L. Mays, *Psalms* (Interpretation; Louisville, Ky.: J. Knox, 1994), 342.

tion does not permit any individualist understanding of religious life. Yet in the end, this fact has positive consequences for the people: on the one hand, God saves the whole body because of a righteous few; and on the other, the intercession of righteous individuals can in certain circumstances be decisive in averting God's destructive punishment (e.g., Moses and Phinehas; cf. vv. 23 and 30–31).

2.2 *1 Kings 8:47 (= 2 Chr 6:37)*

The account of the depositing of the ark and the dedication of the Temple (1 Kgs 8:1–66) includes Solomon's supplicatory prayer, which appears almost verbatim in the parallel passage at 2 Chr 5–7, where it holds a central position. The chapter 1 Kgs 8 is divided into the following sections: an account of the installation of the ark (vv. 1–11); Solomon's poetic utterance concerning the Temple (vv. 12–13); Solomon's address to the assembly (vv. 15–21); the supplicatory prayer of dedication (vv. 22–53); and the benediction (vv. 54–61). By comparison the Chronicler has introduced 6:40–42, a free citation of Ps 132:1, 8–10, in place of the passage at 1 Kgs 8:51–53.[12]

The prayer (vv. 22–53) contains an introduction (vv. 22–26) proclaiming the transcendence of God and alluding to the foundation of the Davidic dynasty. The passage is reminiscent of vv. 14–21. Solomon quotes God's conditional promise, asking him to watch over David's descendants, provided they remain faithful to him (vv. 25–26). The connective particle *wĕ'attāh,* "so now," in vv. 25 and 26 marks the transition to the supplication which follows. After the introduction, Solomon moves on to the subject of the Temple, and prays that the Temple may be a place where God is continually receptive to the supplications of the people in adversity, and where he will show his mercy and forgiveness. Solomon acts as God's "servant," interceding with him and showing that he shares the people's responsibilities in their relationship to God. He also prays for mercy in cases of public disaster (cf. Amos 7:2). From v. 31 onwards, seven possible scenarios are enumerated, and they are introduced with a general appeal (v. 30; cf. vv. 32, 34, 36, 39, 43, 45): "And hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant and of thy people Israel, when they pray toward this place; yea, hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place; and when thou hearest, forgive *(wĕšāmā'tā wĕsālaḥtā).*"

In most of the seven hypothetical scenarios (vv. 31–32, 33–34, 35–36, 37–40, 41–43, 44–45, 46–53) the emphasis is on the desired repentance and for-

[12] For a more detailed analysis, see especially scholarly commentaries and the monographic study by E. Talstra, *Solomon's Prayer: Synchrony and Diachrony in the Composition of 1 Kings 8,14–61* (CBETh 3; Kampen, the Netherlands: Kok Pharos, 1993); D. F. O'Kennedy, "Solomon's Prayer (1 Ki 8:22–53) from a Historical Geographical Perspective," *OTE* 9 (1996), 224–236.

giveness. The form *wĕsālaḥtā* ..., "and forgive ...," is used in a formulaic style (vv. 34, 36, 39, 50). It seems that the first five scenarios are original, while those at vv. 44–45 and 46–53 are later additions by the second Deuteronomist.[13] The formulaic confession appears in v. 47, within the last scenario:

> If they sin against thee—for there is no man who does not sin—and thou art angry with them, and dost give them to an enemy, so that they are carried away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near; yet if they lay it to heart in the land to which they have been carried captive, and repent, and make supplication to thee in the land of their captors, saying, "We have sinned, and have acted perversely and wickedly *(ḥāṭā'nû wĕhe'ĕwînû rāšā'nû);* if they repent *(wĕšābû)* with all their mind and with all their heart in the land of their enemies ... then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause and forgive thy people who have sinned against thee, and all their transgressions which they have committed against thee; and grant them compassion in the sight of those who carried them captive, that they may have compassion on them *(wĕsālaḥtā lĕ'ammĕkā 'ăšer ḥāṭĕ'û lāk-ûlĕkol-piš'êhem 'ăšer pāšĕ'û-bāk ûnĕtattām lĕraḥămîm lipnê šōbēhem wĕrîḥămûm)* ... (vv. 46–53).

It is noteworthy that at 8:50 the twofold description of Israel's sin appears in the third person plural in the order *ḥṭ', pš'*.

This method of looking back over history and forward to the future; the awareness of sin and of the inevitability of retribution (cf. especially v. 32); and the call to repentance as a precondition for forgiveness; all these are distinctive features of Deuteronomistic and post-Deuteronomistic history. These distinctive elements constitute a penitential prayer characterized by a particular liturgical style, which accounts, in turn, for the repetitive construction of the prayer.[14]

2.3 *Daniel 9:5*

The three-verb formula appears within the great penitential prayer at Dan 9:4b–19 which is attributed to Daniel himself. The prayer is part of the

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[13] See J. Gray, *I and II Kings* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1964, 1977), 226; S. J. DeVries, *1 Kings* (WBC 12; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985), 126.

[14] See the statement by R. B. Dillard, *2 Chronicles* (WBC 15; Waco, Tex.; Word Books, 1987), 52: "Solomon's prayer in both histories appears to be influenced by an Exilic or post-Exilic setting: the prayer presumes the possibility of exile and return (6:24–25, 36–39) and emphasizes the temple as a place toward which one prays (6:20, 21, 26, 29, 32, 34, 38) rather than as a place of sacrifice. The petitions are sufficiently general that one might suggest the prayer had liturgical use through a large part of Israel's history, a fact which would also explain its importance to post-Exilic generations." E. Talstra, *Solomon's Prayer,* makes suggestions, based on a diachronic analysis of the text, as to how the prayer might have grown into its present form. On p. 255 he states: "The last revision of Solomon's prayer comes from a post-dtr redaction from the period of the second temple. This redaction gave the prayer its definitive form, that of a penitential prayer, a prayer that God may hear and forgive and restore the relationship between God and Israel."

prophecy that God will end the religious persecution the Jewish community has been suffering at the hands of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Dan 9 can be divided up as follows: a brief narrative introduction (vv. 1–2) composed in the form of an eschatological midrash on Jeremiah's prophecy concerning the "seventy years" of Babylon's dominion over various nations (cf. Jer 25:11–12; 29:10); a long prayer recited by Daniel, taking the form of a communal confession of sin and petition for mercy (9:3–19); and the epiphany and the revelation given by God in the form of an oracle, conveyed to Daniel by the angel Gabriel (9:20–27).[15]

Daniel is reported as saying: "I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession *('etwaddeh)*" (v. 4a). The reflexive form of the verb *ydh* indicates a desire on the part of the petitioner to change his own attitude, in order to receive forgiveness (cf. Lev 16:21; Num 5:7; etc.). The prayer may be outlined as follows: an introductory statement about Daniel's recourse to prayer and fasting as a way of "seeing" God (cf. Exod 34:28; Deut 9:9; Esth 4:6; Dan 10:3; Jdt 8:5, 6; 4 Ezra 5:13, 20; 2 Bar 20:5, 6; Hermas, *Pastor* 6:1; cf. *Asc. of Isa* 2:10, 11; *Testament Reuben* 1:10; *Testament Judah* 15:4; *Testament Simeon* 3:4; *Testament Joseph* 3:4; 9:2; etc.) and his recourse to other traditional forms of bodily penance, such as sackcloth and ashes (vv. 3–4a; cf. 2 Kgs 6:30; Isa 58:5; Jonah 3:6; Esth 4:3–4; Neh 9:1; 1 Chr 21:16; Matt 11:21; *Ta'anith* 16a; etc.). Then follows the prayer (9:4b–19), which contains the following elements: invocation (v. 4b); confession of sin and acknowledgment of divine punishment (vv. 5–14); and prayer for mercy (vv. 15–19).

A comparison of most verses with similar passages elsewhere shows that Daniel's prayer is a mosaic of phrases from the older tradition, which often appeared as a formula. Several passages are drawn almost verbatim from the Hebrew Bible. The invocation in v. 4b is a direct address to God: "O Lord, the great and terrible God" (cf. Deut 7:21; Neh 1:5; 9:32); "who keepest covenant and steadfast love *(ḥesed)* with those who love him and keep his commandments" (cf. Deut 7:9, 12). The confession of sin (9:5–11a) opens

[15] For various questions concerning Dan 9 and its parallels, see especially R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1929), 221–252; N. Porteous, *Daniel* (London: SCM Press, 1965, 1979), 131–144; B. W. Jones, "The Prayer in Daniel IX," *VT* 18 (1968), 488–493; W. S. Towner, "Retributional Theology in the Apocalyptic Setting," *USQR* 26/1 (1970), 203–214; M Delcor, *Le livre de Daniel* (SB; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1971), 186–205; M. Gilbert, "La prière de Daniel: Dn 9,4–19," *RevThL* 3 (1972), 284–310; C. A. Moore, "Toward the Dating of the Book of Baruch," *CBQ* 36 (1974), 312–320; A. Lacocque, "The Liturgical Prayer in Daniel 9," *HUCA* 47 (1976), 119–142; idem, *The Book of Daniel* (trans. from the French by D. Pellauer; Atlanta, Ga.: J. Knox, 1979), 174–199; L. F. Hartman, *The Book of Daniel* (AB 23; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1978), 238–254; J. E. Goldingay, *Daniel* (WBC 30; Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1989), 221–268; G. H. Wilson, "The Prayer of Daniel 9: Reflection on Jeremiah 29," *JSOT* 48 (1990), 91–99; J. J. Collins, *Daniel* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Fortress, 1993), 344–360.

with an expanded confessional formula, listing five terms expressing the sinful condition of the people (9:5):

> *ḥāṭā'nû wĕ'āwînû wĕhiršā'nû ûmāradnû wĕsôr mimmiṣwôtekā ûmmišpāṭêkā,* We have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly (cf. 1 Kgs 8:47; 2 Chr 6:37; Ps 106:6; Bar 2:12; in the very similar context of Neh 1:6, only the verb *ḥṭ'* appears) and rebelled, turning aside from thy commandments and ordinances (cf. Deut 17:20).

The writer himself, or a later editor of this confession, has replaced the Hiph'il of 1 Kgs 8:47 with the Qal *'āwînû* (cf. Esth 1:16). He has also replaced the Qal *rāšā'nû* with the Hiph'il *hiršā'nû* (cf. 11:32; 12:10). It is thus all the more striking that the verb *hāṭā'nû* reappears in vv. 11 and 15, in v. 15 in parallel with *rāšā'nû* (in the Qal). The confession continues (v. 6): "We have not listened to thy servants the prophets (cf. Jer 7:25; 25:4; 26:5; 29:19; 35:15; 44:4–5), who spoke in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers ..." (cf. Jer 1:18; 44:21; Neh 9:32, 34).

At this point it may be noted that the Greek rendering of Dan 9:5 and of other passages containing the formula for confession is not as consistent as the MT. The Septuagint uses the three verbs consistently, but does not always retain the original word sequence. There are two combinations: *hemártomen, enomésamen, edikésamen* (Ps 106:6; 2 Chr 6:37); *hemártomen, edikésamen, enomésamen* (1 Kgs 8:47; Dan 9:5). Bar 2:12, however, uses the verb *esebésamen* instead of *enomésamen* in the sequence: *hemártomen, esebésamen, edikésamen.* The Bar 2:12 version is especially striking, because the prayer at Bar 1:15–2:19 appears to have been originally written in Hebrew and to have been one of the versions of a well-established liturgical text composed in Jerusalem during the time of the Exile.[16]

The petitioner continues his direct address to God by sharply contrasting the righteousness of God with the perfidy of Israel, which causes "confusion of face" (9:7–8): "To thee, O Lord, belongs righteousness (cf. Exod 9:27; Jer 12:1; Bar 1:15a), but to us confusion of face, as at this day, to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem (cf. Ezra 9:7; Bar 1:15b) ... in all the lands to which thou hast driven them ... (cf. Jer 16:15; 23:3; 32:37), because of the treachery which they have committed against thee (cf. Lev 26:40). To us, O Lord, belongs confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee *(ḥāṭā'nû lāk).*" In 9:9 the petitioner proclaims the fundamental traits of God's nature: *la'dōnāy 'ĕlôhēnû hāraḥămîm wĕhassĕlîḥôt,* "To the Lord our God belong mercy and

[16] See the conclusion by A. Lacocque, *HUCA* 47 (1976), 141: "The prayer at the core of Daniel 9 is a liturgical piece composed in Jerusalem during the time of the Exile, more specifically between 587 and 538 B.C.E. It is influenced throughout by Deuteronomistic and Jeremian writings, and has been developed in several versions which are found in Ezra 9:6–15; Nehemiah 9:6–37; Daniel 9:4–19; 1 Baruch 1:15–3:8 and 4 Q Dib Ham."

forgiveness" (cf. Exod 34:6–7; Num 14:18–19; Isa 54:7–10; Hos 2:20–25; Pss 25:6–7; 51:3; 69:17; 86:5, 15; 130:4; Neh 9:17), although in the continuation, up to v. 14, he speaks of Israel's disobedience and God's punishment in the classical retributional style, characteristic of Deuteronomic theology. We may conclude that the praise of God's righteousness *lĕkā 'ădōnāy haṣṣĕdāqāh,* "To thee, O Lord, belongs righteousness," in v. 7 refers primarily to God's saving acts in favour of the penitent remnant.

The acknowledgment of being in the wrong opens the way to a plea for mercy in two sections (vv. 15–19). The transition from the confession of sin to the appeal for mercy is marked by the emphatic particle *wĕ'attāh,* "and now," which is repeated in v. 17 (cf. Exod 32:31–32; 1 Sam 12:10; 15:24–25; 24:10; Ezra 9:8, 10; Neh 9:32; 1 Chr 21:8; Prayer of Azariah in Dan 3:31, 41).[17] After mentioning the Exodus from Egypt, the petitioner repeats his confession using two verbs: *ḥāṭā'nû rāšā'nû,* "we have sinned, we have done wickedly" (v. 15). In v. 16 the petitioner urges: "O Lord, according to all thy righteous acts *(kĕkol-ṣidqōtekā),* let thy anger and thy wrath turn away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy hill ..." The plural form of the noun *ṣĕdāqāh* clearly refers to the mighty saving acts of God (cf. Judg 5:11; 1 Sam 12:7; Mic 6:5: Ps 103:6). The appeal to God to hear the prayer for his own sake (vv. 17, 19) also supports this view, as does the statement: "... for we do not present our supplications before thee on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of thy great mercy *(lō' 'al-ṣidqōtênû kî 'al-raḥămêkā hărabbîm)*" (v. 18). The petitioner concludes by imploring God to forgive Israel's sins and to renew the city which is called by his name (v. 19): "O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive *(sĕlāḥāh);* O Lord, give heed and act; delay not, for thy own sake, O my God, because thy city and thy people are called by thy name" (cf. 1 Kgs 8:30; 34:36; Ps 40:17). Verse 19 is the climax of the appeal to God's mercy.

At 9:20–27 an introductory passage tells how Daniel received a revelation (9:20–21): "While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel ..." In 9:22–23 the angel Gabriel tells Daniel that he has come to give him "wisdom and understanding," and in 9:24–27 he reveals to him how long the post-exilic period will be: "Seventy weeks of years are decreed concerning your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity *(lĕkallē' happeša' ûlĕḥāttēm ḥaṭṭā'wt ûlĕkapper 'āwôn),* to bring in everlasting righteousness, ..." The point of Gabriel's discourse is that ultimately everlasting righteousness will put an end to sin, even though the accomplishment of the promise is prolonged from the seventy years revealed to Jeremiah (cf. v. 2) to seventy weeks of years, i.e., 490 years.

[17] For the function of the particle, see A. Laurentin, "*We'attah–Kai nun*," *Biblica* 45 (1964), 190–197.

The angelic discourse does not suggest the conclusion, shared by some interpreters, that "Contrary to what might be thought on first reading, it is not the case that the writer or editor of Dan. 9 is attempting to show that the prayer of a single pious man can effect an onset of divine decision, implement the destruction of the evil powers, and promote the restoration of the elect in scenes of eschatological renewal. Nor is it being taught that the proper interpretation of the impending eschatological events is to see them simply as reward and punishment for the faithful of Israel and all the rest of mankind ..."[18] Daniel seeks forgiveness, not because it is deserved, but for the sake of God's reputation (9:17). It is clear, then, that God gives the promise of deliverance for his own sake. What determines the way God deals with sinful Israel and the nations is the relationship that he has initiated. Nevertheless, it is safe to conclude that Daniel would not have received any revelation concerning the deliverance of Israel if he had not prayed and confessed the sins of his suffering people. In fact, Dan 9 gives the office of the intercessor a very significant place in God's relationship with his people.

The promise of ultimate deliverance is in essence unconditional, but its fulfilment will involve the chastisement of the sinful people, with the result that a remnant will testify to God's mercy (cf. Ezra 9) and turn to God with true repentance.[19] The interplay of God's purpose and his people's attitude can only be properly understood in the context of a characteristic apocalyptical dualism: the ungodly forces will fail, while those people who remain faithful will be vindicated. But God alone is entitled to choose how and when the ultimate judgment will take place.

3. *The Confessional Formula in Extra-biblical Texts*

Confession using three verbs occupies a central position within the *Rule of the Community* (1:24–26), the *Damascus Document* (20:28–30), and the Mishnah tractate *Yoma* (3:8; 4:2; 6:2). Although verbs are used for confession in all these passages, the verb may appear in either the singular or plural form; and confession may be made either in the first or third persons. Thus, 1QS 1:24–26 and CD 20:28–30 have the first person plural; while *Yoma* 3:8 and 4:2 have the first person singular; and Yoma 6:2 has the third person plural.

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[18] See W. S. Towner, *USQR* 26/1 (1970), 212. J. J. Collins, *Daniel*, 360, claims similarly: "The deliverance promised by the angel is in no sense a response to Daniel's prayer. The word goes forth at the beginning of Daniel's supplication. The end will come at the appointed time because it is decreed, not because of prayer or the repentance of the people."

[19] A. Lacoque, *HUCA* 47 (1976), 119–142, convincingly refutes deterministic interpretations of the apocalyptic literature and correctly emphasizes the crucial role of confessional prayer.

3.1 *The* Rule of the Community *(1QS) 1:24–26*

The *Rule of the Community* is not a unified work; it is composed of several, thematically different units: the Preamble (1:1–15) defining the purpose and the ideals of the Rule; the ritual of the crossing over into the covenant and the annual renewal of the covenant (1:16–3:12); a Wisdom doctrine of the fundamental dualism of the Community: the two spirits (3:13–4:26); the rule of the Community (5:1–6:23); the penal code of the Community (6:24–9:25); and a final hymn on God's righteousness (9:26–11:22). The statement: "Thus they shall do year after year, all the days of the reign of Belial ..." (2:19) supports the assumption that the members of the Community celebrated the annual renewal of the covenant, presumably on the Day of Atonement. On that occasion they confessed their sins and renewed their determination to live according to the will of God.

The section 1:16–3:12 is organized as follows: first of all, the priests and the Levites sing a hymn of praise to the God of salvation, in the presence of those who "cross over into the covenant" (1:18–20). Then the priests recite "the righteousness of God *(ṣdqwt 'l)* along with his wondrous works, and recount all (his) merciful acts of love *(ḥsdy rḥmym)* towards Israel" (1:21–22). Next "the Levites recite the iniquities of the sons of Israel and all their guilty transgressions and their sins during the dominion of Belial *(whlwyym msprym 't 'wwnwt bny yśr'l wkwl pš'y 'šmtm whṭṭ'tm bmmšlt bly'l)*" (1:22–24), and thereafter those who "cross over into the covenant" confess *(mwdym 'ḥryhm)* their own sins and the sins of their fathers (1:24–2:1). During the next stage, the priests pronounce a traditional priestly blessing on "all the men of God's lot" (2:2–4; cf. Num 6:24–26; Pss 4:7; 67); then the Levites recite a traditional curse on "all the men of Belial's lot" (2:5–9). The members of the Community respond to the blessing and cursing with "Amen" (2:10), and the priests and the Levites pronounce a curse on any backsliders there may be among those who enter the covenant (2:11–18). The renewal of the covenant is to be carried out "year after year" in a predetermined order: first by the priests, then by the Levites, and finally by all the people (2:19–26). We next come to the doctrine of atonement: the members of the Community cannot be cleansed from all their iniquities by absolution alone but by repentance and by humbling their souls to all God's statutes (3:1–12; cf. Isa 1:10–17; Amos 5:21–26; Ps 50:8–15; the Mishnah tractate *Yoma* 8:8–9).

The author's method is essentially based on the fundamental dualism of the Community. The writer combines elements of tradition with new views in an antithetic presentation, opposing the reign of Belial and those who enter the covenant; the priestly blessing of the men of God's lot and the men of Belial's lot; the roles of the priests and of the Levites. The opposing roles of the priests (blessing) and of the Levites (cursing) clearly reflect the antithesis of Deut 27–29. This explains their antithetic role in 1:21–24: the

priests are supposed to proclaim the righteousness of God, whereas the Levites enumerate the iniquities of Israel during the dominion of Belial. The *Rule* is concerned with confining the responsibility of pronouncing the blessing to the sons of Aaron alone (cf. Deut 10:8; 21:5). This implies that the priests' primary privilege and responsibility is to safeguard the purity of the people and bring divine blessing and well-being upon them.

This understanding of the ritual structure and its theological background allows us better to assess the role of the Levites in the penitential liturgy. Their impersonal enumeration of the iniquities of the "sons of Israel" is interlinked with the personal confession of "those who cross over into the covenant." The fact that the people "confess after them" *(mwdym 'ḥryhm)* their own sins and the sins of their ancestors is explicitly stated in the text:

> We have perverted ourselves, we have rebel[led], we [have sin]ned, we have acted impiously *(n'wynw [p]š'nw [ḥṭ]nw hrš'nw),* we [and] our [fath]ers before us *('nw [w']bwtynw mlpnynw),* by our walking [...] True and righte[ous] *('mt wṣdyq)* is the [Go]d of [Israel and] his judgment against us and [our] fathers; but his loving mercy *(wrḥmy ḥsdw)* he has [bes]towed upon us from eternity to eternity.[20]

It is interesting to note that the confessional formula used here is less stereotyped than the one used in biblical passages. Here, four verbs for sin are used, appearing in a different sequence.

It is appropriate that the priests should first proclaim the "righteousness of God" and his "merciful acts of love." The first designation refers to God's saving acts in general, the second to his forgiving mercy towards Israel. But the people of Israel have continually responded with "iniquities" and "guilty transgressions and their sins." The members of the Community do not merely express their regret for the sins of their "fathers," but confess, first and foremost, their own sinfulness and their total dependance on God's mercy. Their confession of sin is of ceremonial and therefore of a very general character. It reflects the conviction that sin is a universal human reality which no righteous man can escape. The confession of the "Sons of Righteousness" shows a paradoxical truth: the stronger the will to live in accordance with God's will, the stronger the consciousness of sin. In the final analysis, the principal mark of rebellious sinfulness is human arrogance, i.e., the lack of consciousness of sin. Thus we may claim with Heinrich Böll that unbelievers sin with a "good" conscience, whereas believers sin with a bad one.

[20] This translation is taken from E. Qimron and J. H. Charlesworth, "Rule of the Community," *The Dead Sea Scrolls,* vol. 1 (ed. J. H. Charlesworth; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck]; Louisville, Ky.: J. Knox, 1994), 9–11.

3.2 *The* Damascus Document *(CD) 20:28–30*

The *Damascus Document* can be divided into two parts: the Admonition (cols. 1–8 and 19–20); and the laws and organizational rules of the Community (cols. 9–16). The first part appears to be essentially an introduction to the laws and rules. It represents a parenetic review of Israel's history, contrasting God's faithfulness with the unfaithfulness of the covenant people. The first section (1:1–2:1) opens with an exhortation based on the idea of divine judgment: God punished the people of Israel because of their treachery, "But recalling the covenant with the first ones, he left a remnant of Israel and did not give them up to destruction ...; he turned his attention to them and caused to grow out of Israel and Aaron a root of planting, to inherit his land and grow fat in the goodness of his soil. And they discerned their iniquity and knew that they were guilty people ... and he raised up for them (the) Righteous Teacher to guide them in the way of his heart" (lines 4–11). The exhortation of the second section (2:2–13) is based on the idea of God's love of good and hatred of evil: "Long forbearance (is) with him and manifold forgiveness, so as to atone for those who repent (of) rebellious sin. But (with him too are) might, power, and great wrath with fiery flames in the han[d] of all the angels of destruction for those who wilfully depart from the Way and despise the statute, leaving them neither remnant nor survivors. For God did not choose them primordially; before they were established he knew their works" (lines 4–8). The third section (2:14–4:12a) opens with an exhortation based on the contrasting destinies of the "fathers" (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), who "were registered as lovers of God and parties to (his) covenant forever" (3:3–4), and their rebellious descendants, in order to focus upon God's everlasting covenant with the "fathers," who entered the new covenant: "God in his wonderful mysteries atoned for their iniquity and forgave their sin and built them a sure house in Israel, such as never stood from the earliest times until now" (3:18–19). The fourth section (4:12b–6:1) speaks of "three nets of Belial" (unchastity, arrogance, and defilement of the sanctuary). The fifth section (6:2–7:8) points to God's covenant with "the penitents of Israel who depart from the land of Judah and dwell in the land of Damascus" (6:5). The section opens with the words: "And God recalled the covenant with the first ones, and he raised up from Aaron men of discernment and from Israel wise men ..." The sixth section (7:9–8:21; and the parallel passage at 19:5b–20:27a) threatens the "covenant's vengeance" on the wicked and "for all who enter his covenant (and) who will not hold firmly to these statutes" (19:13–14). The closing section (20:27b–34) promises the blessings reserved for the penitent faithful.

A summary of the first part of the *Damascus Document* reveals the aim of this parenetic review of Israelite history: the members of the Community enter the covenant with the fathers, yet they were not chosen from the be-

ginning. They are "the penitents of Israel" (cf. 6:5; 8:16; 19:29; 20:17). This interpretation is based on the conviction that all are in need of God's mercy and forgiveness, but only those who are faithful and confess their sins can attain it. Thus the concluding section reads:

> But all those who hold firmly to these precepts, to go out and go in according to the Torah, and listen to the voice of the Teacher and confess before God *(wytwdw lpny 'l),* (saying,) "We have [sin]ned, we have done wickedly, we and our fathers, by walking contrarily in the statutes of the covenant. And your judgments against us (are) true *([ḥ]ṭ'nw rš'nw gm 'nhnw gm 'bwtynw blktnw qry bḥqy hbryt w'mt mšpṭyk bnw),*" and they are not to raise a hand against his holy statutes and his righteous precepts and his true testimonies; but rather, they are to be instructed in the first precepts in which the men of the Community were judged, when they listened to the voice of (the) Righteous Teacher, and they are not to reject the righteous statutes when they hear them. (These men) will be joyous and happy, and their heart will take courage, and they will overcome all the sons of the world. And God will atone for them *(wkpr 'l b'dm),* and they will see his salvation, for they took refuge in his holy name.

It is noteworthy that the penitential formula has no ceremonial character, unlike 1QS 1:24–2:1. Although we would expect CD to have a stereotyped threefold confession, only two verbs for sin occur *(ḥṭ'* and *rš').* It thus appears that the formula for confession is defective, or original.

3.3 *The Mishnah Tractate* Yoma *3:8; 4:2; 6:2*

A formula by which the High Priest made confession of sin on the Day of Atonement appears in three places in the Mishnah tractate *Yoma* (3:8; 4:2; 6:2). It is highly significant that the festival is reported as taking place in the Temple. In Lev 16:3 we find the provision: "But thus shall Aaron come into the holy place: with a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering." And Lev 16:6 (see also v. 11) indicates: "And Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering for himself, and shall make atonement for himself and for his house." Referring to this provision, *Yoma* states in 3:8 that the High Priest came to the bullock, which stood between the Porch and the Altar, "and laid both his hands upon it and made confession" *(wĕsômēk šĕtê yādâw 'ālâw ûmitwaddeh),* in the first person singular:

> *'ānā' haššēm 'āwîtî pāša'tî ḥāṭā'tî lĕpānêkā 'ănî ûbêtî; 'ānā' haššēm kapper nā' la'ăwônôt wĕlappĕšā'îm wĕlaḥăṭā'îm še'āwîtî wĕšeḥāṭā'tî lĕpānêkā 'ănî ûbêtî* ..., "I pray, O Eternal! I have done wrong, I have transgressed, I have sinned before Thee, both I and my house; I pray, O Eternal! Forgive, I pray, the iniquities, and the transgressions, and the sins, which I have wrongly committed, and which I have transgressed, and which I have sinned before Thee, both I and my house ..."

At 4:2, *Yoma* states that the High Priest came to the bullock for the second time, "and placed both his hands upon it and made confession" *(wĕsāmak*

šětê yādâw 'ālâw ûmitwaddeh). He broadens the scope of the confessional formula:

> *'ānā' haššēm 'āwîtî pāša'tî ḥāṭā'tî lĕpānêkā 'ănî ûbĕnê 'ahărōn 'am qĕdôšekā* ..., "I pray, O Eternal! I have done wrong, I have transgressed, I have sinned before Thee, both I and my house and the children of Aaron Thy holy people ..."

In Lev 16:5 we find the provision that Aaron "shall take from the congregation of the people of Israel two male goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering." And according to Lev 16:7–10 the two goats must be set before the Lord at the door of the tent of meeting, "and Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats, one lot for the Lord and the other lot for Azazel. And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the Lord, and offer it as a sin offering; but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the Lord to make atonement over it, that it may be sent awav into the wilderness to Azazel." The writer of *Yoma* 6:2 refers to this provision when he tells how the High Priest came to the scapegoat, "and he laid his two hands upon it and made confession" *(ûsômēk šětê yādâw 'ālâw ûmitwaddeh),* again in the third person plural:

> *'ānā' haššēm 'āwîtî pāša'tî ḥāṭā'tî lĕpānêkā 'amĕkā bêt yiśrā'ēl. 'ānā' haššēm kapper nā' še'āwû wĕšepāšĕ'û wĕšeḥāṭĕ'û lĕpānêkā 'amĕkā bêt yiśrā'ēl* ..., "I pray, O Eternal! Thy people, the house of Israel, have done wrong, they have transgressed, they have sinned before Thee. I pray, by Thy Name! Forgive, I pray, the iniquities, the transgressions, and the sins which Thy people, the house of Israel have wrongly committed, and which they have transgressed, and which they have sinned before Thee ..."[21]

It is noteworthy that the order of the three verbs for sin (*'wh,* 'to sin knowingly,' *pš',* 'to transgress purposely,' *ḥṭ',* 'to sin unwittingly'), as given in the Mishnah in all three places, concurs with Lev 16:21, where nouns are used to express Israel's transgressions: "Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins *(wĕhitwaddāh 'ālâw 'et-kol-'ăwônôt bĕnê yiśrā'ēl wĕ'et kol-piš'êhem lĕkol-ḥaṭṭo'tām).*"

The manner in which source material was put together in Mishnah needs to be borne in mind when examining the repetition of the penitential formula in *Yoma* and its appearance in a large number of other documents. Judah the Patriach "did not reproduce his material in a rigidly uniform pattern, reducing it to a single standard of literary style: so far as possible he adhered to the principle of repeating a tradition in the very words in which it had been handed down."[22]

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[21] For the Hebrew text and English translation, see *Mishnayoth,* vol. 2 (2nd ed. by P. Blackman; Gateshead: Judaica Press, 1977), 271–312.

[22] See "Introduction" by H. Danby in *The Mishnah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933, 1977), XXII.

In all three places where the basic confession appears, we may note the way the High Priest is conscious of and identifies with the sin of his own house, the house of Aaron, and the house of Israel. The first chapter of the book of *Jubilees,* from the second century B.C.E., illustrates the much-stressed notion of corporate responsibility for guilt. God speaks to Moses about the apostasy and ultimate restoration of Israel. In 1:22–23 we find God's complaint and assurance:

> I know their contrariness and their thoughts and their stubbornness. And they will not obey until they acknowledge their sin and the sins of their fathers. But after this they will return to me in all uprighteousness and with all of (their) heart and soul. And I shall cut off the foreskin of their heart and the foreskin of the heart of their descendants. And I shall create for them a holy spirit, and I shall purify them so that they will not turn away from following me from that day and forever ...[23]

3.4 *The Babylonian Temple Purgation Rite*

There is a text among Akkadian rituals dating to the Seleucid period, *Temple Programme for the New Year's Festivals at Babylon,* which displays striking formal similarities to Israel's Yom Kippur: the chief priest performs ritual purgation of the temple; animals are slaughtered to eliminate impurity; the participants are rendered impure; the king undergoes a ritual of humiliation and confession.[24] These similarities render all the more significant the conceptual differences relating to the perception of the source of the pollution that causes divine displeasure, and to the purpose of purgation.[25] The Babylonian purgation rite (performed in Marduk's temple, Esagil) is based on the assumption that an independent demonic evil has polluted the temple and must therefore be suppressed (lines 382–383). The Yom Kippur festival, by contrast, reflects the belief that the sanctuary in Jerusalem is polluted by the moral failings of the covenant people, but that the sins of the entire nation can be removed by appropriate penitential acts. The entire ritual is conducted by the High Priest who confesses (three times) "all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins" (Lev 16:21). This implies the centrality of the one absolute and holy God in the rite, and the belief that the iniquity of the covenant people as a whole must be purged away in order to avert divine punishment. In Babylon, on the other hand, it was not the priest who performed a ritual of confession and penitence; instead, the king submitted to an ordeal in the presence of the priest. Instead of performing acts of self-denial, the king made a single self-righteous assertion:

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[23] The translation is taken from O. S. Wintermute, "Jubilees," *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha,* vol. 2 (ed. J. H. Charlesworth; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985), 54.

[24] See the translation by A. Sachs, *ANET,* 332–334 (lines 285–464).

[25] See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16* (AB 3; New York, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1991), 1067–1069.

> I did [not] sin, lord of the countries. I was not neglectful (of the requirements) of your godship. [I did not] destroy Babylon; I did not command its overthrow. [I did not.].. the temple Esagil, I did not forget its rites. [I did not] rain blows on the cheek of a subordinate. ... I did [not] humiliate them. [I watched out] for Babylon; I did not smash its walls (lines 422–429; about five lines are missing).

This assertion reflects the belief that the worthiness of the king alone determines the national destiny. The priest strikes the king's cheek; if "the tears flow, (it means that) the god Bel is friendly; if no tears appear, the god Bel is angry: the enemy will rise up and bring about his downfall" (lines 450–453).

4. *Confessions Using Nouns to Denote Sin and the Order of Terms*

The particular significance of confessions of sin using verbs is that they are so numerous that they are at least to some degree formulaic. But the passages expressing sin by means of nouns are perhaps even more interesting, because they are more original. In any event, they help to clarify the overall picture of confession of sin in ancient Israel. One of the issues which can be clarified only after considering all the passages of a confessional nature is the question of sequence in the use of the respective terms.

4.1 *Passages Containing One or Two Nouns*

The only sentence in Proverbs which contains a reference to the confession of sin is also the only place in the Hebrew Bible where a noun for sin is used on its own (28:13):

> *mĕkasseh pĕšā'âw lō' yaṣlîaḥ*
> *ûmōdeh wĕ'ōzēb yĕruḥām*
> He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper,
> but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.

Confession of sin and the amendment of one's life differ from the attempt to conceal one's sins from God, in that they bring about a complete change of mind and life in human beings, which results in the discovery that true prosperity transcends all the external effects of retribution and mercy.[26]

There are seven passages containing two nouns for sin each (Jer 14:20; Pss 32:5a; 51:5; Job 7:21; 22:5; Ezra 9:6–7; Neh 9:2). In the passage from Jeremiah, the people declare their guilt as follows: "We acknowledge our

[26] W. McKane, in *Proverbs: A New Approach* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1970), 628, makes the following remark: "This verse has affinities with the spirit of prophetic preaching and has to be numbered with the few verses of Proverbs in which the prophetic emphasis is detectable." Since the sentence expresses the basic truth about human nature in general and universal terms it is of characteristic wisdom rather than of prophetic character.

wickedness, O Lord, the iniquity of our fathers *(yādā'nû yhwh riš'ēnû 'ăwôn 'ăbôtênû)* ..." Psalm 32 is a unique biblical expression of the contrast between the concealment of sin with all its devastating consequences and the liberating effects of confession (vv. 3–5). After discovering the truth about himself through submission to the discipline of penitence, the psalmist proclaims in v. 5:

ḥaṭṭā't̂ı̂ 'ôdî'ăkā
wa'ăwônî lō'-kissîtî
'āmartî 'ôdeh 'ălê pĕšā'ay layhwh
wĕ'attāh nāśā'tā 'ăwôn ḥaṭṭā't̂ı̂
I acknowledged my sin to thee,
and I did not hide my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord";
then thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin.

The normal standardized combination of the terms *ḥṭ'* and *'wn* and the linguistic form *'ăwôn ḥaṭṭā't̂ı̂* at v. 5c in this passage shows that the noun *pĕšā'ay* at v. 5b is not part of a confession using three nouns, but provides variation, while retaining the meaning of the pair at v. 5a.

In Ps 51:5 the psalmist confesses his inborn sinful nature by means of the device of synonymous parallelism:

kî pĕšā'ay 'ănî 'ēda'
wĕḥaṭṭā't̂ı̂ negdî tāmîd
For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.

At v. 15 the same root recurs in the word pair *pōšĕ'îm,* 'transgressors' // *ḥaṭṭā'îm,* 'sinners.' It is noteworthy that both in Jer 14:20 and Ps 51:5, the verb *yd'* is used to express confession, instead of the characteristic verb *ydh,* which occurs elsewhere.

Job 7:21 must be considered in the context of the entire passage concerning Job's complaint, as reported in chapters 6–7, particularly at 7:17–21. Job ironically repeats the exclamation found in Ps 8:5 (where, however, it is given a positive emphasis): "What is man, that thou dost make so much of him ..." (v. 17). He thus passes from his individual situation to the human condition in general. Job's suffering alters the positive overtones of Psalm 8, creating an impression of bitterness: he seems to be saying that humans are not worthy of God's attention, because being transient, their sins cannot affect God. In 7:20–21, Job reproaches God:

If I sin *(ḥāṭā't̂ı̂),* what do I do to thee, thou watcher of men?
Why hast thou made me thy mark?
Why have I become a burden to thee?
Why dost thou not pardon my transgression *(ûmeh lō'-tiśśā' piš'î)*
and take away my iniquity *(wĕta'ăwîr 'et-'ăwônî)?* ...

We note that the general term for sin is the verb *ḥāṭā'tî* (v. 20a), which is used in conjunction with the nouns *piš'î* and *'āwônî* (v. 21ab). In 35:6–7, the hypothetical clause in the speech of Elihu (in the second person) recurs:"If you have sinned, what do you accomplish against him *('im- ḥāṭā'tā mah-tip'ol bô)?* And if your transgressions *(pĕšā'êkā)* are multiplied, what do you do to him? ..." In 22:5, Eliphaz challenges Job with a question which presupposes an admission of guilt and confession on Job's part. The question employs a unique pair of synonyms for sin: "Is not your wickedness *(rā'ātĕkā)* great? There is no end to your iniquities *(la'ăwônōtêkā).*"

The conclusion that Job's reproachful speech trivialises human sin is not justifiable, even though the idea that human virtue is not God's concern is also expressed in the speeches of Eliphaz (22:2–3) and Elihu (35:6–8). Rather, this is an urgent attempt by Job to ensure that his declaration of innocence remains open to a confession of possible guilt, and consequently that the law of retribution remains open to forgiveness. Since Job's constant declarations of innocence do not result in the reward and salvation he expects, he makes this hypothetical appeal to God for forgiveness (the only way out of distress for sinners), insisting that his fortunes must change. It is thus clear that Job would openly admit his guilt and beg for God's forgiveness, if he were conscious he had committed any sin. In the final analysis, Job's speech is not motivated by the desire to be left alone in the moment before death, but rather by an attempt—for which he employs the most paradoxical way of appealing to him—to move God to action in his favour. He depicts his imminent end in the darkest colours in order to avert its fulfilment.[27]

The third case of confession is found within Ezra's response to a report concerning mixed marriages (Ezra 9:6–15) in the following form of confession: "O God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to thee, my God, for our iniquities *('āwônōtênû)* have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt *(wĕ'ašmātênû)* has mounted up to the heavens. From the days of our fathers to this day we have been in great guilt *('ašmāh);* and for our iniquities *(ûba'ăwônōtênû)* we, our kings, and our priests have been given into the hand of the kings of the lands ..." (vv. 6–7).

The passage from Neh 9:6–37 is a supplicatory prayer, which has a hymnic character. It is composed in rhythmic liturgical language and contains numerous stereotyped poetic elements from a variety of sources.[28] The pas-

[27] D. J. A. Clines, *Job 1–20* (WBC 17; Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1989), 192–195, and most other commentators probably do not go far enough in the search for the ultimate motives behind Job's speech.

[28] It is possible that Neh 9 refers to the Day of Atonement. J. Morgenstern, "The Chanukkah Festival and the Calendar of Ancient Israel," *HUCA* 20 (1947), 21, n. 34, makes the following observation: "... Neh 9:5–37 was originally a part of the established synagogue liturgy of the pre-Ezra period, in all likelihood of Rosh Ha-shanah, but later, in the Chronicler's own day, of Yom Kippur."

sage opens with an indication of the setting: the public expression of mourning and repentance by an assembly of the people, complete with time reference and encounter with the Law (vv. 1–3):

> Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth (cf. Dan 9:3; Jonah 3:5, 8; 1 Chr 21:16), and with earth upon their heads (cf. 1 Sam 4:12; 2 Sam 1:2; Job 2:12). And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers *(wayyitwaddû 'al-ḥaṭṭō'têhem wa'ăwônôt 'ăbōtêhem).* And they stood up in their place and read from the book of the law of the Lord their God for a fourth of the day; for another fourth of it they made confession and worshipped *(mitwaddîm ûmištaḥăwîm)* the Lord their God.

The prayer as a whole shows that these opening verses are central. The Levites summoned the people and recited a confession of Israel's sins.[29] The structure of the prayer falls into the following sections: a passage of praise (v. 5b); a confession in the form of an account of Israel's history (vv. 6–31); supplication (v. 32); a confession of present sin (vv. 33–35); and a lament (vv. 36–37). The historical passage contains the following traditional accounts: the Creation (v. 6); Abraham (vv. 7–8); the Exodus from Egypt (vv. 9–11); Israel's wandering in the wilderness (vv. 12, 15–21); the Sinaitic revelation (vv. 13–14); how Israel took possession of the Promised Land (vv. 22–25); the time of the Judges (vv. 26–29).[30]

The most striking feature of Neh 9 is a formulaic recital of God's attributes of mercy (vv. 17, 19, 27, 28, 31) and righteousness (vv. 8, 33). God's compassion or mercy is recalled in the manner of a recurring refrain. In parallel with God's attributes, the Levites repeatedly stress the failures of previous generations: "But they and our fathers acted presumptuously ..." (v. 16); "Yet they acted presumptuously and did not obey thy commandments, but sinned *(ḥāṭĕ'û)* against thy ordinances ..." (v. 29); "Yet thou hast been just *(wĕ'attāh ṣaddîq)* in all that has come upon us, for thou hast dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly *(kî-'ĕmet 'āśîtā wa'ănahnû hiršā'nû)* ..." (v. 33); "... and they did not turn from their wicked works" (v. 35); "And its rich yield goes to the kings, whom thou hast set over us because of our sins *(bĕḥaṭṭō'wtênû)* ..." (v. 37). The purpose of the confession is the repentance of the present generation, for it culminates in the conclusion of a new covenant: "Because of all this we make a firm covenant and write it, and our princes, our Levites, and our priests set their seal to it" (v. 38).

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[29] The Septuagint, however, has a gratuitous addition at v. 6a: "And Ezra said."

[30] For a more detailed analysis, other studies are useful, as are A. C. Welch, "The Source of Nehemiah IX," *ZAW* 6 (1929), 130–137; L. J. Liebreich, "The Impact of Nehemiah 9:5–37 on the Liturgy of the Synagogue," *HUCA* 32 (1961), 227–237.

4.2 *Passages Containing Three Nouns*

There are five passages containing three nouns in varying word sequences (Exod 34:7; Lev 16:21; 1QS 1:23; 11:9). In the formulaic threefold proclamation of the basic divine attributes in Exod 34:6–7, the singular form of the classical nouns is used to express God's forgiving nature: "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin *(nōśē' 'āwôn wāpeša' wĕḥaṭṭā'āh),* but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." The parallel passage at Num 14:18 omits the third term, but some manuscripts retain all three nouns.

Lev 16:21 is part of the statute of the Day of Atonement, and it contains the same nouns in the plural form: "And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins *(wĕhitwaddāh 'ālâw 'et-kol-'āwōnōt bĕnê yiśrā'ēl wĕ'et-kol-piš'êhem lĕkol-ḥaṭṭō'tām);* and he shall put them upon the head of the goat, and send him away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness."

In Ps 51:3–6 the psalmist prays to God for mercy and asks to be cleansed from sin, by confessing his sin and acknowledging the rightness of divine judgment:

> Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy steadfast love;
> according to thy abundant mercy blot out my transgressions *(pĕšā'āy).*
> Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity *(mē'āwônî),*
> and cleanse me from my sin *(mēḥaṭṭā'tî)*!
> For I know my transgressions *(pĕšā'ay),*
> and my sin *(wĕḥaṭṭā'tî)* is ever before me.
> Against thee, thee only, have I sinned *(lĕkā lĕbaddî ḥāṭā'tî),*
> and done that which is evil in thy sight,
> so that thou art justified *(lĕma'an tiṣdaq)* in thy sentence
> and blameless in thy judgment.

Note that the writer uses three nouns for sin as he begs to be cleansed of iniquity. Then he acknowledges his sin, using only two nouns to denote sin. Finally, he states that he has sinned against God, using the one main confessional verb. Since the heart of the confession is the statement *lĕkā lĕbaddî ḥāṭā'tî* (cf. David's confession in 2 Sam 12:13: *ḥāṭā'tî layhwh,* "I have sinned against the Lord"), it is entirely reasonable that the prime term *ḥāṭṭā'tî* should appear last in the preceding sections. The writer's theocentric understanding of sin leads him to maximize the poetic effect by gradually leading the reader through a series of other terms to a climax where the prominent term for sin *(ḥṭ')* is repeated. The word then recurs in vv. 7, 9, 11, 15. This explains the unconventional order of the three synonyms in vv. 3b–4.

The self-denying confession of sin has one important goal: the acknowledgment of divine judgment and the proclamation of God's holiness (v. 6). The deeper the darkness of human sin, the brighter the light of God's justice and holiness.[31]

In the *Rule of the Community* from Qumran the three synonyms are found in the same sequence. According to 1QS 1:23 the Levites shall enumerate "the iniquities of the sons of Israel and all their guilty transgressions and their sins *('t 'wwnwt bny yśr'l ukwl pš' 'šmtm wḥṭ'tm)* during the dominion of Belial." Within the final hymn on the righteousness of God (9:26–11:22), the speaker acknowledges his deceitful nature by declaring: "My iniquities, my transgressions, my sins *('wwnwty pš'y ḥṭ'ty),* as well as the perverseness of my heart (belong) to the assembly of maggots and of those who walk in darkness" (11:9).

4.3 *The Order of Terms Denoting Sin and Controversy in Later Jewish Sources*

Synonymous parallelism is the basic ideal form of Hebrew poetry and, by its nature, it encourages the creation of stereotyped word pairs. Unfortunately, most confessions appear in the prose sections and usually contain the one standard verb for sin derived from the root *ḥṭ'*. The first person singular of this word *(ḥāṭā'tî)* is the shortest and the most widely-used formula in individual confessions. The few passages containing two verbs or nouns show no preference for a stereotyped combination. We find combinations of verbal forms derived from the roots *ḥṭ'* and *rš'* (CD 20:28–29); *ḥṭ'* and *pš'* (1 Kgs 8:50; Dan 9:15); as well as nouns derived from *ḥṭ'* and *'wh* (Ps 32:5a; Neh 9:2); *rš'* and *'wh* (Jer 14:20); *pš'* and *ḥṭ'* (Ps 51:5); and we find the chiastic arrangement *'wh, 'šmh // 'šmh, 'wh* (Ezra 9:6–7).

This makes the threefold confessions all the more important. Since there are a fair number of cases where the same three verbs and nouns *(ḥṭ', 'wh, pš')* are combined, passages where they occur appear to be formulaic but not necessarily stereotyped, because they do not always appear in the same order and in the same literary genre. Most passages are confessions, some are declarations of divine attributes or human failures. Given the fact that there are more penitential passages containing just one term for sin than threefold confessions or declarations, the latter are emphatic in nature (cf. for instance the trishagion in Isa 6:3 and Ps 99). Once a threefold emphatic confession or declaration becomes stereotyped, the emphatic force is considerably diminished. Consequently, a particular writer may decide to expand the formula in order to gain more emphatic force (cf. Dan 9:5; cf. *Pesikta Rabbati* XXXV,

[31] This purpose is clear whether the particle *lēma'an* is understood as introducing the purpose clause or as an expression of consequence or result.

160b). The few passages containing two terms for sin may be considered as defective formulae, or as suitable pairs for the structure of synonymous parallelism, or special cases.

With respect to the order of terms, only two types of threefold confession appear. These are: *'wh, pš', ḥṭ'* and *ḥṭ', 'wh, pš'*. The first combination occurs in verbal forms (1QS 1:24–25; the Mishnah tractate *Yoma* 3:8; 4:2; 6:2) and in noun forms (Exod 34:7; Lev 16:21; 1QS 1:23; 11:9), while the second is found only in verbal forms (1 Kgs 8:47 [= 2 Chr 6:37]; Ps 106:6; Dan 9:5; Bar 1:12). In these biblical passages, however, the verb *rš'* stands instead of *pš'*. Dan 9:24 is an exception to the rule, for there are three nouns arranged in the following order: *peša', ḥaṭṭā'wt, 'ăwôn.* It is striking that the first combination is easily the more frequent of the two, occurring in an equal number of verbal and noun forms; while the second combination appears only in verbal forms. This fact is worthy of particular attention, because it shows that verbal forms for sin were used at an earlier date, with noun forms only appearing later on. This conclusion may primarily be drawn from the fact that the verb from the root *ḥṭ'* is used almost exclusively in penitential passages containing one term for sin. A natural tendency to expansion meant that other terms were gradually added. The order *ḥṭ', 'wh, pš'* appears to be older than the alternative *'wh, pš', ḥṭ'*. The way noun forms in threefold declarations or confessions are used may have its own logic. It is possible that, in parallel with a particular combination of verbs, another combination of nouns was in existence, for the passages in Exod 34:6 and Lev 16:21 may reflect a fairly ancient usage. However, they did not develop into a formulaic pattern.

The distribution of the two versions of the formula supports the conclusion that the ancient standard order was created for the service in the Temple of Jerusalem. The shift in the order of the threefold confession was evidently a result of a shift in emphasis. In the second century C.E., R. Meir defended the order given in Mishnah, but the Sages opposed his opinion and suggested the ancient biblical order, which is also given in the *Festival Prayer Book for the Day of Atonement.*[32] In the Babylonian Talmud the controversy between R. Meir and the Rabbis is recorded as follows:

> Our Rabbis taught: How does he make confession: I have done wrong, I have transgressed, I have sinned. Similarly, in connection with the he-goat to be sent away Scripture says: *And he shall confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, even all their sins.*[33] Similarly,

[32] For some basic information on the discussion, see A. Büchler, "Schechter's 'Jewish Sectaries,'" *JQR*.NS 3 (1912–1913), 455; B. M. Lewin, *Otzar ha-gaonim: Thesaurus of the Gaonic Responsa and Commentaries, Following the Order of the Talmudic Tractates,* vol. 6 (in Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1934), 18–20; J. M. Baumgarten, *HThR* 46 (1953), 158–159.

[33] Cf. Lev 16:21.

> with Moses, it says: *Forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin*[34]—these are the words of R. Meir. The Sages, however, say: 'Wrongs' are deliberate misdeeds, thus also does Scripture say: *That soul shall be utterly cut off, his wrong shall be upon him,*[35] 'transgressions' are rebellious deeds, as it is said: *The king of Moab hath transgressed against me;*[36] furthermore: *Then did Libnah transgress at the same time;*[37] 'sins' are inadvertent omissions, as it is said: *If any one shall sin through error.*[38]—Should he then, after having confessed the deliberate misdeeds and the rebellious deeds, turn back and confess inadvertent omissions? Rather, thus did he make confession: I have sinned, I have done wrong, I have transgressed before Thee, I and my house etc. Thus also does Scripture say in connection with David: *We have sinned with our fathers, we have done wrong, we have dealt wickedly.*[39] Thus also with Solomon: *We have sinned, and have done wrong, we have dealt wickedly.*[40] Thus also with Daniel: *We have sinned, and have dealt wrong, and have done wickedly.*[41] ... (Baraita *Yoma* 36b; cf. the Gemara, ibid.).[42]

Yoma 87b informs us that Mar Zutra referred to the standard ancient formula of "the main confession" (i.e., "Truly, we have sinned") when discussing conditions for making confession of sin on the Day of Atonement. But the controversy between R. Meir and the Rabbis regarding the order of the verbs denoting sin is also recorded in the *Tosefta* (2:1).

Another interesting record of the order of verbs for sin is found in the *Pesikta Rabbati* 35:160b, where God is represented as praising the people of Israel for their capacity to confess their sins:

> The Holy One, blessed be He, could say to the ministering angels: Come and I will make you know the valorous conduct of My children. Lo, I burdened them with ever so many troubles in this world, and I brought chastisements upon them in this world in each and every generation, yea, in each and every hour; yet they do not recoil rebelliously—rather they call themselves wicked *(rš'ym),* and even in the moment of their anguish at the hands of the unutterably wicked they speak of Me as "He who is righteous." Even in such a moment they speak as follows: "But in truth, we have sinned. We have committed crimes, we have done what is wrong *('nhnw ḥṭ'nw h'wynw hrš'nw),* we have transgressed, we have revolted, we have rebelled *(pš'nw mrdnw wmrynw).* We have turned aside from Thy commandments and ordinances *(wsrnw mmṣwtyk wmšptyk).* and our sinning has done us no good. Thou art righteous in all that has come upon us; for it is Thou who hast acted truly, and it is we who have done wrong."[43]

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[34] Cf. Exod 34:7.
[35] Cf. Num 15:31.
[36] Cf. 2 Kgs 3:7.
[37] Cf. 2 Kgs 8:22.
[38] Cf. Lev 4:2.
[39] Cf. Ps 106:6.
[40] Cf. 1 Kgs 8:47.
[41] Cf. Dan 9:5.
[42] The translation is taken from I. Epstein, *The Babylonian Talmud,* vol. 3 (London: Soncino, 1938), 168.
[43] The translation is taken from W. G. Braude, *Pesikta Rabbati* (New Haven, N.H. / Lon-

This passage excellently illustrates the way that additions to the formulaic confession arise from the desire to lay greater emphasis on the act of confession. The passage is unique in its concentration in one place of every possible verb, whereas elsewhere, the verbs appear individually or in limited combinations. But the reason for this multiplication of confessional terms is evident from the content of the passage as a whole. The emphasis is on the antithesis between the temptation to accuse God and the fact of doing the opposite: the strongest possible self-accusation by the people.

The ancient biblical order also recurs in Maimonides, even though he refers, in the Mishneh Torah, the Laws of the Day of Atonement Service (chap. 4, law 1), to the tradition about the role of the High Priest as reported in the Mishnah tractate *Yoma.* Maimonides writes that the High Priest "laid both his hands upon the head of the bullock and made confession *(mitwaddeh).* So he said: 'I pray, O Eternal! I have sinned, I have done wrong, I have transgressed before Thee, both I and my house *(ḥāṭā'tî 'āwîtî pāšā'tî lĕpānêkā 'ănî ûbêtî);* I pray, O Eternal! Forgive, I pray, the sins *(kapper nā' laḥăṭā'îm)* ...'"

The adoption of the order *ḥṭ', 'wh, pš'* in the main formula for confession did not affect the traditional freedom of choice as to which nouns denoting sin should be used, and in what order. Thus we find the other order of nouns in the Talmud of Jerusalem (*Yoma* 8, near the end). R. Berakhia emphasizes that the guilty person should confess his sin all the time and advises him to beg for God's forgiveness: ... *štkpr ly 'l kl pš'y utmḥwl ly 'l kl 'wnwty utslḥ ly 'l kl ḥṭ'ty,* "... that you may grant me atonement for all my transgressions, forgive all my iniquities, and pardon all my sins." The order of the terms for sin concurs with that of Ps 51:3–4. On the other hand, the Midrash Rabbah, in *Leviticus* 3:3, returns to the tradition preserved in Exod 34:7; Lev 16:21; 1QS 1:23–25; 11:9; and the Mishnah tractate *Yoma* 3:8; 4:2; 6:2 (favoured by R. Meir). Thus it uses nouns to denote sin in the report about the advice by R. Bibi b. Abaye, who said: "How should a person confess *(kêṣad ṣarîk 'ādām lĕhitwaddôt)* on the eve of the Day of Atonement?—He should say: 'I confess *(môdā')* all the evil I have done before Thee; I stood in the way of evil; and as for all [the evil] I have done, I shall no more do the like; may it be Thy will, O Lord my God, that Thou shouldst pardon me for all my iniquities, and forgive me for all my transgressions, and grant me atonement for all my sins *(šetimḥōl lî 'al kol 'ăwônôtay wĕtislaḥ lî 'al kol pĕšā'ay ûtĕkapper lî 'al kol ḥăṭā'ay).*'"[44]

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don: Yale University Press, 1968), 672.

[44] The translation is taken from J. Israelstam, *Midrash Rabbah* (ed. H. Freedman and M. Simon; London: Soncino, 1939, 1961), 37.

5. *Conclusion*

The change in confessional forms over the centuries is of great interest. The emphasis shifts according to context and historical circumstance. These shifts meant that even the main formulae for confession did not develop unchallenched. The way the simplest forms developed into the standard formula for confession can be traced with a fairly high degree of accuracy. Biblical passages containing three or more terms for Israel's defection do not present major dating difficulties. Solomon's prayer (1 Kgs 8:22–53) seems to be a mixture of late pre-exilic and early post-exilic elements. It is fairly generally agreed that Psalm 106 is to be placed in the early post-exilic period. There is no controversy about the dating of Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles and Daniel to well after the exile. Since the Dead Sea Scrolls are contemporaneous with the latest biblical books, it is hardly surprising that the themes of confession, the lessons of Israel's history and the need for forgiveness are common to all the passages I have cited. It appears that formulaic confession of sin reflects a conventional language, a common Jewish heritage of established phraseology, regularly employed to express confession of sin in differing situations and by means of various combinations. All penitential prayers are a mosaic of phrases taken either literally or with some freedom from older, common sources, probably synagogical prayers used in various forms.[45] The tradition of prayer explains the preservation of the main components in the long history from the pre-Christian centuries until today.

The Yom Kippur festival as reported in the Mishnah tractate *Yoma* is closely linked with the Temple Mount. The similarities between the Babylonian New Year's festival and Israel's Yom Kippur testify to the antiquity of these annual purgation rites for the sanctuaries in Babylon and Jerusalem; and they probably also indicate the common origin of the two festivals. The importance of the confession of sin and of penitence in the early prophetic literature suggests, however, the penitential character of the Yom Kippur festival, its central role in the rite and consequently also its antiquity. It is obvious that the stereotyped self-denying formula for confession is not original, for its language is general and not specific.[46] But its use may go

[45] See the statement by S. C. Reif, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer: New Perspectives on Jewish Liturgical History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 39: "What should perhaps be stressed about all these post-exilic prayers is that while certain individual aspects of the worship described may be found earlier it is only these late sources that contain lengthy and complex amalgams of so many such elements."

[46] See the view by J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16,* 1069–1070: "The vestiges of jubilation and merriment that survived in its observance even into rabbinic times make it doubtful that the element of 'self-denial' is original. Most likely it played an integral and indispensable role during the emergency situations declared by the high priest when he felt that divine punishment was imminent because the people's sins had polluted the sanctuary. When the high priest's pre-

back to a time well before the period for which documentation exists. Confessional prayers appear to be independent adaptations of a common source, in use either in synagogical or in Temple liturgy, and they appear to be much older than is generally thought.

One of the important shared elements of penitential passages is the verb *ydh* in the Hithpa'el form ('to make confession': Dan 9:20; Ezra 10:1; Neh 1:6; 9:2), elsewhere occurring only four times (Lev 5:5; 16:21; 26:40; Num 5:7). In Jer 14:20 and Ps 51:5 the verb *ydh* is replaced by the verb *yd'*. It is interesting that words denoting confession also appear in non-biblical penitential passages: in 1QS 1:24 in the Qal participle *(mwdym),* in the CD 20:28 in the Hithpa'el form *(ytwdw),* and in the Mishnah tractate *Yoma* in the Hithpa'el form *(mitwaddeh:* 3:8; 4:2; 6:2).[47] One of the most important issues is the linking of confession with a direct request for forgiveness and mercy (cf. Ps 51:3–5). The importance of confession as a precondition for mercy and forgiveness is emphasized in contrast to the concealment of sin (cf. Ps 32:3–5; Prov 28:13). But the primary purpose of confession is to witness to the power of God. This is the sense of Joshua's exhortation of Achan: "Give glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession to him *(wĕten-lô tôdāh)*" (Josh 7:19; cf. Ezra 10:11). Confessions must be seen against the background of two results of sin: separation from God and evil effects in the world. Forgiveness can re-establish union with God, but evil effects remain until they are confessed and atoned for in some way.

Another important feature is the frequent reference to the corporate personality, so that confession is extended to cover one's own house, the house of Israel, or the "fathers." In contrast to 1 Kgs 8:47 (2 Chr 6:37) and Dan 9:5, in all other passages where formulaic confession using three (or two) verbs appears, confession is made corporately. In Ps 106:6; Neh 9:2; 1QS 1:25; and CD 20:29, the "fathers" are included among sinners (cf. the book of *Jubilees* 1:22), while in the Mishnah tractate *Yoma* the High Priest confesses: "I have done wrong ..., both I and my house" (3:8); "I have done wrong ..., both I and my house and the children of Aaron Thy holy people" (4:2); "Thy people, the house of Israel, have done wrong ..." (6:2). Admission of sin for generations past also occurs in passages with one verb for sin (Jer 3:25; Neh 1:6) and in confessions using nouns for sin (Jer 14:20; Ezra

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rogative to declare an emergency 'whenever he chooses' was abrogated and the sanctuary's purgation was restricted to an annual observance 'once a year' on the tenth of Tishri, then the penitential characteristics of the emergency days were transferred to the annual day, thereby altering its nature from one of unrestrained joy to one of subdued optimism—that the purgation of the sanctuary, coupled with the people's repentance, as reflected in their acts of self-denial, would result in a blessed new year."

[47] Cf. also The Babylonian Talmud, *Yoma* 87b; Midrash Rabbah, *Leviticus* III,3; *Tosefta* regarding the Day of Atonement 2:1; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah:* The Laws of the Day of Atonement Service (chap. 4, law 1).

9:7; Neh 9:2; cf. Bar 1:16; 2:6, 33; 3:5, 7, 8). The frequent inclusion of the ancestors, whether they are mentioned generally or categorized in various ways, is the principal motive for the use of the first person plural in communal confession. When the writer uses the first person plural, thus including himself, he is encouraging his people to admit that it is apostasy that lies at the root of their painful situation; and he is seeking to induce them to make a frank and free confession.

PART THREE

THE LATTER PROPHETS

The writings of the latter prophets originated in a period of prolonged crises when the existence of Israel was threatened. The theme of judgment therefore dominates their texts to such an extent that the question of reward is only rarely raised. The severity of judgment sometimes seems to exclude any possibility of mercy and forgiveness. Rebellion against God has brought Israel to complete estrangement. The imminence of judgment against Israel echoes the final and universal judgment against the world as a whole. The greater the tendency among the prophets to view everything from a radically theocentric perspective, the greater the possibility that the history of Israel's desolation will open new hope of an eschatological redemption for Israel and other nations. Punishment and forgiveness are seen to be inextricably linked in the fulfilment of God's purpose for his people.

The suffering of the people under the oppressive rule of their own or foreign leaders has, nonetheless, some clearly positive effects: there are signs of a reassessment, repentance and a desire to return to God. In these circumstances, the prophets tend to emphasize the possibility of renewal. The prophesies of salvation contain the promise that God will show his people mercy, forgive their evil doing, renew the covenant, and lead them back to the Promised Land (see especially Hosea; Jer 30–32; Ezek 36:16–38; and Deutero-Isaiah). The forgiveness which Israel is offered before the exile seems inappropriate in view of the nation's lack of repentance. The message of forgiveness is, however, not related to a particular historical situation but to the redemptive plan of God for history as a whole. Israel will assume an important place beside Assyria and Egypt, it will account for God's blessing "in the midst of the earth" (Isa 19:16–25). The universal redemptive plan shatters all narrowness and resistance on the side of humankind because it is grounded in the nature of God as Creator (Jonah).

It is impossible to apply a uniform approach when dealing with the writings of the prophets. The basic literary method needs to be adjusted constantly to take into account the individual features of each book, section, and unit. A close reading of passages, however, raises some crucial questions: When, if ever, does a prophecy envisage condemnation as final and total? What is the place and the role of the righteous remnant in this scheme?

CHAPTER XIV

DELIVERANCE OF THE REMNANT FROM JUDGMENT IN THE PROPHECY OF ISAIAH

In the prophecy of Isaiah all human history, past, present and future, is viewed in the light of God's transcendent holiness and majesty. The focus of the prophet is, first and last, therefore, upon the providence of God. The Lord, he proclaims to the people, is trustworthy. He will save those who believe in him. This theological understanding is the reason for the prophet's strong reactions to Israel's pride, pretence, and trust in the nations at critical historical moments. When the disbelief of the people, especially of their ruling class, was evident, when there was no room for repentance, cleansing, and ethical obedience, Isaiah's response was the announcement of total destruction. This fact is one of the chief reasons why it is sometimes very difficult to determine the provenance of the prophecies dealing with the future deliverance of the people.[1]

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[1] Amongst commentaries on the book of Isaiah, see especially F. Delitzsch, *Biblischer Commentar über den Prophet Jesaia* (BC III/1; Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1866); English translation by J. Martin, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah,* 2 vols. (CFThL IV/14–15; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1867); B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaia* (HK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1892, 1968); T. K. Cheyne, *Introduction to the Book of Isaiah* (London: A & C. Black, 1895); K. Marti, *Das Buch Jesaja* (KHC 10; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1900); G. B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah I–XXVII* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912); O. Procksch, *Jesaia,* vol. 1 (KAT 9; Leipzig: D. W. Scholl, 1930); E. J. Kissane, *The Book of Isaiah,* vol. 1 (Dublin: Browne & Nolan, 1941); R. B. Y. Scott, G. G. D. Kilpatrick, J. Muilenburg, and H. S. Coffin, *The Book of Isaiah* (IntB 5; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1956), 151–773; A. Penna, *Isaia* (SB; Turin / Rome: Marietti, 1958); O. Kaiser, *Der Prophet Jesaja: Kapitel 1–12* (ATD 17; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960, 1970); idem, *Der Prophet Jesaja: Kapitel 13–39* (ATD 18; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973); English translation by J. Bowden, *Isaiah 1–12: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1972; 2nd ed. completely rewritten 1983); R. A. Wilson, *Isaiah 13–39: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1974); P. H. Kelley, *The Broadman Bible Commentary,* vol. 5 (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1971); P. Auvray, *Isaïe 1–39* (SB; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1972); A. S. Herbert, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah: Chapters 1–39* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); H. Wildberger, *Jesaja,* 3 vols. (BK.AT X/1–3; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1972–1982); R. E. Clements, *Isaiah 1–39* (NCBC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1980); J. D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33* (WBC 24; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985); J. N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39* (NIC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 1986); A. Gileadi, *The Literary Message of Isaiah* (New York, N.Y.: Hebraeus Press, 1994); J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1994); J. Manley (ed.), *Isaiah through the Ages* (Menlo Park, Calif.: Monastery Books, 1995); J. Barton, *Isaiah 1–39* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); E. Bosshard-Nepustil, *Jesaja 1–39 und das "Zwölfprophetenbuch" in exilischer und frühnachexilischer Zeit: Redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur literarischen Vernetzung der Prophetenbücher* (Zurich: Zentralstelle der Studentenschaft, 1995); idem, *Rezeptionen von Jesaia 1–39 im Zwölfprophetenbuch: Untersuchungen zur literarischen Verbindung von Prophetenbüchern in babylonischer und persischer Zeit* (OBO 154; Freiburg,

The present study will be limited to the three sections that pronounce the threat of judgment in the Isaianic parts of Isa 1–39: chapters 1–12; 13–23; and 28–33. The "Great Apocalypse" (chaps. 24–27), the "Little Apocalypse" (chaps. 34–35), and the Isaiah Narratives (chaps. 36–39) do not belong to this framework. From the first section chapters 1, 6, and 7:1–17 deserve special attention in view of their importance in Isaiah's prophetic experience and preaching, and in the textual history of the book of Isaiah.

1. *Isaiah's Commission to Prevent Repentance and Announce Destruction (6:1–13)*

It is generally held that the account of Isaiah's call in chapter 6 contains essentials of the prophet's entire message, shaping and defining the book as a whole. It is therefore natural that this chapter should have drawn the attention of many scholars.[2] The account falls into three parts: a vision of God (vv. 1–4); the effect of the vision on the prophet (vv. 5–8); and the giving of the divine commission (vv. 9–13).

It is obvious that v. 3 plays a key role in the whole chapter. Above the Lord stood the seraphim, calling to each other:

> Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;
> the whole earth is full of his glory.

The threefold *holy* is the strongest form of the superlative in Hebrew.[3] Its

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Switzerland: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997); M. A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39: With an Introduction to Prophetic Literature* (FOTL 16; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 1996); H.-M. Pfaff, *Die Entwicklung des Restgedankens in Jesaja 1–39* (EHS.Th 561; Frankfort on the Main: P. Lang, 1996); B. G. Webb, *The Message of Isaiah: On Eagles' Wings* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1996); U. Becker, *Jesaja—von der Botschaft zum Buch* (FRLANT 178; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997); U. Berges, *Das Buch Jesaja: Komposition und Endgestalt* (HBS 16; Freiburg im Breisgau / Basel / Vienna: Herder, 1998).

[2] For discussion of the problems relating this chapter, see besides the commentaries cited especially I. P. Seierstad, *Die Offenbarungserlebnisse der Propheten Amos, Jesaja und Jeremia: Eine Untersuchung der Erlebnisvorgänge unter besonderer Berücksichtigung ihrer religiös-sittlichen Art und Auswirkung* (SNVAO II/2; Oslo: Commisjon hos Jacob Dybward, 1946); I. Engnell, *The Call of Isaiah: An Exegetical and Comparative Study* (UUÅ 4; Uppsala: A.-B. Lundequistska Bokhandeln; Leipzig: O. Harrassowitz, 1949); E. Jenni, "Jesajas Berufung in der neueren Forschung," *ThZ* 15 (1959), 321–339; C. Whitley, "The Call and Mission of Isaiah," *JNES* 18 (1959), 38–48; N. Habel, "The Form and Significance of the Call Narratives," *ZAW* 77 (1965), 297–323; K. Baltzer, "Considerations regarding the Office and Calling of the Prophet," *HThR* 61 (1968), 567–581; R. Knierim, "The Vocation of Isaiah," *VT* 18 (1968), 47–68; O. H. Steck, "Bemerkungen zu Jesaja 6," *BZ* 16 (1972), 188–206; K. Gouders, "Die Berufung des Propheten Jesaja (Jes. 6,1–13)," *BiLe* 13 (1972), 89–106, 172–184; G. Meagher, "The Prophetic Call Narrative," *IThQ* 39 (1972), 164–177; G. F. Hasel, *The Remnant: The History and Theology of the Remnant Idea from Genesis to Isaiah* (AUMSR 5; 2nd ed.; Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1974), esp. pp. 233–250.

[3] There are, however, some reasons for uncertainty whether this is the original reading. See N. Walker, "The Origin of the 'Thrice-Holy,'" *NTS* 5 (1959), 132–133; B. M. Leiser, "The

use shows that Isaiah perceives in the Lord the Holy One, the only absolute God. This is confirmed by the unique status of the appellative "the Holy One of Israel/Jacob" in the book of Isaiah.[4] The broader context of all passages shows that the holiness of God means the distinctiveness of the divine character and activity from all other things. The Holy One is the absolutely upright, the utterly true God.[5]

Having seen the Holy One, Isaiah becomes aware of himself and of his people. The vision intensifies his consciousness of sin; it has such an effect on him that he must pronounce upon himself the woe that is usually reserved for others. In v. 5 he says:

> Woe is me *('ôy-lî)!* For I am lost *(kî nidmêtî);* for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!

The verb *dāmāh* II means like *dmm,* 'to be silent, still'; in Niph'al 'to be silenced, be dumb.' Isaiah is aware that no human being may stand before the holy God. All the tragedy of his own being and of a disobedient people is revealed to him when he faces the mirror of divine holiness. Both he and his people are men of "unclean lips" because their character is contrary to God's will and nature. In Isaiah's cry of despair is apparent an expectation of God's judgment. Isaiah does not plead for mercy; nevertheless he achieves purification through the intervention of a heavenly being. Out of the smoke comes a seraph having in his hand a burning coal, who touches the prophet's mouth, and says (v. 7):

> Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven *(wĕsār 'ăwônekā wĕḥaṭṭā'tĕkā tĕkuppār).*

Through sovereign divine intervention the prophet's sinfulness and guilt are removed; Isaiah is then qualified for the role of emissary-prophet.

But something unexpected follows. Isaiah's commission is not to announce to the people what he himself has experienced; he is not sent to preach the forgiveness and healing of a sinful people, but the diametric opposite. His task is to render them blinder, deafer, and more insensitive. The divine command in vv. 9–10 says:

Trisagion of Isaiah's Vision," *NTS* 6 (1960), 261–263; N. Walker, "Disagion Versus Trisagion: A Copyist Defended," *NTS* 7 (1961), 170–171.

[4] This name for God occurs thirteen times in the book of Proto-Isaiah, eleven times in the book of Deutero-Isaiah, and only eight times elsewhere: 2 Kgs 19:22 (= Isa 37:23); Isa 1:4; 5:19, 24; 10:20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19, 23; 30:11, 12, 15; 31:1; 37:23; 41:14, 16, 20; 43:3, 14; 45:11; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5; 55:5; 60:9, 14; Jer 50:29; 51:5; Pss 71:22; 78:41; 89:19. In Ezek 39:7 there appears the formulation "the Holy One in Israel."

[5] See H. Ringgren, *The Prophetical Conception of Holiness* (UUÅ 12; Uppsala: A.-B. Lundequistska Bokhandeln; Leipzig: O. Harrassowitz, 1948); J. Krašovec, "Božja in človeška svetost v Izaijevem preroškem svetu," *BV* 33 (1973), 48–59.

Go, and say to this people:
"Hear and hear *(šim'û šāmôa')*, but do not understand;
see and see *(ûrĕ'û rā'ô)*,[6] but do not perceive."
Make the heart of this people fat,
and their ears heavy,
and shut their eyes;
lest they see with their eyes,
and hear with their ears,
and understand with their hearts,
and turn and be healed *(wāšāb wĕrāpā' lô)*.

Such an ironical declaration presents a challenge to any commentator.[7] Needless to say, no explanation can be satisfactory if we do not accept as a background the usual biblical axiom that God desires the reform and deliverance of the chosen people. The divine declaration indicates what must be done for the redemption of the people at a moment when there are no longer any prospects of success. God sees that the obduracy of the people is already complete and irrevocable; nevertheless he still sends a prophet to proclaim the penitence that is the sole possible route to life. By doing so he unintentionally achieves an intensification of human blindness, sealing the death sentence. The effect of one's shutting himself off in his own wisdom and values is such that his stubbornness only increases whenever this attitude is questioned and its dire end becomes evident. This demonstrates that the divine sentence is completely justified—or rather, that the people have in fact condemned themselves.[8]

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[6] For this use of the infinitive absolute after the verb, see W. Gesenius, E. Kautzsch, and G. Bergsträsser, *Hebräische Grammatik* (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1962), § 113r; English edition by E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910, 1980), § 113r. The infinitive absolute strengthens the main verb and expresses the long continuance of an action.

[7] See the statement by E. M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (London: S.P.C.K., 1965), 136: "The prophet is commanded, as it were, to be an antiprophet, to do the opposite of what a prophet does."

[8] It is surprising that the Septuagint places the full responsibility for obduracy directly on the people. And this version appears also in Matt 13:14–15 and Ac 28:26–27:

You shall indeed hear but never understand,
and you shall indeed see but never perceive.
For this people's heart has grown dull,
and their ears are heavy of hearing,
and their eyes they have closed,
lest they should perceive with their eyes,
and hear with their ears,
and understand with their heart,
and turn for me to heal them.

There is an especially good explanation of this passage in the Hebrew Bible in F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, vol. 1, 200–201: "The commission which the prophet received, reads as though it were quite irreconcilable with the fact that God, as the Good, can only will what is good. But our earlier doctrinarians have suggested the true solution, when they affirm that God does not harden men *positive aut effective*, since His true will and

Isaiah's reaction to God's commission is succinct; he uses a form for the opening of laments: *'ad-mātay 'ădōnāy,* "How long, O Lord?" (6:11a). The prophet evidently cannot accept that the people are to be totally ruined and therefore inquires how long the hardening of heart will continue. His cry implies a request for mercy on the people. The divine answer to Isaiah's cry remains, however, in accordance with the commission given in previous verses. In 6:11b–13 we read:

> Until cities lie waste
> without inhabitant,
> and houses without men,
> and the land is utterly desolate,
> and the Lord removes men far away,
> and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.
> And though a tenth remain in it *(wĕ'ôd bāh 'āśīriyyāh),*
> it will be burned again,
> like a terebinth or an oak,
> whose stump remains standing
> when it is felled.

The holy seed is its stump *(zera' qōdeš maṣṣabtāh).* With this the solemn sequence of divine utterances achieves its climactic conclusion. Isaiah speaks within a definite time and for a specific generation, which has evidently signed its own death warrant. He probably senses the universal guilt of the people and consequently the inevitability of the sequence of cause (obduracy) and effect (destruction).

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direct work are man's salvation, but *occasionaliter et eventualiter,* since the offers and displays of salvation which man receives necessarily serve to fill up the measure of his sins, and *judicialiter* so far as it is the judicial will of God, that what was originally ordained for man's salvation should result after all in judgment, in the case of any man upon whom grace has ceased to work, because all its ways and means have been completely exhausted. It is not only the loving will of God which is good, but also the wrathful will into which His loving will changes, when determined and obstinately resisted. There is a self-hardening in evil, which renders a man thoroughly incorrigible, and which, regarded as the fruit of his moral behaviour, is no less a judicial punishment inflicted by God, than self-induced guilt on the part of man. The two are bound up in one another, inasmuch as sin from its very nature bears its own punishment, which consists in the wrath of God excited by sin. For just as in all the good that men do, the active principle is the love of God, so in all the harm that they do, the active principle is the wrath of God. An evil act in itself is the result of self-determination proceeding from a man's own will; but evil, regarded as the mischief in which evil acting quickly issues, is the result of the inherent wrath of God, which is the obverse of His inherent love; and when a man hardens himself in evil, it is the inward working of God's peremptory wrath. To this wrath Israel had delivered itself up through its continued obstinacy in sinning. And consequently the Lord now proceeded to shut the door of repentance against His people. Nevertheless He directed the prophet to preach repentance, because the judgment of hardness suspended over the people as a whole did not preclude the possibility of the salvation of individuals." See further the different opinions of the following scholars: F. Hesse, *Das Verstockungsproblem im Alten Testament* (BZAW 74; Berlin: A. Töpelmann, 1955), esp. pp. 83–91; A. F. Key, "The Magical Background of Isaiah 6:9–13," *JBL* 86 (1967), 198–204; J. M. Schmidt, "Gedanken zum Verstockungsauftrag Jesajas (Is. VI)," *VT* 21 (1971), 68–90.

Because of the temporal limitation and restriction to the present generation, the passage, despite the absoluteness of its sentence, is not sealed off from the characteristic biblical message of divine mercy and redemption. The opposite is the case.[9] The text is a particularly effective divine call to obedience and redemption for all future generations. In disclosing the reason for the destruction of a particular generation, it points to the actual and only possibility of life for generations yet to come, which is that humans must cling to undivided fidelity to the Creator, and must change their attitude and seek the ways of God. Isaiah himself has been saved, since he desired his own renewal and submitted himself to divine guidance.

Future generations enter the reckoning, however, only if the present generation survives. There would be no point to the commissioning of a prophet and his words would be empty if the destruction of the present generation is so complete that not a single member of it survives. The most conspicuous example of a "remnant" is Isaiah himself and his family. He was purified by the wonder of divine grace and destined to testify to the greatness of God's mercy. In a period of widespread stubbornness and inevitable destruction the prophet himself is therefore the most incontestable proof that God's judgment does not mean total destruction. It also suggests that the prophet was probably not the only one who remained open to the manifestation of God's will and who was therefore saved by his grace. All such exceptions to the general rule are a sign of hope for the future.[10] It is therefore very appropriate that the chapter should end with a prediction of the "holy seed" that will spring forth to new life out of the "tenth" and the "stump" of a terebinth or an oak that remains after felling. If these words are a later addition, as some scholars assume, they are fully in accordance with the inner logic of Isaiah's commission.[11] How natural it is to expect new life even after the felling of a tree is clearly expressed in Job 14:7–9:

> For there is hope for a tree,
> if it be cut down, that it will sprout again,

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[9] See the statement by A. F. Key, "The Magical Background of Isaiah 6:9–13," *JBL* 86 (1967), 204: "All this does not mean that prophetic thought gave up the idea that repentance could lead to forgiveness. The prophet is simply saying that the time for repentance is past, the day of judgment has now come, and there is nothing anyone can do about it ... The speaking of the prophetic words is not a call for repentance, but a signal for the beginning of God's action."

[10] See the statement by F. Hesse, *Das Verstockungsproblem im Alten Testament,* 89–90: "Die Verstockung ist doch nicht so total wie es nach Jes 6,9f. scheint. Daß die Verstockung nie, auch nicht in der dunklen Gegenwart, alle umgreift, macht ein Stück wie Jes 8,18–20 deutlich: Die Prophetenfamilie mit der Jüngerschaft ist Kern des echten Gottesvolkes, Typus des zukünftigen Restes, niemals der Verstockung anheimgefallen. So ist der Prophet selber also erster Repräsentant des Restes." G. F. Hasel argues Similarly, *The Remnant,* 243: "... So the prophet himself may be considered the proleptic representative of the future remnant, because he was confronted by Yahweh's 'holiness' and emerged as a cleansed and purified individual."

[11] The concluding words of v. 13, "The holy seed is its stump," are lacking from some manuscripts of the Septuagint, but they are included in 1QIs[a].

and that its shoots will not cease.
Though its root grow old in the earth,
and its stump die in the ground,
yet at the scent of water it will bud
and put forth branches like a young plant.

But the prophet and other possible righteous representatives of the faithful people are not the only reason for hope that obduracy was not the end of the story. The important aspect of God's activity in the world is its positive aim and the positive effect of divine judgment. God destroys in order to rebuild. G. F. Hasel argues: "The 'holy seed' is holy only after the cleansing experience brought about by a confrontation with the divine holiness analogous to the confrontation and cleansing experience of Isaiah. After the annihilation of the nation a holy people will sprout from the remaining root stock. It will be holy, for it has experienced cleansing judgment. Because of this experience it will stand in the right relationship of faith, trust and obedience to the Lord. It will then be the vehicle of election."[12]

2. *Signs of Deliverance and Judgment (7:1–17)*

This famous passage from the time of the Syro-Ephraimite war (735–733) falls into two parts: the sign of Shear-jashub (vv. 1–9); and the sign of Immanuel (vv. 10–17).[13] After 738 Judah and Israel were brought directly under Assyrian domination. Pekah, king of Israel, and Rezin, king of Syria, attempted to persuade Ahaz, king of Judah, to join them in an anti-Assyrian coalition. Ahaz refused, and Pekah and Rezin planned to replace him by force with a certain "ben Tabe-el" (cf. 2 Kgs 16:5; Isa 7:1–9). From 2 Kgs 16:7–9 we learn that Ahaz turned to Tiglath-pileser III for aid: "So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, saying, 'I am your servant and your son. Come up, and rescue me from the hand of the king of Syria and from the hand of the king of Israel, who are attacking me.' Ahaz also took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the Lord and in the treasures of the king's house, and sent a present to the king of Assyria. And the king of Assyria hearkened to him; the king of Assyria marched up against Damascus, and took it, carrying its people captive to Kir, and he killed Rezin."

These manoeuvres by Ahaz provoke the prophet Isaiah, who begins with

[12] See *The Remnant*, 247.

[13] For general questions concerning this passage, see especially M. Saebø, "Formgeschichtliche Erwägungen zu Jes. 7:3–9," *StTh* 14 (1960), 54–69; O. H. Steck, "Rettung und Verstockung: Exegetische Bemerkungen zu Jesaja 7,3–9," *EvTh* 33 (1973), 77–90; T. Lescow, "Jesajas Denkschrift aus der Zeit des syrisch-ephraimitischen Krieges," *ZAW* 85 (1973), 315–331; H.-P. Müller, "Glauben und bleiben: Zur Denkschrift Jesajas Kapitel VI 1–VIII 18," *Studies on Prophecy* (VT.S 26; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), 25–54.

an exhortation not to fear the two attackers from the north, for a wicked design cannot succeed. When Ahaz's heart and the heart of his people "shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind" (Isa 7:2) the Lord said to Isaiah how King Ahaz should act (7:3–9). The first major feature of this account is the fact that the prophet was commanded to take his son Shear-jashub with him when he went forth to meet the king. The reason for that order is obviously the prophetic significance of the name, which was at that moment well suited to form part of Isaiah's message to the distressed king. Seeing the boy, the king would recall his name and its significance. The practice of naming a child as a prophetic symbol is also documented in Hos 1:6, 9 and Isa 8:3. That the names have a symbolic significance is clear from Isa 8:18: "Behold, I and the children whom the Lord has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the Lord of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion." The present passage does not specify what the significance of the name was, so it is understandable that scholars differ on the question of how it is to be translated. The name seems to be a sentence with a subject-predicate sequence of elements and means: "A (the) remnant will return." This in turn has two possible meanings: a) "Only a remnant will return"; or b) "At least a remnant will return." Again, it is not clear whether the "remnant" is already a historical reality or not: the sentence can refer to the present, or to the near or remote future. The sequence of elements matters little because subject and predicate are equally important.[14] The emphasis is, however, more clearly placed on the subject "remnant" if the syntactical structure is understood as a relative sentence which should be translated: "The remnant that returns (will return)."[15] In that case one would naturally be even more inclined to translate the name: "There is a remnant that returns (will return)." Such a translation can suggest that the remnant is already there and that at least the prophet and his family are its representatives.[16]

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[14] See the statement by J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1962), 424, n. 3: "... both terms are equally significant: there will be a remnant, and this remnant will return."

[15] L. Koehler, "Syntactica II: שאר ישוב und der nackte Relativsatz," *VT* 3 (1953), 84–87, states that in Hebrew syntax the subject is placed after the predicate in the independent simple clause; therefore he thinks that the syntactical structure of this name is a "nackter Relativsatz" with the meaning "Der Rest, der umkehrt." G. F. Hasel, "Linguistic Considerations regarding the Translation of Isaiah's *Shear-jashub:* A Reassessment," *AUSS* 9 (1971), 36–46, disagrees with Koehler on the basis of Hebrew and other West Semitic onomastics and states that the sequence predicate-subject is not fixed. He goes too far, however, when he totally rejects Koehler's view and without any valid linguistic argument places emphasis on the subject.

[16] See A. H. J. Gunneweg, "Heils- und Unheilsverkündigung in Jes. VII," *VT* 15 (1965), 27–34. Gunneweg follows L. Koehler and says on p. 28: "Der Name ist hier niemals nur Bezeichnung, sondern wie einer heißt, so ist er. Schear-jaschub heißt also nicht nur so, sondern ist selber Teil jenes schon in Israel existierenden Restes, der umkehrt ... Das Mitnehmen von Schear-jaschub meint also nicht eine Unterstreichung des gesprochenen Wortes, sondern ist als symbolische Handlung komplementär zu der mündlichen Verkündigung und hat einen Aussagegehalt, der nicht auch schon in den zu Ahas gesprochenen Worten enthalten ist. Wenn dem

The indefiniteness of the context of the passage and the uncertainty attending the translation and interpretation of Shear-jashub confirm the impression that the meaning of this name can best be determined in the light of the main emphases of Isaiah's overall message.[17] This broader perspective helps to determine the meaning of the verb *šwb*. Does it indicate the return from battle or captivity? Does it imply the theological meaning "to repent, to (re)turn to God"? The "religious" character of the root *šwb* in West Semitic literatures and the theological background of Isaiah's prophecy support the conclusion that a return to Yahweh, rather than a return from a war or exile, is meant in the name of Isaiah's son.[18]

The theological interpretation fits the immediate context best, for there we find the key to the basic belief and understanding of Isaiah in the contrast between trust in the nations and trust in God. The passage does not mention this contrast on a theoretical level but concerns itself with the most fundamental theological principles or postulates. Using an actual example of the behaviour of responsible persons in a particularly critical situation, it illuminates questions of principle about the ultimate possibilities of philosophical-theological reflection and about the ultimate results of human activities. Ahaz has an opportunity to trust God for deliverance and should not turn to the Assyrians for assistance, for they too will lay waste to his kingdom. In such a situation Isaiah sees the possibility of deliverance as lying only in total trust in divine aid. The life or death of Jerusalem depends upon the faith (or lack of it) of its inhabitants. In vv. 4 and 9 Isaiah utters the most unambiguous demand for faith in ancient Israel: "Take heed, be quiet *(hiššāmēr wĕhašqēṭ),* do not fear ..." (7:4; cf. 28:12; 30:15); the word-play sums up the whole issue *'im lō' ta'ămînû kî lō' tē'āmēnû,* literally: "If you do not firm up, surely you will not be confirmed." Without doubt this principle is the pivot of the whole passage

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so ist, ergibt sich die Notwendigkeit, den Abschnitt VV 1–9 zu deuten unter Berücksichtigung des komplementären Verhältnisses von symbolischer Handlung und gesprochenem Wort. Und zwar: Vor Ahas stehen zeichenhaft die Repräsentanten des Restes ..." On p. 32 he says: "Damit ist zugleich auch etwas gesagt über eine mögliche Identifizierung des Immanuel. Er ist zu suchen im Jesajakreis, innerhalb des Restes."

[17] See especially J. M. P. Smith, "שאר ישוב," *ZAW* 34 (1914), 219–224; S. H. Blank, "The Current Misinterpretation of Isaiah's *She'ar Yashub,*" *JBL* 67 (1948), 211–215; E. W. Heaton, "The Root שאר and the Doctrine of the Remnant," *JThS* 3 (1952), 27–39; F. Dreyfus, "La doctrine du reste d'Israël chez le prophète Isaïe," *RSPhTh* 39 (1955), 361–386; S. H. Blank, "Traces of Prophetic Agony in Isaiah," *HUCA* 27 (1956), 81–92; U. Stegemann, "Der Restgedanke bei Isaias," *BZ* 13 (1969), 161–186; G. F. Hasel, *The Remnant,* esp. pp. 270–301: "The Remnant Motif in Isaiah's Career During the Syro-Ephraimite War (734–733 B.C.)"; J. Day, "Shear-jashub (Isaiah VII 3) and the Remnant of Wrath (Psalm LXXVI 11)," *VT* 31 (1981), 86–88.

[18] See W. L. Holladay, *The Root šûbh in the Old Testament: With Particular Reference to Its Usages in Covenantal Contexts* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958), 9, where he states that Amorite personal names compounded with the root *šwb* and Proto-Sinaitic inscriptions involved a "religious" usage of this root. See also G. F. Hasel, *AUSS* 9 (1971), 45. For the opposite view, see especially the statement by S. H. Blank, *JBL* 67 (1948), 15: "'Return' in this context means only: 'come back alive,' from a war undertaken against God's will."

as well as the key to understanding Isaiah's entire theology of divine and human righteousness with their appropriate consequences.[19] In the present situation it means negatively that Ahaz should maintain his strict neutrality, and positively that he should rely fully upon God and thus be at his best even though there is no guarantee of a favourable outcome. The presence of Isaiah's son Shear-jashub should help to persuade the king that the only way to deliverance is repentance and a return to God.[20]

The second part of chapter 7 (vv. 10–17) is closely related to the first, although it evidently deals with a second encounter between Isaiah and Ahaz. In 7:10–11 we read:

> Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, "Ask a sign *('ôt)* of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven *(ha'mēq šĕ'ālāh*[21] *'ô hagbēah lĕmā'lāh)*."

The sentence "let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven" is a classical example of merism, i.e., of expressing totality through opposites. The meaning is: "let it be anything at all."[22] Once we perceive that the sentence has this quite general meaning, it becomes much easier to understand the word "sign." A sign may indicate a quite ordinary event, or one that is extraordinary or miraculous. The emphasis is not placed on the nature of the sign, however, but on the quality of belief. The Lord is the absolute and only source of Israel's existence. Thus, in principle, it is impossible to arrive at any conclusion other than that survival or destruction is dependent upon faithfulness or unfaithfulness to him—a conclusion that is especially important when it seems that the Lord has abandoned his people, as no sign of his aid is visible. The principle of divine absoluteness and the indisputable fact of human limitedness add up to only one possible conclusion: in a time of crisis humans must

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[19] See especially C. A. Keller, "Das quietistische Element in der Botschaft Jesajas," *ThZ* 11 (1955), 81–97; R. Smend, "Zur Geschichte von האמין," *Hebräische Wortforschung: Festschrift zum 80. Geburtstag von Walter Baumgartner* (VT.S 16; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 284–290; H. Wildberger, "'Glauben': Erwägungen zu האמין," *Hebräische Wortforschung*, 372–386; idem, "'Glaube' im Alten Testament," *ZThK* 65 (1968), 129–159.

[20] See the statement by G. F. Hasel, *The Remnant*, 284–285: "The name Shear-jashub is in this connection an exhortation to king and people for an unconditional return to Yahweh in faith ... The salvation of the remnant will depend on the decision to return to Yahweh in faith. In other words faith is the *criterium distinctionis* between the surviving remnant and the perishing masses."

[21] The parallelism with *lĕmā'lāh* and the Septuagint's *eis báthos* suggest the conclusion that *šĕ'ālāh* should not be understood as an imperative but as a locative of *šĕ'ōl*. The transition from *o* to *a* is due to the pause—see E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, § 29u.

[22] The meristic function of this sentence was well perceived by F. Delitzsch, who says in *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, 214: "This offer of the prophet to perform any kind of miracle, either in the world above or in the lower world, has thrown rationalistic commentators into very great perplexity." See also R. E. Clements, *Isaiah 1–39*, 87: "The phrase *let it be deep as Sheol* is an obvious hyperbole, meaning 'let it be anything at all.'" For merism in general, see J. Krašovec, *Der Merismus im Biblisch-Hebräischen und Nordwestsemitischen* (BibOr 33; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1977).

be even more than ordinarily self-critical and must truly trust in divine assistance. When the matter is one of life or death, when a nation hopes against hope, then impotence of humans to save themselves is most clearly revealed. It follows that he must act only in utter loyalty to the divine wisdom and to a power that raises even the dead to life. Innumerable examples indicate that human beings can make fatal mistakes if they trust too much in their own capabilities. The facts of their limited nature and of their universally doubtful conduct provide indisputable proof, backed by experience, that the demand for belief in God in a critical situation is not only justifiable but absolutely necessary.

Self-will, from which faith could have safeguarded him, is the reason why Ahaz declines Isaiah's offer. His answer is hypocritical, even though it formally complies with the prohibition on putting the Lord to the test in Deut 6:16. The king says: "I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test" (v. 12). This excuse would have been justified only if Isaiah had proposed to him that he should ask from the Lord a sign that was specific in form and time. But Ahaz did not want some general sign of deliverance in accordance with God's providence because he sought no solution other than the one he himself had devised. Ahaz's mind was obviously made up. He was firmly determined to pursue his own policy.

Isaiah's answer in 7:13–17 is resolute and significant, even though its key elements are not precisely stated. The first sentence is a direct criticism of Ahaz's lack of faith, which "wearies" God as well as those faithful people who had expected a different decision from the king. By his use of the possessive pronoun in the first person "you weary *my* God" (cf. the expression "your God" in 7:11), Isaiah clearly indicates that the king has already rejected the true God of promise and fulfilment. Therefore the question of whether this is the sign God intended to give when he commanded that Ahaz should ask for a sign is not really relevant. In any case the emphasis is placed on the salvation of Israel when it was a matter of life or death. It is, however, an indisputable truth that every sign of salvation "may well mean weal and woe together. To the extent that we are dependent upon him, his presence results in blessing; but to the extent that we refuse to depend upon him, his presence is an embarrassment and a curse. Both realities are implicit in his presence."[23] It is virtually a matter of principle that the sign of the sovereign God means salvation for the people and the threat of punishment for the unbelieving king, as most scholars point out.[24]

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[23] See J. N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39*, 209.

[24] See for instance the statement by F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, 220: "The sign in question was, on the one hand, a mystery glaring in the most threatening manner upon the house of David; and, on the other hand, a mystery smiling with rich consolation upon the prophet and all believers, and couched in these enigmatical terms, in order that those who hardened themselves might not understand it, and that believers might in-

Was Ahaz able to see immediately the saving and condemnatory character of the sign of Immanuel in the same way as Isaiah saw it? The history of the interpretation of 7:14 offers the clearest answer to this question. Those who are, like Ahaz, looking for one specific meaning of the sign in a particular historical situation probably miss its point.

Down the centuries commentators have concentrated on answering two questions: to whom does Isaiah refer and what does the sign signify? The dogmatic or traditional Christian interpretation is dominated by the use of Isa 7:14 in Matt 1:23, where Immanuel is equated with Jesus Christ and "the virgin" with the Virgin Mary. This view finds strong support in the Septuagint's Greek, where the ambiguous *'almāh* is translated by the unambiguous *parthénos,* 'virgin.' But *'almāh* signifies a sexually mature young woman, who is normally eligible for marriage; "it asserts neither virginity nor the lack of it."[25] The context, however, raises serious difficulties for the traditional Christian view of Isaiah's prediction. The sign is obviously rooted in Isaiah's and Ahaz's own time and refers to the immediate future; it is designed to serve as a sign of deliverance from a current and seemingly hopeless situation. The context and the use of the definite article support the traditional Jewish and modern critical view that *hā'almāh* must have referred to a woman who was a contemporary and was known both to Isaiah and Ahaz. The most common conclusion is that she must have been the wife of either Ahaz or Isaiah.

As the situation was extremely serious, there was no ground for great expectations. Isaiah was realistic enough to refrain from predicting some overwhelming and miraculous deliverance.[26] He merely says: "... the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted." This prediction means, it is true, that the enemy's plan will not succeed and that the lineage of David will survive, but to most people that might not mean very much. For a prophet like Isaiah, however, these events are a clear sign of God's miraculous gift of deliverance. In an extremely difficult situation even an unimportant child can witness to God's presence with his people if there is reason to hope that the child will, in contrast to Ahaz, turn to God. These considerations make it evident that the names Shear-jashub and Immanuel must be closely related.

Once it is recognized that Immanuel also means "remnant," it becomes evident that its significance transcends the days of its prediction. The sign of Immanuel confirms the universal truth of human history and of the biblical message that in all ages only a minority is truly faithful to God's com-

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creasingly long to comprehend its meaning."

[25] See G. B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah,* 126.

[26] See the statement by G. B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah,* 124: "The miracle here, so far as there is a miracle, may lie solely in the prediction."

mandments and thus affords a sign of salvation for mankind. The more desperate the situation, the more miraculous the minor signs of salvation appear. By emphasizing the importance of quality rather than quantity, the concept of the remnant can be extended without limitation. The history of the Jewish people shows that the sign of Immanuel was for them the most important source of hope in times of despair. Christians, on the other hand, spontaneously saw the fulfilment of Isaiah's prediction in Jesus Christ, who suffered under Pontius Pilate and finally became the sign of hope that a new heaven and new earth will one day come to pass.[27]

The reason for discerning universality here does not lie so much in the sign itself, but rather in God who is the source, the aim, and the effective agent of all authentic signs, binding them to form a chain in the history of salvation. Only in the light of God's eternity and absolute holiness can the sign of Immanuel serve as "a proof either retrospectively of the divine causality of other events, or prospectively of their divine certainty."[28]

3. *An Introduction and a Summary (Chapter 1)*

The first chapter provides a general introduction to the prophecies of Isaiah and presents the basic theme of the book.[29] It contains the superscription (v. 1) and six prophecies: vv. 2–3, 4–9, 10–17, 18–20, 21–28, 29–31. Most scholars regard vv. 27–28 and 29–31 as later additions. The purpose of these opening prophecies is obviously "to show that the prophet's preaching established a lasting disclosure of Israel's sin and of the need of the people to show a deep and genuine repentance. By the addition of such an introduction the book as a whole has been given a permanent and timeless relevance, extending the significance of prophecies which were originally addressed to specific historical situations into a larger context."[30]

The chapter clearly reflects the critical historical situation of Jerusalem. After the Assyrians have laid waste the kingdom of Israel, the inhabitants of

[27] Such attitudes are far from the strange pessimism of some interpreters who do not take into account the rhetoric of some biblical language and claim that Isaiah's vision of the near future was exclusively one of complete destruction in accordance with the strict justice of God. See for instance S. H. Blank, who maintains that there is no place for a "remnant" in the message of Isaiah. Hence the title of his article "Traces of Prophetic Agony in Isaiah," *HUCA* 27 (1956), 81–92. Such conclusions affront common sense and depict Isaiah as an even greater unbeliever than Ahaz, since he seems unable to believe in the wonder of God's grace and fidelity to his creation.

[28] See F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah,* 213. For the extraordinary size of the bibliography of 7:1–17, esp. v. 14, see above all H. Wildberger, *Jesaja,* vol. 1, 262–264; J. D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33,* 78–104.

[29] See especially G. Fohrer, "Jes. 1 als Zusammenfassung der Verkündigung Jesajas," *ZAW* 74 (1962), 251–268.

[30] See R. E. Clements, *Isaiah 1–39,* 28.

Jerusalem are in deathly fear that their end may be near. They appear to be complaining that God has abandoned them and thus revoked his earlier promises. In this situation Isaiah calls upon the heavens and the earth to witness that the Lord is accusing his people because they have rebelled against him and do not understand who is their master. By contrasting their conduct with that of the animals, Isaiah stresses its unnatural character (1:2–3).

The second utterance (1:4–9) commences with a cry of threat and lamentation *hôy,* 'Woe!' and describes the full extent of the corruption of the people. They are a "sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity *(gôy ḥōṭē' 'am kebed 'āwôn)* ..." (1:4). Isaiah sees a causal link between the guilt of the people and the desolation of the country. To prevent complete destruction following their forsaking of the Lord, the people must desist from their backsliding. So the prophet exclaims: "Why will you still be smitten *(tukkû),* that you continue to rebel?" (1:5a). The whole country looks like a body that is covered by wounds "from the sole of the foot even to the head" (1:5b–6); it is desolate and devastated by foreigners (1:7). The only source of consolation and hope is God's mercy. That Jerusalem did not suffer the same fate as the other towns is due to the forbearance of the Lord. The prophet takes stock of the situation, and says in 1:8–9:

> And the daughter of Zion is left *(wĕnôtĕrāh bat-ṣiyyôn),*
> like a booth in a vineyard,
> like a lodge in a cucumber field,
> like a besieged city.
> If the Lord of hosts
> had not left us a few survivors *(śārîd kim'āṭ),*
> we should have been like Sodom,
> and become like Gomorrah.[31]

In 1:10–17 Isaiah sets out the classical prophetic teaching that God takes no notice of the prayers and sacrifices of the people unless they are an expression of ethical purity. The admonitions are brought to a close by a powerful appeal for true repentance and a return to the Lord: "Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean ..." (1:16–17). The people can be saved only by repentance and by submission to the ethical demands of their God. Verses 18–20 contain God's challenge to a formal trial and provide a conclusion to the indignant declarations of the preceding verses about futile sacrifices:

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[31] Some commentators take 1:9 to be a later addition. See H. Barth, *Die Jesaja-Worte in der Josiazeit: Israel und Assur als Thema einer produktiven Neuinterpretation der Jesajaüberlieferung* (WMANT 48; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1977), 190–191; R. E. Clements, *Isaiah and the Deliverance of Jerusalem: A Study of the Interpretation of Prophecy in the Old Testament* (JSOT.S 13; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980), 35: "This single verse has certainly been added, sometime after 587 B.C.E., to the original prophecy which was consistently threatening in tone." There is, however, no compelling reason to suspect the originality of this verse; it conforms equally well to the historical situation of Isaiah's time and to characteristic features of his prophecies.

Come now, let us reason together *(lĕkû-nā' wĕniwwākĕḥāh),*
  says the Lord:
if your sins are like scarlet,
  they shall be as white as snow;
if they are red like crimson,
  they shall become like wool.
If you are willing and obedient,
  you shall eat the good of the land;
but if you refuse and rebel,
  you shall be devoured by the sword;
  for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Interpretations of the conditional clauses of 1:18 differ considerably. The most precarious of them is the view that Isaiah equates complete forgiveness with unconditional justification by grace.[32] The whole tenor of the context, not to mention common sense, makes it plain that unconditional forgiveness is out of place in a "lawsuit." The common ground of the prophetic teaching is that forgiveness is an offer of God's mercy and cannot be merited, but may be obtained only as a result of a changed attitude to the divine commands. Every interpretation should therefore take into consideration the rhetorical features of the prophet's utterance and interpret it in accordance with the basic presuppositions of God's absoluteness and holiness. Even in bringing the most weighty charges against his people, the Lord remains a God of mercy; the purpose of the lawsuit is to make plain that the reason for destruction is their corruption. Only in the wake of awareness that they are guilty and that their God is just can they become willing to submit to God's judgment and demands. The more weighty the charges against the people the more it becomes evident that what Isaiah says amounts to the strongest possible call for repentance, for a return to the Lord, and includes a conditional promise of forgiveness when these requirements are satisfied.[33]

It follows plainly, that the statement is best understood if the indicative mood is assumed.[34] It can hardly be accidental that 1:18 is expressed in

[32] For the whole of this prophetic judgment speech, see especially D. Jones, "Exposition of Isaiah Chapter One Verses Ten to Seventeen," *SJTh* 18 (1965), 457–471.

[33] F. Delitzsch, for instance, suggests in *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah,* 98, the following interpretation: "Jehovah will not treat Israel according to His retributive justice, but according to His free compassion. He will remit the punishment, and not only regard the sin as not existing, but change it into its very opposite. The reddest possible sin shall become, through His mercy, the purest white." On p. 99 he says: "Jehovah offers to Israel an *actio forensis,* out of which it shall come forth justified by grace, although it has merited death on account of its sins. The righteousness, white as snow and wool, with which Israel comes forth, is a gift conferred upon it out of pure compassion, without being conditional upon any legal performance whatever."

[34] K. Marti, *Das Buch Jesaja,* 15, detects a sarcastic tone in the statement; B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaia,* 31, and E. J. Kissane, *The Book of Isaiah,* 7, translate it in the jussive mood; G. Fohrer, *ZAW* 74 (1962), 263, and H. Wildberger, *Jesaja,* vol. 1, 50, suggest the interrogative. All of these seem to be less likely interpretations.

conditional form—the reason being the conditional form of the antithetic parallelism in 1:19–20, which affirm the classical principle of retribution. Here we find the key to the significance of the preceding verse. The prophet presents two options to his hearers, expecting that they will make a positive choice. Only on this expectation is the promise of forgiveness in v. 18 understandable. The utterance as a whole discloses the ultimate degree of divine righteousness in the dialectic between the demand for punishment for sins committed and the promise of mercy in view of possible repentance. In the long run, humans choose for themselves between life and death by their final obedience or disobedience to their Creator and Law-giver. The greater the guilt, the greater the divine goodness when humans sincerely turn from following the wrong path towards their only true source of life.

The remaining vv. 21–31 of chapter 1 clearly fall into two sections, either 21–26 and 27–31, or 21–28 and 29–31. Verses 21–26 contain a complete poem of impressive artistic design. It opens with the exclamation *'êkāh,* which is characteristic of laments, and concludes with a promise of the restoration of Jerusalem. Isaiah expresses amazement at the moral corruption of the city and compares its present state with the Jerusalem of earlier days:

> How has she become a harlot *('êkāh hāyĕtāh lĕzônāh),*
> the faithful city *(qiryāh ne'ĕmānāh),*
> she that was full of right *(mĕlē'ătî mišpāṭ)*!
> Righteousness *(ṣedeq)* lodged in her,
> but now murderers ...

Isaiah probably has in mind the rule of the judges and of King David, who were conspicuous for their insistence on justice. In contrast, Isaiah sees in his own time a general corruption that makes God's judgment necessary. It does not, however, imply destruction but radical purging—the separation of a metal from its ore in a smelting-furnace. In 1:24 a turning point is signalled by the particle "therefore":

> Therefore *(lākēn)* the Lord says,
> the Lord of hosts,
> the Mighty One of Israel:
> "Ah, I will vent *('ennāḥēm)* my wrath on my enemies,
> and avenge *(wĕ'innāqĕmāh)* myself on my foes.
> I will turn *(wĕ'āšîbāh)* my hand against you
> and will smelt away your dross as with lye
> and remove all your alloy.
> And I will restore *(wĕ'āšîbāh)* your judges as at the first,
> and your counsellors as at the beginning.
> Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness *('îr haṣṣedeq),*
> the faithful city *(qiryāh ne'ĕmānāh).*"

The structure of the poem comprises certain key-words. For a start there is the glaring opposition of expressions, some of which begin a chiastic pattern

(1:21): harlot (now) // faithful city + full of justice (once); righteousness (once) // murderers (now). The expression *qiryāh ne'ĕmānāh,* 'faithful city,' also appears at the end of the poem (1:26b) in connection with the promise of the restoration of Jerusalem, thus creating a chiastic structure for the passage. It is noticeable also that the expression *'îr haṣṣedeq* (1:26b) corresponds to *ṣedeq yālîn bāh* (1:21b). Promises for the future are based on remembrance of the past, and do not imply that the Lord overlooks the present and gives assurance of unconditional forgiveness.[35] Verses 24–26 contain an irrevocable decree of judgment that opens with the exclamatory particle *hôy* (1:24b). The declaration of judgment is also antithetic: in 1:24b–25 the Lord speaks of comforting himself by taking vengeance on unjust rulers who have become his enemies; in 1:26 he gives a promise of new rulers. The most remarkable constituent part of this antithesis is the root *šwb* in the Hiph'il stem: in 1:25 the Lord says he will turn his hand against his enemies among the people—i.e., he will remove them; and in 1:26 he states that the righteous judges will return "as at the beginning." Only after having passed through the fires of the smelting-furnace will Jerusalem be able to return to the old values.

Verses 27–28 are in antithetic parallelism and thus highlight the twin features of vengeance and salvation in 1:21–26. This antithesis is most effective as a conclusion of the poem, which is itself structured antithetically: the present corruption (1:21–23) // a future restoration through judgment (1:24–26). Because the poem concludes with the promise of salvation it is appropriate that the antithetic parallelism in 1:27–28 should start with the positive aspect:

> Zion shall be redeemed by right *(ṣiyyôn bĕmišpāṭ tippādeh)*,
> and those in her who repent, by righteousness *(wĕšābĕhā biṣdāqāh).*
> But rebels and sinners shall be destroyed together,
> and those who forsake the Lord shall be consumed.

The promise of 1:27 is ambiguous; it is not immediately clear whether the words *mišpāṭ* and *ṣĕdāqāh* refer to divine or human justice and righteousness. The whole tenor of Isaiah's prophecies makes it evident, however, that both possibilities must be considered. Redemption in its true sense can be offered only by divine righteousness, which signifies God's fidelity in keeping the created world in existence and in saving humankind. But the fruits of divine righteousness can be enjoyed only if God's offer is answered by human righteousness, which means first of all faithfulness in trusting God.[36] Unfaithful-

[35] See the statement by G. Fohrer, *ZAW* 74 (1962), 266: "Es gibt keine unbedingte Rettung um Davids oder des Zion willen, sondern nur die bedingte Rettung bei echter Umkehr ..."

[36] See J. Krašovec, *La justice (ṣdq) de Dieu dans la Bible hébraïque et l'interprétation juive et chrétienne* (OBO 76; Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988).

ness demands repentance: the people must regret their harlotry and return to their first and only true love and the source of their life; they must become a faithful city if they are to partake in the righteousness of God.

The negative part of the antithetic parallelism (1:28) links this passage with the last independent section of chapter 1—i.e., vv. 29–31. Here rebels and sinners who forsake the Lord and practice the worship of idols are singled out. By turning away from the Holy One of Israel they have cut themselves off from the only source of life, and such conduct can only result in the most radical punishment: "For they shall be ashamed *(kî yēbōšû)* ..." (1:29).[37] When the impotence of their idols becomes apparent, their fate is sealed: total failure and self-destruction follow.

4. *The Threat of Judgment in Chapters 2–5 and 8–12*

2:6–22 is a clear thematic unit. The opening *kî* may be understood either as a means of relating the passage to the preceding five verses or as an emphatic particle: "Indeed, thou hast rejected thy people *(kî nātaštāh 'ammĕkā),* the house of Jacob..." The reason for this rejection is Israel's paganism and materialism, which betray pride and arrogance (cf. vv. 6–8). The announcement of condign punishment is reinforced by the repetition of some expressions and sentences. Three times there appears a classical description of the Day of the Lord: *bayyôm hahû',* "in that day" (vv. 11b, 17b); and *yôm lyhwh,* "there is a day belonging to the Lord" (v. 12a). The effect of the judgment is to exalt the Lord by puncturing human self-exaltation. This central point is enunciated in three variations of what is basically the same theme in vv. 9, 11, 17. Verse 9 reads:

> So man is humbled *(wayyiššaḥ 'ādām),*
> and men are brought low *(wayyišpal-'îš)*—
> forgive them not *(wĕ'al-tiśśā' lāhem)!*

The sudden appeal "forgive them not" is considered by most commentators to be a later editorial addition, but it fits neatly into its context. The gravity of Israel's religious degradation and the severity of God's reaction confirm two principles governing the relationship between punishment and forgiveness: first, forgiveness is not possible without some punishment for sin; sec-

[37] The verb *bwš* appears, as in the Septuagint, in the third person plural even though the other verbs in this section are in the second person plural. The present form does not necessarily imply a later correction; it might well have been originally chosen in order to create a connection with the "impersonal" 1:28. For the meaning of the verb *bwš* in general and in this passage, see M. A. Klopfenstein, *Scham und Schande nach dem Alten Testament: Eine begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu dem hebräischen Wurzeln bôš, klm und ḥpr* (AThANT 62; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1972).

ondly, the sins of idolatry, arrogance and obstinacy may preclude forgiveness. This does not mean, however, that the prophet wishes the final ruin of his people. The opposite is the case: by illuminating the swiftest way to self-destruction, he seeks to move his people to repentance, which is the prerequisite for forgiveness and may yet avert disaster.

The general threat of judgment in 2:6–22 is followed by a vivid forecast of coming anarchy and general confusion in 3:1–4:1. It is generally recognized that this section contains two groups of utterances: 3:1–15; 3:16–4:1. The reason for the imminent disaster is made plain in 3:8–9: "For Jerusalem has stumbled, and Judah has fallen; because their speech and their deeds are against the Lord, defying his glorious presence ..." The accusation ends with the exclamation "Woe to them! For they have brought evil upon themselves *(kî gāmĕlû lāhem rā'āh).*" There then follows an antithetic parallelism reasserting that God will reward each person according to his deeds:

> Tell the righteous that it shall be well with them,
> for they shall eat the fruit of their deeds.
> Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him,
> for what his hands have done shall be done to him (3:10–11).

Such antithetic sayings are characteristic of later Wisdom literature (cf. especially Prov 12:14). There the purpose is to assert the general validity of the principle of retribution, but in this particular context the antithesis serves as an affirmation that, while the punishment of the wicked was justified, for the righteous there is hope. A more original antithetic formulation of poetic justice, most probably of Isaianic origin, is found in 3:24 in the context of judgment upon the proud women of Jerusalem:

> Instead of perfume there will be rottenness;
> and instead of a girdle, a rope;
> and instead of well-set hair, baldness;
> and instead of a rich robe, a girding of sackcloth;
> instead of beauty, shame.[38]

The next important passage dealing with judgment is chapter 5, which contains three distinct poems: the song of the vineyard (vv. 1–7); a sixfold series of "woes" (vv. 8–24); a premonition of a foreign invader (vv. 25–30). Isaiah sees in the coming of Assyria the execution of God's judgment upon Judah. In 5:25c a motif is stated that is echoed in 9:11b, 16c, 20b; 10:4b:

> For all this his anger is not turned away
> and his hand is stretched out still.

This refrain is one of the reasons that has caused commentators to rearrange the cycle of prophecies relating to the threat of Assyria in various ways. Pos-

[38] For textual questions concerning this verse, see H. Wildberger, *Jesaja,* vol. 1, 136.

sibly the most cogent is the suggestion that 5:25–30 is the misplaced conclusion of 9:7–10:4.[39]

The song of the vineyard (5:1–7) is a parable in which Israel is seen as the vineyard of the Lord. Its theme is complaint or accusation and its structure is as follows: introduction (v. 1a); the story of the vineyard (vv. 1b–2); an appeal for judgment on what has gone wrong (vv. 3–4); a declaration of judgment (vv. 5–6); and an explanation of the parable (v. 7). The fact that the vineyard has, contrary to all expectation, produced bad fruit gives rise to a threefold formulation of the antithesis between expectation and event: "... and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes" (v. 2c); "When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?" (v. 4b); "... and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, a cry!" (v. 7c). In the antitheses of v. 7c there are remarkable assonances: *mišpāṭ // miśpāḥ; ṣĕdāqāh // ṣĕ'āqāh.* The reason for accusation becomes the reason for punishment. The declaration of the verdict in vv. 5–6 is in striking contrast to the description of loving care in vv. 1b–2b.

The sixfold series of "woes" in 5:8–24 comprise a description of different kinds of bad fruit. The first, second, and sixth sections (vv. 9b–10, 13–17, 24) also contain an explicit promise of punishment; the fourth section carries the implication of punishment in the terms *'āwôn,* 'guilt,' and *ḥaṭṭā'āh,* 'sin' (v. 18).

The passage 8:1–22 contains several shorter units that reflect the historical situation already encountered in 7:1–17: vv. 1–4, 5–8, 9–10, 11–15, 16–18, and 19–22. For our purposes the relevant sections are vv. 1–4, 5–10, and 11–15. In the first of these the name of Isaiah's son (*mahēr šālāl ḥāš baz,* "The spoil speeds, the prey hastes"[40]) symbolically signifies a speedy Assyrian punitive action against Rezin, the king of Syria, and Pekah, the king of Israel, who have invaded Judah. Verses 5–10 are a threat triggered by Ahaz's appeal to Tiglath-pileser for help—a policy that was supported by all the people, although Isaiah took a very different stance. In 8:6–8 Isaiah, using an effective contrast, announces punishment for despising the quiet and secret waters of Shiloah: "Because this people have refused the waters of Shiloah that flow gently, and melt in fear before Rezin and the son of Remaliah; therefore, behold, the Lord is bringing up against them the waters of the River, mighty and many, the king of Assyria and all his glory; and it will rise over all its channels and go over all its banks; and it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass on, reaching even to the neck; and its outspread wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanu-el." The next section, 8:11–15, brings out the belief of Isaiah that only quiet confidence in

[39] See G. B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah,* 82, 95, 179–180.

[40] See the marginal note in RSV.

God can save Jerusalem. The more valid this assurance, the more potent the threat to those who do not fear him. Since his way is different from that of the people, it has become obvious to Isaiah that the real danger to them lies in the Lord whom they have forsaken, preferring a political alliance. Verse 15 concerns itself with punishment and salvation: the announcement of the former ("And many shall stumble thereon ...") implies the promise of the latter for those who fear the Lord.

The well-known promise of a royal saviour in 8:23–9:7 is followed by a historical survey of past retribution and a prediction of the continuing anger of the Lord in 9:7–10:4. The key to the interpretation of this poem is the repetition (noted above) of the phrase *bĕkol-zō't lō'-šāb 'appô wĕ 'ôd yādô nĕtûyāh,* "For all this his anger is not turned away and his hand is stretched out still" (vv. 9:11b, 16c, 20b; 10:4b; see also 5:25c). This refrain is the clearest evidence that the poem is composed of four strophes: 9:7–11, 12–16, 17–20; and 10:1–4. In 9:12 is found the reason for the continuation of God's anger: "And the people did not turn to him who smote them *(wĕhā'-ām lō'-šāb 'ad-hammakkēhû),* nor seek the Lord of hosts." The verb *šwb,* 'to return,' is used to express causality in opposite directions: the anger of the Lord did not turn away because the people did not turn to him. Consequently the hand of the Lord remains stretched out because his earlier chastisement failed to produce repentance and reform. The situation and the theme of this poem parallel the narrative of the plagues of Egypt: the aim of God's punishment is reform, which is the prerequisite for the turning away of his anger. The prophet knows that God's punitive hand will remain stretched out as long as the reason for punishment persists, even though the outcome may be the same as in the case of Pharaoh's stubbornness.

In the literary masterpiece 10:5–15 Isaiah turns from Israel to Assyria: "Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger, the staff of my fury! Against a godless nation *(bĕgôy ḥānēp)* I send him, and against the people of my wrath I command him, to take spoil and seize plunder, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. But he does not so intend, and his mind does not so think; but it is in his mind to destroy, and to cut off nations not a few." (10:5–7). In Isaiah's view the Assyrian king had received from the Ruler of the world a commission to punish the "godless nation" of Israel, which is no longer to be considered the chosen people, but, putting himself in the place of God (cf. vv. 8–11, 13–15), he became himself the object of God's punishment: "When the Lord has finished all his work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem he will punish[41] the arrogant boasting of the king of Assyria and his haughty pride" (10:12; cf. the editor's conclusion in 14:24–27). The three following units, 10:16–19, 20–23, 24–27a, are generally held to be a

[41] According to the Septuagint; in MT the first person singular *'epqōd* is given.

later addition; there is, however, a wide diversity of opinion about the period to which they should be ascribed. The prophecy in 10:20–23 that a remnant will return is based on the name of Isaiah's son Shear-jashub (7:3). The assurance in 10:24–27a that God's indignation and anger are at an end (v. 25) obviously has in mind the refrain of 5:25c; 9:11b, 16c, 20b; and 10:4b.

5. *The Threat of Judgment in Chapters 13–23*

Chapters 13–23 constitute a collection of oracles (Heb. sing. *maśśā'*) mainly addressed to foreign nations and peoples. There is a wide diversity of opinion about the origin of these prophecies. Most commentators believe that a core of Isaianic speeches has subsequently been considerably enlarged. For many reasons it is impossible to identify with certainty the original setting, the date, or the nucleus of Isaianic prophecies within this corpus. But its predominantly threatening tone accords reasonably well with Isaiah's views.

The oracle that deals with Babylon in 13:1–14:23 consists of a prediction of its capture by the Medes (13:2–22), a promise of the return of the Israelites to their land (14:1–4a), a magnificent mocking-song for the death of a cruel world-ruler (14:4b–21), and a concluding statement that foretells the extermination of the Babylonians (14:22–23). Pride and arrogance have provoked God's punishment and in 13:11 he says:

> And I will punish *(ûpāqadtî)* the world for its evil,
> and the wicked for their iniquity;
> I will put an end to the pride of the arrogant,
> and lay low the haughtiness of the ruthless.

In 14:13–15 the overweening pride and ambition of the tyrant and his downfall to the lowest depths of Sheol are effectively contrasted. The fall of Babylon offers the Jews in captivity a great sign of hope that "the Lord will have compassion *(kî yĕraḥēm)* on Jacob and will again choose Israel, and will set them in their own land ..." (14:1).

The present arrangement of the prophecies in 14:28–32 begins a series of threats to those neighbouring nations that attempted to recruit Judah into a defensive alliance against Assyria. The passage is commonly recognized as Isaianic and the immediate occasion for its utterance was the Philistine rejoicing after the collapse of some hitherto victorious adversary, although the more general reason seems to have been the constant expectation of the Philistines of the downfall of Judah. Isaiah warns them that after a brief respite an army coming "out of the north" (14:31b) will destroy them. The present structure of the oracle contains two antithetically parallel sayings in a chiastic arrangement, predicting the differing fates of Philistia and Judah: vv. 30a//30b; 31//32. The poor of Judah are contrasted with the mighty ones

of Philistia. Isaiah knows that both kingdoms will be invaded, but firmly believes that Judah will rise again more glorious than before, whereas Philistia will perish utterly. 14:30 reads:

> And the first-born of the poor will feed,
> and the needy lie down in safety;
> but I will kill your root *(šoršēk)* with famine,
> and your remnant *(ûšĕ'ērîtēk)* I will slay.[42]

The word 'remnant' is here synonymous with 'root'; once the root is destroyed there is no prospect of recovery. In this respect 14:30ab is totally different from the promise in 6:13bc, which corresponds to the assurance in 14:30a, 32. The closing statement: "For the Lord has founded Zion, and in her the afflicted of his people *('ammô)* find refuge" (14:32b) must refer to the remnant of Judah and Israel who keep faith with the Lord. "The first-born of the poor" who depend on him are stronger than the powerful invaders and those who rebel against them.

Chapters 15–16 contain "an oracle concerning Moab" (15:1). A major part of it also appears in Jer 48, although the order and structure differ. The passage is a lament over the desolation of Moab, and chapter 15 ends with the words: "... yet I will bring upon Dibon even more, a lion for those of Moab who escape *(liplêṭat mô'āb),* and for the remnant *(wĕliš'ērît)* of the land" (15:9). The poet seems to be saying that there is no security for the remnant; those who flee from the city may fall victim to a predator. In 16:6–12 Moab's self-exaltation (v. 6) is contrasted with its coming misery. The passage begins with an accusation, based on Isaiah's favourite theme:

> We have heard of the pride of Moab,
> how proud he was;
> of his arrogance, his pride, and his insolence—
> his boasts are false.

The misery to come makes plain that human pride, as well as being foolish, is the probable cause of Moab's downfall. The denunciation closes with a prose appendix (16:13–14) that sets the time-scale (v. 14): "In three years, like the years of a hireling, the glory of Moab will be brought into contempt, in spite of all his great multitude, and those who survive will be very few and feeble *(ûšĕ'ār mĕ'aṭ miz'ār lô' kabbîr)."*

In 17:1 begins "an oracle concerning Damascus," which incidentally also concerns Ephraim, i.e., the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The major part of 17:1–11 is attributed by most commentators to the prophet Isaiah. Verses 7–9 are usually regarded as a later editorial addition, and some scholars think that the original unit consisted only of vv. 1–6.[43] The present structure of the

[42] "I will slay" in one ancient manuscript and Vulgate; MT gives the third person *yahărōg.*

[43] It is generally held that at least vv. 1–6 of the present text were composed as an expres-

oracle 17:1–11 may be divided into four strophes: the ruin of Damascus (vv. 1–3); the ruin of Ephraim (vv. 4–6); return to the Holy One of Israel, the Maker of all men (vv. 7–8); and punishment for apostasy (vv. 9–11).

Some important indications of this division are provided. The oracle is introduced by *hinnēh,* 'Behold!' The first strophe concludes with the statement "says the Lord of hosts" and the second with "says the Lord God of Israel." The second, third, and fourth strophes are introduced by the formula *bayyôm hahû',* "In that day." The main motif of the poem is judgment, with an intervening theme of return to the Lord. The reason for placing this theme between the two sections dealing with judgment is obviously an intention to create a chiastic arrangement of the prophecy.[44]

The most striking feature in the announcement of judgment is the theme of the remnant. The first strophe concludes (17:3):

> The fortress will disappear from Ephraim,
> and the kingdom from Damascus;
> and the remnant of Syria *(ûšĕ'ār 'ărām)* will be
> like the glory of the children of Israel,
> says the Lord of hosts.

This verse obviously predicts the same fate for both Syria and Israel; in both kingdoms only a "remnant" of their former *kābôd,* 'glory'—i.e., of their significance and reputation among their neighbours—will survive. The same idea recurs in the second strophe in three figures of speech: a man who has grown thin (17:4); a few stray stalks left after the corn harvest for the poor to garner (17:5); a handful of olives left on the trees after they have been beaten to shake off the ripe olives (17:6). In each case the emergent idea is that of the minute remnant. So it becomes plain that this oracle stands firmly in the line of Isaiah's presentation of his son Shear-jashub (7:3): Israel will never be completely destroyed; even after the most dreadful devastation some signs of continued existence will persist. Whether 17:7–8 are original or not, they are plainly derived from the belief, based on historical experience, that in utter distress a remnant of the people recognize the folly of reliance on idols and on the mundane, and are willing to turn to the God they have forgotten.

From the rest of the prophecies in chapters 13–23 only "the oracle concerning the valley of vision" in 22:1–14 is relevant to the present study. It concerns the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and Isaianic origin is commonly accepted at least for vv. 1–3, 12–14. It seems most likely that the prophecy relates to the confusing situation that followed the siege of Jerusalem by the

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sion of Isaiah's protest against the formation of the Syro-Ephraimite alliance against Assyria (cf. chap. 7).

[44] H. Wildberger, *Jesaja,* vol. 2, 638–641, in contrast to most other commentators recognizes the main structural criteria of the oracle. On p. 638 he convincingly states that 17:1–11 has to be perceived "als eine kerygmatische Einheit." J. N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39,* 352, recognizes the chiastic arrangement of the text.

Assyrian king Sennacherib in the year 701. The fact that the Assyrian troops had withdrawn from Jerusalem without seizing the city was for those who survived a notable occasion for feasting—conduct that provoked in Isaiah an even blacker vision of destruction. To him, the only appropriate reaction would have been mourning as a sign of self-examination and repentance. The first condition of repentance is a remembrance of the pain of former punishments, and the siege of Jerusalem should have reminded the people how shameful the situation actually was: the rulers had fled and been captured "without the bow" (22:3). Isaiah weeps and rejects comfort, foreseeing as he does, the complete destruction of Jerusalem (22:4).

The woeful and poignant accusation of the people reaches its climax in the final proclamation in 22:12–14 of the divine punishment for Jerusalem's insensitive conduct:

> In that day the Lord God of hosts
> called to weeping and mourning,
> to baldness and girding with sackcloth;
> and behold, joy and gladness,
> slaying oxen and killing sheep,
> eating flesh and drinking wine.
> "Let us eat and drink,
> for tomorrow we die."
> The Lord of hosts has revealed himself in my ears:
> "Surely this iniquity will not be expiated for you
> *('im-yĕkuppar he'āwôn hazzeh lākem),*
> till you die *('ad-tĕmutûn),*"
> says the Lord God of hosts.[45]

Verses 12//13 are effectively contrasted in order to make it plain that the people have not seized their last chance of repenting and turning to the Lord. Their unwillingness to mourn and repent is obvious proof that their "guilt" signifies obstinacy. Therefore their fate is irrevocably sealed, and their guilt can be atoned for only by death.[46] There are similar cases of unforgivable guilt to be found elsewhere: 1 Sam 3:14; Jer 18:23; Isa 47:11.

6. *The Threat of Judgment in Chapters 28–33*

The opening prophecy in these chapters (28:1–6) is addressed to the Northern kingdom of Israel; it must therefore refer to a period before the fall of

[45] The concluding statement "says the Lord God of hosts" is omitted by the Septuagint; it may not have been part of the original text. It is, however, possible that the Greek omission is due to haplography.

[46] The verb *tĕmutûn* is written with *nûn paragogicum* which usually expresses marked emphasis. See E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar,* § 47m.

Samaria (722–721). Most of the other prophecies, however, relate to the years between the fall of Samaria and Sennacherib's attack on Jerusalem (701). In the later part of his reign (705–701), King Hezekiah became one of the leaders of the revolt against Assyria and turned towards an alliance with Egypt. To Isaiah, Judah's foreign policy under Hezekiah was as faithful a mirror of disbelief in the Lord as it had been under Ahaz, who had submitted himself to the Assyrian yoke. Many sayings reflect Isaiah's anti-Egyptian views. His purpose was to show God's lordship over the nations and to identify Zion as the only firm ground for confidence. The focus of his prophecy is again upon Judah's choice between trusting in the Lord or in worldly power. Chapters 28–33 are for the most part regarded as authentically Isaianic.

The prophecy 28:1–6 is addressed primarily to the political leaders of the Northern kingdom of Israel. Its distinctive feature is the contrasting of the fate of the false and the true crowns (vv. 1–4 // 5–6). Especially conspicuous is the antithesis between vv. 1 and 5. In v. 1 the prophet exclaims:

> Woe to the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim,
> and to the fading flower of its glorious beauty,
> which is on the head of the rich valley of those overcome with wine!

Verse 5 proclaims in contrast:

> In that day the Lord of hosts will be a crown of glory,
> and a diadem of beauty, to the remnant of his people *(liš'ār 'ammô).*

The expressions *'ăṭeret gē'ût,* "a proud crown," and *ṣîṣ nōbēl ṣĕbî tip'artô,* "a fading flower of its glorious beauty" of v. 1a (cf. vv. 3–4a) are effective linguistic counterparts of the expressions *'ăṭeret ṣĕbî,* "a crown of glory," and *ṣĕpîrat tip'ārāh,* "a diadem of beauty," in v. 5. The most important factor in the metamorphosis is the term "remnant," which attains its full significance only after "the proud crown of the drunkards" is destroyed by God's mighty judgment (vv. 2–4). The expression "the remnant of his people" signifies the restoration of a purified people of God, as distinguished from the portion that had been swept away.[47]

The present form of the prophecy contained in 28:7–13 continues the theme of 28:1–6. The statement in v. 7a: "These also reel with wine and stagger with strong drink ..." provides a link between the two passages. It seems that Isaiah turns here from Ephraim to Judah. The priests and the prophets are

[47] Most modern exegetes regard 28:5–6 as either a later addition or as an excerpt from another context. The antithetic structure, which is a favourite stylistic feature of Isaiah, and the notion of the remnant, however, make their assumptions questionable in the absence of definite proof. See especially E. J. Kissane, *The Book of Isaiah,* vol. 1, 309; G. F. Hasel, *The Remnant,* 301–309; J. N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39,* 508. G. F. Hasel states on p. 309: "One is hardly able to dispute that the content and main ideas of this brief oracle are in harmony with the future hopes of Isaiah and the Isaianic remnant motif."

accused of being drunkards, mocking the prophet and his teaching (28:7–10). Such ungodliness must incur an appropriate punishment. Isaiah turns their own words back upon them: "Nay, but by men of strange lips and with an alien tongue the Lord will speak to this people" (28:11). The expressions "strange lips, alien tongue" probably refer to the Assyrians (cf. 33:19; 36:11), who will come to teach the lesson of God's punishment in their own harsh-sounding language. In 28:12 Isaiah speaks God's words to the people: "This is rest *(zō't hamměnûḥāh);* give rest to the weary *(hānîḥû le'āyēp);* and this is repose *(wězō't hammargē'āh).*" "Rest" carries connotations of dwelling securely in the promised land. The statement builds a chiasmus in order to underline an interdependence between the "rest" given to the people by God and the "rest" the rulers of Israel should grant to the weary. In the days of Assyria's rise to power, God's offer of "rest" was dependent upon Israel's willingness to accede to the divine policy of remaining (cf. 7:4; 30:15) instead of joining an alliance against Assyria. Because the rulers failed to fulfil their obligation, the rejection of God's word will become an instrument of judgment leading to their fall: "... that they may go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken" (28:13d).

The next section (28:14–22) is closely related to the preceding prophecy and opens with the particle "therefore." The "scoffers" addressed are the political leaders in Jerusalem. Isaiah is obviously referring to the treaty with Egypt upon which they pride themselves when he speaks of "a covenant with death" and "an agreement with Sheol" (v. 15ab). The leaders expect this treaty to give them security (v. 15cd), but Isaiah predicts God's "decree of destruction" (vv. 18–22). Between the sardonic satire based upon cynical projections of the future by the rulers of Jerusalem and the announcement of punishment by God is inserted a magnificent promise of God's saving lordship in Zion (28:16–17), valid for all who believe in him:

> Behold, I am laying in Zion for a foundation
> a stone, a tested stone,
> a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation:
> "He who believes *(hama'ămîn)* will not be in haste."
> And I will make justice the line,
> and righteousness the plummet;
> and hail will sweep away the refuge of lies,
> and waters will overwhelm the shelter.

In its present form, the text of this promise signifies a threat to all whose confidence is based on false grounds. The believer waits in patience for God to complete his work and will be saved; the unbeliever carefully lays his own plans and will come to nothing. So the prophecy 28:13–22 fully corresponds in circumstance and subject to the dual aspects of judgment and salvation in 7:1–17.

From the rest of this collection of prophecies two passages, 30:1–17 and

31:1–3, are important for the present study. Both are commonly regarded as authentically Isaianic and follow the same general lines as chapter 28. The passage 30:1–17 consists of five units, probably originally independent vv. 1–5, 6–7, 8–11, 12–14, 15–17. The first section, vv. 1–5, begins with a proclamation of "woe" and condemns the Egyptian alliance, which the prophet can no longer prevent:

> "Woe to the rebellious children," says the Lord,
> "who carry out a plan, but not mine;
> and who make a league, but not of my spirit,
> that they may add sin to sin (*ḥaṭṭā't 'al-ḥaṭṭā't*) ..."

It concludes with the statement that the treaty will bring only shame and disgrace. The same is true of the prophecy in 30:6–7. In contrast 31:1–3, dealing with the same situation as these two sections, is not content to express indignation but also announces God's punishment.

Section 30:8–11 contains the command to write an inscription (v. 8) and a severe indictment of "a rebellious people *('am-mĕrî)*" that refused to hear what the prophet had told them (vv. 9–11; cf. 1:2, 4; 30:1). The Lord sums up the accusation of the preceding verses and promises consequential destruction (vv. 12–14):

> Because you despise this word,
> and trust in oppression and perverseness,
> and rely on them;
> therefore this iniquity *(he'āwôn hazzeh)* shall be to you
> like a break in a high wall, bulging out, and about to collapse,
> whose crash comes suddenly, in an instant;
> and its breaking is like that of a potter's vessel
> which is smashed so ruthlessly *(lō' yaḥmōl)*
> that among its fragments not a sherd is found
> with which to take fire from the hearth,
> or to dip up water out of the cistern.

The vivid similes of a high wall that suddenly collapses and of a potter's vessel smashed "ruthlessly" into fragments need no elucidation. The focus is on the dramatic nature and the completeness of the judgment, which result from the very nature of the people's "guilt."

30:15–17 point to a causal link between the nature of that guilt and its inescapable, disastrous results using the metaphor of fleeing on horse back. Verse 15 sums up the nature of false confidence, and the particle "therefore" in v. 16c introduces the consequence of that misplaced trust:

> For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel,
> "In returning and rest you shall be saved;
> in quietness and in trust shall be your strength."
> And you would not, but you said,
> "No! We will speed *(nānûs)* upon horses,"
> therefore you shall speed away *('al-kēn tĕnûsûn);*

and, "We will ride upon swift steeds *(wĕ'al-qal nirkāb),*"
therefore your pursuers shall be swift *(yiqqallû).*"
A thousand shall flee at the threat of one,
at the threat of five you shall flee,
till you are left *('ad 'im nôtartem)*
like a flagstaff *(kattōren)* on the top of a mountain,
like a signal *(wĕkannēs)* on a hill (30:15–17).

The most striking stylistic feature in this statement of the law of retribution is the play upon the verbs *nws* and *qll.* As God's messenger, Isaiah enunciates the guiding principle of the divine prescription for Israel's situation: *bĕšûbāh wānaḥat tiwwāšē'ûn bĕhašqēṭ ûbĕbiṭḥāh tihyeh gĕbûratkem,* "In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength" (30:15b; cf. 7:4; 28:12). The negative side of this requirement was abstention from an alliance with Egypt against Assyria. The positive aspects were recognition of the need for repentance in turning from self-reliance back to God;[48] trust in the Lord as the only true basis for confidence; and a peaceful calm. Because rulers and people alike had rejected this advice and the alliance with Egypt had become an irreversible fact, to Isaiah the only possible outcome appeared to be destruction brought about by the turning of their actions against themselves.[49]

The impression given by the images used by Isaiah in 30:13–14 is that Judah and Jerusalem were about to undergo complete destruction. A collapsed wall and a shattered potter's vessel seem to be utterly useless. But Isaiah cannot resist reverting to his characteristic theme of the remnant. In 30:17bc it is said that Israel will remain "like a flagstaff on the top of a mountain, like a signal on a hill."

7. *Conclusion*

The Isaianic parts of the book of Isaiah make it apparent that Isaiah was primarily a prophet of doom. The reason for this was the sustained unbelief and obstinacy of the people—and particularly of the political and religious rulers. Their rebellious conduct made forgiveness impossible because it was rooted in pretentious pride and arrogance.[50] In 2:9b Isaiah exclaims: "... for-

[48] For the semantic range of the noun *šûbāh,* see especially F. Huber, *Jahwe, Juda und die anderen Völker beim Propheten Jesaja* (BZAW 137; Berlin / New York: W. de Gruyter, 1976), 140–147: "Exkursus 2: Semantische Analyse der Wörter *bitha* und *suba* in Jes 30,15."

[49] For the structural characteristics of 28:7–13, 14–22; and 30:15–17, see especially R. F. Melugin, "The Conventional and the Creative in Isaiah's Judgment Oracles," *CBQ* 36 (1974), 301–311.

[50] It may be noted that the theme of pride is one of the most characteristic features of Isaiah's prophecy; it runs like a scarlet thread through all his utterances: 2:9, 11–12, 17(refrain); 5:15; 10:7–15; 13:11; 14:13–14; 16:6; 23:9; 28:1–4.

give them not!" He receives the commission to announce total desolation (6:11–13ab), and in 22:14 he reports: "The Lord of hosts has revealed himself in my ears: 'Surely this iniquity will not be forgiven you, till you die.'"

This adds importance to the question: how significant was the concept of the remnant for Isaiah? The idea recurs frequently, it is true, but most of the instances are usually considered secondary;[51] only passages like 7:3 and 17:3 are commonly recognized as Isaianic. The idea of the remnant is, however, expressed not only in words that denote it directly, but also symbolically or indirectly. In 17:4–6 there is the metaphor of a remnant after harvest, in 30:17bc that of a remnant after battle. The protest against Assyria's conduct makes it plain that the Assyrian king is initially regarded as "the rod" of God's anger in punishing "a godless nation" (10:5–6), but then becomes the recipient of punishment because "it is in his mind to destroy, and to cut off nations not a few" (10:7). Here we find the clearest evidence that in Isaiah's view the total destruction of any nation is not part of God's plan. It follows that secondary passages concerning the concept of the remnant are not only fully compatible with the Isaianic alternation of prophecies of judgment and salvation, but also depend on Isaiah.[52]

Isaiah never says directly that the remnant will be saved because of repentance and a return to God,[53] but he implies what God can assure him: "... your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven" (6:7b), because Isaiah is ever faithful to him; the people cannot "turn and be healed," because they are obstinate (6:9–10); Isaiah's son Shear-jashub signifies a call to return in terms of trust in God rather than in the empires of human rulers (7:3–9); the declaration to the unbelieving majority "In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength" (30:15) indirectly means that the remnant will find salvation by following this counsel. To Isaiah it must have seemed obvious that not all the people without exception were obdurate. And his own family and the disciples who transmitted his prophecies to later generations are proof enough that Isaiah was not alone in his faithfulness.

History justified Isaiah's principle of trust in God. The captains and the kings were destroyed, the humble and the contrite lived on. The survival of an important remnant of the faithful is a historical fact. To insist that Isaiah foresaw only total destruction would involve the claim that his prophecies were not fulfilled by history. The miraculous survival of the remnant was

[51] See O. Kaiser, *Isaiah 13–39*, 78 (n. b).

[52] See the word *šĕ'ār* in 10:19–22; 11:11, 16; 14:22; 16:14; 21:17; *šĕ'ērît* in 14:30; 15:9; *śārîd* in 1:9; *maṣṣebet* in 6:13; *gēza'/šōreš* in 11:1.

[53] See the conclusion of H. W. Wolff concerning the prophecy of Isaiah in "Das Thema 'Umkehr' in der alttestamentlichen Prophetie," *ZThK* 48 (1951), 138: "Umkehr ist keine reale Möglichkeit für Israel; sie gehört darum als Thema ausschließlich in die Gerichtsverkündigung."

decisive for Israel then and in the future. The community that was delivered from judgment found in the theme of a purged remnant a new hermeneutical principle for the interpretation of history. Characteristic of this interpretation is the statement in 10:20–23: "In that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean upon him that smote them, but will lean upon the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God. For though your people Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return. Destruction is decreed, overflowing with righteousness. For the Lord, the Lord of hosts, will make a full end, as decreed, in the midst of all the earth." An apocalyptic and eschatological vision could prevail because it became more and more apparent that even in the most stressful historical circumstances a believing remnant was saved, whereas the haughty rulers were sooner or later destroyed. Thus did historical experience confirm the cornerstone of Isaiah's prophecy: "If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established" (7:9; cf. 28:16; 30:15). It is hardly accidental that this principle occasioned so many antithetic formulations of exhortation and threat.[54]

There is only one foundation for this truth: absolute monotheism. And God's holiness and transcendence allow only two related options: the way of belief leading to salvation // the way of disbelief leading to destruction. He who chooses the latter can be saved only if he repents and returns to God.[55]

[54] Cf. 1:19//20, 27//28; 3:10//11; 5:15//16; 8:6//7, 12//13; 30:15//16. Antithetic parallelism seems to be the most appropriate means of expressing the incontestable, ever valid truth that there is always hope for those who trust in God, whereas the way of the wicked will perish (cf. Ps 1).

[55] Only such an understanding of divine and human options could occasion editorial sayings like 14:1–2; 19:16–25; 30:18–26; 31:4–9; 33:17–24. God's mercy and healing of the people can be announced where the signs of returning to him are in some way visible.

CHAPTER XV

REJECTION AND RECONCILIATION IN THE BOOK OF HOSEA

Nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible is the polarization between divine wrath and love, or between punishment and forgiveness as stark and extreme as in the book of Hosea. And it is this contrast that makes its interpretation so difficult. The more dramatic the swing from one extreme to the other, the more acute the questions of authorship and dating become. The main problem in the first three chapters is that of historical authenticity: is the story of Hosea's marriage factual, or is it an allegory designed to depict the relationship between the covenanted people and their God?

Much spilling of exegetical ink has shown that it is not possible to answer this question solely by textual analysis. In solving the most difficult puzzles, human universal conjectures and experiences become relevant whether one wishes that to happen or not. Identifying the most profound explanations of the persistence of divine forbearance—despite the continuing apostasy of the people—is among the most significant of these; another is that of the threats or declarations of merciless divine punishment. These in turn give rise to the urgent question as to what kind of link exists between the repentance of the people and divine mercy.

The book of Hosea comprises two formal, distinctively different sections: 1) chapters 1–3; 2) chapters 4–14. The first part is biographical (chaps. 1–2) and autobiographical (chap. 3), while the second is a collection of the prophet's speeches.[1] Both sections are largely metrical in form al-

[1] The question of the structure of Hosea is of prime interest to recent commentators. It has also led to special studies. The problem remains insoluble when interpreters are biased and depend too much upon the formal criteria of structure, although some motives and phrases are repeated throughout the book. Thematic aspects should thus be taken even more into account, for they bear witness to the fundamental unity of the book with its permanent tension between the declarations on punishment and forbearance. See particularly recent interpreters who also summarize the views of earlier ones: W. R. Harper, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1905); A. Weiser, *Das Buch der zwölf Kleinen Propheten*, vol. 1 (ATD 24; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1950), 1–104; H. W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheton, 1: Hosea* (BK 14/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1965); F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 24; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980); J. Jeremias, *Der Prophet Hosea: Übersetzt und erklärt* (ATD 24/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983); E. Bons, *Das Buch Hosea* (NSK.AT 23,1; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1996). H. W. Wolff, F. I. Andersen, and D. N. Freedman are particularly exhaustive, especially in view of their extremely full bibliography. For special questions of structure and poetry, see H. Frey, "Der Aufbau der Gedichte Hoseas," *WuD*.NF 5 (1957), 9–103; E. M. Good, "The Composition of Hosea," *SEÅ* 31 (1966), 21–63; M. D. Zulick, *Rhetorical Polyphony in the Book of the Prophet Hosea* (Evanston, Ill., Northwestern University, Diss., 1994); I. Šporčić, *Das untreue Volk: Zum Sprachfeld der Untreue bei Hosea* (Rome, Pon-

though the first contains a higher proportion of prose than the second—as is natural, for the speechmaker always inclines more towards rhetoric and poetry than does the narrator.

1. *The Marriage of Hosea (Chapters 1–3)*

Despite differences in style and what appears to be an apparent discontinuity between individual sections, the three opening chapters of Hosea are unified in theme. The account of Hosea's marriage is sequential: the infidelity of his wife, the rejection of her children, and a reconciliation brought about by Hosea's—or rather—God's forbearance. Embodied in the paradox of Hosea's marriage is the process towards the validation of the truth of the divine dealings with a covenanted people. Israel rejects the Lord completely, despite which God does not abandon her but instead draws up a fresh covenant that carries with it the promise of a bright tomorrow. The section divides into the following units: an introduction (1:1); the story of Hosea's wife, the naming and renaming of her children (1:2–2:3); accusations of unfaithfulness, conciliation, and renewal of the covenant (2:4–25); the autobiographical narrative of the purchase of Hosea's estranged wife; and the assurance that the children of Israel will come in fear to the Lord "in the latter days" (3:1–5).[2] No clear indications of any current reform of the people of Israel are given, so it must be accepted that Hosea's paradoxical reconciliation with his wife symbolizes an about-turn by the people of Israel only in an undefined future—little though we may like that conclusion.

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tificia Universitas Gregoriana, Diss., 1985, 1995); G. Morris, *Prophecy, Poetry and Hosea* (JSOT.S 219; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); M. Schulz-Rauch, *Hosea und Jeremia: Zur Wirkungsgeschichte des Hoseabuches* (CThM.B 16; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1996); B. Seifert, *Metaphorisches Reden von Gott im Hoseabuch* (FRLANT 166; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996); J. Jeremias, *Hosea und Amos: Studien zu den Anfängen des Dodekapropheten* (FAT 13; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1996); M.-T. Wacker, *Figurationen des Weiblichen im Hosea-Buch* (HBS 8; Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1996).

[2] The first three chapters as a whole or as seperate units have been the subjects of diverse treatises. More or less hypothetical, they delve to greater or lesser depths: A. D. Tushingham, "A Reconsideration of Hosea, Chapters 1–3," *JNES* 12 (1953), 150–159; L. Waterman, "Hosea, Chapters 1–3, in Retrospect and Prospect," *JNES* 14 (1955), 100–109; U. Devescovi, "La nuova alleanza in Osea (2,16–25)," *BeO* 1 (1959), 172–178; H. H. Rowley, *Men of God: Studies of Old Testament History and Prophecy* (London: T. Nelson, 1963), 66–97: "The Marriage of Hosea"; H. W. Wolff, *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (ThB 22; Munich: C. Kaiser, 1964), 151–181: "Der große Jesreeltag (Hosea 2,1–3)"; E. Galbiati, "La struttura sintetica di Osea 2," *Studi sull'Oriente e la Bibbia* (edited by G. Buccellati et al.; Genova: Studio e Vita, 1967), 317–328; H. Krszyna, "Literarische Struktur von Os 2,4–17," *BZ*.NF 13 (1969), 41–59; J. Schreiner, "Hoseas Ehe, ein Zeichen des Gerichts (zu Hos 1,2–2,3; 3,1–5)," *BZ*.NF 21 (1977), 163–183.

1.1 *Hosea's Wife and the Names of the Children (1:2–2:3)*

In 1:2 the Lord commands Hosea: *lēk qaḥ-lĕkā 'ēšet zĕnûnîm wĕyaldê zĕnûnîm kî-zānōh tizneh hā'āreṣ mē'aḥărê yhwh,* "Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry, for the land commits great harlotry by forsaking the Lord." This passage is crucial to an understanding of the entire book of Hosea. Since the text is terse in the extreme and linguistically uncertain, no explanation can hope to be final and authoritative. The possibilities and boundaries of exegesis are not determined here solely by linguistic factors and the immediate context, but by the entire book of Hosea and by experience of the relationship of God and humankind.

The uniqueness of these first three chapters lies in their emphasis on the analogy between the fate of Hosea's marriage and God's covenant with Israel. Their special linguistic characteristic is the use on three occasions of the root *znh,* which primarily designates every type of extramarital female sexual activity. The corrupt wife is not described by the expression *'iššāh zônāh,* 'whoring woman,' or the simple *zônāh,* 'harlot,' but abstractly as *'ēšet zĕnûnîm,* 'wife of harlotry.' It is reasonable to assume that at the time of the marriage, Hosea's wife was not in fact a harlot but merely an unstable character whose breaches of marital fidelity came later.[3] This means that God's command in 1:2 cannot be treated as a decree that Hosea should take a prostitute to wife, but rather as a statement of the divine will following an unsuccessful marriage. In pained disappointment the prophet acknowledges that he must judge the fate of his marriage in the light of God's covenant with an unfaithful people. In retrospect it becomes clear to him that marriage to an unstable wife must have been according to the divine will and that it forms an essential part of his prophetic mission.[4]

This assumption is of course valid for the whole declaration: *lēk qaḥ-lĕkā 'ēšet zĕnûnîm wĕyaldê zĕnûnîm.* If the expression *'ēšet zĕnûnîm* does not mean harlot, but merely describes the unstable character of his wife and her wayward inclinations, then the same is true of the expression *yaldê zĕnûnîm* (cf. *bĕnê zĕnûnîm* in 2:4). The children exhibit the same characteristics as their mother even if all three may be Hosea's offspring.[5] In 1:3 we read that

[3] See E. Eichrodt, "'The Holy One in Your Midst': The Theology of Hosea," *Interpretation* 15 (1961), 260: "... the term used for the prophet's wife ('a wife of harlotry') can mean only a woman inclined to promiscuity. It is thus a question of a character trait and not an activity." See also F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Hosea,* 157–168.

[4] See A. Weiser, *Das Buch der zwölf Kleinen Propheten,* vol. 1, 17–18; W. Eichrodt, *Interpretation* 15 (1961), 260–263; F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Hosea,* 162–167.

[5] See F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Hosea,* 168: "The title 'children of promiscuity' and their symbolic names link mother and children together as representing the action, having the same character. The description of Hosea's fulfilment of the command, which follows immediately in v. 3, does not say that he acquired a wife and children, but simply that he married Gomer. The children follow later: *yaldê zĕnûnîm* means 'children of (a wife of) promiscuity,' in recognition of this family solidarity."

his wife Gomer "conceived and bore him a son." The name of that first child awakens no pejorative echoes: Jezreel simply means "let God sow."

After that, the name of the second, Not pitied (1:6), is all the more surprising, as is Not my people for the third (1:9). God's command in 1:2 is in fact a product of hindsight following the adultery of Hosea's wife, two supposition are permissible: first, the naming of Jezreel took place during the harmonious period of the marriage and reflects the happiness created by a first child; and secondly, the name is connected with the valley of Jezreel, linked as the latter is with the bloody history of Jehu's dynasty after the adultery of his wife. The selection of exceptionally harsh names for the second and third children is an expression of the prophet's disappointment and anger at his wife's infidelity, and the declaration of punishment in relation to all three simultaneously proves that the prophet is already judging the fate of his own marriage in the light of the broken covenant between God and the people of Israel. It is of course possible that neither the second nor the third child was Hosea's. Deep domestic disappointment ultimately opens the prophet's eyes, it seems, enabling him to see more clearly the corruptness of the entire people and the contemporary degeneration into unavoidable catastrophe. Wounded in soul and intellect, he talks only of an end without return.

God's command in 1:4–5 runs thus:

> Call his name Jezreel; for yet a little while, and I will punish *(wĕpāqadtî)* the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end *(wĕhišbattî)* to the kingdom of the house of Israel. And on that day, I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel.

In 1:6–7 the command continues:

> Call her name Not pitied *(lō' ruḥāmāh)*,[6] for I will no more have pity *(kî lō' 'ôsîp 'ôd 'araḥēm)* on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all *(kî nāśō' 'eśśā' lāhem)*. But I will have pity on the house of Judah, and I will deliver them by the Lord their God;[7] I will not deliver them by bow, nor by sword, nor by war, nor by horses, nor by horsemen.

In 1:9 God instructs Hosea: "Call his name Not my people, for you are not my people and I am not your God." After these terrible utterances, which signify the complete rejection of Israel, the promises of 2:1–3 have an almost dreamlike balm. The contrast is most apparent in the divine conclusion that the names of the second and third children will change in the light

[6] The form *ruḥāmāh* is Perfect of Pu'al; *lō' ruḥāmāh* thus designates the already completed activity of rejection. See F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Hosea,* 187–188.

[7] All translations understand the statement about Judah positively: "But I will have pity on the House of Judah and I will deliver them by the Lord their God." However, the supposition that the initial *kî lō' 'ôsîp 'ôd,* "For I will no more," relates to the Lord's entire declaration seems more probable. This means that the Lord is denying Israel as well as Judah in his mercifulness. See F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Hosea,* 188–189.

of Israel's future:

> Yet the number of the people of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which can be neither measured nor numbered; and in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Sons of the living God." And the people of Judah and the people of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head; and they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel. Say to your brother, "My people" *('ammî),* and to your sister, "She has obtained pity" *(ruḥāmāh).*

The complete contradiction between these two passages and the absence of any transition may arouse doubt as to the competence of the final editing or even call in question Hosea's authorship of the promises in 2:1–3. Extreme contrasts are of course characteristic of the entire book of Hosea,[8] and this must be taken into account. The repetition of the opposing terms extreme punishment // forbearance and redemption must therefore have more profound theological implications, and these may possibly be better understood after an examination of all such passages in the book.

1.2 *Defection and Reconciliation (2:4–25)*

Like 2:1–3, this unit consists of two contrasting sections: 2:4–15 contain a scathing accusation of Hosea's wife's infidelity and 2:16–25 the assurance of renewed betrothal. The children are no longer the centre of attention, however, but their mother. Who exactly is calling for reconciliation: the prophet or God? The repetition of the phrase *nĕ'um yhwh,* "says the Lord" (vv. 15, 18, 23) and other statements (e.g., in vv. 16 and 23) prove that God is speaking in both antithetical sections. Nevertheless Hosea's marital drama can still be sensed backstage. As the reality of the prophet's marriage and its allegorical role intertwine, so too do the words of the prophet and his God, emerging as a common indictment—or magnificent promise.

The proceedings in 2:4–15 lay bare every aspect of Hosea's wife's adultery which, legally, means the end of the marriage. The argument in 2:4a is: *kî-hî' lō' 'ištî wĕ'ānōkî lō' 'îšāh,* "for she is not my wife and I am not her husband." Yet the aim of the process is not formal divorce. The deceived husband wants the exact opposite: that his wife should acknowledge her fault and return. The invocation of the death penalty serves the same purpose. The announcement of punishment in 2:8–15 has only one aim, made explicit in 2:9c: "Then she shall say: 'I will go and return *(wĕ'āšûbāh)* to my first husband, for it was better with me then than now.'" Return is possible because it can be recognized that the essence of the wife's infidelity is self-deception. After experiencing bitter disillusion in her adventures, she will acknowledge where the true source of her being and the guarantee of her ex-

[8] See F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Hosea,* 199–213.

istence lie. Because God plainly has in mind this possibility, all threats of punishment are conditional. Consequently the carrying out of extreme punishment would be considered only if none of the lessons succeeded in its didactic mission.

In the light of this confidence in the success of such intervention, the transition to a promise valid for the future (2:16–25) becomes understandable. The introductory vv. 16–18 set the tone.[9] Verse 17b advances the argument that after leaving Egypt, Israel was faithful for a time, only later proving faithless; but it is difficult to reconcile this view with the prevailing account of rebelliousness in the wilderness.[10] Perhaps Hosea had in mind the very earliest period, immediately after the Exodus from Egypt, a time when the people still had vivid memories of their slavery and miraculous deliverance. But it is possible that such lines of thought are also dictated by two more likely explanations. First, Hosea's marriage, which had begun well; and secondly, experience of the purifying role of the desert. Only in the wilderness do people truly sense their dependence and poverty and thus become more responsive to the dictates of their heart than when in a land of plenty. Hosea believes that only in the desert will his unfaithful wife come to understand that Baalism is an illusion and only then will she call the Lord *'îšî*, "My husband."

After his wife takes the decisive step, God will renew the marital covenant. Verses 20–25 are rich with magnificent promise that possesses all the characteristics of a classical eschatological text of the Old Testament. Some elements in 2:16–25 can be considered as in a direct antithetic relationship to the first section (2:4–15). The assurance that his wife will call God "my husband" (v. 18) is the antithesis of the divine declaration in 2:4a. The promise of renewed betrothal and general blessing is the antithesis of the threat of the execution of an unfaithful wife and desolation in the land (2:11–15). The climax of the promise under discussion is the renaming of the second and third children in 2:25. This line is directly antithetic to 1:6–8 but in accordance with the promise given in 2:1–3. Linked to that promise, 2:16–25 poses the question of when the brave new era will commence. On this point, the promise in 2:16–25 is only superficially more definite than that of 2:1–3 because the expression *bayyôm hahû'*, "in that day" (2:18, 20, 23), appears three times. Here too the timing remains a blank. It is obvious that Hosea is more concerned with what will happen rather than with when

[9] On account of the death penalty upon Achan (see Josh 7:24–25), the Valley of Achor serves as a symbol for divine judgment. Because carrying out the punishment simultaneously signifies the cessation of divine wrath, it could also be valid as a door of hope.

[10] See G. W. Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness: The Murmuring Motif in the Wilderness Traditions of the Old Testament* (Nashville / New York: Abingdon, 1968); R. Adamiak (with a Foreword by D. N. Freedman), *Justice and History in the Old Testament: The Evolution of Divine Retribution in the Historiographies of the Wilderness Generation* (Cleveland, Ohio: J. T. Zuba, 1982).

it will happen. Anyone who believes in the miraculous might of divine love may also expect that the reform will transpire in the near future. Even more credible would be the dawn of a new order in distant eschatological time. Hosea's glorious vision of the future covenant is of even greater significance, standing as it does as the oldest declaration of a new covenant that later acquires its classical form in Jer 31:31–34 (cf. Ezek 36:24–32).

1.3 *Hosea Takes Back His Wife (3:1–5)*

This passage is an appropriate successor to the opening pages of the book of Hosea, rounding off as it does the question of Hosea's marriage. It is a laconic autobiographical statement that links reality and allegory effectively. Like 1:2, the narrative begins with the Lord's command: "Go again, love a woman who is beloved of a paramour and is an adulteress; even as the Lord loves the people of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins" (3:1). If God's command in 1:2 is not to be taken literally, but in a transferred and retrospective sense, the psychological and theological problem of the divine will only becomes apparent in 3:1: how can a man love a perfidious wife who is enjoying a relationship with others?

It is obvious that reconciliation involves bilateral action. The wife has suffered inevitable disillusion at the hands of others, and is therefore ready to return to her first husband. Disappointment and a nose for an advantageous solution do not add up to religious reform, however: only the first—albeit decisive—step has been taken, clearing the way for further lessons to be learnt. Trial by wilderness must continue. When Hosea buys his wife back (3:2) he says: "You must dwell as mine for many days; you shall not play the harlot, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you" (3:3). It is plain that this lesson would not be successful were it not founded on an experience of love and forgiveness. Only then is renewed trust and complete togetherness possible. The greater the earlier disappointment and the stronger the later experience of love, the more complete the purification and new togetherness will be. Full reform is possible only in the glow of an absolute divine love that never accepts separation but always re-educates its people in the wilderness, in order to win them back.

Hosea's transactions with his wife demonstrate that renewal of the covenant is not necessarily limited to eschatological time but is possible in any era. Consequently Hosea's example can serve as a portent for all peoples in the immediate or distant future. In 3:4–5 we read:

> For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or teraphim. Afterward the children of Israel shall return *('aḥar yāšûbû)* and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and they shall come in fear to the Lord and to his goodness in the latter days *(bĕ'aḥărît hayyāmîm)*.

2. *Hosea's Prophecies (Chapters 4–14)*

The second section of the book of Hosea comprises the prophet's speeches, which originated at various times and in diverse circumstances. The individual utterances are not directly linked to each other, nor are there any signs of a formal unifying structure for the whole collection, which makes it all the more important to emphasize the *thematic* unity of these pages. Even the introduction (4:1–3) demonstrates that the basic theme is God's dealings (*ryb*) with Israel: there is no fidelity *('ĕmet),* no kindness *(ḥesed)* or knowledge of God *(da'at 'ĕlōhîm).* Instead, perjury, lies, homicide, theft, adultery and the spilling of blood are rampant (4:1–2). God's actions involve threats and the declaration of penalties; indeed, some speeches contain classical formulations of retribution and punishment generally.

Punishment is not, however, Hosea's only theme. As in the first part of the book, outpourings of unquenchable love suddenly cease—until, that is, God's guarantee of mercy and love for the future is reaffirmed.

Despite the absence of formal links between the speeches, it is possible to divide the collection into three sections: (a) chapters 4–7; (b) chapters 8–11; (c) chapters 12–14. The first of these deals with the current situation, the second with the past infidelities of Israel, and the third with past, present and future time.[11]

2.1 Chapters 4–7

The statement about God's actions contained in the three introductory verses of this section is linked to the unit 4:4–6, in which God accuses the priesthood, imposing punishment according to the principle of retaliation *(lex talionis):*

> Yet let no one contend,
> and let none accuse,
> for with you is my contention, O priest.[12]
> You shall stumble *(wĕkāšaltā)* by day
> the prophet also shall stumble *(wĕkāšal gam-nābî')* with you by night;[13]
> and I will destroy your mother.
> My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge;
> because you have rejected knowledge *(kî-'attāh hadda'at mā'astā),*

[11] See F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Hosea,* 314.

[12] The translation of 4:4c is an attempt made in accordance with the majority view: the Masoretic text runs *wĕ'ammĕkā kimrîbĕ kōhēn,* "For with you is my contention, O priest."

[13] Because priest and prophet are synonymous, the pair by day // by night most probably has the role of merism, in the sense of "always, permanently." The priest or prophet will "always" trip. See "Zu Text und Form von Os 4,4–6," *Biblica* 42 (1961), 331; J. Krašovec, *Der Merismus im Biblisch-Hebräischen und Nordwestsemitischen* (BibOr 33; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1977), esp. p. 105.

I reject you from being a priest to me *(wĕ'em 'āsĕ'kā mikkahēn lî).*
And since you have forgotten *(wattiškaḥ)* the law of your God,
I also will forget *('eškaḥ)* your children.

Because Hosea uses the same verb when talking of guilt and punishment, the law of retaliation is entirely appropriate here. Evidence of how fitting such a form of law is can be gathered from similar declarations of punishment found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. Gen 9:6a provides the best example of the balance between statements concerning guilt and punishment: *šōpēk dam hā'ādām bā'ādām dāmô yiššāpēk,* "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed." Before Achan is stoned in the Valley of Achor, Joshua says to him: *meh 'akartānû ya'korkā yhwh bayyôm hazzeh,* "Why did you bring trouble on us? The Lord brings trouble on you today" (Josh 7:25). In 1 Sam 15:23 Samuel, in chastising Saul's guilt, adopts very similar terms to those used by Hosea in 4:6b: "Because you have rejected *(mā'astā)* the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king *(wayyim'oskā mimmelek).*" In 1 Sam 15:33 Samuel decrees the death penalty for the Amalekite king, Agag: "As your sword has made women childless *(šikkĕlāh nāšîm),* so shall your mother be childless *(tiškal)* among women." In 2 Sam 12:12 God passes judgment on David through the prophet Nathan: "For you did it *('āśîtā)* secretly; but I will do *('e'ĕśeh)* this thing before all Israel, and before the sun." In 1 Kgs 21:19b God announces through Elijah punishment for Ahab, who has murdered Naboth: "In the place where dogs licked up *(lāqĕqû)* the blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick *(yāloqqû)* your own blood." In 2 Kgs 17:15–20 the writer speaks of divine punishment for the people of Israel in accordance with their iniquity: "They despised *(wayyim'ăsû)* his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers ... And the Lord rejected *(wayyim'as)* all the descendants of Israel ..." Ps 137:5 contains an example similar to Hos 4:6: "If I forget you *('im-'eškāḥēk),* O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget *(tiškaḥ).*" In 2 Chr 12:5b Shemaiah the prophet delivers the divine judgment on Rehoboam and the princes of Judah: "You abandoned me *('ăzabtem),* so I have abandoned you *('āzabtî)* to the hand of Shishak." The prophet Zechariah in 2 Chr 24:20, speaks similarly: ... *kî 'ăzabtem 'et-yhwh wayya'ăzōb 'etkem,* "Because you have forsaken the Lord, he has forsaken you."[14]

There are so many examples of this kind and their similarity is so great that we can consider them all to be variants of the talion form. This arises only where the demand for appropriate punishment and a desire for a certain artistry in its shaping are equally powerful. Verbal expressions of *lex talionis* were not confined to Hebrew but also appear in other languages of the Northwest Semitic cultural region. There is, however, a significant difference between the biblical examples and the others: all the biblical ones are in the in-

[14] All these examples are dealt with by N. Lohfink, *Biblica* 42 (1961), 311–325.

dicative mood. In other words, this form serves as a statement or declaration of punishment for errors already committed. The sole exception is Gen 9:6a where there is no mention of any definite, already perpetrated wickedness but only of the generally accepted law of blood vengeance. When some great iniquity has occurred, the judicial findings guarantee punishment corresponding to the wrong committed. Punishment is not declared by any human authority but by God. Only the prophetic religion of Israel contains such apodictic statements on divine punishment. There was no theological basis for a prophetic protest against corrupt irreligiosity and lawlessness in the creeds of Israel's neighbours; hence we search in vain for examples of talion form in the indicative mood, although examples of verbal forms in the conditional-optative are known. Consequently the talion pattern does not serve as a style of punishment for some misdeed already perpetrated that transgresses the divine covenant, but gives expression to the wish that any wrongdoer who offends within the realm of human authority should be dealt a punishment corresponding to his wickedness—such as the conclusion to the Phoenician inscription of King Kilamuwa I from Zenjirli (c. 825 B.C.E.); lines 15–16 run: "... if anyone smashes *(yšḥt)* this inscription, may Baal-Semed who belongs to Gabbar smash his head *(yšḥt r'š),* and may Baal-Hammon who belongs to BMH and Rakkabel, lord of the dynasty, smash his head *(wyšḥt r'š)!*"[15]

Biblical examples of talion form with the verbal form differ greatly from the classical law of retaliation in Exod 21:23–25; Lev 24:18–20; Deut 19:21 (cf. 1 Kgs 20:42). First, this law comes in noun form: "... life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth ..."; secondly, it appears within a group of judicial ordinances and laws, signifying that it is the generally used decree of punishment for specific types of wickedness;[16] and thirdly, it does not serve as a rule for divine dealings with humankind but as an ordinance for human establishments.[17]

[15] See J. C. L. Gibson, *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 30–39; *KAI* 24, 15–16. There is a similar end to the Aramaic text from Sfire (stele I C 16–25) from the mid-8th century B.C.E. See J. C. L. Gibson, *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions,* stele I C 15–25 (pp. 33–34): "... may the gods keep (him) all his days and his house as long as it last! But whoever does not keep the words of the inscription which is on this stele, but says, I shall efface some of its words, or, I shall change the good things and turn them into evil *('hpk ṭbt' w'šm [l]lḥyt),* on a day when he does so, may the gods overturn *(ykpkw)* that man and his house and all who are [in] it, and make its lower part its upper part; and may his stock inherit no name!" See also *KAI* 222 C 16–25: "Wer dagegen die Worte der Inschrift, die auf dieser Stele sind, nicht bewahrt, sondern spricht: 'Ich werde ihre Worte auslöschen!' oder 'Ich werde das Gute umstürzen und [zum] Bösen kehren!' – an dem Tage, an dem er so handel[t], sollen die Götter [je]nen Man[n] umstürzen und sein Haus und alles, was [dar]in ist, und sollen sein Unterstes [zuo]berst kehren! Und seine Nahkom[menschaft] soll keinen Namen besitzen!"

[16] We must not overlook the fact that the verbal forms of talion law in Gen 9:6a and both the mentioned non-biblical examples are also not statements of punishment for definite, already carried out activities. These cases are concerned with the principle, or wish, that any possible evil-doer will suffer appropriate punishment for his deed.

[17] For the law of retaliation, see particularly: S. A. Cook, *The Laws of Moses and the Code of Hammurabi* (London: A. & C. Black, 1903), 249–262; D. H. Müller, *Die Gesetze Hammu-*

It is clear after all this that Hosea's talion form in 4:6 is of particular significance. It provides a divine conclusion of punishment for the religious leaders of the people and is the sole double biblical example. Unavoidably the shadow of this decree falls on other instances where the judicial sentence and criticism appear in different forms. A characteristic pattern of the principle of retribution appears in 4:9. In 4:7–8, 10–11 it is explained why the priest will suffer the same fate as his people. Further mentions of various types of transgression lead to 5:4 stating that their deeds debar them from returning to the Lord, while 5:5 asserts that Ephraim and Judah shall stumble in their iniquity *(yikkāšĕlû ba'ăwônām).*

The threat of punishment is not, however, as inexorable as it may seem; in 5:15–6:3 we find that it has after all an exclusively educational purpose. The key to understanding this passage is the declaration in 5:15c: "And in their distress they seek me." The prophets take into account the fact that for most people the precondition for conversion is negative: only when illusions are shattered, when political and religious idols fall, and people find themselves in a hopeless impasse do they begin to consider, to reflect upon their guilt, and to return.[18] When guilt is acknowledged and the guilty are willing to repent, God appears, without reservation, to assist them to a full conversion with all the power of his mercy and love.[19] The entire journey from the hesitant realization of guilt and the first tremulous signs of longing for the true source of life to the far goal of complete healing corresponds more or less to the resurrection from death to life. In the light of prophetic belief in an absolute God, we may understand the statement about awakening to the new life in 6:2 both metaphorically and literally. The God of biblical revelation is also able to heal incurable disease and to transform the desert into an oasis (cf. Ezek 37:1–14; 47:1–12). This means that in the true meaning of

rabis und ihr Verhältnis zur mosaischen Gesetzgebung sowie zu den XII Tafeln (Vienna: A. Hölder, 1903), 146–156: "XXXV. Die Talion"; J. Blau, "Lex Talionis," *Central Conference of American Rabbis XXVI* (Wildwood, N.J.: I. E. Marcuson, 1916), 336–375; D. Daube, *Studies in Biblical Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), 102–153: "Chapter II. Lex Talionis"; J. K. Mikliszanski, "The Law of Retaliation and the Pentateuch," *JBL* 66 (1947), 295–303; A. Alt, *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel* I (2nd ed.; Munich: O. Beck, 1959), 341–344: "Zur Talionsformel"; W. Lillie, "Towards a Biblical Doctrine of Punishment," *SJTh* 21 (1968), 449–461. See also N. Lohfink, *Biblica* 42 (1961), 303–332.

[18] See G. von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments,* vol. 2 (5th ed.; Munich: C. Kaiser, 1968), 121–129: "Die Eschatologisierung des Geschichtsdenkens durch die Propheten"; von Rad uses the term "Nullpunktsituation." See also p. 152 of his book.

[19] Regarding the correlation of all fundamental theological postulates in prophetic literature and the demands of the natural senses, what is said about the question of return in F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Hosea,* 418–419, is unconvincing: "When Yahweh comes like the rain, the healing in v. 1 will take place, and it is because he will come like the rain that the people return to him. Verse 3b comes logically and chronologically before vv 1b and 2. It is also possible that v 3a, its repetition of 'Yahweh,' is parallel to v 1a; but it is more likely that it describes the pursuit of Yahweh by the revived people after restoration, not by the repentant people before revival."

the word God can also arouse the dead.[20]

The section 6:7–7:2 makes it clear that this healing and awakening from the dead are for the future: God chastises the breaking of the covenant in the past and wickedness of every kind in the present. In 6:11–7:1a the text is unfortunately vague about timing but the context indicates the general direction exegesis should take. The declaration in 6:11b *bĕšûbî šĕbût 'ammî,* "When I would restore the fortunes of my people," evidently serves as a promise of redemption for the future. Thus, despite Israel's errors, God will not reject her but will punish all iniquities that impede self-healing. On what basis will the fate of the people be altered in the future? Evidently initially there will be judgment on the evildoers but healing for those who have not apostasized entirely. All of this will happen during periods of such stress as will force the people to think again and to make appropriate decisions.[21]

2.2 *Chapters 8–11*

The main theme of chapters 8–11 continues to be that of the misdeeds and divagations of the people of Israel. Linked to this are various declarations on punishment or retribution. The first example (8:7) is this: "For they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind." This allegorical utterance demonstrates how fundamental is the connection between the behaviour of the covenanted people and their fate. The phrase qualifies as a wisdom saying because it incorporates certain facets of nature and humanity and is consequently of universal significance. The question of the relationship between "wind" and "whirlwind" is therefore all the more important. Are they synonyms? Perhaps. But as a whirlwind is much more powerful than a wind, perhaps not. General experience of the relation between seeds and harvest in the natural order, and between human activities and their effects on the moral order, suggests that "reap" is usually a more impressive part of the

[20] The sequence "after two days—the third day" in 6:2 should not be interpreted literally. The use of numbers in the Bible in order to demonstrate intensification is so frequent that there are evidently artistic reasons behind it. Increase by a single number must have its own explanations in parallelism. See the sequence of numbers in various combinations: 1–2 in Ps 62:12–13; Job 40:5; 2–3 in Isa 17:6; Sir 23:16; 26:28; 50:25 (see also Ahikar 92); 3–4 in Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6; Prov 30:15–16, 18–19, 21–23, 29–31; Sir 26:5; 4–5 in Isa 17:6; 6–7 in Job 5:19; Prov 6:16–19; 7–8 in Mic 5:4; Qoh 11:2; 9–10 in Sir 25:7. G. Sauer, *Die Sprüche Agurs: Untersuchungen zur Herkunft, Verbreitung und Bedeutung einer biblischen Stilform unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Proverbia c. 30* (BWANT 3/4; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1963) is exhaustive about the place and the meaning of the sequence of numbers in the Old Testament and in the literature of other nations of the ancient Near East.

[21] Concerning the role of punishment and repentance of the people upon the restoration, the opinion on 7:1 in F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Hosea,* 444, seems too biased: "As in 2:16, and generally in Ezekiel, the repentance of the people seems to be the result—not the precondition—of divine restoration. It is Yahweh's generosity, not his severity, that makes them ashamed of themselves."

cycle than "sow"—otherwise the sowing would be pointless. The disproportion between sowing and reaping also demonstrates the negative aspect of such a process. It is generally accepted that one of the main reasons why human evil multiplies is its social nature. It is not by chance that biblical primeval history bears witness to the intensification of evil and God's measures of mitigation. Despite all this, the basic natural law that every cause produces an appropriate effect remains valid. There is normally proportion between cause and effect. Wind and whirlwind are related concepts; their use in a synonymous parallelism indicates this and the use of the second word in the second verse is characteristic, expressing as it does more or less the same as the first. The positive meaning of the pair sow // reap in 10:12 demonstrates synonymity. The principle: as you sow, so shall you reap, is clearly evident here. We must not overlook the essential link between human and divine righteousness: those who sow "for righteousness" reap divine righteousness—i.e. divine benevolence, gifts, redemption.[22] The author emphasizes the link between divine and human righteousness by using sow // reap as a merism, and because the concepts *ṣĕdāqāh // ḥesed* are synonymous, the adjuration "Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruits of steadfast love" means: whatever you do, do it with good intentions.[23] Human actions must on the whole be virtuous; only then will divine righteousness rain down upon those who perform them. A comparison of the statements in 8:7 and 10:12 permits two conclusions to be drawn: first, the harvest will never be good if the sowing is poor, and secondly, the harvest will only be good if the crop is well cared for right up to harvest time.

What about other expressions of retribution in these chapters? In 8:13b the prophet affirms: "Now he will remember their iniquity, and punish *(yipqōd)* their sins," a statement that is repeated in 9:9b. In 9:7a there is a classic example of a declaration of retribution in perfective form: "The days of punishment *(pĕquddāh)* have come, the days of recompense *(šillum)* have come." The perfective means that the effects of punishment are already being felt or that the conclusion about punishment has already been reached. In 9:15 God threatens to drive *(gāraš)* the people of Israel "out of my house" on account of their evil deeds and to love them no longer. In 9:17 we read: "My God will cast them off *(yim'āsēm)*, because they have not hearkened to him; they shall be wanderers among the nations." In chapter 10 punishment is mentioned in vv. 2, 10, 15.

Chapter 11 begins with God lamenting that in the past Israel has repaid divine benevolence and loving care with ingratitude and iniquity. The chap-

[22] See J. Krašovec, *La justice (ṣdq) de Dieu dans la Bible hébraïque et l'interprétation juive et chrétienne* (OBO 76; Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988).

[23] See. J. Krašovec, *Der Merismus*, esp. p. 98.

ter begins: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son" (11:1); but the people followed Baal and other idols (11:2); God had cared for Israel as a mother for her children (11:2–4), but they did not recognize this (11:3b). After this, a return to the confusion and trouble from which they had been rescued seemed an appropriate punishment. In 11:5 God threatens the people of Israel: "They shall return to the land of Egypt, and Assyria shall be their king, because they have refused to return *(kî mē'ănû lāšûb)* to me." In 11:6 he prophesies killing by the sword in their native land and in the following verse complains of their apostasy.

All this could lead to the expectation that God would absent himself completely, leaving the people of Israel to the blunders that were propelling them towards destruction. But at this most critical moment, God movingly declares that sentiments of divine love will overcome those of destructive wrath. Verses 11:8–11 are justifiably considered the theological pinnacle of the book of Hosea, one of the most important texts in the Old Testament, and a point of contact between the Old and the New. Here too is the key to understanding such passages as 2:1–3, 16–25 and 3:1–5: God does not intend to destroy the people of Israel as he did Admah and Zeboim, together with Sodom and Gomorrah—but this does not mean to say he will not punish the people; there is talk of transgressions and punishments from beginning to end of the book. A decisive divine internal about-turn is made only when the alternatives are complete destruction and redemption. The tension between threats of punishment and occasional indications of a sense of mercy indicates that God always punishes Israel with feelings of pain and regret, and only in order to reclaim her, so destruction cannot be the divine aim. A fundamental difference between God and humankind is evident in their understandings of the purpose of punishment and in the balance between the motifs of anger and mercifulness and love. The history of humanity is sufficient witness to the contentiousness of its measures and impulses in dealings with the world, humankind, and God. In general they are marred by bias, enmity and revenge intended to destroy those who are seen as "the enemy." Divine sanctity must surely be more a matter of the imperative of God's love and redemption than of the demands of divine wrath, for the former was and is the driving force behind Creation and the completion of the world.[24] The purpose of Creation and the history of mankind is so mani-

[24] In F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Hosea*, 22–23, 575–576. The translation of 11:9 differs from that found elsewhere:

> I will certainly act out my burning anger.
> I will certainly come back to destroy Ephraim.
> For I am a god and not a human.
> I, the Holy One, will certainly come into the midst of your city.

The explanation of this translation given on pp. 589–591 is unconvincing.

fest that no force can hinder the implementation of God's plan. "He will roar like a lion" in order to summon the chosen people from all corners of the earth and to establish them in the Promised Land.

2.3 *Chapters 12–14*

The next passage to be considered comes from chapter 12. Here the speaker talks, mainly in the third person, of God's dealings with Israel (Ephraim) and with Jacob (12:4–6, 13). Only in 12:10–11 does God himself speak in the first person. The divine criticism is based on Israel's general dishonesty, bargaining with foreign nations and worshipping idols. Thus the motif of a suit or process (*ryb*; cf. 4:1) appears again in 12:3 together with the retributive statement:

> The Lord has an indictment against Judah,
> and will punish (MT *wĕlipqōd*) Jacob according to his ways,
> and requite him *(yāšîb lô)* according to his deeds.

Jacob's behaviour at birth, his battle with God, and the meeting with him at Bethel are mentioned (cf. Gen 25:19–26; 32:23–33; 35:1–15), and this evidently serves a dual purpose in the given context. First, the author draws attention to Jacob's cunning and rebelliousness, giving us to understand that Israel has long since been similarly false and rebellious. Secondly, albeit indirectly, the writer emphasises that Jacob did not receive his privileged status on account of his own virtues but as a result of God's free will and mercy. The statement "he wept and sought his favour" in 12:5 signifies, of course, that Jacob was aware of his wickedness and dependence upon God. Herein certainly lies a reason for hoping that Israel, too, will now attain such self-knowledge. In 12:7, the speaker turns to him, saying:

> So you, by the help of your God, return *(tāšûb)*,
> hold fast to love and justice,
> and wait continually for your God.

The call to reform is especially necessary because the people of Israel imagine they are already righteous and in no need of it. Indeed, they even ascribe their wealth to their own virtue (12:9), while in Gilead and Gilgal they make sacrifices to idols (12:12). All this is happening although God has been Lord of Israel since the days in Egypt; alone can guarantee her existence in the future; and, according to the prophets, alone has saved the people (vv. 9–10, 13). As Israel chooses to overlook all this, the prophet is unable to promise anything other than appropriate punishment. In 12:15 he says:

> Ephraim has given bitter provocation;
> so his Lord will leave his blood-guilt upon him,
> and will turn back *(yāšîb lô)* upon him his reproaches.

Not only is this declaration about retribution an appropriate conclusion to chapter 12; it also defines the theme for the passage that follows: 13:1–14:1, which represents the peak of God's dealings with the people of Israel under the names Ephraim and Samaria. Textual criticism is difficult in many places. And this is not a systematic composition. The main theme, however, is sufficiently clear: interwoven, and in complete contrast to each other, are declarations of the uniqueness of Israel's God and of her unexampled apostasy. There is a statement on punishment in 13:1. Thus the speaker sees an essential link between the people's sins and the course of national history, which is exhibiting signs of approaching collapse. There is a similar judgment at the end of this unit (14:1). The statements on guilt, using the same word *('šm),* and on punishment at the beginning and the end are to be understood as belonging to the unit 13:1–14:1.

The introductory part of this passage (13:1–3) reproaches idolaters (v. 2), predicting appropriate punishment and using images of morning mist, dew, chaff and smoke—all transient phenomena (v. 3). Apostasy to foreign gods is something hitherto unheard of because the God of Israel has been her sole redeemer since the Egyptian captivity (v. 4; cf. 12:1a) and supported the people in the desert (13:5). Since they forgot their Redeemer as soon as they began to prosper (13:6), God is unable to show them forbearance, but, like the lion or the bear, will leap upon them, tearing them to pieces (13:7–8; cf. 5:14). Neither kings nor other earthly leaders will assist in the day of trouble. God continues to speak in 13:11 about his punishment by anger. The iniquity of Israel is so great that it cannot be forgotten or forgiven (cf. v. 12). So serious is the matter that this is now a question of life and death. In 13:14 God exclaims that compassion *(nōḥam)* is hid from his eyes. In 13:15 the speaker ends by representing an inexorable judge and in that role uses stark imagery: the east wind is invoked, which even dries up wells and fountains.

Despite the many harsh statements on punishment, the book of Hosea ends on a note of benevolent reassurance, just when it seems that there can be no saving an Israel that has no wish to be saved. In accordance with the principle sustained throughout the book, the prophet starts by drawing attention to the reason for the present collapse: Israel has stumbled, and the call to return means that the people must acknowledge their guilt; they must be capable of uttering the words laid upon their lips by the Lord in 14:4. Perhaps this call was heard after the destruction of Samaria in 721 when many Israelites had to think again and were—ultimately—willing to heed the prophet.

When the divine call to repent is accepted into the hearts of a penitent people, God can then restore the guarantee of love that had been turned aside by wrath. The prophet assured that God will heal Israel's faithlessness, "for my anger has turned from them *(kî šāb 'appî mimmennû)* ... and they shall return *(yāšûbû)* and dwell beneath my shadow ..." (14:5b–9). After so

much talk of the punishment of Israel, it is impossible that God would use such language if a decisive turnabout had not occurred in the people's attitude. An expression of their new way of thinking is given in 14:4: "... In thee the orphan finds mercy." All exegetes agree that 14:2–9 belongs at the end of Hosea. There are several reasons for this. First is the role of the divine love that provides the reason and purpose of Creation and history, Secondly, there is the educational purpose of punishment, a goal that is sooner or later achieved. Thirdly, there is the prophet's mission: his suffering and persistent call to amendment could not prove fruitless in the end. And fourthly, there is the breaking of the idols when their day of judgment inevitably arrived. Taken together, these factors explain why love overcomes disappointment and anger so often in the book of Hosea: 2:1–3, 16–25; 3:1–5; 11:8–11; 14:2–9.

Hosea provides a dynamic account of two possible routes for human life: one leads to life, the other to destruction. Which is why the editor saw a great opportunity to make use of Wisdom literature, and why in the last verse (14:10) he addresses his readers thus:

> Whoever is wise, let him understand these things;
> whoever is discerning, let him know them;
> for the ways of the Lord are right,
> and the upright walk in them,
> but transgressors stumble in them.

Antithetic parallelism is an ideal stylistic, rhetorical means of illustrating the destinies of the faithful and the faithless. At the start or end of a passage it summarizes the basic content of the whole (cf. Judg 5:31; Ezek 27:33–34; 31:18; Pss 1:6; 31:24; 40:15–16; 68:2–4; 73:27–28; 81:16–17; 112:9–10; 145:20; 146:9; Prov 1:32–33; 2:21–22; 8:35–36).

3. *Synthesis: Unifying Themes in the Book of Hosea*

The book of Hosea starts with an account of an adverse personal experience at two levels: the prophet's betrayal by an unfaithful wife, and God's rejection by a wicked people. As deity and prophet are in the closest of personal relationships, Hosea's marriage can stand as an allegory representing the link between God and a covenanted people.

One characteristic of Hosea is the frequent use of the root *znh* in the verb *zānāh* (1:2; 2:7; 3:3; 4:10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18; 5:3; 9:1) and in the noun forms *zĕnûnîm* (1:2; 2:4, 6; 4:12; 5:4) and *zĕnût* (4:11; 6:10). The use of this root to designate the guilt of Israel means that we are not concerned merely with specific examples of this or that error but with apostasy at the very heart of humanity, with iniquity that corrodes relationships between human beings

and the covenanted link with the divine down to their deepest foundations. Hence it is understandable that the pain of the deceived partner, the prophet or the Lord, should repeatedly overflow in outbursts of anger that demand appropriate punishment or even destruction. Amongst expressions of punishment, roots of a personalized nature—i.e., *rḥm* and *nḥm* in the negative sense—are most characteristic of Hosea, whose second child is named *lō' ruḥāmāh* because she will not receive pity (1:6–7). In an especially intense declaration on punishment in 13:14, God says: "Compassion *(nōḥam)* is hid from my eyes." In the face of such statements, any possibility of forbearance seems slender; in fact, these words complete the evidence that the people have no desire for reform and are in fact incapable of it. In 5:4 we read: "Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God." In 7:10 the speaker says: "The pride of Israel witnesses against him; yet they do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek him, for all this." And in 11:5 Ephraim's sentence is substantiated with the words *kî mē'ănû lāšûb,* "because they have refused to return."

Despite such conclusions, the book of Hosea is conspicuous for its themes of mercy and covenant renewal. The prophet and his God behave in a manner that contradicts both the law on unfaithful wives (cf. Deut 24:1–4) and their own personal statements about inexorable punishment. A people designated "You are not my people" receive a new name: "Sons of the living God," the child called "Not my people" is renamed "You are my people"; and his sister, "Not pitied," becomes "She has obtained pity" (2:1–3). 2:16–25 directly contradicts the judgments in 2:4–15. Instead of "For she is not my wife and I am not her husband" (2:4), 2:20–22 speaks of a new covenant and eternal betrothal in righteousness and justice *(bĕṣedeq ûbĕmišpāṭ),* in steadfast love and mercy *(bĕḥesed ûbĕraḥămîm),* Instead of the ruthless "Upon her children also I will have no pity ..." (2:6), in 2:25 we have the promise: "And I will sow him for myself in the land. And I will have pity on Not pitied *(wĕrīḥamtî 'et-lō' ruḥāmāh),* and I will say to Not my people 'You are my people'; and he shall say, 'Thou art my God.'" In 3:1 God commands the prophet: "Go again, love a woman who is beloved of a paramour and is an adulteress; even as the Lord loves the people of Israel ..."

What lies behind such an about-turn in sentiment? An answer is not possible solely by reference to linguistic and literary factors in the book of Hosea. The universal characteristics of love, the role of punishment, and the likelihood or unlikelihood of a return to God must also be taken into consideration. Only one who loves with a complete love can forgive.

Since love is the highest principle in human personal life, and for God the activity of Creation and all history from the beginning to final fulfilment, it is clear that it is in its essentials eternal and irrevocable. Even an unfaithful partner cannot invalidate such love. The other partner will react bitterly and perhaps initiate appropriate punishment, only to find it impossible to

turn finally against a first love. There follows an attempt to regain the estranged one's love—and perfect love is such that even punishment is an expression of it. In 11:8–9 complete love dictates God's words: "How can I give you up, O Ephraim! How can I hand you over, O Israel!" The power of love in cloud and sunshine alike provides the foundation of hope that the unfaithful partner will be won over and helped to return. Ultimately, this simultaneously implies an ability to acknowledge wrongdoing, with a resulting capacity to return. Hosea takes this possibility seriously, and thus talks not only of rejection or inability (5:4; 7:10; 11:5), but also of his conviction that his wicked people will return. In 2:9 God predicts punishment for the unfaithful wife: "She shall pursue her lovers, but not overtake them, and she shall seek them but shall not find them. Then she shall say, 'I will go and return *('elkāh wĕ'āšûbāh)* to my first husband, for it was better with me then than now.'" In 3:5 we read: "Afterward the children of Israel shall return *('aḥar yāšûbû bĕnê yiśrā'ēl)* and seek the Lord their God ..." In 6:1 the future of the people of Israel in time of trouble is forecast thus: "Come, let us return to the Lord *(lĕkû wĕnāšûbāh 'el-yhwh)* ..." When the right conditions were established, the prophet encouraged his people: "Return *(šûbāh),* O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. Take with you words and return *(wĕšûbû)* to the Lord ..." (14:2–4).

These examples suggest that the prime reason for the return of an unfaithful partner is the experience of first love. Other forms of it cannot replace anything that is "deep as first love, and wild with all regret," in Tennyson's words. The revelation of the unique value that the unrepeatable quality of first love has is not accidental, however: to savour it, to value it properly, demands a later experience also. Eventually, searching for this other love has leads to disappointment unless the new partner can at least match the first. If the newcomer is clearly inferior, the ground is cleared for suspicions of deception, disappointment is complete and the longing for the first love even greater. The people of Israel abandoned their covenanted God by allying themselves to other nations and accepting their gods. They exchanged an absolute God for an illusion, and disappointment was inevitable. When the collapse came, when they experienced the duplicity of foreign powers and the fallibility of their gods, then—and only then—did they begin to acknowledge the reality of the self-revelation by the God of Israel. Tasting the fruits of an absolute love, they acknowledged him to be the sole source of all benefits and the only solution to their predicament. The prophet had reached such conclusions without *Sturm und Drang,* being possibly inoculated by the divine nature of his inspiration. Only when their erroneous ways had led them to the brink of some catastrophe did the masses achieve an equal insight. In 2:16 God speaks of the possibility of education in the wilderness. Only there did the people acknowledge that God is the sole source of life and consequently of salvation.

Acknowledging iniquity and a desire for return do not of course imply healing. Only absolute divine love can heal, can regenerate. Nevertheless, the recognition of guilt and a wish to return are essential requisites for divine mercifulness and forbearance. The revelation of divine love and the demolishing of idols have rendered such shifts in human personality possible through all ages, and the promise of healing and a fresh covenant cannot be confined in its application to the distant future, to eschatological time; to a greater or lesser degree, these promises are also fulfilled in the present.

The most compelling proof of this is the behaviour of the prophet himself, who neither rejects his unfaithful wife nor divorces her but attempts to reclaim her—something he actually achieves. As noted above, his paradoxical behaviour transgresses certain sections of the law and challenges hypocrisy and self-righteousness. Despite this, it has enthused the countless masses who have hungered and thirsted after divine righteousness through the centuries. The human race tends to find Hosea's conduct more convincing than the scandalized reactions of the pseudo-righteous.[25] His behaviour must reflect the deepest feeling, instincts and hopes of human nature which, despite its frailty, stands witness that creation mirrors the divine image. Thus and only thus has Hosea' s marriage served in all ages as an allegory for the covenant between God and the people of Israel. In his beliefs and actions, Hosea cannot have stood alone among his contemporaries, for larger or smaller groups of the righteous have existed throughout history—which is the sole basis for the hope of a future Messianic era. Critics of Israel's iniquity in prophetic literature sometimes create the impression that all went astray without exception; but biblical writing is often rhetorical, rejoicing in symbols and hyperbole that cannot be understood literally. At the same time, the revelation of absolute divine sanctity and love to the prophets dictates an exceptional severity in judging the covenanted people. This criticism, however, is levelled more at the ruling class than at simpler folk, since the for-

[25] See S. Bitter, *Die Ehe des Propheten Hosea: Eine auslegungsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (GöThA 3; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975). The history of interpretation of the book of Hosea indicates that the Lord's command in 1:2–3 was the reason for errors in many Jewish and Christian interpretations. For Christian tradition the difference between the Antiochene school and the Alexandrian school was characteristic. The former persisted in a word for word explanation whilst the latter gave precedence to allegorical interpretation. These two basic types of exegesis have remained valid until today. In fact, the solution lies in linking them. When talking of the relationship between God and the people, Hosea's marriage cannot be anything but an allegory, nevertheless the Lord's dealing with the covenanted people can ultimately be represented convincingly by images and examples that can be brought to bear in human life. The interdependence between the literal and allegorical interpretations acquires a full meaning and profundity of its own if we constantly take into account the incompleteness of human nature, the positive aim of Creation as a whole, the educational role of the relationship of God to humanity, and the educational role of human leaders (e.g., the prophets) among peoples. In the light of these axioms, reasons for error vanish, even if in 1:2–3 the Lord did command Hosea to marry a woman who had been a harlot before the marriage took place.

mer, responsible for the governance of an entire people, were too much involved in furthering their own personal interests.

The complete contrast between the statements on punishment and mercy and a fresh covenant on the one hand, and assumptions about the existence of the faithful and unfaithful on the other, are sufficient reason for supposing that the threat and declaration of punishment were not made to the same people as heard the promise of the new covenant's cornucopia. Had there been at least a partial overlap, the circumstances would have had to be different, as would the relationship of the people to the basic demands of the divine law.[26] Circumstances can affect human behaviour considerably: external show can mislead, the wilderness can liberate. The example of Hosea's wife shows that this is so. At one time she allowed herself to be seduced, to be disloyal, but after the inevitable disillusionment she was prepared to return. Hosea's own sentiments and declarations, too, were certainly dependent upon the mood and behaviour of his wife: when there was not yet hope of any acknowledgment of guilt, a wave of anger and threats of merciless punishment swept the stage; but when at least some degree of penitence and a desire to return became clear, feelings of love and mercy countervailed completely.

The human race's profounder inspiration possesses as many reasons for forbearance as their maker: the exemplary and exclusively positive purpose of love, a recognition of human frailty, of the bewitching power of personal tempters and other detractors. The prophet and his God knew that the majority of people were unfaithful to their Lord, a powerful mitigating circumstance when the choice of a marriage partner and her later infidelity were concerned. Only in the light of general infidelity does God's command to Hosea in 1:2 become comprehensible: "Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry, for the land commits great harlotry by forsaking the Lord." If all are unfaithful, the prophet cannot hope to find a wife who is not. For the same reason, he can show forbearance when, after a period of estrangement, she indicates her willingness to return. On the other hand, an experience of the frailty of human nature and the seductiveness of its surroundings confirm the role of the love of a righteous partner. The frailer a person is and the more blinded by others, the more necessary true love becomes—the only thing that is able to save, especially in time of crisis.

The unresolved relationship between human responsibility and the role of suffering in a person's beliefs and actions means (whether we wish it or not) that in the deceived partner the clash between the sentiment of benevolence and the rejection is dramatic. Even if love is never completely overwhelmed

[26] See G. von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, vol. 2, 151: "... Aber wer sagt denn, daß Hosea vor denselben Menschen, denen er das Gericht angekündigt hat, auch vom künftigen Heil gesprochen habe!"

by anger and desire for revenge, it can be diluted by a pain that may be immeasurable. The book of Hosea does not conceal either Hosea's or God's pain, provoked by the iniquities of Israel, and it is therefore one of the Bible's best testimonies to the fact that in humanity's progress towards completeness, suffering is inevitable, playing an essential role in healing. Suffering is in fact one of the easily recognizable landmarks of redemptive history. The constant possibility of deviations means that it is highly appropriate to speak of "the retributive reformation of the world."[27] Because God loves the world and the chosen people with an eternal love, they will never be abandoned, although the caress frequently needs to give way to the rod if the people are not to err completely in their purposes.

Divine love is of itself unique and constant, externally expressed in diverse nuances when concerned with human response. When that response is positive, it is calm; when it is negative, it is restless and pursues the iniquitous. When, in the wilderness, humankind opens itself up to love anew, it is completely merciful, full of fresh promises. In all of this it can never compromise.

[27] See E. H. Maly, "Messianism in Osee," *CBQ* 19 (1957), 213–225, esp. p. 224. See also R. Törnkvist, *The Use and Abuse of Female Sexual Imagery in the Book of Hosea: A Feminist Critical Approach to Hos 1–3* (AUU A/7; Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1998).

CHAPTER XVI

THE TERMINOLOGY OF PUNISHMENT AND FORGIVENESS IN THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

The great themes of Jeremiah's theology, divine election and covenant on the one hand, and the tragically fallible response of the people of Israel on the other, inevitably bring the question of retribution sharply into focus. God, who elected Israel, made a covenant with her and remains ever faithful to it.[1] It is natural to expect equal fidelity from the people, but Israel constantly regresses to her idols, and transgresses the sacred covenant in ways without number. God must therefore act as a judge, and makes use of foreign nations to enforce his punishment. The prophet cannot interpret the advent of the Chaldeans as anything other than retribution for the people's transgressions.[2] There is no present hope of forgiveness—or at least so it would seem. In all the groups of materials that form the book of Jeremiah, the terminology of guilt and punishment predominates, and the severest charge against the people is the accusation that Israel refused to turn to her God in spite of many ways of correction.

Nevertheless, Jeremiah and his Deuteronomic editors persist in their calls for repentance and amendment of Israel's conduct—a fact that seems to indicate the possibility of present reform. The greater the emphasis on the need for Israel's obedience to the ordinances of the covenant, the more urgent the call to repentance when God's anger is provoked. Especially remarkable is the assurance that the repentance of the people will be followed by that of the Lord, who will repent of the evil that has been pronounced against them. It is true that the response of the people was positive only in part, but it proved sufficient for God to assure them that a remnant will be delivered from judgment, and to proclaim that the future will be marked by his forgiveness and salvation.[3] The most celebrated of the prophecies of sal-

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[1] There is every indication that the covenant between God and Israel is fundamental to the whole thinking and feeling of Jeremiah. The litmus test for Israel's attitude to her God is obedience or disobedience to divine laws, and the people are punished because they do not attend to God's commandments. The most obvious sign of the covenant background is, however, frequent use of the word *bĕrît,* 'covenant,' in the book of Jeremiah: 11:2, 3, 6, 8, 10; 14:21; 22:9; 31:31, 32, 33; 32:40; 33:20, 21, 25; 34:8, 10, 13, 15, 18.

[2] In several places the coming of a foe "from the north," or "from a distant land," is announced, i.e., one who will bring judgment on the inhabitants of the land: 1:13–16; 4:4–5, 13–22, 27–31; 5:15–17; 6:1–8, 22–26; 8:14–17. Cf. 25:9; 46:10; 47:2; 50:3, 9, 41; 51:48.

[3] For the whole of the book of Jeremiah, see especially the following commentaries and cognate studies: F. Giesebrecht, *Das Buch Jeremia* (HK II/2.1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1894); B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia* (KHC XI; Tübingen / Leipzig: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1901); C. H. Cornill, *Das Buch Jeremia* (Leipzig: C. H. Tauchnitz, 1905); S. R.

vation (Jer 31:31–34) demands particularly close scrutiny, and will therefore be studied separately.

1. *Guilt and Divine Anger*

Jeremiah employs a wide range of terms to express the guilt of Israel or of other nations, and the divine reaction. Guilt is commonly expressed by words that are by their very nature negative in purport, but equally striking is the use of terms with a positive element in their negation. The root of Israel's guilt is her failure to make a positive response to God's commandments; the attitude of the people to their God is one of disobedience. The immediate reaction of one who is a personal being is an outburst of wrath that must result in punishment. The terminology of guilt and anger exhibits partly both verbal and nominal stems, partly only verbal or nominal forms.

Driver, *The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1906); L. E. Elliott, *The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah* (London: Methuen, 1919); A. Condamin, *Le livre de Jérémie* (EB; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1920); P. Volz, *Der Prophet Jeremia* (KAT X/A; Leipzig: A. Deichertsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1922); A. Penna, *Geremia* (SB; Turin / Rome: Marietti, 1954); J. P. Hyatt and S. R. Hopper, *The Book of Jeremiah* (IntB 5; New York / Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1956), 775–1142; J. Bright, *Jeremiah* (AB 21; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965); W. Rudolph, *Jeremia* (HAT I/12; 3rd ed.; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1968); A. Weiser, *Das Buch des Propheten Jeremia* (ATD 20/21; 6th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968); J. L. Green, *Jeremiah* (BBC 6; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1971), 1–202; J. G. Janzen, *Studies in the Text of Jeremiah* (HSM 6; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973); E. W. Nicholson, *Jeremiah*, 2 vols. (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973–1975); E. Tov, *The Septuagint Translation of Jeremiah and Baruch: A Discussion of an Early Revision of the LXX of Jeremiah 29–52 and Baruch 1:1–3:8* (HSM 8; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press for Harvard Semitic Museum, 1976); J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (NIC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 1980); B. M. Zlatowitz, *The Septuagint Translation of the Hebrew Terms in Relation to God in the Book of Jeremiah* (New York: Ktav, 1981); L. G. Perdue and B. W. Kovacs (eds.), *A Prophet to the Nations* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1984); R. P. Carroll, *Jeremiah* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1986); W. McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, vol. 1 (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986); D. Bourguet, *Des métaphores de Jérémie* (EtB 9; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1987); W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1–2* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1986, 1989); R. E. Clements, *Jeremiah* (Interpretation; Atlanta, Ga.: J. Knox, 1988); F. B. Huey, *Jeremiah & Lamentations* (NAC 16; Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1993); W. McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, vol. 2 (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996); M. E. Biddle, *Polyphony and Symphony in Prophetic Literature: Rereading Jeremiah 7–20* (SOTI 2; Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1996); K. Schmid, *Buchgestalten des Jeremiabuches: Untersuchungen zur Redaktons- und Rezeptionsgeschichte von Jer 30–33* (WMANT 72; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1996); J. R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah: A Study in Ancient Hebrew Rhetoric* (2nd ed.; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1997); R. F. Person, *The Kings—Isaiah and Kings—Jeremiah Recensions* (BZAW 252; Berlin / New York: W. de Gruyter, 1997); W. Werner, *Das Buch Jeremia* (NSK.AT 19; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1997); A. H. W. Curtis et al. (eds.), *The Book of Jeremiah and Its Reception = Le livre de Jérémie et sa réception* (BEThL 128; Leuven: University Press, 1997).

1.1 *Words Denoting Guilt*

First let us consider the most general expressions used for guilt. Possibly the most familiar of them is the noun *'āwôn,* which is usually translated 'guilt' or 'iniquity' (2:22; 3:13; 5:25; 11:10; 13:22; 14:7, 10, 20; 16:10, 17, 18; 18:23; 25:12; 30:14, 15; 31:30, 34; 32:18; 33:8; 36:3, 31; 50:20; 51:6); in 51:6 it may also be translated 'punishment.' This word often occurs in parallelism with the noun *ḥaṭṭā't,* 'sin' (5:25; 14:10; 15:13; 16:10, 18; 17:1, 3; 18:23; 30:14, 15; 31:34; 36:3; 50:20). Quite frequent is the verbal stem of the same root in Qal, *ḥāṭā',* 'to sin' (2:35; 8:14; 14:7, 20; 16:10; 33:8; 40:3; 44:23; 50:7, 14). The following words also possess the general meaning of guilt: the verb *pāša'* in Qal, 'to rebel, to revolt' (2:8, 29; 3:13; 33:8), the noun *peša',* 'rebellion' (5:6); the nouns *rā'āh,* 'evil, wickedness' (1:16; 3:2; 4:14; 6:7; 7:12; 8:6; 9:2; 11:17; 12:4; 14:16; 18:8, 10; 22:22; 23:11, 14; 32:32; 33:5; 44:3, 5, 7, 9; 48:2; 52:24) and *ra'* or *roa',* 'evil, wickedness' (5:28; 7:30; 23:22; 25:5; 26:3; 32:30; 44:22; 52:2), the adjective *rā'(āh),* 'evil, wicked' (2:19; 3:17; 7:24; 8:3; 11:8; 13:10; 16:12; 18:11, 12; 23:10, 22; 25:5; 26:3; 35:15; 36:3, 7); the noun *reša',* 'wickedness' (14:20), the adjective *rāšā',* 'guilty, wicked man' (12:1; 23:19; 25:31; 30:23); the noun *šeqer,* 'lie, deception,' which is most frequently used in relation to false prophets (3:10; 5:2, 31; 7:4, 8, 9; 8:8; 9:2, 4; 13:25; 14:14; 16:19; 20:6; 23:14, 26, 32; 27:10, 14, 15, 16; 28:15; 29:9, 21, 23, 31; 37:14). Also quite general in meaning are the words that signify 'way' and 'works': the noun *derek,* 'way, conduct,' occurs both in singular and plural as a term for evil conduct (4:18; 15:7; 16:17; 17:10; 18:11, 15; 22:21; 23:22; 25:5; 26:3, 13; 35:15; 36:3, 7); the noun *ma'ălāl,* 'deed,' is often found in parallelism with *derek* but is used only in the plural to designate evil deeds (4:18; 11:18; 17:10; 18:11; 21:12, 14; 23:2, 22; 25:5; 26:3, 13; 35:15; 44:22). In contrast, the synonym *ma'āśeh,* 'deed, work,' seems to have more specific meaning, as in the phrase "the work(s) of your (their) hands," an allusion to idolatry (1:16; 25:7, 14; 32:30; 44:8).

Several words are used to bring more specific charges against the people, and are more or less directly connected with their relationship to their God: the verb *bāgad* in Qal, 'to deal treacherously' (3:8, 11, 20; 5:11; 9:1; 12:1, 6), the adjective *bāgôd,* 'treacherous' (3:7, 10), the noun *beged,* 'treachery' (12:1); the verb *mārāh* in Qal, 'to rebel' (4:17; 5:23); the verb *sārar* in Qal, 'to be rebellious' (5:23; 6:28); the noun *qešer,* 'revolt, conspiracy' (11:9); the verb *šākaḥ* in Qal, 'to forget' (2:32; 3:21; 13:25; 23:27); the verb *sûr* in Qal, 'to turn aside, to apostatize' (5:23; 6:28; 17:5); the verb *'āzab* in Qal, 'to leave, to forsake' (1:16; 2:13, 17, 19; 5:7, 19; 9:1, 12; 16:11; 17:13; 19:4; 22:9); the derivatives from the root *šwb,* the noun *měšûbāh,* 'backturning, defection, apostasy' (2:19; 3:6, 8, 11, 12, 22; 5:6; 8:5; 14:7), the adjectival forms *šôbāb, šôbēb,* 'backturning, apostate, faithless' (3:14, 22; 8:5; 31:22;

49:4; 50:6|?|); the verb *zānāh* in Qal, 'to commit whoring, to play the harlot' (2:20; 3:1, 3, 6, 8; 5:7), the noun *zĕnût,* 'whoring, harlotry' (3:2, 9; 13:27); the verb *nā'ap,* 'to commit adultery,' in Qal (3:8; 9:5, 7; 7:9; 23:14) and Pi'el (9:1; 23:10; 29:23), the noun *nī'upîm,* 'adultery' (13:27).

A further notable aspect of Israel's guilt is her disobedience. The corresponding vocabulary consists of words with positive meanings that state their negation by using the adverb *lō',* 'not,' and the verb *mā'an,* 'to refuse.' Statements of disobedience usually refer to God's law, but occasionally to God himself. The most frequently used word is the verb *šāma'* in Qal, 'to listen, to give attention, to obey' (3:13, 25; 5:21; 6:10; 7:13, 24, 26, 27, 28; 11:8, 10; 13:10, 11; 16:12; 17:23; 19:15; 22:21; 25:3, 4, 7, 8; 26:5; 29:19; 32:23, 33; 34:14, 17; 35:14, 15, 16, 17; 36:31; 37:2; 40:3; 42:21; 43:4, 7; 44:5, 16, 23). Less frequently, and sometimes in parallelism with the verb *šāma',* the following verbs are used: *qāšab* in Hiph'il, 'to give attention, to listen, to give heed' (6:17, 19; 18:18);[4] *nātāh ('ōzen)* in Hiph'il, 'to incline (the ear)' (7:24, 26; 11:8; 17:23; 25:4; 34:14; 35:15; 44:5); *šāmar* in Qal, 'to keep, to observe' (only 16:11 in relation to *tōrāh*). Closely related to the terminology of obedience are some passages in which the verb *yāda',* 'to know, to observe,' occurs (2:8; 4:22; 5:4; 8:7; 9:2, 5; 14:18).

The clearest mark of the people's guilt and the most obvious reason for judgment without mercy is obduracy, a form of extreme disobedience. The recurrence of the stereotyped formula *šĕrī(î)rût libbô/libbām (hārā'),* "stubbornness of his/their (evil) heart(s)," is notable, and it is always preceded by the verb *hālak,* 'to walk, to follow' (3:27; 7:24; 9:13; 11:8; 13:10; 16:12; 18:12; 23:17).[5] Stubbornness is also expressed by two verbs: *ḥāzaq* in Pi'el, 'to make hard, to strengthen' the faces or the hands (5:3; 23:14) and *qāšāh* in Hiph'il, 'to harden, to stiffen,' forming the phrase *hiqšû (wayyaqšû) 'et-'orpām,* "they have stiffened their neck" (7:26; 17:23; 19:15). Finally, it is represented by the statement that the people refused to return *(mē'ănû lāšûb)* (8:5) or to take correction *(mē'ănû qaḥat mûsar)* (5:3).[6]

The last term to be considered here is the root *'šm,* 'to be, to become guilty.' In recalling the days of Israel's youth the prophet says in 2:3: "Israel was holy to the Lord, the first fruits of his harvest. All who ate of it became guilty *(ye'šāmû);* evil came upon them, says the Lord." In contrast to this statement 50:7 provides an opposite view of Israel's enemies: "We are not guilty *(lō' ne'šām),* for they have sinned against the Lord, their true habitation, the Lord, the hope of their fathers." In 51:5 the noun *'āšām,* 'guilt,' is so used that it may refer either to Israel or (more probably) to the land of the

[4] In 18:18 exceptionally with the negative *'al.* See also the questions in 6:10 and 23:18.

[5] Only in 3:17 is the phrase used in a positive sense as part of a description of the future state of salvation.

[6] Cf. also similar phrases in 9:5; 11:10; 13:10.

Chaldeans: "For Israel and Judah have not been forsaken by their God, the Lord of hosts; but their land is full of guilt *('arṣām mālĕ'āh 'āšām)* against the Holy One of Israel."[7]

1.2 *Words Denoting Divine Anger*

Words designating God's wrath occur fairly often in parallelism with their synonyms, especially in statements and threats that employ stereotyped phrases. They are listed here in alphabetical order: the noun *'ap,* 'anger' (2:35; 7:20; 10:24; 15:14, 15; 17:4; 18:23; 21:5; 23:20; 32:31, 37; 33:5; 36:7; 44:6; 52:3); the noun *'ēš,* 'fire' (4:4; 5:14; 6:29; 15:14; 17:4, 27; 21:12; 23:29); the noun *za'am,* 'indignation, wrath' (15:17; 50:25); the phrase *ḥărôn 'ap,* 'fierce anger' (4:8, 26; 12:13; 25:37, 38; 30:24; 49:37; 51:45); the noun *ḥēmāh,* 'heat, fury, wrath' (4:4; 6:11; 7:20; 10:25; 18:20; 21:5, 12; 23:19; 25:15; 30:23; 32:31, 37; 33:5; 36:7; 42:18; 44:6); the verb *kā'as* in Hiph'il, 'to provoke to anger, to irritate' (7:18–19; 8:19; 11:17; 25:6–7; 32:29, 30, 32; 44:3, 8); the verb *nāṭar* in Qal, 'to be angry' (3:5, 12); the noun *sa'ar,* 'storm, tempest' (23:19; 25:32; 30:23); the noun *'ebrāh,* 'wrath' (7:29); and the noun *qeṣep,* 'indignation, wrath' (21:5; 32:37; 50:13).

2. *God's and Israel's Repentance or Return*

Two roots are used to designate both God's and Israel's "turning" or "repentance": *nḥm* and *šwb.* The root *nḥm* expresses the meaning 'to regret, to repent, to relent, to be sorry' in the Niph'al stem. In contrast, the verbal forms of the root *šwb* denote different aspects of turning: Qal signifies God's and Israel's turning away and returning; the Hiph'il stem signifies God's action of changing the fortunes of the people in a positive or a negative sense, and man's action in relation to his fellows. The subject of the Qal stem is much less frequently God than the people, whereas in the case of the Hiph'il stem the opposite is true. In a few passages the Pi'lel stem can also be found.

Verbal forms of the root *šwb* are in themselves ambiguous in several ways. First, they cover physical movement, religious relationships, and determination of the fate of a particular person or people. Secondly, they signify movement in opposite directions: 'to turn back' from someone or something, and 'to return' or 'to bring back' to someone or something. The Qal stem expresses the people's relationship to their God, i.e., loyalty or

[7] For more detailed treatment of this root, see P. Joüon, "Racine *'šm,*" *Biblica* 19 (1938), 454–459.

disloyalty: 'to turn back' signifies their turning back from evil (idols) in the sense of repentance; while 'to turn away' often signifies the people's turning away from their God; and 'to return' means their repentance in turning to God. Here the 'covenantal' usage of the verb is obvious.[8]

2.1 *Divine Repentance and the Work of Restoration*

The verb *nīḥam* (Niph'al) is used eight times in relation to God's repentance (4:28; 18:8, 10; 20:16; 26:3, 13, 19; 42:10).[9] As part of a dramatic description of the shape of things to come in 4:5–31, Jeremiah proclaims the inevitability of God's judgment (v. 28): "For this the earth shall mourn, and the heavens above be black; for I have spoken, I have purposed; and I have not relented nor will I turn back *(wĕlō' nīḥamtî wĕlō'-'āšûb mimmennāh).*" In 20:16 Jeremiah uses the verb *nīḥam* in an even more extreme pronouncement of judgment; the verb is a constituent part of Jeremiah's curse upon him "who brought the news" of his birth to his father: "Let that man be like the cities which the Lord overthrew without pity *(wĕlō' nīḥam);* let him hear a cry in the morning and an alarm at noon." The expression *wĕlō' nīḥam* (literally "and was not sorry") refers to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

In contrast to these proclamations of God's pitiless judgment, other passages make a positive use of the verb *nīḥam* in conditional clauses (18:7–10), in appeals for repentance (26:3, 13), and in assertions that God's attitude towards Israel has changed (26:19; 42:10). All these passages indicate that the decision concerning divine judgment is not immutable. The prose allegory of the potter's house in 18:1–12 indicates that God is free to alter his original purpose. The central section (18:7–11) embodies a Deuteronomic call for repentance. In 18:7–10 the writer outlines two opposing hypothetical situations, using the verb *nīḥam* in each case: "If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will repent of the evil *(wĕnīḥamtî 'al-hārā'āh)* that I intended to do to it. And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will repent of the good *(wĕnīḥamtî 'al-haṭṭôbāh)* which I had intended to do to it."

In chapter 26, which exhibits strong Deuteronomic-Deuteronomistic influence, the verb *nīḥam* occurs in three sections: vv. 2–6—the summary of

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[8] For the use and significance of the root *šwb* in Hebrew in general, see especially W. L. Holladay, *The Root Šûbh in the Old Testament with Particular Reference to Its Usages in Covenantal Contexts* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958).

[9] For the use and significance of this word in the book of Jeremiah and elsewhere, when related to God, see J. Jeremias, *Die Reue Gottes: Aspekte alttestamentlicher Gottesvorstellung* (BSt 65; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1975), esp. pp. 75–87.

Jeremiah's preaching in the temple precincts; vv. 7–16—his arrest and trial; vv. 17–19—the elders' plea for his vindication. In 26:3 God's word to Jeremiah runs as follows: "It may be they will listen, and every one turn from his evil way, that I may repent of the evil *(wĕnīḥamtî 'el-hārā'āh)* which I intend to do to them because of their evil doings." Jeremiah's defensive speech (26:12–15) contains *inter alia* a direct call for reform of life in v. 13: "Now therefore amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God, and the Lord will repent of the evil *(wĕyinnāḥēm yhwh 'el-hārā'āh)* which he has pronounced against you." In 26:17–19, some of the elders address the congregation, citing Micah's prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem; in 26:19, they recall the response of king and people: "Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him to death? Did he not fear the Lord and entreat the favour of the Lord, and did not the Lord repent of the evil *(wayyinnāḥem yhwh 'el-hārā'āh)* which he had pronounced against them? But we are about to bring great evil upon ourselves."

Chapter 42 recounts the resolve of the Jewish remnant to leave Judah and flee to Egypt because of their fear of the Babylonians. Jeremiah delivers God's response in vv. 9–22, and it opens (v. 10) with a conditional clause: "If you will remain in this land, then I will build you up and not pull you down; I will plant you, and not pluck you up; for I repent of the evil which I did to you *(kî nīḥamtî 'el-hārā'āh 'ăšer 'āśîtî lākem)*." The use of the motifs "building" and "planting," which had a prominent place in the call narrative (1:10), is remarkable. God's regret for the devastation that has taken place does not, of course, mean that the judgment had been unnecessary. It merely indicates that the punishment had exonerated Israel from her guilt to an extent that justified optimism about the future.

The root *šwb* is found in relation to God in Qal (2:35; 4:8, 28; 12:15; 23:20; 29:14; 30:3, 18, 24; 31:23; 32:40; 48:47), Hiph'il (15:19; 18:20; 23:3; 24:6; 27:22; 28:3, 4, 6; 29:10, 14; 30:3; 31:18; 32:37, 44; 33:7, 26; 35:22; 49:6, 39), and Pi'lel (50:19). It sometimes occurs in phrases so alike that we can speak of formulaic speech; other instances are more or less original. In 2:35; 4:8; 23:20; and 30:24 there are similar statements with *šwb* in Qal that the (fierce) anger of God has not turned (will not turn) from the people. Another example of formulaic language in Qal, with minor variations, is the phrase used in God's declarations concerning his future dealings with Israel or other nations: "I will be found by you, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes *(wĕšabtî 'et-šebûtkem*[10]*)* and gather you from all the nations ..." (29:14). "For behold, days are coming, says the Lord, when I will restore the fortunes *(wĕšabtî 'et-šĕbût)* of my people, Israel and Judah ..." (30:3). "Behold, I will restore the fortunes *(hinĕnî-šāb šĕbût)* of the tents

[10] Ketib *šĕbîtkem*.

of Jacob, and have compassion on his dwellings ..." (30:18). "... Once more they shall use these words in the land of Judah and in its cities, when I restore their fortunes *(běšûbî 'et-šěbûtām)* ..." (31:23). "Yet I will restore the fortunes of Moab *(wěšabtî šěbût-mô'āb)* in the latter days, says the Lord" (48:47). Finally the Qal stem is used in antithetical statements in 4:28 in contrast to 12:15 and 32:40. The first of these (4:28) declares God's determination to execute ruthless judgment: "... And I have not relented nor will I turn back *(wělō' nīḥamtî wělō'-'āšûb mimmennāh).*" But in 12:15 he promises: "And after I have plucked them up, I will again have compassion on them *('āšûb wěrīḥamtîm),* and I will bring them again each to his heritage and each to his land." And in 32:40 he declares: "I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away *('ăšer lō'-'āšûb)* from doing good to them ..."

The occurrences in Hiph'il display a similar relationship between formulaic and original speech, but in contrast to those in Qal are exclusively concerned with God's endeavour and determination to restore Israel or other nations. In most passages God declares that he "will bring them (you) back" (23:3; 24:6; 27:22; 28:3, 4, 6; 29:10; 30:3; 32:37; 34:22). The first passage (23:3) reads: "Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back *(wahăšîbōtî 'ethen)* to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply." The next group's distinguishing feature is God's declaration that he "will restore the fortunes" of Israel or of the nations: "... for I will restore their fortunes *(kî-'āšîb 'et-šěbûtām),* says the Lord" (32:44). "I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel *(wahăšîbōtî 'et-šěbût yěhûdāh wě'ēt šěbût yiśrā'ēl),* and rebuild them as they were at first" (33:7). "... For I will restore the fortunes of the lands *(kî-'āšîb 'et-šěbût-hā'āreṣ)* as at first, says the Lord" (33:11). "... For I will restore their fortunes, and will have mercy upon them *(kî-'āšîb*[11] *'et-šěbûtām wěrīḥamtîm)*" (33:26). "But afterward I will restore the fortunes of the Ammonites *(wě'aḥărê-kēn 'āšîb 'et-šěbût běnê-'ammôn),* says the Lord" (49:6). "But in the latter days I will restore the fortunes of Elam *(wěhāyāh bě'aḥărît hayyāmîm 'āšîb*[12] *'et-šěbût*[13] *'êlām),* says the Lord" (49:39). Three remaining passages (15:19; 18:20; 31:18) are more original. In 15:19 is found God's response to Jeremiah's complaint in the preceding four verses: "If you return, I will restore you *('im-tāšûb wa'ăšîbĕkā),* and you shall stand before me ..." In 18:20 Jeremiah complains to God of his enemies: "Is evil a recompense for good? Yet they have dug a pit for my life. Remember how I stood before thee to speak good for them, to turn away thy wrath from them *(lĕhāšîb 'et-ḥămātĕkā mēhem).*"

[11] Ketib *'āšûb.*
[12] Ketib *'āšûb.*
[13] Ketib *šĕbît.*

In 31:18 Jeremiah reports Ephraim's lament: "Thou hast chastened me, and I was chastened, like an untrained calf: bring me back that I may be restored *(hăšîbēnî wĕ'āšûbāh),* for thou art the Lord my God."

The only occurrence of *šwb* in Pi'lel (50:19) also deals with future restoration: "And I will restore Israel *(wĕšōbabtî 'et-yiśrā'ēl)* to his pasture ..."

2.2 *Repentance or (Re)turning of Israel*

The verb *nīḥam* (Niph'al) is used only twice to designate human repentance (8:6; 31:19). In the poem 8:4–7 God accuses Israel of turning away from him to their own ways and refusing to return. Verse 6 reads: "... no man repents of his wickedness *('ên 'îš nīḥām 'al-rā'ātô),* saying, What have I done?' Every one turns to his own course, like a horse plunging headlong into battle." In contrast, the poem in 31:15–20 suggests a completely different situation. The distinctive section (31:18–19) reports the lament of Ephraim: "Thou hast chastened me, and I was chastened, like an untrained calf; bring me back that I may be restored, for thou art the Lord my God. For after I had turned away I repented *(kî-'aḥărê šûbî nīḥamtî)* ..."

The root *šwb* very often refers to human '(re)turning', and occurs almost exclusively in Qal, denoting various aspects of turning away and returning in a moral-covenantal sense (3:1, 7, 10, 12, 14, 19, 22; 4:1; 5:3; 8:4, 5, 6; 11:10; 15:7, 19; 18:8, 11; 22:10, 11, 27; 23:14; 24:7; 25:5; 26:3; 30:10; 31:8, 16, 17, 18, 21; 34:11, 15, 16; 35:15; 36:3, 7; 44:5, 14; 46:27). Stems other than Qal represented are Hiph'il (23:22; see also 34:16 where the verb is not used in a moral-covenantal sense) and Pi'lel (8:5; 50:6). The semantic range of the root in Qal is as follows: the people have turned to/back/around (8:6; 11:10; 34:11, 16); they did not turn from their ways/wickedness (15:7; 23:14; 44:5); they refused to return to their God (3:1, 7, 10; 5:3; 8:5); God's appeal to repentance, sometimes implying an offer of restoration (3:12, 14, 22; 18:11; 25:5; 35:15); hypothetical cases of turning from following God, turning from evil, and returning to God (3:7, 19; 4:1; 8:4; 15:19; 18:8; 26:3; 36:3, 7); the people will turn to the prophet, but he will not turn to them (15:19); denial of return to the land (22:10, 11, 27; 44:14); assurance that Israel will come back from the land of the enemy or return to her own country (30:10; 31:8, 16, 17; 46:27); an appeal to Israel that she should return to her cities (31:21); after having turned away Israel repented (31:19); Israel has recently repented (34:15); in eschatological time the people will return to God with their whole heart (24:7). The wide semantic range of the root *šwb* used in Qal is paralleled by a great variety of stylistic devices. Some sayings display remarkable originality, but most tend to be formulaic, thus bearing witness to their Deuteronomic-Deuteronomistic character.

The Hiph'il usage of the verb occurs in the context of a denunciation of the characteristics of false prophets in 23:16–22. The concluding verse reads:

"But if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them *(wîšībûm)* from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings." The Pi'lel (Polel) form in 8:5 is used in relation to God's complaint against the apostasy of the people (8:4–7): "Why then has this people, Jerusalem, turned away *(maddûa' šôbĕbāh hā'ām hazzeh yĕrûšālaīm*[14]*)* in perpetual backsliding? They hold fast to deceit, they refuse to return." The statement in 50:6 is a constituent part of the section 50:1–10 dealing with Babylon's fall and Israel's release. It refers to Israel's false shepherds in the past: "My people have been lost sheep; their shepherds have led them astray, turning them away on the mountains *(hārîm šôbĕbûm*[15]*)* ..."

3. *Words Denoting Judgment and Punishment*

The most unspecific words used to denote God's judgment derive from the roots *ryb* and *špṭ;* sometimes they occur in the context of a legal debate. The root *špṭ* clearly alludes to God's judgment in 2:35 and 25:31 (in Niph'al), while *ryb* expresses different aspects of a legal debate and of his vindication both in verbal (Qal) and in nominal stems: the complaint of the people against God (2:29; cf. 12:1); God's contention with Israel or the nations (2:9; 25:31); his vindication (50:34; 51:36).

As part of the chronicle of Israel's apostasy in 2:4–13 God presses his charges against his people in v. 9, using the verb *rîb:* "Therefore I still contend with you *('ārîb 'ittĕkem),* says the Lord, and with your children's children I will contend *('ārîb).*" The accusation of disobedience in 2:29–37 forms the most remarkable example of a legal debate. The passage opens with God's question: "Why do you complain against me *(lammāh tārîbû 'ēlāy)*? You have all rebelled against me, says the Lord." In v. 35 God indicates that he will take Israel to court and prove her guilt in the face of her professions of innocence: "You say, 'I am innocent; surely his anger has turned from me.' Behold, I will bring you to judgment *(hinĕnî nišpāṭ 'ôtāk)* for saying, 'I have not sinned.'" The announcement of God's universal judgment in 25:30–38 is another passage in which both roots occur. In v. 31 he summons the nations to court in order to establish their guilt and to punish them: "The clamour will resound to the ends of the earth, for the Lord has an indictment against the nations *(kî rîb layhwh baggôyīm);* he is entering into judgment with all flesh *(nišpāṭ hû' lĕkol-bāśār),* and the wicked he will put to the sword."

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[14] Yod is missing.

[15] So Qere, but Ketib suggests rather the adjective *šôbāb* in the plural; the phrase *hārîm šôbĕbûm* (Ketib *šôbĕbîm*) can signify "backturning (seductive) mountains."

In contrast to these complaints and declarations of judgment, 50:34 and 51:36 point to a vindicative meaning of the root *ryb*. This duality derives from the dual aspects of judgment and restoration in the book of Jeremiah as a whole. The pronouncement of judgment on Babylonia in 50:21–40, includes (v. 34) divine vindication of Israel: "... He will surely plead their cause *(rîb yārîb 'et-rîbām)*, that he may give rest to the earth, but unrest to the inhabitants of Babylon." In 51:36 God replies to Judah's complaint against Babylon (51:34–40) that he will vindicate Judah by punishing Babylon: "Behold, I will plead your cause and take vengeance for you *(hinĕnî-rāb 'et-rîbēk wĕniqqamtî 'et-niqmātēk)*. I will dry up her sea and make her fountain dry ..."

Of special interest is the use of the root *nqh* in Niph'al (+ Qal) with the meaning 'to be innocent, to be free from punishment' (2:35; 25:29; 49:12) and in Pi'el with the meaning 'to pronounce innocent, to let go unpunished' (30:11; 46:28). In 2:35 God responds to Israel's complacency with an announcement of judgment: "You say, 'I am innocent *(wattō'mĕrî kî niqqētî)* ...'" In 25:29 and 49:12 there are similar declarations by God in which the metaphor of drinking from the cup is used. 25:28–29 runs as follows: "... You must drink! For behold, I begin to work evil at the city which is called by my name, and shall you go unpunished? You shall not go unpunished *(wĕ'attem hinnāqēh tinnāqû lō' tinnāqû)*, for I am summoning a sword against all the inhabitants of the earth, says the Lord of hosts." In 49:12 we read: "... If those who did not deserve to drink the cup must drink it, will you go unpunished? You shall not go unpunished *(wĕ'attāh hû' nāqōh tinnāqeh lō' tinnāqeh)*, but you must drink." In 30:11 and 46:28 God's promise in favour of Israel recurs. The first of these runs: "For I am with you to save you, says the Lord; I will make a full end of all the nations among whom I scattered you, but of you I will not make a full end. I will chasten you in just measure, and I will by no means leave you unpunished *(wĕnaqqēh lō' 'ănaqqekā)*."

In passages where Jeremiah pronounces God's judgment, the terminology used to express the theme of punishment possesses a diversity similar to that displayed by the vocabulary of guilt—and this is logical, since punishment is usually a direct response by God to the guilt of Israel or of the nations. Especially striking is the use of classical roots signifying punishment: *pqd, r'', nqm, šlm, gml*. The root *pqd* is found in verbal and nominal stems to designate God's visitation in the senses of punishment or deliverance:[16] the verb *pāqad*

[16] For the whole range of meaning of the root, see especially J. Scharbert, "Das Verbum PQD in der Theologie des Alten Testaments," *BZ*.NF 4 (1960), 209–226; A. Gunnel, *Determining the Destiny: PQD in the Old Testament* (CB.OT 16; Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1980) — see review by R. P. Gordon in *VT* 32 (1982), 349–351; B. Grossfeld, "The Translation of Biblical Hebrew *pqd* in the Targum, Peshitta, Vulgate and Septuagint," *ZAW* 96 (1984), 83–101.

in Qal, 'to visit, to punish' (5:9, 29; 6:15; 9:8, 24; 11:22; 14:10; 15:15; 21:14; 23:2, 34; 25:12; 27:8; 29:32; 30:20; 36:31; 44:13, 29; 46:25; 49:8; 50:18, 31; 51:44, 52) or 'to visit, to deliver' (27:22; 29:10; 32:5/?/), the noun *pĕquddāh,* 'visitation, punishment' (8:12; 10:15; 11:23; 23:12; 46:21; 48:44; 50:27; 51:18). It is noteworthy that in 5:9, 29 and 9:8 the same question is asked and asked again: "Shall I not punish them for these things? says the Lord; and shall I not avenge myself on a nation such as this?" Even more frequent than the use of stems of the root *pqd* is that of derivatives from the root *r'',* namely the nouns *ra'* (25:7) and *rā'āh* (2:27, 28; 4:18; 5:12; 6:1, 19; 11:11, 14, 15, 17; 14:16; 15:11; 16:10; 17:17/?/, 18; 18:8, 11; 19:3, 15; 21:10; 23:12, 17; 24:9; 25:29, 32; 26:3, 13, 19; 29:11/denied/; 32:23, 42; 35:17; 36:3, 31; 39:16; 40:2; 42:10, 17; 44:2, 11, 17, 23, 27, 29; 45:5; 49:37; 51:2, 60, 64); sometimes they designate 'evil' committed by the people, sometimes God's punishment in the sense of 'evil, doom, trouble'. Many passages contain the formulaic phrase *hinneh 'ānōkî mēbî' rā'āh 'el/'al ...,* "Behold, I am bringing evil upon ...," with slight variations. God's declaration in 14:16 makes it clear that the "evil" that God brings upon Israel is an inevitable consequence of the "evil" that the people commit: "... For I will pour out their wickedness upon them *(wĕšāpaktî 'ălêhem 'et-rā'ātām).*"

Derivatives from other roots mentioned above occur much less frequently. The root *nqm* is found in verbal and nominal stems: Niph'al (15:15; 46:10; 50:15) and Pi'el (51:36), 'to avenge, to take vengeance,' Hithpa'el, 'to avenge oneself' (5:9, 29; 9:8); the noun *nĕqāmāh,* 'vengeance' (11:20; 20:10, 46:10; 50:15, 28; 51:6, 11, 36). One characteristic of these words is that they are applied more to Jeremiah's or Israel's enemies than to Israel itself. Take for example the apostrophe in 46:10 and the exclamation in 50:15. The former reads: "That day is the day of the Lord God of hosts, a day of vengeance, to avenge himself on his foes *(yôm nĕqāmāh lĕhinnāqēm miṣṣārâw).*" In the latter the poet calls for God's vengeance upon Babylon: "Raise a shout against her round about, she has surrendered; her bulwarks have fallen, her walls are thrown down. For this is the vengeance of the Lord: take vengeance on her, do to her as she has done *(kî niqmat yhwh hî' hinnāqĕmû bāh ka'ăšer 'āśĕtāh 'āsû-lāh).*"

The root *šlm* occurs in the book of Jeremiah in relation to God's punishment only in the verbal stem Pi'el, 'to recompense, to requite,'[17] whereas the root *gml* is found in two noun forms, both denoting 'recompense': *gĕmûl* (51:6) and *gĕmûlāh* (51:56).[18] It is hardly accidental that both forms occur in

[17] Cf. 16:18; 25:15; 32:18; 50:29; 51:6, 24, 56. In 18:20 the Pu'al stem is used in relation to Jeremiah's enemies; Jeremiah, being persecuted, exclaims: "Is evil a recompense for good *(hayešullam taḥat-ṭôbāh rā'āh)?* Yet they have dug a pit for my life. Remember how I stood before thee to speak good for them, to turn away thy wrath from them."

[18] For a more complete presentation of both roots, see J. Scharbert, "Šlm im Alten Testament," *Lex tua veritas: Festschrift für Hubert Junker* (ed. H. Gross and F. Mussner; Trier: Pau-

connection with the verb of the root *šlm;* the two passages form part of the judgment on Babylon. 51:6 reads: "Flee from the midst of Babylon, let every man save his life! Be not cut off in her punishment *('al-tiddammû ba'ăwônāh),* for this is the time of the Lord's vengeance, the requital he is rendering her *(kî 'ēt nĕqāmāh hî' layhwh gĕmûl hû' mĕšallēm lāh).*" 51:56 affirms that Babylon has been repaid in full: "... for a destroyer has come upon her, upon Babylon; her warriors are taken, their bows are broken in pieces; for the Lord is a God of recompense, he will surely requite *(kî 'ēl gĕmulôt yhwh šallēm yĕšallēm).*"

The formulaic declaration in 32:18 is of special importance because it concerns the problem of "collective" retribution and occurs with some variation in a few other places (Exod 20:5–6; 34:6–7; Num 14:18; Deut 5:9–10). The verse stands at the beginning of Jeremiah's prayer in 32:17–25: "Ah Lord God! It is thou who hast made the heavens and the earth by thy great power and by thy outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for thee, who showest steadfast love to thousands, but dost requite the guilt of fathers to their children after them *('ōśeh ḥesed la'ălāpîm ûmĕšallēm 'ăwôn 'ābôt 'el-ḥêq bĕnêhem 'aḥărêhem),* O great and mighty God whose name is the Lord of hosts, great in counsel and mighty in deed; whose eyes are open to all the ways of men, rewarding every man according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings ..." (32:17–19). The pivotal point of the formula is the striking emphasis on God's "steadfast love." The number "thousands" probably symbolises God's infinite goodness. The declaration of "collective" retribution in the second part of the formula, "but dost requite the guilt of fathers to their children after them," is problematical. The generalized character of the declaration accounts for the wide diversity of opinion about its precise meaning.[19] The most likely explanation seems to be that the phrase denotes "collective" retribution not in a direct but in an indirect sense. It refers to the natural course of events in every human society, and shows that the consequences of human guilt also fall upon others—notably upon the evildoer's closest relatives.[20] The formula is in fact an expression of the feeling that ancestral guilt is inheritable. The greater the guilt, the more inevitable is "collective" retribution.

There are, finally, a good number of words that more or less clearly sig-

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linus-Verlag, 1961), 209–229; W. Eisenbeis, *Die Wurzel šlm im Alten Testament* (BZAW 113; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1969); G. Gerleman, "Die Wurzel *šlm,*" *ZAW* 85 (1973), 1–14; K. Seybold, "Zwei Bemerkungen zu *gml/gmwl,*" *VT* 22 (1972), 112–117; A. Lauha, "'Dominus benefecit': Die Wortwurzel *gml* und die Psalmenfrömmigkeit," *ASTI* 11 (1978), 57–62.

[19] See J. Scharbert, "Formgeschichte und Exegese von Ex 34,6f und seiner Parallelen," *Biblica* 38 (1957), 130–150; M. Weiss, "Some Problems of the Biblical 'Doctrine of Retribution,'" *Tarbiz* 31 (1961–1962), 236–263 + I–II; 32 (1962–1963), 1–18 + I–II.

[20] See J. Krašovec, "Božja dobrota za tisoč, kazen za tri ali štiri rodove (God's Love to Thousands, Punishment to Three or Four Generations)," *BV* 48 (1988), 357–384; idem, "Is There a Doctrine of 'Collective Retribution' in the Hebrew Bible?," *HUCA* 65 (1994), 35–89.

nify the consequences of guilt. Quite often they stand in direct connection with the more characteristic terminology of punishment. Some such words are derived from the root *bwš:* the verbal stems in Qal, 'to be ashamed' (12:13; 17:13, 18; 20:11; 22:22; 31:19: 48:13, 39: 49:23; 50:12; 51:47) and Hiph'il, 'to put to shame' (2:26; 8:9; 10:14; 46:24); the noun *bōšet,* 'shame' (3:25; 7:19). Closely allied to them are derivatives from the roots *klm* and *ḥrp:* Niph'al *niklam,* 'to be put to shame' (22:22; 31:19) and the noun *klimmāh,* 'insult, dishonour' (3:25; 20:11); the noun *ḥerpāh,* 'reproach, taunt' (23:40; 24:9; 29:18; 31:19; 42:18; 44:8, 12; 49:13). The following words comprise a special group: *ḥorbāh,* 'desolation' (22:5; 25:18; 44:2, 6, 22), *šammāh,* 'horror, waste' (19:8; 25:9, 11, 18; 29:18; 44:6, 22; 49:13; 51:37), *šemāmāh,* 'horror' (4:27; 6:8; 9:10; 10:22; 25:12; 34:22; 44:6; 49:2, 33; 50:13; 51:26, 62), *šĕrēqāh,* 'hissing' (19:8; 25:9, 18; 29:18; 51:37). The use of the vocabulary of cursing is also noteworthy: *'ālāh,* 'curse, execration' (23:10; 29:18; 42:18; 44:12), passive *'ārûr,* 'cursed' (11:3; 17:5; 20:14–15; 48:10), *qĕlālāh,* 'curse' (24:9; 25:18; 26:6; 29:22; 42:18; 44:8, 12, 22; 49:13). A survey of the position of all these words shows that in particular the nouns *'ālāh, ḥerpāh, qĕlālāh,* and *šammāh* tend to occur together in more or less formulaic statements.

An unusual simile to denote punishment is found in the account of Babylon's fall in 51:33: "The daughter of Babylon is like a threshing floor at the time when it is trodden; yet a little while and the time of her harvest will come *('ôd me'aṭ ûbā'āh 'ēt-haqqāṣîr lāh).*"

4. *Correction, Total Destruction, and the Remnant*

We have by no means exhausted the vocabulary of judgment and punishment. Declarations and announcements of God's judgment imply two intrinsically opposed functions of punishment: correction and total destruction. This polarity raises the question of the survival of a remnant. It seems appropriate to devote a separate section to these three important points.

4.1 *Words Denoting Correction*

Punishment is in its essence correction, because its aim is reform of the guilty, and the terminology of correction is conspicuous throughout the book of Jeremiah. The most obvious words derive from the root *ysr:* verbal stems Niph'al, 'to let oneself be admonished' (6:8; 31:18) and Pi'el, 'to correct, to punish' (2:19; 10:24; 30:11; 31:18; 46:28); the noun *mûsār,* 'correction, discipline, instruction, punishment' (2:30; 5:3; 7:28; 17:23; 30:14; 32:33). Much less frequent are derivatives from three other roots: *ykh* in Hiph'il, 'to reprove' (2:19); *'wd* in Hiph'il, 'to admonish, to warn' (6:10; 11:7; 42:19);

and *ṣrp* in Qal, 'to refine' (6:29; 9:6). All these terms signify the reason or purpose of correction, and its positive or negative results. There is a marked difference in the use of verbal and nominal stems.

The verbal stems convey God's warning and correction in relation to different periods of time. In 2:19 he says: "Your wickedness will chasten you, and your apostasy will reprove you *(tĕyassĕrēk rā'ātēk ûmĕšubôtayik tôkīḥuk)* ..." In 6:8 he declares: "Be warned *(hiwwāsĕrî)*, O Jerusalem, lest I be alienated from you; lest I make you a desolation, an uninhabited land." In 6:10 he asks: "To whom shall I speak and give warning *(wĕ'ā'îdāh)*, that they may hear? ..." In 6:29 we read: "The bellows blow fiercely, the lead is consumed by the fire; in vain the refining goes on *(laššāw' ṣārap ṣārôp)*, for the wicked are not removed." In 9:6 God's determination is asserted: "Behold, I will refine them and test them *(hinĕnî ṣôrĕpām ûbĕḥantîm)*, for what else can I do, because of my people?" In 10:24 either Jeremiah or the community embodied in the first person singular prays for mercy: "Correct me *(yassĕrēnî)*, O Lord, but in just measure; not in thy anger, lest thou bring me to nothing." In 11:7 is found an expression of the function of God's call to obedience throughout the entire sweep of Israel's history: "For I solemnly warned *(kî hā'ēd ha'îdōtî)* your fathers when I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, warning them persistently *(haškēm wĕhā'ēd)*, even to this day, saying, Obey my voice." In 30:11 and 46:28 we find God's declaration: "... And I will chasten you in just measure *(wĕyissartîkā lammišpāṭ)*, and I will by no means leave you unpunished." In 31:18 the report of Ephraim's lament runs: "Thou hast chastened me, and I was chastened *(yissartanî wā'iwwāsēr)*, like an untrained calf ..."

The noun *mûsār* always (except in 30:14) occurs in statements that the people refused to accept correction, and it invariably refers to the past. It is noteworthy that the word forms a fixed pattern in combination with the verb *lāqaḥ*, 'to take.' In 2:30 God rebuts the people's complaint: "In vain have I smitten your children, they took no correction *(mûsār lō' lāqāḥû)* ..." In 5:3 an unnamed speaker addresses God: "... Thou hast smitten them, but they felt no anguish; thou hast consumed them, but they refused to take correction *(mē'ănû qaḥat mûsār)*. They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to repent *(mē'ănû lāšûb)*." There are similar statements in 7:28, 17:23, and 32:33, while 30:14 says that the gravity of God's punishment matches that of the people's guilt: "... for I have dealt you the blow of an enemy, the punishment of a merciless foe *(mûsar 'akzārî)*, because your guilt is great, because your sins are flagrant."

4.2 *Words Denoting Total Destruction*

Refusal to accept correction is the surest mark of stubbornness, which inevitably leads to destruction. Here lies the reason for the threat that God will

utterly destroy the rebellious people or their enemies, even though it is not always explicitly stated. On the other hand, willingness to repent can move God to the promise that he will not in fact destroy sinners in spite of his severe judgment upon them. The following roots are used to denote total destruction, positively or negatively: the verb *kālāh* in Qal, 'to cease, to be finished' (44:27) and Pi'el, 'to finish, to consume' (5:3; 9:15; 10:25; 14:12; 49:37); and the noun *kālāh,* 'end' (4:27; 5:10, 18; 30:10; 46:28); *tmm* in Qal (24:10; 27:8; 44:12, 18, 27) and Niph'al, 'to be complete, to be consumed' (14:15; 44:12); *ḥrm* in Hiph'il, 'to banish, to destroy utterly' (25:9; 50:21, 26; 51:3). These words are almost exclusively used in expressing divine demands and threats of *future* judgment; only 5:3, 10:25, and 44:18 relate to the past. The threats are illustrated by 24:10 and 44:12. In 24:10 God declares: "And I will send sword, famine, and pestilence upon them, until they shall be utterly destroyed from the land *('ad-tummām mē'al hā'ādāmāh)* which I gave to them and their fathers." In 44:12 he warns: "I will take the remnant of Judah who have set their faces to come to the land of Egypt to live, and they shall all be consumed *(wĕtammû kōl);* in the land of Egypt they shall fall; by the sword and by famine they shall be consumed *(yittammû);* from the least to the greatest, they shall die by the sword and by famine; and they shall become an execration, a horror, a curse, and a taunt."

The prominence given to terms signifying return to God in the book of Jeremiah, and in the three passages cited above that relate to the past, shows that threats are not necessarily final where the people of Israel are concerned; they may be understood rather as an emphatic warning designed to inspire amendment of Israel's conduct. It seems, however, that Israel's enemies were destined for total destruction (cf. 50:21, 26; 51:3). God's judgment on Babylon in the second of these passages (50:26) runs as follows: "Come against her from every quarter; open her granaries; pile her up like heaps of grain, and destroy her utterly; let nothing be left of her *(wĕhaḥărîmûhā 'al-tĕhî-lāh šĕ'ērît).*"

The use of the noun *kālāh* raises the problem of the apparent contradiction found in 4:27 and 5:10, 18. The contexts of these passages convey an impression of total condemnation, so the explicit setting of a limit to destruction by the use of the standard phrase "I will not make a full end" suggests a mitigating editorial gloss rather than an original statement.[21] All the more noteworthy, therefore, is the reassurance in 30:11, which recurs with only slight variation in 46:28: "... For I will make a full end *(kî 'e'ĕśeh kā-*

[21] For further discussion, see especially W. McKane, *Jeremiah,* vol. 1, p. 109; W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah,* vol. 1, pp. 143, 167, 183, 190. See also J. A. Soggin, "La 'negazione' in Geremia 4,27 e 5,10a, cf. 5,18b," *Biblica* 46 (1965), 56–59 = "The 'Negation' in Jeremiah 4,27 and 5,10a, cf. 5,18b," *Old Testament and Oriental Studies* (BibOr 29; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1975), 179–183.

lāh) of all the nations among whom I scattered you, but of you I will not make a full end *('ak 'otkā lō'-'e'ĕśeh kālāh).* I will chasten you in just measure, and I will by no means leave you unpunished."[22]

4.3 *Words Denoting the Remnant*

The terminology of punishment in general and of destruction in particular raises the question of survival in a given situation or in principle. The vocabulary of the remnant is important in the book of Jeremiah, and it is used in both positive and negative senses. Where there is obduracy, divine judgment does not permit the subsistence of any remnant, but repentance and an eschatological vision of salvation make it possible for God to proclaim that a remnant will be saved. The following terms are prominent in the context of judgment or salvation (forgiveness): the root *š'r* in Niph'al, 'to remain, to be left over' (8:3; 21:7; 24:8; 42:2) and Hiph'il, 'to let remain, to leave behind' (49:9; 50:20); and the noun *šĕ'ērît,* 'remnant, remainder' (6:9; 8:3; 11:23; 15:9; 23:3; 24:8; 25:20; 31:7; 42:2, 15, 19; 44:7, 12, 14, 28; 47:4, 5; 50:26); the nouns *pālîṭ,* 'one escaped' (42:17; 44:14) and *śārîd,* 'one left, survivor' (31:2; 42:17; 44:14; 47:4). Very closely related to the notion of remnant is the word *'aḥărît,* 'end, future' (5:31; 29:11; 31:17; 48:47; 49:39; 50:12).[23] There are three main types of passage that use the terminology of the remnant: those dealing with judgment on Israel, judgment on the nations, and the salvation of Israel.

Judgment on Israel is expressed in broad terms. The passage 6:9–15 opens with a threat of total destruction that uses the metaphor of gleaning: "... Indeed let them glean as a vine the remnant of Israel *('ôlēl yĕ'ôlĕlû kaggepen šĕ'ērît yiśrā'ēl);* like a grape-gatherer pass your hand again over its branches." The whole passage is negative in its drift; the subject of the phrase *'ôlēl ye'ôlĕlû* must be the enemies of Jerusalem who are about to destroy what is left of Israel. Verse 9, however, may be understood as a call for a divine attempt to save the remnant of Israel. If so, Jeremiah's reflective lament in 6:10–15 would signify that there is no prospect of salvation for the remnant because no one will listen to him. In 8:1–3 a hyperbolic image of the plundering of family tombs and the display of the bones of the dead is

[22] To the terminology of total destruction may belong also the root *dmm* even though its basic meaning 'to be (become) silent' does not necessarily imply complete reduction to silence. The following stems and associated passages may be mentioned: Qal, 'to be silent' (48:2), Niph'al, 'to be reduced to silence, to be destroyed' (18:14; 25:37; 49:26; 50:30; 51:6), Hiph'il, 'to reduce to silence, to destroy, to cut off' (8:14). Jeremiah's emphatic cry for revenge in 17:18 is noteworthy: "Let those be put to shame who persecute me, but let me not be put to shame; let them be dismayed, but let me not be dismayed; bring upon them the day of evil and destroy them with double destruction *(ûmišneh šibbārôn šobrēm).*"

[23] Cf. 5:31; 29:11; 31:17; 48:47; 49:39; 50:12. See also the temporal meaning of the construction *'aḥărê-kēn,* 'afterward,' in 49:6.

used in order to emphasize that the lot of survivors in exile would be even more unhappy than that of defiled corpses. Verse 3 runs: "Death shall be preferred to life by all the remnant that remains *(haššĕ'ērît hanniš'ārîm)* of this evil family in all the places where I have driven them, says the Lord of hosts." The secondary commentary on 11:18–19 in 11:23 runs as follows: "And none of them shall be left *(ûšĕ'ērît lō' tihyeh lāhem).* For I will bring evil upon the men of Anathoth, the year of their punishment." The passage 15:5–9 follows the announcement of the final downfall of Jerusalem and Judah with the conclusion: "... And the rest of them *(ûšĕ'ērîtām)* I will give to the sword before their enemies, says the Lord." The statements, admonitions and threats relating to Israel in the following verses clearly hark back to the style of Deuteronomy: 24:8; 42:2, 15, 17, 19; 43:5; 44:7, 12, 14, 28.

What little is said about foreign nations tends to reject survival of a remnant: 25:20; 47:4–5 (the Philistines); 49:9–10 (Edom); 50:26 (Babylon). Let us confine ourselves to re-citing the call to total destruction in 50:26 (already quoted above): "... pile her up like heaps of grain, and destroy her utterly; let nothing be left of her *('al-tĕhî-lāh šĕ'ērît).*" All the more surprising is the assurance of the recovery of Moab and Elam "in the latter days." In 48:47 it is asserted: "Yet I will restore the fortunes of Moab in the latter days *(bĕ'aḥărît hayyāmîm),* says the Lord," and in 49:39: "But in the latter days I will restore the fortunes of Elam, says the Lord" (cf. 46:26b concerning Egypt, and 49:6 Ammon).

Several passages mention a turning-point in Israel's fate: 23:3; 29:11; 31:2, 7, 17; 50:20. The first and last of these are especially noteworthy. The salvation oracle in 23:3–4 stands in contrast to the judgment oracle in the preceding vv. 1–2. God declares: "Then I will gather the remnant of my flock *('ēt-šĕ'ērît ṣō'nî)* out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply ..." In 50:20 the emphasis is on God's forgiveness of Israel: "In those days and in that time, says the Lord, iniquity shall be sought in Israel, and there shall be none; and sin in Judah, and none shall be found; for I will pardon those whom I leave as a remnant *(kî 'eslaḥ la'ăšer 'aš'îr).*"

5. *Words Denoting Mercy and Forgiveness*

Terms signifying mercy or compassion and forgiveness are used in both their negative and positive senses. The subject of words denoting mercy is usually God, more rarely humans; while that of words meaning forgiveness is always God. The two categories are very similar in meaning but nevertheless different in emphasis. The terminology of forgiveness is more closely related to guilt and repentance than is that of mercy or compassion, although it seems that both aspects—mercy and forgiveness—are implied in the phrase *lĕma'an*

šĕmekā, "for thy name's sake," which forms part of the lament of the people in a time of drought (14:1–15:9). Their supplication in 14:7 runs as follows: "Though our iniquities testify against us, act, O Lord, for thy name's sake; for our backslidings are many, we have sinned against thee," and in 14:20–21 we find: "We acknowledge our wickedness, O Lord, and the iniquity of our fathers, for we have sinned against thee. Do not spurn us, for thy name's sake; do not dishonour thy glorious throne; remember and do not break thy covenant with us." God's reply in 15:1–9 makes clear that he cannot relent (v. 6), because "they did not turn from their ways" (v. 7), which indicates that God cannot be merciful and forgive the people's guilt until they have returned in full sincerity of heart. Only then can their fortunes be restored.

5.1 *Words Denoting Mercy*

The most important word signifying mercy is the root *rḥm*, which occurs in the verbal stem Pi'el, 'to have compassion, to have mercy,' and in the noun stem *raḥămîm,* 'compassion, mercy.' The subject of the verbal stem is God on five occasions (12:15; 13:14; 30:18; 31:20; 33:26) and humans on four (6:23; 21:7; 42:12; 50:42);[24] the noun stem is found only in 16:5 and 42:12: in the former God declares: "... I have taken away my peace from this people ..."; in the latter there is the promise: "I will grant you mercy, that he (the king of Babylon) may have mercy on you and let you remain in your own land". In 12:15 there is the assurance that God will once more show mercy both on Judah and on the nations if they will adopt Judah's religion. The declaration of judgment on the people in 13:12–14 concludes: "... I will not pity or spare or have compassion *(lō'-'eḥmôl wĕlō'-'āḥûs wĕlō' 'ăraḥēm),* that I should not destroy them." In contrast to this determination 30:18; 31:20; and 33:26 offer a striking promise that Israel will be restored through God's compassion. In 31:20 there is an emphatic assurance about Ephraim: "... I will surely have mercy on him *(raḥēm 'ăraḥămennû),* says the Lord." The passages with a human subject all relate to the merciless cruelty of Babylon or her enemies. In 6:23 the imminent threat to Jerusalem by the Babylonians is announced by the statement that "they are cruel and have no mercy *('akzārî hû' wĕlō' yĕraḥēmû).*" In 50:42 the same conventional proclamation apostrophizes the enemies of Babylon, probably the Persians. The judgment oracle 21:3–7 asserts the folly of continued resistance to the king of Babylon by emphasizing his cruelty (v. 7): "... He shall smite them with the edge of the sword; he shall not pity them, or spare them, or have compassion *(lō'-yāḥûs 'ălêhem wĕlō' yaḥmōl wĕlō' yĕraḥēm).*"[25] As noted above,

[24] God is subject in 12:15; 13:14; 30:18; 31:20: 33:26, humans in 6:23; 21:7; 42:12; 50:42.

[25] In 13:14 basically the same phrase is used in the first person singular as God's own declaration. The Septuagint gives only the first and last verbs of these passages in the first per-

42:12 asserts that the king of Babylon will himself become merciful through the intervention of the merciful God: "I will grant you mercy, that he may have mercy on you *(wĕ'ettēn lākem raḥămîm wĕrîḥam 'etkem*[26]*)* and let you remain in your own land."

We have already met in 13:14 and 21:7 the verbs *ḥāmal,* 'to have compassion on, to pity, to spare,' and *ḥûs,* 'to pity, to spare' (both in Qal). The verb *ḥāmal* also occurs in 15:5 and 51:3. In 15:5 we face God's question: "Who will have pity on you *(mî-yaḥmōl 'ālayik),* O Jerusalem, or who will bemoan you?..." In 51:3 his instructions to those who attack Babylon envisage the destruction of the entire Babylonian army: "... And spare not her young men; utterly destroy all her host *(wĕ'al-taḥmĕlû 'el-baḥurêhā haḥărîmû kol-ṣĕbā'āh).*" Finally, to the same semantic field belongs the adjective *ḥāsîd,* 'gracious, merciful,' which is found in 3:12 in the context of God's call to repentance: "... Return, faithless Israel, says the Lord. I will not look on you in anger, for I am merciful *(kî-ḥāsîd 'ănî),* says the Lord; I will not be angry for ever."

5.2 *Words Denoting Forgiveness*

The concept of forgiveness is handled by four verbs: *sālaḥ* in Qal, 'to forgive, to pardon' (5:1, 7; 31:34; 33:8; 36:3; 50:20); *ṭāhar* in Pi'el, 'to cleanse' (33:8); *kāpar* in Pi'el, 'to make exempt from punishment, to forgive' (33:8); and *māḥāh* in Hiph'il, 'to blot out' (18:23). It is striking that some passages assume the impossibility of forgiveness in the present, while a few others directly predicate it of the future.

In three places God's forgiveness in the present is excluded: 5:1, 7 and 18:23. The opening verse of the oracle 5:1–6 reads: "Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, look and take note! Search her squares to see if you can find a man, one who does justice and seeks truth; that I may pardon her *(wĕ'eslaḥ lāh).*" The corresponding verse in the oracle 5:7–9 recounts God's grave charges against his people: "How can I pardon you *('ê lāzō't 'eslawḥ-lāk*[27]*)*? Your children have forsaken me, and have sworn by those who are no gods. When I fed them to the full, they committed adultery and trooped to the houses of harlots." Finally, Jeremiah's reaction to a plot against him (18:18–23) concludes: "Yet, thou, O Lord, knowest all their plotting to slay me. Forgive not their iniquity, nor blot out their sin from thy sight *('al-tĕ-*

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son singular. Therefore many commentators prefer here, in harmony with 13:14, the first person singular, assuming God to be the subject.

[26] The Septuagint, however, uses the first person singular in relation to God in the entire sentence: *kai dóso humîn éleos kai eleéso humâs* ..., "And I will grant you mercy, and will have mercy on you ..." (49:12).

[27] The correct Ketib and Qere form is *'eslaḥ;* see E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), § 65b.

kappēr 'al-'ăwônām wĕḥaṭṭā'tām millĕpānêkā 'al-temḥî[28]*).* Let them be overthrown before thee; deal with them in the time of thine anger."

Very special are the place and significance of forgiveness in the narrative of Jeremiah's scroll in 36:1–32. In the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah (605–604 B.C.E.), Jeremiah is commissioned to persuade the community to repent. In 36:3 God speaks: "It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I intend to do to them, so that every one may turn from his evil way, and that I may forgive *(wĕsālaḥtî)* their iniquity and their sin." The king rejects the message of the scroll by burning it, which could only lead to judgment; 36:30–31 reports God's determination to punish condignly the king and the people of Judah.[29]

Three passages clearly foretell God's future forgiveness of the people's iniquity: 31:34; 33:8; 50:20. In contrast to 5:1, 7, in 31:34 the prophet proclaims divine forgiveness as the foundation of an unbreakable new covenant "after those days" (31:33): ... *kî 'eslaḥ la'ăwônām ûlĕḥaṭṭā'tām lō' 'ezkor-'ôd,* "... for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." The unique oracle dealing with the new covenant (31:31–34) predicts a splendid future made possible by God's final, gracious provision for Israel. But this utopian prospect suggests an important question: when it is attained, will the people sin no more? The same issue arises in 33:1–13, which shows much Deuteronomic-Deuteronomistic editorial influence. Verses 6–9 forecast the restoration of Jerusalem, Judah, and Israel after they have experienced God's severe judgment on their wickedness (cf. v. 5): "Behold, I will bring to it health and healing, and I will heal them and reveal to them abundance of prosperity and security. I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel, and rebuild them as they were at first. I will cleanse them *(wĕṭīhartîm)* from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive *(wĕsālaḥtî)* all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me. And this city shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth who shall hear of all the good that I do for them; they shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity I provide for it."

The last striking proclamation of Israel's and Judah's restoration is found in 50:19–20, and reads as follows: "I will restore Israel to his pasture, and he shall feed on Carmel and in Bashan, and his desire shall be satisfied on the

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[28] The form *'al-temḥî* for a second person singular masculine is not correct; "but the *Mil'ēl*-tone probably points to *temaḥ* as the correct reading" (cf. Neh 13:14: *'al-temaḥ*). See E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar,* § 75ii.

[29] The story of 2 Kgs 22 is the counterpart to the narrative of Jehoiakim's burning of the scroll; when the book of the law was found in the temple and read before King Josiah, he rent his clothes (v. 11). God's response is therefore completely different: "... because your heart was penitent, and you humbled yourself before the Lord, when you heard how I spoke against this place, and against its inhabitants, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and you have rent your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, says the Lord ..." (vv. 18–20).

hills of Ephraim and in Gilead. In those days and in that time, says the Lord, iniquity shall be sought in Israel, and there shall be none; and sin in Judah, and none shall be found; for I will pardon those whom I leave as a remnant *(kî 'eslaḥ la'ăšer 'aš'îr).*" This announcement is a concomitant to God's threat of judgment on Babylon; the preceding v. 18 reads: "... Behold, I am bringing punishment on the king of Babylon and his land, as I punished the king of Assyria." This causal link, however, does not necessarily mean that Israel is regarded in chapters 50–51—in contrast to chapters 2–20—"as the innocent victim of vicious opponents."[30] Such a conclusion contradicts common sense as well as the concepts of forgiveness and of the remnant. Forgiveness is mentioned only where there is general or particular guilt, and the salvation of the remnant from judgment implies destruction of the main body of offenders, atonement for the guilt of the nation as a whole, and purification of the remnant.

6. *Conclusion*

Jeremiah occupies a unique position among the biblical books that deal with the polarity between guilt, punishment and forgiveness. Nowhere else are there so many words expressing the whole semantic range of this polarity as are found in all the major parts of this book.[31] Especially striking are the use and significance of the root *šwb;* it occurs here in a richer variety of nuances than in any other book of the Hebrew Bible. It is understandable, therefore, that the terminology of correction and the remnant is also important in Jeremiah. We can safely conclude that its central figure was in essence a prophet of repentance, even if the frail response of the people forced him to conclude his sayings in most cases with an announcement of (total) destruction.

The vocabulary of guilt is manifold, and most of its terms point to Israel's failure to keep the covenant with her God. So the reasons for punishment are clear and convincing enough. Statements concerning God's forgiveness in the future are more problematic, however, because there is no explicit mention of the people's repentance. It is all the more important, therefore, to take historical circumstances into consideration. The assurance of God's future forgiveness presupposes a radical change of situation: forgiveness will follow the execution of divine judgment. This fact makes it

[30] See R. P. Carroll, *Jeremiah,* 823.

[31] Nevertheless, it would be difficult to establish with any certainty, on the basis of a terminological analysis alone, either the sayings that are native to Jeremiah or the story of the book's composition and process of growth until it reached its final form, since these terms occur in all types of texts, in poetry and prose, in short and long sayings. Although only part of the evidence, however, such an analysis confirms the impression that many stereotyped sayings point to editorial activity.

evident that there must be various reasons for forgiveness: satisfaction or atonement for guilt in the past, the destruction of the obdurately wicked, sincere acknowledgment of the true God after the repudiation of idols, or reduction of the people to a remnant. The purified remnant becomes the repository of the hope that all will some day turn to the only true God. There will be two main sources of knowledge of God in the future, one negative, one positive: the experience of divine judgment on human self-assertion, and the triumph of God's work of salvation. The two are inseparable in the divine manner of instructing Israel—a method that becomes typical even though it can be manifested only in concrete historical situations.[32] Only in view of this interrelation is it possible to see that the prophetic vision of divine forgiveness and salvation in the future is not utopian in the pejorative sense of that word.

It seems clear that the promises of salvation as well as the threats of punishment are in principle always conditional. The fulfilment of the promises of salvation depends on the obedience of Israel to the demands of the covenant, and the maintenance of the divine conditional promise depends in turn on her capacity to repent when corrected for her disobedience.[33] The book of Jeremiah confirms the standpoint of many other parts of the Bible: the saving of God's people and the world may be achieved by a new beginning with a small but purified remnant.

[32] The interrelation between these aspects is very clearly indicated in the report of Jeremiah's call and commission in 1:10. Here God tells him: "See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant." The crucial nature of this commission is shown by the passages in which this vocabulary recurs, at least in part: 12:17; 18:7–10; 24:6; 31:28, 40; 42:10; 45:4.

[33] It is striking that statements about reward for obedience, other general qualities, or amendment of life are rarely encountered in the book of Jeremiah (7:3, 23; 12:16; 22:15–16; 42:6). This seems especially strange in view of the fact that the book of Deuteronomy, in many respects its second cousin, is quite unrelated in this point. Deuteronomy displays a unique balance between conditional promises of reward and conditional threats of punishment/curse. It is all the more important, therefore, to realize that the temporal perspectives of the two books are different. Jeremiah is, as a prophetic book, mainly concerned with the disobedience of the people and with its present consequences, whereas Deuteronomy is composed as a testament that looks ahead to the future attitude of the people to their God in the Promised Land. It is mainly concerned with the principle that allows both options, prosperity or destruction, and hence it is marked by wisdom and law rather than by prophecy.

CHAPTER XVII

A NEW COVENANT BASED ON FORGIVENESS (Jer 31:31–34)

These four verses, Jer 31:31–34, form a distinctive unit within the proclamation of redemption that occupies chapters 30–31. They are generally considered to be one of the most significant passages in the Old Testament and are of particular importance for our understanding of the New. Consequently, the passage is much discussed by the exegetes.[1] From the linguistic point of view the text is clear enough, but the rather indeterminate use of its key concepts has given rise to much difference of opinion. Taking similar biblical texts into account only partially assists clarification, for the so-called messianic or eschatological passages all tend to a solemn obscurity, although they differ greatly in other respects one from another. In comparing Jer 31:31–34 with cognate texts, some exegetes expressly emphasize its originality and uniqueness.[2] The majority ascribe it to Jeremiah, allowing for some contribution by the editor during the finalizing of the text, while others consider it the work of Jeremiah's pupil or of the Deuteronomic theological circle.[3]

A critical examination of the bibliography indicates that many exegetes do not take either the fundamental structure of the text or the indeterminate

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[1] The bibliography that follows is limited to recent work on the subject: U. Devescovi, "Annotazione sulla dottrina di Geremia circa la nuova alleanza," *RivBib* 8 (1960), 108–128; R. Martin-Achard, "La nouvelle alliance, selon Jérémie," *RThPh* 12 (1962), 81–92; J. Coppens, "La nouvelle alliance en Jer 31,31–34," *CBQ* 25 (1963), 12–21; S. Herrmann, *Die prophetischen Heilserwartungen im Alten Testament: Ursprung und Gestaltwandel* (BWANT V/5; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1965), 179–241; J. Bright, "An Exercise in Hermeneutics: Jeremiah 31:31–34," *Interpretation* 20 (1966), 188–210; P. Buis, "La nouvelle alliance," *VT* 18 (1968), 1–15; C. Mielgo, "Jer 31,31–34: Vocabulario y estilo," *EstAg* 4 (1969), 4–14; W. C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Old Promise and the New Covenant: Jeremiah 31:31–34," *JEThS* 15 (1972), 11–23; B. Chiesa, "La 'nuova alleanza' (Ger. 31,31–34)," *BeO* 15 (1973), 173–184; R. Martin-Achard, "Quelques remarques sur la nouvelle alliance chez Jérémie (Jérémie 31,31–34)," *Questions disputées d'Ancien Testament: Méthode et Théologie* (ed. C. Brekelmans; BEThL 33; Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1974), 141–164; H. Weippert, "Das Wort vom neuen Bund in Jeremia XXXI 31–34," *VT* 29 (1979), 336–351; J. Mejía, "La problématique de l'alliance et de la nouvelle alliance dans Jérémie XXXI 31–34 et quelques autres textes," *Congress Volume: Vienna 1980* (edited by J. A. Emerton; VT.S 32; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 263–277; W. E. Lemke, "Jeremiah 31:31–34," *Interpretation* 37 (1983), 183–187; H. D. Potter, "The New Covenant in Jeremiah XXXI 31–34," *VT* 33 (1983), 347–357; C. Levin, *Die Verheißung des neuen Bundes in ihrem theologiegeschichtlichen Zusamnenhang ausgelegt* (FRLANT 137; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985); B. Renaud, "L'alliance éternelle d'Ez 16,59–63 et l'alliance nouvelle de Jér 31,31–34," *Ezekiel and His Book: Textual and Literary Criticism and Their Interrelation* (ed. J. Lust; BEThL 74; Leuven: Leuven University, 1986), 335–339.

[2] See especially J. Coppens, *CBQ* 25 (1963), 12–21; R. Martin-Achard, *Questions disputées d'Ancien Testament* (BEThL 33, 1974), 141–164.

[3] See especially S. Herrmann, *Die prophetischen Heilserwartungen im Alten Testament*, 179–241.

use of key concepts sufficiently into account. Hence they overlook the fact that the passage covers more territory than is at first apparent, while offering exceptional scope for messianic-eschatological explanations. The exegetical approach is too frequently biased or even exclusively quantitative, although the meanings of the passage are manifold and call for an inclusively qualitative interpretation.[4]

1. *The Structure of the Passage Determines the Meaning of the Terminology*

It is important to notice that the present passage is not the sole promise of a secure future held out to the people of Israel in the Old Testament. The shock caused by the fall of Jerusalem and the misery of exile made possible a radical reassessment of the relationship between the people of Israel and their God in past history, and the prophets saw Israel's present condition as the execution of righteous divine judgment upon an apostate people. Nevertheless, they were convinced that despite everything, God would not reject the people of Israel completely, but would take pity on them and guarantee them a fresh start. This promise is particularly explicit in Deutero-Isaiah and in Deut 30:1–10; Jer 24:5–7; 31:31–34; 32:37–41; Ezek 16:53–63; 34:25–31; 36:22–35; 37:21–28; Zech 7:7–8:17; Bar 2:29–35. The similarity of the passages dealing with a state of distress and a promise of deliverance is of extraordinary significance in explaining them individually. On the one hand it demonstrates the degree to which similar texts express the common characteristics of Hebrew belief and adopt appropriate literary structures;[5] on the other it draws attention to the point at which originality or uniqueness of any given passage starts.

The peculiar feature of 31:31–34 lies in the antithesis between covenants past and future. There is much emphasis on the expression *bĕrît ḥădāšāh,* "the new covenant," which will replace the earlier one broken by the people of Israel. The fundamental antithesis based on the time aspect of former // future days is in turn the basis of the antithesis between the people (they) and God (I): the people broke the covenant; God will establish a new one in order to redeem them. The text runs:

31 Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new

[4] S. Herrmann, *Die prophetischen Heilserwartungen im Alten Testament,* 214–215, is felicitous in his use of the terms "exclusive // inclusive" and "exclusive-quantitative // inclusive-qualitative Interpretation"; but he unfortunately gives absolute preference to the exclusive interpretation on the basis of an ideal and abstract concept of history. The diachronic perspective is questionable, because the history of classical Israel is relatively short and the language of the Scripture is polysemic and symbolical.

[5] It is noteworthy that P. Buis, *VT* 18 (1968), 1–15, attempts to identify common structural elements in the above-mentioned passages.

covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.
32 Not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord.
33 But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.
34 And no longer shall each man teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Since some of the concepts in these verses are imprecise, they pose many problems to exegetes. First comes the question of the indication of time most used in announcing the new covenant. The participial form of the introduction *hinnēh yāmîm bā'îm* (v. 31) gives the impression that the prophet has the near future in mind,[6] but in principle the distant future is also a possibility. An explanation of *'aḥărê hayyāmîm hāhēm,* "after those days," (v. 33) is even harder to find. Because the text speaks of a time "after those days," the reader naturally wonders what happened *before* those days. There is a wide diversity of opinion on this question. One hypothesis is that vv. 31 and 33 relate to the same time,[7] but against this is the use of the preposition *'aḥărê* instead of the expected *bĕ,* which would have allowed the reading "in those days" rather than "after those days." A further suggestion is that *'aḥărê* implies an interim period between the time the promise was made and the realization of the promise of a new covenant.[8] It is more probable, however, that the statement "after those days" refers to a definite earlier historical event. But which? One possibility is the fall of the Kingdom of Judah and the beginning of exile. This period is seen as one of divine wrath provoked by apostasy and the making of a new covenant therefore signifies a restoration—in other words, a real turning point "after those days." Needless to say, this transformation cannot occur without forgiveness of the people's guilt.[9] It is also possible, however, that "after those days" simply indicates a step forward, that is, the return from exile and restoration (cf. Jer 30:5–31:22).[10] Perhaps the most cogent conclusion is that the prophet is deliberately speaking solemnly and vaguely in order to place all his emphasis on the affirmation of God's faithfulness and mercy towards the people of Is-

[6] For the participial form in denoting the future, see P. Joüon, *Grammaire de l'hébreu biblique* (Rome: Institut biblique pontifical, 1923), § 119n.
[7] See R. Martin-Achard, *RThPh* 12 (1962), 83.
[8] See J. Coppens, *CBQ* 25 (1963), 15.
[9] See E. König, *Die messianischen Weissagungen des Alten Testaments vergleichend, geschichtlich und exegetisch behandelt* (Stuttgart: C. Belser, 1923), 236.
[10] See W. Rudolph, *Jeremia* (HAT 12; 3th ed.; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1968), 202–203.

rael at a time when it appears as if their God has finally broken with them.[11]

The meanings of the concepts of covenant *(bĕrît)* and law *(tôrāh)* are somewhat easier to determine, because they are the pivotal points of the entire passage and all the elements of the structure of the text combine to clarify them. The prophet solemnly announces that God will conclude a "new covenant" *(bĕrît ḥădāšāh)* with Israel and the house of Judah,[12] an expression unique in the whole of the Old Testament, as is the style of announcement of the innovation. The prophet speaks antithetically of the covenant from both negative and positive points of view. Negatively he anticipates that the new covenant will be different in kind from that made by God at the time of the Exodus and later broken by Israel (v. 32). Positively he points to the promise that God will set the law *(tōrāh)* "within" the people, writing it upon their hearts so that an ideal relationship will prevail between them and God, and all the people will know God, who will forgive their apostasy (vv. 33–34).

The antithetic relationship between the two covenants not only indicates the nature of the new covenant but also stresses the reason for its introduction: a new covenant is required because the people of Israel violated the previous one, rendering it invalid. This argument is comprehensible only in the light of God's profound faithfulness. As it was the people who broke the covenant, God no longer has any obligations towards them, and the only thing they might expect is appropriate punishment, something that has in fact occurred: the kingdom of Israel has long lain in ruins, Judah is undergoing its own agony, and many are in exile. The prophet must have had this in mind when concluding v. 32 with the statement *wĕ'ānōkî bā'altî bām.* God appears in the role of Lord of the law, in order to validate legal rights against an unfaithful wife, which can only mean punishment.[13] Nevertheless,

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[11] See P. Volz, *Der Prophet Jeremia* (KAT 10; 2nd ed.; Leipzig: D. W. Scholl, 1928), 296.

[12] In v. 31 the "house of Israel" and the "house of Judah" are mentioned, whereas in v. 33 only the "house of Israel." There is diversity of opinion among exegetes about the reason for this discrepancy.

[13] The statement *'ăšer hēmmāh hēpērû 'et-bĕrîtî wĕ'ānōkî bā'altî bām* is the most controversial part of the passage. Numerous exegetes interpret the second part, i.e., *wĕ'ānōkî bā'altî bām,* in a positive sense: "though I was their husband." See *RSV;* J. Bright, *Jeremiah* (AB 21; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965), 277, 283; *Einheitsübersetzung,* etc. E. König, *Die messianischen Weissagungen des Alten Testaments,* 236–237, argues well that both for linguistic-stylistic and thematic reasons such interpretation is questionable. The verb *bā'al* here and in 3:14 appears in combination with the preposition *bĕ,* as the verb denoting ruling. The relationship between the two parts of the statement, especially between the pronouns *hēmmāh // 'ānōkî,* is antithetical; the verbs *prr* (Hiph'il) and *bā'al* must stand in the sequence relationship cause // consequence: they broke my covenant, therefore I have ... E. König defines the meaning of the verb *bā'al* "als Ehegemahl auftreten gegen das Weib, d.h. die negativen Eherechte gegen dasselbe gebrauchen." Aquila *(ekurieusa)* and Vulgate *(dominatus sum)* translate the verbe in this sense. Among recent exegetes this explanation is adapted by W. Rudolph, *Jeremia,* 201, and J. Coppens, *CBQ* 25 (1963), 14–15. Coppens translates thus: "Car eux ont violé mon alliance et, moi, j'ai du agir envers eux en maître-époux." This interpretation is in accordance with the

this intervention is not the final reckoning with a people in apostasy, for God's action is ultimately motivated not by the demands of law but by the unconditional plan of redemption: God does not punish the people in order to reject them but in order to reclaim them for a new covenant. This implies that God is prepared to forgive iniquity. The divine action after the breach of the covenant—i. e., forgiveness impelled by a determination to redeem the people—is, then, the profounder reason for concluding a new covenant. So the antithesis between the unfaithfulness of the people and God's faithfulness attains its peak.[14]

A description of the distinctive features of the new covenant provides the key to two questions that are causally linked: First, what kind of a covenant was the previous one, nowhere specifically described? And secondly, why must the new covenant be as the promise asserts? The assurance that God will set the law within and upon the hearts of the people indicates that during the days of the former covenant, the law made its demands upon the covenanted people from outside. The Sinai covenant was like that, with the law written upon tablets of stone (cf. Exod 31:18; 34:27–28) and later in book form (cf. Exod 24:7). An opinion that became increasingly valid during the classical period of Hebrew monotheism was the conviction that, despite all the teachers of the law and the prophets, the covenanted people never met the most fundamental demands of the law—that is, they never remained faithful to the one and only God of Israel. Ultimately, this view led to the conclusion that the people were in fact incapable of fulfilling the law.[15] Jeremiah expresses this idea in 13:23 in a famous allegory:

> Can the Ethiopian change his skin
> or the leopard his spots?
> Then also you can do good
> who are accustomed to evil.

Consciousness of the persistence of iniquity must have led, at the moment of the break, to the conviction that a new beginning would only be possible if the people changed completely: not only is forgiveness required but also a creative divine intrusion in their innermost selves.

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meaning of the verb *gā'al,* suggested without good reason by certain exegetes instead of *bā'al.* See W. J. Moulton, "The New Covenant in Jeremiah," *Expositor* 7 (1906), 380; E. König, *Die messianischen Weissagungen des Alten Testaments,* 237.

[14] The antithetic explanation of the statement in v. 32b bears great weight, because it clarifies decisively the antithesis between the previous and the new covenants. In addition, it suggests a motive for concluding a new covenant: the previous covenant ended with the punishing of an unfaithful people; the basis of the new covenant will be God's forgiveness "after those days" (v. 33) of downfall and exile.

[15] See H. W. Wolff, "Das Thema 'Umkehr' in der alttestamentlichen Prophetie," *ZThK* 48 (1951), 129–148; E. W. Nicholson, *Jeremiah 26–52* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 70–71; G. von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments,* vol. 2 (5th ed.; Munich: C. Kaiser, 1968), 224–228.

In the light of such a radical understanding of the relationship between God and the covenanted people, the question of which covenant the prophet has in mind appears of secondary importance.[16] The same is true of the question as to how broadly the content of the notion of the law *(tôrāh)* should be comprehended: only the Ten Commandments, Deuteronomical Law, or even the entire Bible of Jeremiah's era?[17] No one can prove how broadly Jeremiah understood this concept, which makes it even more necessary to take into account the fact that this notion always primarily designates the essential biblical demands regarding God and human beings—i. e., the Ten Commandments. Throughout history, the nucleus of Hebrew law has been consistent (cf. e.g. Matt 5:17). The novelty of the new covenant cannot therefore be that the content of the law will alter, or objective law defer to individual-subjective law. On the contrary, this is precisely why the promise that God will set the law within the people is of great significance: the covenanted people must become capable of fulfilling a law that is the foundation stone of both old and new covenants.[18] Only then will there be a time when the relation between God and the people will not be burdened by the reciprocal of guilt—divine wrath—but will be blessed with redemptive acts by God. To sum up: the novelty of the new covenant with regard to the law consists in a guarantee of the permanence of divine fidelity to the covenant. Although the people broke the covenant, it cannot come to an end because God long ago determined an irrevocable plan of redemption for the people

[16] Nearly all exegetes think that by the covenant broken by Israel is meant the covenant of Sinai, which is characterized by the law written on the stone tablets. S. Herrmann, *Die prophetischen Heilserwartungen im Alten Testament,* 179, however, thinks that the term may relate to a sequence of several covenants. For a survey of viewpoints and bibliography relating to the concept of covenant, see especially G. E. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," *BA* 17 (1954), 50–76; J. Coppens, *CBQ* 25 (1963), 12, n. 1; E. Kutsch, *Verheißung und Gesetz: Untersuchungen zum sogenannten "Bund" im Alten Testament* (BZAW 131; Berlin / New York: W. de Gruyter, 1973); idem, "Gottes Zuspruch und Anspruch: *bĕrît* in der alttestamentlichen Theologie," *Questions disputées d'Ancient Testament* (BEThL 33, 1974), 71–90; W. Thiel, "Die Rede vom 'Bund' in den Prophetenbüchern," *ThV* 9 (1977), 11–36; D. J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old Testament* (AB 21B; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981); E. W. Nicholson, *God and His People: Covenant and Theology in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

[17] For the meaning of the concept of the law in Jeremiah, elsewhere in the Old Testament, and in later Judaism, see especially S. H. Blank, "The LXX Renderings of Old Testament Terms for Law," *HUCA* 7 (1930), 259–283; A. Robert, "Le sens du mot loi dans le Ps. CXIX (Vulg. CXVIII)," *RB* 46 (1937), 182–206; J. P. Hyatt, "Torah in the Book of Jeremiah," *JBL* 60 (1941), 381–396; M. Noth, *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (3th ed.; Munich: C. Kaiser, 1966), 9–141: "Gesetze im Pentateuch: Ihre Voraussetzungen und ihr Sinn"; W. D. Davis, *Torah in the Messianic Age and/or the Age to Come* (JBL.M 7; Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1951), esp. pp. 13–28: "Jeremiah 31:31–34." See also G. E. Mendenhall, "Ancient Oriental and Biblical Law," *BA* 17 (1954), 26–46.

[18] See B. W. Anderson, *The Old Testament and Christian Faith,* 237: "The Prophet does not speak of a new torah but of a new covenant relationship which will enable men to obey the covenant stipulations out of inner motivation."

of Israel. Ultimately, the present declaration is valid as a promise of divine redemptive intervention in any situation that gives no grounds for hope. The promise regarding the law is subjugated to this motive and consequently only understandable in its light.[19]

At this point, the question again arises of the meaning of the declaration about the forgiveness of iniquity within the framework of the entire passage. What kind of role does the particle *kî* have here? An answer is found in the first part of the text, where it is stated that the former covenant ended because Israel broke it. This means that a new covenant can be introduced only because *(kî)* God will forgive iniquity. Forgiveness is its precondition and "preparatory moment."[20] The declaration on forgiveness is the pinnacle of the passage, explaining everything that is said about the new covenant and in all probability more than seems immediately apparent. The particle *kî* before the declaration on forgiveness not only expresses the motivation for the drawing up of a new covenant but also its permanence; forgiveness will be the reason for recognition of God. How is forgiveness of this sort to be visualized?

The historical situation that led to the promise being given demonstrates that forgiveness cannot be solely an activity of divine mercy in the abstract but must find expression within a defined historical event. Forgiveness is in fact a redemptive about-turn in a hopeless situation. To a people that had been living on illusions, deriving support from foreign powers and their gods, the complete rupture of their national entity produced a shock that convinced them that no salvation lay with the idols. This may have generated an internal desire to return to God, although return in the complete sense was possible only through a positive act of redemption—e.g., return from exile—that must convince the people that God alone is all-powerful and forbearing, the sole source of Israel's existence, and that their redemption is possible solely through fidelity to divine law. The prophet firmly be-

[19] M. Weinfeld, "Jeremiah and the Spiritual Metamorphosis of Israel," *ZAW* 88 (1976), 28, explains the novelty of the future: "The principal novelty is, I believe, this, that the covenant is not written on stone but on their heart." The expression "the principal novelty" is questionable, for an examination of the text in the light of the history of covenant relationships and of the "present" hopeless situation discloses a more fundamental novelty, i.e., the grace of a new covenant as such. J. Bright, *Covenant and Promise* (London: SCM Press, 1977), 196, says: "The Mosaic covenant reminded Israel of God's grace to her which had saved her and made her his people, and of her obligation to live in obedience to his commandments if she wished to continue in his favor and receive his blessing. The promises to Abraham and to David assured her that, in the final analysis, her future rested ultimately not in what she was—or had, or had not, done—but in the sure, immutable purposes of God which nothing could cancel. Without the one, Israel could not have been God's people; without the other, she might well have lived—to despair."

[20] See E. König, *Die messianischen Weissagungen des Alten Testaments,* 240: "Bei der Aufrichtung des neuen Bundes ist die *Verzeihung* der vom Volke Israel in jahrhundertelangen Zeiten der Untreue kontrahierten *Sündenschuld* ein vorbereitendes Moment (V. 34b). Also der neue Bund floß aus einem weit höheren Grade von göttlicher Gnade."

lieves in the miracle of redemption, and is therefore simultaneously able to believe in the miracle of recognizing God on the basis of prior experience. Thus God will set the law indirectly within the innermost being of the people, through activating the fruits of the miraculous redemptive event.[21] This does not, of course, exclude the possibility of his reaching directly into their inner being and altering it. The practical question is simply this: could Jeremiah rely on a miraculous about-turn by the people, "from the least of them to the greatest" in the near future?[22]

2. *What Determines the Meaning of the Promise?*

An analysis that takes account of the structure of these four verses can obviously do much to clarify the significance of their key concepts and individual statements. At the same time, it has its limitations: the historical situation in which the passage came into being must also be considered. The promise was given in a situation of extreme distress, something characteristic of most messianic-eschatological pronouncements. Even more important is the underlying motive of the promise: God's primary plan of redemption, which involves the exercise of pure divine grace with regard to Israel's apostasy.

The ultimate motive for forgiveness raises the following questions: on what conditions will God forgive the iniquity of the people? How complete and permanent will the knowledge of God be within the new covenant? Is fulfilment of the promise only possible in eschatological terms, or can it happen in present historical conditions? How far is it possible to interpret the text Christologically? An attempt to answer these questions must seek support from the relationship between the fundamental postulates of Hebrew belief and the structure of human existence.

The paradox of the constancy of divine faithfulness is understandable only if the covenant is not solely external, a legal contract applicable to a defined historical period, but something possessing a basis of its own in the creation of the world and human beings—which would be possible only in the absolute monotheism that prevailed during Jeremiah's times.[23] Being the absolute beginning and end of creation, God remains faithful to his own es-

[21] See C. H. Cornill, *Das Buch Jeremia* (Leipzig: C. H. Tauchnitz, 1905), 352; E. König, *Die messianischen Weissagungen des Alten Testaments*, 240; J. Morgenstern, "The Book of the Covenant: Part III—The Ḥuqqim," *HUCA* 8–9 (1931–1932), 5.

[22] See J. Coppens, *CBQ* 25 (1963), 17: "Ce qui caractérise notre passage, ce n'est pas le don d'un coeur renouvelé, voire nouveau, mais le don de la loi divine au coeur de l'homme."

[23] See The statement by S. Herrmann, *Die prophetischen Heilserwartungen im Alten Testament*, 200: "Der neue Bund ist das sublimste Bekenntnis zum Monotheismus, das in Palästina zur gleichen Zeit formuliert wurde, in der Deuterojesaja im Exil auf anderen Wegen zu denselben Einsichten elangte."

sence and to the aim of creation even during major crises provoked by Israel's unfaithfulness. Regarded historically, Jeremiah's promise sounds like hoping against hope, but in the light of divine absoluteness and supremacy it seems completely realistic, because it offers the sole possibility of survival. When the people apostatized from their God, the prophet, who had to pass through all the darkness and light of his own soul before his God and his people, emerged with an even clearer knowledge of God and consequently an even greater conviction of the miracle of future redemption. Ultimately, the promise of a new covenant is an affirmation *par excellence* of the belief and work of the prophet, who stands between the iniquity of his people and the mighty benevolence of his God.

The absoluteness of divine fidelity necessarily signifies the constancy of divine law. God's demands upon Israel and the nations are essentially always the same, and can never be less in the future than they have been in the past. Why then is the divine wrath not equally constant, or the training of Israel to fulfil the law immutable, so that the divine wrath will never be necessary? Why did the old covenant expire in an expression of God's anger, whilst the new covenant will be primarily characterized by divine benevolence? Upon what basis will God pardon the iniquity of an unfaithful people who could not be forgiven under the old covenant? No direct answers to these questions emerge from the text, and the opinions of exegetes consequently differ greatly. Some consider that the assurance of forgiveness does not assume penitence on the part of a people living under the sign of divine anger. This line of thought is well expressed in the following statement: "Die Bekehrung ist nicht Bedingung für den Empfang des Heils, sondern das zugesagte Heil ist die Voraussetzung, die Begründung für die Bekehrung."[24] Such explanations reflect both a presupposition of divine liberty and the view that the people are incapable of reform on their own.

This explanation is indisputably correct if reform in the full sense of the word is in question, but not if it excludes every sign of penitence and desire to reform manifested by the people. In that case, God's future dealings with Israel would directly contradict the divine *modus operandi* used in the past. Hence some distinction must be made between a capacity for complete fidelity and a minimum of postulates or demands within the relationship that obtains between God and human beings. If the prophets state that the people of Israel are incapable of reform, they apparently have in mind not so much the ontological position as an inability that is morally based; the people have become accustomed to slackness and have become slaves of their own iniquity (cf. Jer 13:23; Hos 5:4; John 8:24). The essence of their guilt lies in a stubborn clinging to a miscellany of idols, thus turning their backs upon

[24] H. W. Wolff, *ZThK* 48 (1951), 142.

their Creator and true Saviour. Here also is found the reason for the frequent use of the threat of divine judgment by the prophets. Convinced that the people of Israel will be capable of true reform only if their illusions crumble, they see in the execution of divine judgment the urgently required prerequisite of the divine mercy expressed in reform, or as Hans Walter Wolff puts it: "Dadurch, daß Jahwe Israel alle Gelegenheit zum Baaldienst entzieht, ihm allen Grund zum Vertrauen auf die politischen Großmächte und alle Freude am Genuß des Kulturlandes nimmt, bringt er das Volk zu der Rückkehr, zu der es von sich aus nicht kommen konnte und wollte."[25]

But is this not exactly what happened when Jeremiah announced that God would initiate a new covenant? The people of Israel found themselves *in extremis,* robbed of all they had previously held dear, so that they were experiencing a "situation of nothing" *(Nullpunktsituation)* in the fullest sense.[26] Through suffering they have been led to recognize that redemption can only come through God; it is they who must make the first move towards their Lord.

Does Jeremiah's promise of a new covenant signify a limited or a radical change in the knowledge of God? The statement that "all" will know God, "from the least of them to the greatest" (v. 34) is particularly open to question, as it seems to indicate that all will accept God as the only God, together with the divine redemptive work, and the fundamental demands of the law.[27] Some exegetes evaluate this promise of the knowledge of God so radically that they even exclude the possibility of apostasy.[28] Such a view seems incompatible with the present state of things: a complete knowledge of God will surely be possible only in another, eschatological era, when a direct relationship between God and humans will come into being.

It appears that Jeremiah envisioned a new covenant in the near future. Consequently, rhetorical-literary features are so prominent that expressions such as "all" and "from the least of them to the greatest" cannot be taken literally but only relatively—i.e., as denoting a majority. Only the minority

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[25] *ZThK* 48 (1951), 141. On p. 145 we find a similar argument: "Wo echte Rückkehr zu Jahwe selbst geschieht, da vollzieht sich immer auch ein bestimmtes Abschiednehmen von Kult und Kultur, ein Weg in die Wüste (Hosea 2)."

[26] See G. von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments,* vol. 2, 125, 152.

[27] See H. B. Huffmon, "The Treaty Background of Hebrew *yāda'*," *BASOR* 181 (1966), 31–37; W. Vogels, "Restauration de l'Egypte et universalisme en Ex 29,13–16," *Biblica* 53 (1972), 489; B. Chiesa, *BeO* 15 (1973), 174.

[28] See P. Volz, *Der Prophet Jeremia,* 297: "In Zukunft wird kein Abfall mehr möglich." It seems that G. von Rad assumes such a situation, for he claims in *Old Testament Theology,* vol. 2 (trans. D. M. G. Stalker; London: SCM Press, 1965), 213–214: "What is here outlined is the picture of a new man, a man who is able to obey perfectly because of a miraculous change of his nature." J. Bright, *Interpretation* 20 (1966), 195, has a more cautious statement: "... Will the people thereafter sin no more? That is a question that lies beyond Jeremiah's field of vision. The new covenant is God's final, gracious provision for his people; the question of its continuing endurance does not enter his mind."

were faithful in the past, which provides sufficient reason for announcing a new covenant, should the majority be faithful in the future, thanks to their improved understanding. Such a radical change in minority/majority relations can only come about on the basis of an exceptional redemptive intervention following a period of extreme distress. In times gone by, the righteous minority prevented total breakdown, and in the day of misfortune, the majority could be convinced that the minority were right. Now some hope exists that this recognition will be permanent on account of the exceptional nature of what has happened—particularly because the possibility also exists that an intensively personal covenant relationship will provide a fresh impulse for persistence in faithfulness. The possibility of direct divine action within a person's inner being is always greater when the postulates of absolute monotheism shift religious consciousness away from the institutional-collective towards the individual-personal. In the past, such a personal relationship between God and the people of Israel has been possible only in the case of righteous individuals; but in Jeremiah's perception it now appears as a valid ideal for all. What the visionary Jeremiah experiences today in his innermost heart, he sees as a normal future condition for everyone.

An interpretation derived from the relationship between the minority and the majority has obvious consequences for the link between collective and individual retribution. In the past, a collective-institutional theology and the unfaithfulness of the majority ensured the dominance of collective retribution. In contrast, the future will lie with individual retribution, because the trend will be in the direction of an individual-personal relationship with God and hence towards individual responsibility. It is not by chance that this alteration in roles is mentioned in the preceding vv. 29–30 (cf. Ezek 18).[29]

The view that the promise of a new covenant can become effective only in eschatological circumstances is an exaggeration. It is based upon a too literal explanation of the text and a failure to take into account the role of the righteous minority that had been bearers of the covenant for the whole human race (Noah), and certainly for the people of Israel (Abraham, Moses) through their faithfulness. Even in its most extreme provocation of divine wrath, before the Flood, unfaithfulness was never so total that no basis existed for making a new covenant. Consequently, the fate of the former covenant cannot be described by the word "break-up" *(Scheitern)* in any absolute sense.[30] The foundation and criteria for the promise of the new covenant are the historical experience of the righteous minority. Hence the view seems

[29] See B. Chiesa, *BeO* 15 (1973), 183.

[30] The word "Scheitern" is a characteristic term used by R. Bultmann in denoting the fate of the promise in the Old Testament in order to emphasize the eschatological nature of the New Testament. See *Glauben und Verstehen,* vol. 2 (5th ed.; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1968), 162–186: "Weissagung und Erfüllung."

justified that Jeremiah had in mind a continuing process of the dialectical historical education of the covenanted people under divine guidance rather than the making of a single new covenant once and for all. The distinguishing trait of this education is rehabilitation of the righteous: once the people as a whole experience the downfall of the idols of the majority and the rehabilitation of the righteous minority, they gradually achieve a clearer understanding that God is the sole master of their lives, and thus become more capable of forming a personal covenanted relationship with their God. The theological vision of history between its beginning and its end means that the history of redemption must show some progress in knowledge of God.

In conclusion, what are the primary foundations on which a new covenant must be based? The first is the benevolence and supreme power of God the Creator which, despite human resistance, history witnesses in all the glory of its accomplishment. The second is an experience of the impotence of the idols when their time of judgment arrives. And the third is the inscrutable ability of the human being to rebound even after the most dramatic defeats. The promise of the new covenant does not rest on this or that factor but on all three in interdependence. Consequently it is not utopian, even if the structure of the world and human existence do not permit its fulfilment in this present era. The key to an interpretation of Jeremiah's announcement of a new covenant is the divine command that became Jeremiah's guide to his prophetic activity, but which is equally valid for all ages:

> See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms,
> to pluck up and to break down,
> to destroy and to overthrow,
> to build and to plant (Jer 1:10).

CHAPTER XVIII

PUNISHMENT AND MERCY IN THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL

The threat of punishment is undoubtedly the dominant theme of the book of Ezekiel. And this is especially true of the first 24 chapters. In most cases the causal link between guilt and punishment is highlighted, although in some instances wrongdoing must be inferred. Because of Israel's past and present sins punishment is seen by the prophet as imminent and inevitable; yet he is aware that the history of Israel is marked by God's patience and forbearance, and makes it clear that the restoration of Israel must be regarded exclusively as an unmerited act of divine grace.[1]

The book of Ezekiel contains an exceptionally large number of oracles, which are from the structural and thematic points of view homogeneous. Hence the themes of guilt, punishment, repentance, and forgiveness are often presented not in short sayings, but in complex literary structures that call for a holistic interpretation.[2] It is not necessary, however, to deal with all units which are concerned with the predominant theme of punishment, for most threats and announcements of punishment are similar from a thematic point of view, or do not reflect greater theological issues.[3] Detailed study will therefore be limited to the more remarkable and original oracles.[4]

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[1] It may be noted that the concept of mercy *(rḥm)* is found only once (39:25) in the book of Ezekiel. The notion of forgiveness in a positive sense occurs in 16:63 and 20:17 (cf. also 20:9, 14, 22, 44; 36:22). Elsewhere it is denied. In 7:4, 9 is found God's statement, made in almost identical terms in the two places: "And my eye will not spare you, nor will I have pity *(wĕlō'-tāḥôs 'ênî 'ālayīk wĕlō' 'eḥmôl)*; but I will punish you for your ways, while your abominations are in your midst. Then you will know that I am the Lord" (cf. 9:5, 10). In 24:14 we find: "I the Lord have spoken; it shall come to pass, I will do it; I will not go back, I will not spare, I will not repent *(lō'-'epra' wĕlō'-'āḥûs wĕlō' 'ennāḥēm)*; according to your ways and your doings I will judge you, says the Lord God." Ezekiel has his own way of propounding the paradox of God's future mercy.

[2] This method is used most convincingly by M. Greenberg in his commentary *Ezekiel, 1–20* (AB 22; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983); idem, *Ezekiel, 21–37* (AB 22; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1997). For justification, see esp. pp. 18–27: "The Method of This Commentary: Holistic Interpretation"; idem, "The Vision of Jerusalem in Ezekiel 8–11: A Holistic Interpretation," *The Divine Helmsman: Studies on God's Control of Human Events, Presented to Lou H. Silberman* (ed. J. L. Crenshaw and S. Sandmel; New York: Ktav, 1980), 146–164. In general, commentaries take too little account of the structure of particular passages and the mutual relations of sections within the whole.

[3] See 4:1–5:17; 6:1–14; 7:1–27; 8:1–11:25; 12:1–20; 13:1–23; 14:1–11, 12–23; 15:1–8; 19:1–14; 21:1–22, 23–37; 22:1–16, 17–22, 23–31; 24:1–14, 15–27; 25:1–17; 26:1–21; 27:1–36; 28:1–19, 20–24; 29:1–16, 17–21; 30:1–19, 20–26; 35:1–15; 39:21–24; 44:10–14.

[4] For the whole of the book of Ezekiel, see especially following commentaries and cognate studies: G. A. Cook, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936, 1970); G. Fohrer and K. Galling, *Ezechiel* (HAT 13; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1955); H. G. May and E. L. Allen, *The Book of Ezekiel* (IntB 6;

1. *The Office of a Watchman (3:16–21; 33:1–9)*

These two passages are very similar, and in places even identical in both theme and style. Most commentators consider 33:1–9 to be the original from which the other was derived, although the specific use of themes common to both passages argues against any direct dependence.[5]

1.1 *Ezekiel 3:16–21*

The passage begins with an account of God's charge to the prophet: "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me" (v. 17). The rest of the passage clearly falls into two antithetically structured parts: vv. 18–19 and 20–21. Each part is a casuistic statement of the prophet's capital responsibility to warn first the wicked and secondly the righteous against doing wrong. The first antithesis runs as follows:

> If I say to the wicked, "You shall surely die," and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, or from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you will have saved your life.

The second antithesis deals with the case of a lapse by a previously righteous man:

> Again, if a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because you have not warned him, he shall die for his sin, and his righteous deeds which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand. Nevertheless if you warn the righteous man not to sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live, because he took warning; and you will have saved your life.

New York / Nashville: Abingdon, 1956), 39–338; J. W. Wevers, *Ezekiel* (NCBC; London: T. Nelson, 1969); W. Zimmerli, *Ezechiel,* 2 vols. (BK.AT XIII/1–2; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969); English translation, *Ezekiel,* 2 vols. (Hermeneia; Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1979–1983); W. Eichrodt, *Das Buch Hezekiel* (ATD 22; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965–1966); English translation, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1970); K. W. Carley, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974); M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel, 1–20* and *Ezekiel, 21–37;* R. M. Hals, *Ezekiel* (FOTL 19; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 1989); I. M. Duguid, *Ezekiel and the Leaders of Israel* (VT.S 56; Leiden / New York / Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1994); R. W. Clements, *Ezekiel* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996); R. Wündrich, *"Du sollst erfahren, daß ICH der Herr BIN ...": Das Buch Hesekiel und die Geschichte des Nahen Ostens* (Frankfort on the Main: Haag & Herchen, 1996); D. R. Ulrich, *Proleptic Intrusions of the Final Judgement in Ezechiel's Oracles Against the Nations* (microfiche-edition; Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Theological Seminary, Dissertation, 1996).

[5] See M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel, 1–20,* 87–97.

Both antitheses make it plain that the passage is concerned with the fate of the watchman. All the emphasis is on his responsibility to warn the wicked or the backsliding righteous. He must even admonish the evildoer who is already doomed as a result of his obduracy. In every case the responsibility is laid upon the prophet-watchman, even at the risk of his own life. His warning to the wicked opens up a final possibility of redemption, but if there is no response, death inexorably awaits the evildoer. What is said of the righteous man who has lapsed makes it evident that the present is decisive, not the past; present vice cannot be excused by past virtue. But there is much greater hope that such a man may reform his ways and save himself, and the watchman's warning may be decisive in such cases.

It can hardly be accidental that 3:16–21 stands at the beginning of the prophet's ministry. The book of Ezekiel is a witness to the fact that God persistently proffers life to his people, and enforces strict justice only after all attempts to prevent its being necessary have been exhausted.

1.2 *Ezekiel 33:1–9*

There is an important difference between this passage and 3:16–21. The first section (33:1–6) envisages the appointment of a watchman, chosen by the threatened town or people, whose duty it will be to warn them of impending danger, while the second (vv. 7–9) identifies this watchman with the prophet. The starting point of the first section is the fact of the people's guilt and God's consequent bringing "the sword upon a land" (v. 2). The usual precaution taken by a community threatened by a menacing enemy is to appoint a watchman to give them timely warning of an attack. If he does his duty, any who ignore him are responsible for their own deaths; the watchman is exculpated. If, however, the watchman fails to sound an alarm, both he and they will perish. There is a double paradox here: God introduces himself as the enemy of the guilty people and in that capacity judges the man the people have chosen to warn them of impending retribution. In this way Ezekiel emphasizes God's extreme concern for the fate of his people. A wicked people can experience divine favour only if it turns and complies with his covenant; otherwise the inexorable demands of the law of retribution must be met.

The application to the prophet in 33:7–9 of what seems to be a general statement surprises the reader because here only the first of the two cases propounded in chapter 3 (vv. 18–19) is adduced: that of the wicked who persist in their guilt and die in consequence, whereas the watchman—if he has warned them—saves his own life. The people are unfaithful, showing no sign of true repentance, but the prophet knows that he must nevertheless carry out all his obligations as a watchman towards them, even though they already stand condemned. And, because he is aware of irrevocable divine faithfulness, he also knows how to hope against hope.

2. *God's Justice between Punishment and Forbearance (16:1–63; 23:1–49)*

Both these passages are parables. The main section in each has an antithetic structure, and the two have a similar theme: the contrast between God's benevolence and faithfulness towards his people and their reckless infidelity.[6] Both chapters contain material that would make possible a discussion of which was the original version and which the later addition, but we are here primarily concerned with the present state of the texts and their ideological presuppositions.

2.1 *Ezekiel 16:1–63*

Chapter 16 is the longest prophecy in the book of Ezekiel. It starts with the characteristic revelation formula *wayĕhî dĕbar-yhwh 'ēlay lē'mōr,* "And the word of the Lord came to me" (v. 1), followed by the command that the prophet should arraign Jerusalem for her "abominations" (v. 2), and three sections of unequal size: vv. 3–43, 44–58, and 59–63. It is generally accepted that the last two of these must have been appended later to chapter 16.

The first section is unique in its general character and is an antithetic composition that clearly falls into four parts: vv. 3–5, 6–14, 15–34, 35–43. The whole passage employs the figure of a nymphomaniac adulteress to symbolize Jerusalem. The parable is based on the fairy-tale motif of the foundling child who is brought to prosperity and happiness. The story has an expressly personal note, as the narrator uses the second person throughout. The first part (16:3–5) tells of an abandoned baby girl and emphasizes her unhappy origins and the trauma of her birth:

> ... Your origin and your birth are of the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite, and your mother a Hittite. And as for your birth, on the day you were born your navel string was not cut, nor were you washed with water to cleanse you, nor rubbed with salt, nor swathed with bands. No eye pitied you, to do any of these things to you out of compassion for you; but you were cast out on the open field, for you were abhorred, on the day that you were born.

Forsaken by her natural parents, the child would have perished miserably had not a passer-by, God himself, rescued her (16:6–14). At their first meeting, which takes place accidentally, he adjures her: "Live, and grow up like a plant of the field." On their second, he covers her nakedness with his own garment and then adorns her, giving her the aspect of a bride. The account of his loving care in v. 9 contrasts with the denial of it by her parents in v. 4. The account concludes: "You grew exceedingly beautiful, and came to regal estate. And your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty, for it was

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[6] See J. Krašovec, *Antithetic Structure in Biblical Hebrew Poetry* (VT.S 35; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984), 96–98.

perfect through the splendour which I had bestowed upon you, says the Lord God" (16:13c–14). The antithesis between the first and second parts is thus absolute: on the one hand complete rejection, amounting to a sentence of death, by those who had a natural obligation to her; on the other elevation to high estate out of pure benevolence. This antithesis made it possible to show, more clearly than by any other means, that everything—her life and all her queenly splendour—was the gift of her husband, and that everyone could therefore expect her to be grateful and faithful.

But nothing of the sort occurred. The third and the longest part (16:15–34) stands in absolute antithesis to the second. The queen displays not an iota of gratitude, but proves utterly perfidious. Seduced by the flattering attentions of those around her, she forgets her earlier deliverance and spends her rich endowment on fornication (16:15–22). Insatiable, she surrenders to her admirers, out-Heroding all the harlots known to man. The account of her decline and fall ends thus: "Men give gifts to all harlots; but you gave your gifts to all your lovers, bribing them to come to you from every side for your harlotries. So you were different from other women in your harlotries: none solicited you to play the harlot; and you gave hire, while no hire was given to you; therefore you were different" (16:33–34). Egyptians, Assyrians and Chaldeans are included in the catalogue of her lovers—the narrator of the parable obviously having in mind Israel's barren political pact-making with these nations.

After this barrage of denunciation, condign punishment must be expected. Ingratitude and unfaithfulness to a beneficent husband alone call for merciless reprisals. It follows that the fourth part (16:35–43) is the complete antithesis of the second: the decision "Live, and grow up like a plant of the field" is revoked and a dire threat takes its place. From vv. 39–43 and from other passages like it, we can conclude that the narrator, when talking of divine justice, has in mind the natural outcome of the relationship between Israel and other nations. Experience shows that friends cannot be gained by deceit, and those who play off one lover against another turn their first lover against themselves. Sooner or later, imagined allies show themselves to be enemies and, as the divine tools, avenge unfaithfulness.

The second section of chapter 16 (vv. 44–58) brings a fresh indictment against Jerusalem, using the proverbial phrase "Like mother, like daughter" and the allegory of sisterhood. All have in common the guilt of worshipping the Baals and sacrificing children to Moloch. Starting with the sister who symbolizes Jerusalem, the narrator sets the older sister, Samaria, on her left and the younger sister, Sodom, on her right. Both of them have been penalized for their errors, according to the generally accepted interpretation, but the third sister (Jerusalem) has erred so much more grievously than the other two that she makes them appear relatively righteous (16:51–52):

> Samaria has not committed half your sins; you have committed more abomi

> nations than they, and have made your sisters appear righteous *(tĕṣaddĕqî)* by all the abominations which you have committed. Bear your disgrace, you also, for you have made judgment favourable to your sisters; because of your sins in which you acted more abominably than they, they are more in the right than you *(tiṣdaqnāh mimmēk)*. So be ashamed, you also, and bear your disgrace, for you have made your sisters appear righteous *(bĕṣaddeqtēk 'aḥyôtēk)*.

It is evident that "disgrace" here connotes punishment. Like Sodom and Samaria before her, Jerusalem, an elected city, has undergone inexorable punishment. In 16:53–55, however, God speaks of the three sisters' return to favour:

> I will restore their fortunes *(wĕšabtî 'et-šĕbîthen)*, both the fortunes of Sodom and her daughters, and the fortunes of Samaria and her daughters, and I will restore your own fortunes in the midst of them, that you may bear your disgrace and be ashamed of all that you have done, becoming a consolation to them *(bĕnaḥămēk 'ōtān)*. As for your sisters, Sodom and her daughters shall return to their former estate, and Samaria and her daughters shall return to their former estate; and you and your daughters shall return to your former estate.

We can only guess at the nature of the disgrace and shame of Jerusalem in this context. Obviously, the main reason for the city's ignominy is the fact that her self-righteous citizens behaved even worse than the people of Sodom and Samaria, in spite of the gift of a divine covenant. By doing so, they provided a strong reason for the justification and restoration of their "sisters." The second reason is the dissemination of God's mercy: he will allow all of them to return to their former estate and, because of the heavier guilt of Jerusalem, God's mercy towards her will be greater than towards Sodom and Samaria. Thus Jerusalem will have cause to be doubly ashamed: first, because she will understand that nothing is due to her own merit; and secondly, when she finds Sodom and Samaria restored with her, there will be no justification for asserting her superiority. This passage shows most clearly that God is absolutely just in his judgment as well as in apportioning his mercy.

The third section of chapter 16 (vv. 59–63) brings the truth of the unmerited election of Israel and praise for God's incomprehensible love to a climax. Faced by Israel's unfaithfulness, God must speak in terms of punishment: "I will deal with you as you have done *('āśîtî 'ôtāk ka'ăšer 'āśît)*, who have despised the oath in breaking the covenant" (16:59). But his inward inclination to his elected people dictates the declaration in the verses that follow (16:60–63):

> Yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant *(bĕrît 'ôlām)*. Then you will remember your ways, and be ashamed when I take your sisters, both your elder and your younger, and give them to you as daughters, but not on account of the covenant with you. I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the Lord, that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I forgive you all that you have done *(bĕkappĕrî-lāk lĕkol-'ăšer 'āśît)*, says the Lord.

Chapter 16, like chapters 20 and 33:16–38, concludes with the victory of God's love over the postulates of the law of retribution.[7] Ultimately God turns from putting Israel's worthiness to the test and acts in accordance with the very principle of his creation, which cannot but have a positive goal. The verb *lĕkappēr* clearly refers to God's action, and it may denote purgation or absolution of Israel's guilt; in any case, Jerusalem will remember what happened. And the manifestation of divine mercy will give her much greater reason for shame than would her guilt alone. If her deserved punishment has moved Jerusalem to at least some sign of penitence, the prerequisite for God's forgiveness, the experience of shame in fact of his absolution may lead her to true penitence and reform which will make possible a new relationship with her God.[8]

2.2 *Ezekiel 23:1–49*

This passage clearly falls into two parts: vv. 1–35 and 36–49. It remains an open question whether or not vv. 28–35 are a later addition to vv. 1–27. In contrast to chapter 16, this chapter contains not a parable but an allegory that uses only a few pictorial images to make its point as clearly as possible. Two sisters with symbolic names, Oholah (Samaria) and Oholibah (Jerusalem), are said to have defiled themselves by playing the harlot in their youth in Egypt.[9] The basic unit (vv. 1–27) displays an antithetic structure similar to that of 16:3–43; but the first antithetic pair 2–4a//4b, although it espresses the same thoughts as 16:3–5//6–14, is very much shorter. The third part (23:5–21) portrays the sins of each sister: Oholah bestowed her favours on the Assyrians, while Oholibah consorted first with the Assyrians and then with the Babylonians, and was the worse of the two. The fourth part (23:22–27) proclaims the sentence upon Oholibah (her sister had already been dealt

[7] See the statement by W. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel,* 219: "At the very point where the disgraceful entanglement of his nation in despicable self-prostitution wounds the prophet, dominated as few others are by an overwhelming impression of God's greatness and mercy, he finds in the love of God praised by Hosea and Jeremiah a counterbalance which helps him to hold out in face of extreme tension. Against the gloomy background of human guilt and disorder God's perfection dawns for him with a yet more blazing brightness, so that no word seems too strong to express the wonder of its glory."

[8] See M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel, 1–20,* 306: "... Sibling rivalry gives occasion for her first experience of shame—really humiliation over having made her disdained sisters look righteous by comparison with her. This prepares a faculty within her which, in her final stage of restoration, can respond to God's undeserved favor with penitential shame over all her past offences ... Shame and disgrace over the past bespeak the new, impressionable, contrite heart that will animate the future Israel."

[9] See G. A. Cooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel,* 249: "Both mean *tent,* the second with a slight increase of emphasis, in allusion, probably, to the tents set up on the high places for religious prostitution; ... The point is that the sisters were alike, as in name so in guilt."

with in 23:9–10), beginning with the introductory formula "Thus says the Lord God." This part is expanded by two additional threats of punishment (23:28–31, 32–35), each prefaced similarly.

The fundamental difference between chapters 16 and 23 is thematic: chapter 16 refers to the seductions of Canaanite religion, while chapter 23 alludes to political alliances with Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt. The punishments meted out are similar. The sentence passed on Oholah reads: "Therefore I delivered her into the hands of her lovers, into the hands of the Assyrians, upon whom she doted. These uncovered her nakedness; they seized her sons and her daughters; and her they slew with the sword; and she became a byword among women, when judgment had been executed upon her." Ohola's punishment obviously lies in the past. But that of Oholibah is yet to come, vv. 22–27 conclude: "They shall also strip you of your clothes and take away your fine jewels. Thus I will put an end to your lewdness and your harlotry brought from the land of Egypt; so that you shall not lift up your eyes to the Egyptians or remember them any more." Thus all those to whom Jerusalem gave herself will range themselves against her.[10]

The next unit (23:28–31) to some extent repeats the proclamation of punishment made in 23:22–27, while in its successor, vv. 32–35, we find in poetical form an outpouring of the retributive justice. The second section of chapter 23 (vv. 36–49) is based upon the preceding section but refers to other crimes committed by both sisters: Moloch-worship, defilement of the sanctuary, and profanation of the sabbath. The sisters are presented here as contemporaries, so punishment, in both cases, is yet to come. The section opens with the characteristic introduction: "Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Then declare to them their abominable deeds" (v. 36; cf. 16:2; 20:4; 22:2), and it concludes with the proclamation of inexorable punishment (23:45–49) giving the whole chapter the hallmark of judgment.

3. *Punishment for a Double Breach of Faith (17:1–24)*

This chapter falls into three sections: the parable/riddle of the cedar and the two eagles (17:1–10); the interpretation of that parable (17:11–21); and a supplementary parable of God's planting of a cedar twig (17:22–24), a coda that brings the whole passage to a satisfactory close.[11] The most marked feature of this prophecy is its duality: poetic parable and prose interpreta-

[10] See W. Zimmerli, *Ezechiel,* 551: "Im Gericht wird das ganze Grauen dessen über sie kommen, dem sie sich verkauft hat. Gott braucht keine Engel vom Himmel, er richtet den Menschen durch das, was dieser sich in seiner eigenen gottlosen Liebe selber gewählt hat."

[11] In contrast to the majority of commentators, M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel, 1–20,* 319–324, understands 17:22–24 as an integral part of the uniform pattern of the whole chapter 17. He sees that section as a coda perfectly matched to the body of the oracle.

tion, two eagles, two plants, two modes of punishment, earthly and divine agencies, condemnation and consolation.[12] The theme of the parable is the universal, immediately obvious law of the natural world, and its fundamental message is equally obvious and universal, although details of time and historical circumstances are unclear. The following analysis, however, will clarify these factual details and show that the prophet stems from a definite historical situation.[13]

The parable is divided into three parts: vv. 3b–6, 7–8, and 9–10. The introduction (17:1–3a) contains the characteristic revelation formula, the command to propound a riddle *(ḥîdāh)* or utter a parable *(māšāl)* to the house of Israel, and the messenger formula. It should be noted that the interpretation (17:11–21) is also introduced by the revelation formula, which thus underlines the symmetry of parable and exposition. The first part of the fable (17:3b–6) tells of a great eagle arriving at a mountain in Lebanon where it performs two tasks. First, it crops a cedar-top and removes it to a "city of merchants." Then it takes "the seed of the land," plants it in fertile soil beside an abundant water supply where "it sprouted and became a low spreading vine, and its branches turned toward him, and its roots remained where it stood ..." (v. 6). One can hardly miss the explicit emphasis on the eagle's taking into account the natural laws of horticulture, although it is self-evident that the vine will flourish only if its roots thrust downwards, and that the dry climate will restrict its growth. At this point the eagle is active, the plants passive.

The second part of the parable (17:7–8) mentions another, less impressive eagle. It is only there to provide an occasion for the carefully tended vine to begin, quite unnaturally, to extend its branches and even its roots towards the bird. It is evident that the second eagle offers a temptation the vine cannot resist. The plant's activity gives rise to an antithetic relationship between the first and second parts of the story.[14] The sensible and purposive action of the first eagle, and the senseless reaction of the vine contradict each other.

In the third part of the parable (17:9–10) the poet uses this antithesis as his starting point and urges his hearers to realize the natural consequences of the offence by asking rhetorical questions: "Will it thrive? Will he not pull up its roots and cut off its branches, so that all its fresh sprouting leaves wither? It will not take a strong arm or many people to pull it from its roots. Behold, when it is transplanted, will it thrive? Will it not utterly wither when

[12] This feature is brought to the reader's notice by M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel, 1–20,* 317.

[13] For the interpretation of the parable, see apart from commentaries, A. Ravlin, "The Parable of the Eagles, the Cedar and the Vine," *BetM* 54 (1973), 342–359; H. Simian-Yoffre, "Ez 19,1–10 como enigma y parábola," *Biblica* 65 (1984), 27–43.

[14] See J. Krašovec, *Antithetic Structure in Biblical Hebrew Poetry*, 98–102.

the east wind strikes it—wither away on the bed where it grew?" Because the vine's behaviour is contrary to the laws of nature and to the explicit will of its protector, the two will collaborate in its destruction: the first eagle will easily uproot the plant that even the light east wind has already dried out.

The interpretation (17:11–21) begins with the revelation formula (v. 11) and the following instruction to the prophet: "Say now to the rebellious house, Do you not know what these things mean?" (v. 12a). Then God unfolds the meaning of the parable on two planes of agency: earthly (17:12b–18) and divine (vv. 19–21).[15] The decipherment of the parable in 17:12–15 makes clear the relations of King Zedekiah of Judah to the kings of Babylon and Egypt: the first eagle symbolizes the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar; the second eagle is Egypt; the top of the cedar is King Jehoiachin, taken as hostage by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon; and the vine is the new King Zedekiah (Matthaniah) installed in Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in place of Jehoiachin. Zedekiah then made a covenant with the Babylonian king, giving his pledge of allegiance. And here lies the point of both parable and explanation. God argues: "But he rebelled against him by sending ambassadors to Egypt, that they might give him horses and a large army. Will he succeed? Can a man escape who does such things? Can he break the covenant and yet escape?" (v. 15).

The punishment goes beyond the uprooting foreshadowed in the parable. In 17:16–18 we find:

> As I live, says the Lord God, surely in the place where the king dwells who made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant with him he broke, in Babylon he shall die ... Because he despised the oath and broke the covenant, because he gave his hand and yet did all these things, he shall not escape.

We note that the agent of retribution is not God but the Babylonian king, and the punishment has the appearance of natural vengeance—it is understandable that Nebuchadnezzar should not spare a disloyal vassal, and Zedekiah's treachery attests his shortsightedness. The punishment is, however, solemnly pronounced by God himself: "As I live, says the Lord..." (v. 16). Why does God take this upon himself when the matter is apparently one of rebellion against an unbearable tyrant? Does an oath imposed upon a vassal by a tyrant bind him, even in the sight of God?

These questions become even more urgent in view of 17:19–21, where the divine agency is made explicit. This section appears as a new communication, for it is introduced by the messenger formula: "Therefore *(lākēn)* thus says the Lord God: ..." Here the Babylonian king is no longer mentioned, and God alone is the author of punishment. The classical traditional

[15] See M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel, 1–20*, 318–319.

exegesis finds a ready explanation for the duality of earthly and divine planes of punishment: Zedekiah must have invoked the God of Israel to witness his promise of allegiance. Thus God regards the treaty between Nebuchadnezzar and Zedekiah as his own, even though the oath was taken under compulsion and therefore defective.[16] Consequently Zedekiah's treachery not only brings down the punishment foreshadowed in the parable, but also calls for God's direct sentence of judgment.[17]

There are, however, strong grounds for assuming that 17:19–21 do not refer to the same covenant as the preceding ones, but to nothing less than the covenant between God and Israel.[18] The decisive reason can be found in the duality riddle/parable and interpretation, and in the sudden shift from the human plane of explanation (17:12b–18) to the divine one (17:19–21). A distinct division between these two passages is marked by the use of the particle *lākēn* to introduce the messenger formula in v. 19. We can conclude that chapter 17 up to v. 21 has a three-part structure that achieves its climax in vv. 19–21: vv. 3–10 contain the riddle/parable, and vv. 12b–18 the exposition of a tale that serves as a parable of the covenant between God and Israel, which was broken by the king of Israel and his people. If this surmise is correct, all political transactions between Nebuchadnezzar and Zedekiah are an allegory of the relationship between God and Judah, and the point of the chapter is not Zedekiah's treachery towards the king of Babylon, but his more radical breach of faith with his God (cf. 16:59). Accordingly, the divine retribution will follow as inexorably as did the punishment inflicted by Nebuchadnezzar.[19]

The judgment of the king of Judah and Jerusalem marks the end of the covenant between God and Israel. Like Jeremiah (cf. 31:31–34), Ezekiel must have seen that the history of Israel was at an end if the outcome depended on the people and their rulers, but this would have contradicted God's plan for Israel and for the future of mankind. The coda (17:22–24) confirms the classical

[16] See the report on Zedekiah in 2 Chr 36:13: "He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God." Cf. M. Tsevat, "The Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Vassal Oaths and the Prophet Ezekiel," *JBL* 78 (1959), 199–204. See further the Hittite, Assyrian, and Egyptian vassal-treaties where gods of both sides concerned are invoked.

[17] M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel, 1–20,* 319, puts it well: "The two planes of punishment in the interpretation recall the double agency of punishment in the fable: eagle and wind."

[18] This is the view of M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel, 1–20,* 321–323.

[19] See M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel, 1–20,* 322: "There is, then, warrant for taking vs. 19 according to its natural sense, and seeing in all of B2 a shift from earthly to divine matters. Both fable and its earthly interpretation are suddenly transposed into an allegory of the relation between God and (the king of) Judah. The earthly suzerain, Nebuchadnezzar, will not let rebellious Zedekiah get away with his treachery, how much less will the divine sovereign countenance the Judahite's breach of faith with *him.*" See also p. 323: "Events on the two planes are indeed parallel and simultaneous: for his own reasons Nebuchadnezzar will punish the Judahite rebel, but in so doing he will (all unknown to him) be executing the design of the divine architect of history upon the king responsible for violation of his covenant with Judah. This brings us to the coda."

prophetic belief that the purpose of judgment is not destruction but renewal. When the human actors fail totally, God himself takes the initiative and reveals his glory. His activity is in stark contrast to that of the two human protagonists, and the punishment inflicted on the king of Judah by the king of Babylon is only partly in accord with God's purposes. Nebuchadnezzar oversteps his authority, seeking not only to punish the guilt of Zedekiah but to humiliate and utterly destroy the kingdom of Judah (cf. Isa 10:5–15).

This is why the imagery and terminology of the coda are drawn from the parable, although they are used in a markedly antithetic sense. In v. 3 we find: "A great eagle with great wings and long pinions, rich in plumage of many colours, came to Lebanon and took the top of the cedar *(wayyiqqaḥ 'et-ṣammeret hā'ārez)* ..." In the coda God declares: "I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar *(wĕlāqaḥtî 'ānî miṣṣameret hā'erez hārāmāh),* and will set it out; I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I myself will plant it upon a high and lofty mountain" (17:22). In contrast to the humiliating behaviour of the king of Babylon, God will plant the cedar-shoot upon the high mountain of Sion. This reversal of national fortunes epitomizes the universal divine judgment: "... And all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I the Lord have spoken, and I will do it" (17:24). The antithesis humiliate/exalt emerges as a universal rule in God's dealings with man (cf. 1 Sam 2:7; Pss 18:28; 75:8; 147:6). God always "has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up and high ..." (Isa 2:12–17). On the other hand, "thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite'" (Isa 57:15). The history of Israel began with the delivery of a humble people from slavery in Egypt (cf. Exod 2:24; 3:7, 9). And that is the surest promise that the period of Babylonian bondage—and all such periods of captivity—will engender in the nation a humble and a contrite heart.

4. *Divine Justice and Repentance (18:1–32; 33:10–20)*

There is a similar thematic and stylistic relationship between these two passages as between 3:16–21 and 33:1–9, although their essence is different here. Similarities and differences can be established by investigating the structure of each passage separately.

4.1 *Ezekiel 18:1–32*

This passage is formally introduced as a disputation containing an introduc-

tion (vv. 1–4), two main sections (vv. 5–20 and 21–29), and the conclusion (vv. 30–32). The prophet starts from a saying then current in Jerusalem (cf. Jer 31:29): "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (v. 2b). The point of the proverb is clear: the children suffer the consequences of their fathers' misdeeds (cf. Exod 20:5 [= Deut 5:9]; 34:7; Lev 26:39; Num 14:18; Jer 32:18; Lam 5:7). In vv. 2–3 God's utterance refutes in principle the saying's validity, and in vv. 5–20 a series of examples couched in the form of casuistic law affirms the validity of individual retribution. A further such sequence in vv. 21–29 states God's ceaseless readiness to accept and save the penitent. In the conclusion (vv. 30–32) God calls the people to repentance.

The first main section (18:5–20) unfolds the fate of a righteous man (vv. 5–9), his wicked son (vv. 10–13), and the son's righteous son (vv. 14–18). A conclusion (vv. 19–20) summarizes the outcome of the three cases. The opening sentence of the first: "If a man is righteous and does what is lawful and right" (v. 6) is typical of casuistic law. The list of sins avoided by him includes both religious and moral offences, and concludes with the statement: "... he is righteous, he shall surely live, says the Lord God" (v. 9). The second case (vv. 10–13) states that his wicked son "shall surely die"; the implication is that the evildoer alone will be responsible for his death, and the merits of his father will not save him. The case of the third generation (vv. 14–18) makes it clear that wickedness is no more hereditary than righteousness; the good man shall live. In v. 19 the prophet directly attacks the belief in collective retribution, and in v. 20 he states the principle towards which the cited cases point: "The soul that sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself."

In the second section (18:21–29) the prophet looks at the same question from another standpoint, applying the principle of individual retribution to the wicked who repent and the righteous who falter. The rejection of collective guilt means that retribution is determined by a person's present state. The first part of the section (vv. 21–25) comprises a statement about two antithetical cases and a conclusion. If a wicked man repents, his earlier misdeeds will not be counted against him (vv. 21–23), and conversely a righteous man who turns to evil will lose his life and gain no credit for his earlier righteousness (v. 24). The conclusion reads as follows: "Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way not just? Is it not your ways that are not just?" (v. 25). The prophet then reverses the terminals, considering the case of the lapsed righteous first (v. 26), and then that of the repentant wicked (vv. 27–28). Verse v. 29 repeats the conclusion of v. 25.

The conclusion of the oracle is introduced with the customary *lākēn:* "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his

ways, says the Lord God" (v. 30a). This declaration is followed by urgent appeals to repent and to cultivate a new heart and a new spirit, indicating that the theme of individual retribution is subordinate to the call to repentance. Like v. 23, the concluding v. 32 provides the justification of the appeal: "For I have no pleasure in the death of any one, says the Lord God: so turn, and live."

One may form the impression that Ezekiel's attempt to refute the philosophy of corporate responsibility, or "horizontal" collective retribution, cannot hope to succeed, for it must necessarily be true what the proverb cited at the beginning of the oracle affirms; and it is clearly evident, especially in times of desolation resulting from catastrophic mistakes, that the guilt of the fathers is indeed avenged upon the children. Ezekiel, we must remember, was speaking to those who were exiled because their rulers had rebelled against the Babylonian king. There are, however, two keys that unlock this particular door and enable us to discern the true message of chapter 18. The first thing to note is the indignation expressed in vv. 2–3: "What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'? As I live, says the Lord God, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel." The second is the theme of repentance in 18:21–29, followed by a direct appeal for contrition in 18:30–32. Both points suggest that Ezekiel was attacking not the content of the proverb but the cynical use of it by the people. They were using adage to unload their guilt upon their forebears and to challenge God's justice—actions all that result from their unjustified assumption of their own righteousness. By affirming the validity of collective retribution they hope to exclude individual responsibility.

Ezekiel for his part emphasizes the validity of individual responsibility without ignoring the fact that the individual is influenced by the society to which he belongs. What he rejects is the idea of inherited *guilt,* not that of the inherited *consequences* of guilt. Thus the point of his message is the deep conviction of God's justice and of his unwavering readiness to forgive a people that have mended their ways. He is completely persuaded that the guilt of *all* its component individuals is the main source of a nation's misfortune. Everyone is therefore obliged to recognize his own wickedness and to repent, rather than entitled to accuse his forefathers, thus challenging God's justice. Since the guilt of all is the reason for the nation's present misfortunes, the prophet sees in repentance and reformation the only sure source of hope for the future.[20]

[20] See M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel, 1–20,* 340: "... while Ezekiel held no hope out to the homelanders, he did anticipate the reformation and restoration of the exiles (e.g., 11:16, 18). According to the established view set out in Lev 26:41; Deut 4:29; I Kings 8:47f.; Jer 29:12f., the chastisement of exile was supposed to soften Israel's obduracy till they turned back con-

In the light of the decisive role of repentance the principle of retribution loses much of its force. Neither collective nor individual retribution determines human fate through the mechanism of generation. Both have positive aims, but in his "vertical" judgment God makes use exclusively of the latter: every man individually faces God and is judged on his own merits, while that judgment is in itself a call to repentance. Knowledge of this should help an exiled people to find the way of salvation. The urgent call "Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel?" (18:31) does not sound as if the action is to be solely on God's part (in contrast to 36:26). The theory of inexorable divine retribution is qualified by the casuistic explication of the principle and the vigorous call to conversion. Thus for a supposedly lost people the light of hope shines anew into their present blackness. God remains faithful to his people even now, and the past plays no decisive role in human fate. Past iniquity is forgotten if righteousness takes its place—although the obvious corollary is equally true, and a man's present state is always decisive. It is therefore at once a promise for the future and a warning. The two can never be separated in the story of human affairs.

4.2 *Ezekiel 33:10–20*

In this passage the main points of chapter 18 are repeated with equal emphasis, although it is not a proverb (18:2) that is chosen as a starting point but a complaint: "Our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we waste away because of them; how then can we live?" (33:10b). How forcefully the problem of God's retributive justice is resurrected is shown in the concluding vv. 17–20: "Yet your people say, 'The way of the Lord is not just'; when it is their own way that is not just. When the righteous turns from his righteousness, and commits iniquity, he shall die for it. And when the wicked turns from his wickedness, and does what is lawful and right, he shall live by it. Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' O house of Israel, I will judge each of you according to his ways."

The oracle is a sermon preached to exiles who had little sense of their own responsibility, and equally little faith in the possibility of their restoration. But for Ezekiel this renewal is the main concern. He emphasizes God's justice and his willingness to forgive a repentant people because he sees in conversion the only way to recovery.

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tritely to their God. That could come about only on the basis of trust in God's justice; so long as the view of God's way reflected in the proverb prevailed, there was little prospect of repentance. The basic issue raised by the proverb was practical rather than theoretical; there were vital behavioral consequences at stake, hence the static-didactic A section must be complemented by the dynamic-volitional B section."

5. *Apostasy and Restoration (20:1–44)*

This chapter comprises an introduction (vv. 1–4) and two main sections: vv. 5–31 and 32–44. The first of those describes the "abominations" of the fathers during four periods: the sojourn in Egypt (vv. 5–9), the first generation in the wilderness (vv. 10–17), the second generation in the wilderness (vv. 18–26), and the arrival in the Promised Land (vv. 27–31). The second section tells of God's purgative judgment in the wilderness (vv. 32–38) and of the new worship in a re-created Zion (vv. 39–44).

According to the introduction, certain elders of Israel came to Ezekiel seeking a divine oracle. An exact date is given for this event, indicating the special importance of the inquiry, and it is evident that the elders had some particular question to ask and that, in their unbounded complacency, they challenged God. He, however, refuses to be interrogated and instructs Ezekiel to remind them of the consistently rebellious attitude of their fathers, as well as their own apostasies. The prophet must make clear to them that the history of Israel has been plagued by sinfulness, rooted in the people's nature. God gave them warnings and his code of laws, but still they rebelled—an attitude all the more odious in its contrast to his interventions in periods of bondage and his manifestations of munificence at all times.

Nevertheless, God did not judge the Israelites according to their conduct. Ever and again he withheld punishment for his name's sake and did not destroy them. The description of their perfidy in Egypt ends with God's statement: "But I acted for the sake of my name *(lĕma'an šĕmî),* that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among whom they dwelt, in whose sight I made myself known to them in bringing them out of the land of Egypt" (v. 9). The same treatment was accorded to the first generation in the wilderness: "But I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out" (v. 14); "Nevertheless my eye spared them *(wattāḥās 'ênî),* and I did not destroy them or make a full end of them in the wilderness" (v. 17). Similarly with their successors: "But I withheld my hand, and acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out" (v. 22). The emphasis on the case against Israel and on God's ultimate forbearance provides the reason for ending with the rhetorical question: "And shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live, says the Lord God, I will not be inquired of by you" (v. 31).

The reiterative statements of God's patience form the core of the first section (20:5–31). The doctrine implicit in the phrase "for the sake of my name" is strongly reminiscent of Deutero-Isaiah's theology of God's forgiveness for his own reasons (see 43:22–28; 48:1–11; cf. Jer 14:7, 21). We should not allow ourselves to become entangled in the literal meaning of these words, for there is much else to be considered. The heart of the matter

is God's determination to be true to his nature, which necessitates revelation of his goodness and wonderful purposes for his people. But his self-revelation binds him not only in his own eyes, but also in the sight of the world. His design for Israel has been made known to the nations. All the more must he insist on fulfilment of his purpose of salvation. To deal with his people on their merits would mean the profanation of his name *apud gentiles.* When his purpose is frustrated by his people's sin he must instruct them in his ways not only by applying the strict law of retribution, but also by mitigating the consequent punishment and giving them a second chance. To assume that unconditional forgiveness is involved here seems unwarranted.

The second section of chapter 20 (vv. 32–44) is closely related to the first, even though it may not be part of the original account. Verse 32 links the two passages: "What is in your mind shall never happen—the thought, 'Let us be like the nations, like the tribes of the countries, and worship wood and stone.'" It is most likely that this declaration relates to the preceding recital of judgment, in order to reinforce the pronouncement that follows: "... and I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will enter into judgment with you face to face. As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you, says the Lord God. I will make you pass under the rod, and I will let you go in by number. I will purge out the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against me *(ûbārôtî mikkem hammordîm wĕhappôšʿîm bî);* I will bring them out of the land where they sojourn, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord" (20:35–38). God will never permit the entire nation to follow the bad example of its forebears; he will punish the rebellious and thereby help men of goodwill to observe his ordinances. Verses 32–38 show most clearly that the inscrutable miracles of divine patience recounted in the first section cannot be regarded as unconditional: God does not spare all men, but only the corrigible. His declaration in v. 32 that complete national apostasy "shall never happen" is possible because such a thing has never happened before. The wish of the elders and some of the people to be "like all the nations" (cf. 1 Sam 8:20) was never adopted by the prophets.

Purgative judgment is the first step in rebuilding Zion and creating a new Israel (20:39–44). It is implied that those who are not rebels or transgressors will be rehabilitated in the land of Israel, and God assures them: "And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I bring you into the land of Israel, the country which I swore to give to your fathers. And there you shall remember your ways and all the doings with which you have polluted yourselves; and you shall loathe yourselves for all the evils that you have committed. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I deal with you for my name's sake *(lĕmaʿan šĕmî),* not according to your evil ways, nor according to your corrupt doings, O house of Israel, says the Lord God" (20:42–44). The phrase

lĕma'an šĕmî echoes earlier affirmations that God acts out of faithfulness to his own being, making the plan of salvation a fortress so firm that it cannot be destroyed by the pervasively rebellious attitude of the people. The present proclamation of forgiveness is based on the conviction that humiliating experience in the past will necessarily induce penitence that will make its recurrence impossible. But so radical a change of state can be achieved only by a creative act of God's will. God has postulated a positive aim for history and nothing can prevent the accomplishment of that purpose.

6. *The New Creation of God's People (36:16–38; 39:21–29)*

These passages have a similar basic structure that combines retrospect and prospect. Looking backward, they affirm the reason for the exile; looking forward, they posit the true basis for the restoration of Israel.

6.1 *Ezekiel 36:16–38*

This oracle was derived from the same theological postulates as chapter 20. Formally it divides into four parts: vv. 17–21, 22–32, 33–36, and 37–38. In the first of these God outlines the reasons for the exile. The people of Israel had defiled their own land by their conduct, constraining God to punish them: "So I poured out my wrath upon them for the blood which they had shed in the land, for the idols with which they had defiled it. I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed through the countries; in accordance with their conduct and their deeds I judged them" (36:18–19). The exile, however, led to the profaning of God's "holy name," and the exiles would have lost their identity in a heathen land had he confined his role to that of a righteous judge. In the second part the prophet is commanded to present the reason for God's decision to rehabilitate them in the promised land: "Therefore *(lākēn)* say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake *(lō' lĕma'ankem),* O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name *(kî 'im-lĕšēm-qodšî),* which you have profaned among the nations to which you came" (36:22).

God proclaims that he will transform the land and bring about a salvation beyond human imagining. The return and the restoration of the land is not based on Israel's deserts: the new salvation will be an act of pure grace springing from God's fidelity to his own intrinsic nature. God enunciates the famous words of promise: "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my

statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances" (36:25–27; cf. 11:19; 18:31). This proclamation corresponds to Jeremiah's "new covenant," in which God's law is put within them, and written upon their hearts (Jer 31:31–34). Under this dispensation the people will be outwardly cleansed and inwardly renewed. The oracle concludes by repeating the opening words of 36:22: "It is not for your sake that I will act, says the Lord God; let that be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel" (36:32).

The exalted announcement that Israel will be purified and enter into an ideal relationship with God is based primarily on two related assumptions: first, on the prophet's recognition that God alone is the mighty one who will bring history to its consummation; secondly, on the principle of an intimately personal relationship between God and his people. Ezekiel assumes a genuine personal fellowship arising between God and man in the future,[21] and therefore believes that the Lord's work of salvation will have so profound an effect upon Israel and upon the world in general that the people will be less prone to relapse than formerly. The upshot, the essence of the transaction, is that Israel should finally be delivered from all self-glorification and self-righteous pride. The statement: "And you will loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abominable deeds" (36:31b; cf. 6:9; 16:63; 20:43) implies profound humility and repentance on the part of the people. And this belief is fully compatible with the principle of individual retribution, which is nowhere so strongly defended as in the book of Ezekiel.

The section 36:33–36 proclaims that the waste places shall be rebuilt and the nations round about Israel take note of the metamorphosis. The last two verses (37–38) revert to the flock symbolism of chapter 34. In contrast to the rebuff in 14:3 and 20:3, 31, God is now willing to be inquired of, for he will freely grant Israel's plea for prolific growth. The passage ends: "Then they will know that I am the Lord" (36:38c). The divine work of restoration will evoke public testimony to the power of God, who brings his plan of salvation to its omega point. And this means that the creation and the history of salvation are intimately related in the new world-harmony.[22]

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[21] See W. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 501: "... the new covenant between God and people is transformed from a new institution into a spiritual reality, making the covenant formula, once again solemnly repeated in v. 28, serve to describe a direct connection between the covenant God and every single member of his people."

[22] See W. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 504–505: "The inward and outward fulfilments mutually correspond, as the acts of the Creator and the Redeemer. The deeper the realization of man's alienation from his Creator, which has led creation away from the objective intended by God, the more indispensable does it seem that the glory of the original designs should be brought out in all their fullness and clarity in a new creation, without which no real fulfilment of salvation can be conceived. The Old Testament message here is distinctly re-echoed in the New Testament (Rom. 8.19–22; II Peter 3.13: 'A new heaven and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells'; Rev. 21.1–4, 23–27). Israel's material recreation is in this way brought into association with her

6.2 *Ezekiel 39:21–29*

This passage forms an editorial conclusion to the part of the book of Ezekiel lying between the oracles directed against the nations (chaps. 25–31) and that dealing with the new cultic order (chaps. 40–48). It summarizes Ezekiel's prophecy. The first section (39:21–24) starts by saying that the judgment on the nations is a manifestation of God's glory (v. 21). Because this judgment will make possible Israel's release, her people will know their God "from that day forward" (v. 22). But such a new beginning calls for an explication of God's attitude towards Israel in the past: "And the nations shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity, because they dealt so treacherously with me that I hid my face from them and gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and they all fell by the sword. I dealt with them according to their uncleanness and their transgressions, and hid my face from them" (vv. 23–24).

The second section (39:25–29) announces the dawn of a new age marked by God's mercy. The change is indicated by the particle *lākēn:* "Therefore thus says the Lord God: Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel *(wĕrīḥamtî kol-bêt yiśrā'ēl);* and I will be jealous for my holy name *(wĕqinnē'tî lĕšēm qodšî)*" (v. 25). The people will "bear their shame" (v. 26) remembering their sins in the felicity of the present and the coming age. Even so will they recognize God's mercy. The passage ends with the following words: "Then they shall know that I am the Lord their God because I sent them into exile among the nations, and then gathered them into their own land. I will leave none of them remaining among the nations any more; and I will not hide my face any more from them, when I pour out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, says the Lord God" (vv. 28–29).

7. *Conclusion*

Ezekiel was sent to "a nation of rebels" (see 2:3; cf. 17:15; 20:38), to "a rebellious house" (see 2:5, 6, 7, 8; 3:9, 26, 27; 12:2, 3, 9, 25; 17:12; 24:3; 44:6). These phrases make it clear that the oracles are addressed to the people as a whole, and when certain elders come to him seeking divine guidance, he must reply that all preceding generations as well as their own

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recreation from within. Undoubtedly we must repudiate any attempt to give a literal interpretation to the symbolism. Yet in its deeper significance it serves as a pointer, and helps us to understand the cosmic breadth of God's redemption. A petty-minded reduction of it to merely human notions of existence only leads to a caricature of biblical beliefs about creation." See also L. Giuliano, *L'acqua di purificazione e il dono dello Spirito in Ezechiele 36,24–28* (Rome: Pont. Univ. Urbaniana, Dissertation, 1997).

committed "abominations." Nevertheless Ezekiel—more than any of his peers—defends the validity of individual retribution and believes that responsibility for the exile must be laid not only at the feet of the fathers, but also to the charge of the contemporary generation. He says explicitly that everyone is responsible only for his own iniquity (see 18:1–32; 33:10–20). One facet of the prophetic office is the duty of warning, of serving as a watchman (3:16–21; 33:1–9). The principle of individual retribution is also implied in the promise of rehabilitation: renewal can follow when the rebels and transgressors are purged (20:38). The more religion is based on a personal relationship between God and man, the clearer it becomes that individual retribution is the only valid principle.

Israel's past survival and future restoration, however, far transcend the requirements of both collective and individual retribution. Ezekiel presents Israel as a nation marked from the time of its origin by sinfulness. Its people survived only by an inscrutable miracle of divine patience. God did not judge them strictly and solely by their ways, but acted rather "for the sake of his name"; he held his hand and did not destroy them (20:9, 14, 17, 22). All the more must it be true that the salvation to come cannot be attributable to the people's deserts, but to God's absolute faithfulness to his plan of salvation. The people will be ashamed because the Lord will forgive all they have done (16:63). He will restore them in their land, purifying and changing them inwardly (36:16–38; 39:25–29). The sprinkling of clean water upon them and the implanting of his spirit in their hearts imply above all else the revelation of the full extent of God's forgiving acts. The core of Ezekiel's prophecy is his faith that the story of salvation will reach its planned denouement in spite of the long chronicle of human weakness.

CHAPTER XIX

FORGIVENESS AND THE CALL TO REPENTANCE IN ISAIAH 40–66

The collection of oracles ascribed to Deutero-Isaiah (chaps. 40–55) is usually designated the Book of Consolation, and many of them are prophecies of salvation. Thematic and literary consistency, allied to some clear historical facts and allusions, show that at least most of these oracles were written by one person in the period between the fall of Jerusalem (587 B.C.E.) and the collapse of the Babylonian empire (538 B.C.E.). The anonymous prophet addresses a despairing people in exile, announcing an imminent turning point in Israel's fortunes: its people will return to their homeland even more gloriously than did their fathers after leaving Egypt. This orientation towards the future is, however, intimately linked with a harking back to the origin of the history of the world, of Israel, and of the nations. God is Creator, the prophet proclaims. The will of the only ruler over Israel and the nations is to deliver the chosen people. The desolation of earlier years was caused by their guilt, which has now been expiated. The prophet sees the whole of history as a unity. In face of the self-pitying lamentation of the Jews in exile, he points to the reasons for punishment and to the possibility of forgiveness and restoration. The message to the people is summarized at the beginning of the account of the prophet's commission (40:1–2).

Trito-Isaiah (chaps. 56–66) is less unified than Deutero-Isaiah from the thematic as well as the literary point of view. A new preacher addresses himself to his people in a new situation, after their return to Judah. He follows his predecessor in proclaiming deliverance (cf. 57:14–20; 60–62; 65:16b–25; 66:6–16). This nucleus has, however, been expanded by additions dating from different times, and the following themes are treated in it: the people's complaints, the prophet's response with its charges of guilt, a recital of reasons for the present misery and a statement of the conditions for forgiveness and restoration, a confession of guilt, and a proclamation of forgiveness and salvation.[1]

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[1] For chaps. 40–66 of the book of Isaiah as a whole or in their constituent parts, see especially: F. Delitzsch, *Biblischer Commentar über den Prophet Jesaia* (BC III/1; Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1866); English translation by J. Martin, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, vol. 2 (CFThL IV/15; Edinburgh: T. &. T. Clark, 1867); B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaia* (HK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1892, 5th ed. 1968); P. Volz, *Jesaia*, vol. 2 (KAT IX; Leipzig: A. Deichertsche Verlagsbuchhandlung D. Werner Scholl, 1932); E. J. Kissane, *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. 2 (Dublin: Browne & Nolan, 1943); J. Muilenburg and H. S. Coffin, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66* (IntB 5; New York / Nashville: Abingdon, 1956), 381–773; C. Westermann, *Das Buch Jesaja: Kapitel 40–66* (ATD 19; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966); English translation by D. M. G. Stalker, *Isaiah 40–66: A Commentary* (OTL;

1. *Deutero-Isaiah (Chapters 40–55)*

Deutero-Isaiah comprises over 50 sayings, most of them addressed to the Jews in exile. The proclamation of salvation leads to comment on the Persian king Cyrus and on Babylon. Cyrus is sometimes referred to obliquely (cf. 41:2, 25; 45:13; 48:14), while in 44:28 and 45:1 he is named and greeted as God's "shepherd" and "his anointed" respectively because he was called "to subdue nations before him and ungird the loins of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed" (45:1). On Babylon, however, the severest of judgments is pronounced. In chapter 47 there is a unique poem of doom that predicts its fall, using particularly harsh language containing no glimmer of mercy: "I will take vengeance *(nāqām 'eqqāḥ)* and I will spare no man" (v. 3b). Verse 11 is particularly striking:

> But evil shall come upon you,
> for which you cannot atone *(lō' tēdĕ'î šaḥrāh)*;
> disaster shall fall upon you,
> which you will not be able to expiate *(lō' tûkĕlî kappĕrāh)*;
> and ruin shall come on you suddenly,
> of which you know nothing.[2]

London: SCM Press, 1969); E. J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah II: Chaps. 40–66* (NIC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 1972); P.-E. Bonnard, *Le Seconde Isaïe: Son disciple et leurs éditeurs: Isaïe 40–66* (EtB; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1972); R. N. Whybray, *Isaiah 40–66* (NCBC; Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1975); A. S. Herbert, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah: Chapters 40–66* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); P. D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1975), 32–208: "Isaiah 56–66 and the Visionary Disciples of Second Isaiah"; K. Elliger, *Deuterojesaja, 1. Teilband: Jesaja 40,1–45,7* (BK.AT XI/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978); R. P. Merendino, *Der Erste und der Letzte: Eine Untersuchung von Jes 40–48* (VT.S 31; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981); H. G. M. Williamson, "Isaiah 63,7–64,11: Exilic Lament or Post-Exilic Protest?," *ZAW* 102 (1990), 48–58; B. Janowski, "Er trug unsere Sünden: Jesaja 53 und die Dramatik der Stellvertretung," *ZThK* 90 (1993), 1–24; O. H. Steck, "Der Gottesknecht als 'Bund' und 'Licht': Beobachtungen im Zweiten Jesaja," *ZThK* 90 (1993), 117–134; A. R. Ceresko, "The Rhetorical Strategy of the Fourth Servant Song (Isaiah 52:13–53:12): Poetry and the Exodus—New Exodus," *CBQ* 56 (1994), 42–55; K. Holter, *Second Isaiah's Idol-fabrication Passages* (BBETh 28; Frankfort on the Main: P. Lang, 1995); P. D. Hanson, *Isaiah 40–66* (Louisville, Ky.: Knox Press, 1995); B. Janowski (ed.), *Der leidende Gottesknecht: Jesaja 53 und seine Wirkungsgeschichte; mit einer Bibliographie zu Jes 53* (FAT 14; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1996); B. Marconcini, *Il libro di Isaia (40–66)* (Rome: Città Nuova, 1996); M. Rosenbaum, *Word-Order Variation in Isaiah 40–55: A Functional Perspective* (SSN 35; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1997); H. Spieckermann, "Konzeption und Vorgeschichte des Stellvertretungsgedankens im Alten Testament," *Congress Volume: Cambridge 1995* (ed. J. A. Emerton; VT.S 66; Leiden / New York / Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1997), 281–295.

[2] The charges brought against Babylon are cruelty and arrogant self-assurance, indicative of a general attitude of the Babylonian empire (cf. 47:5–12). Particularly significant are vv. 6–7:

> I was angry with my people,
> I profaned my heritage;
> I gave them into your hand,
> you showed them no mercy *(raḥămîm)*;

In such a setting, the oracles addressed to the exiles are all the more remarkable, for in them the dominant theme is proclamation of forgiveness and recognition of atonement for guilt. The prophet feels obliged to set forth the reasons for forgiveness and, in order to counter misinterpretations of the past and to dispel illusions concerning the future, he must occasionally reject the complaints of the people and call them to repentance. The following sections deal with this or other, interrelated aspects of forgiveness: 40:1–11; 43:22–28; 44:21–22; 48:1–11, 18–19; 50:1–3; 52:13–53:12; 54:1–10; 55:6–11. The longer ones will be studied separately, while the shorter will be linked to the discussion of 40:1–11 and 54:1–10.

1.1 *Forgiveness Is the Foundation of Deliverance (40:1–11; 54:1–10)*

The section 40:1–11 provides an account of the prophet's commission rather than of his call. There is no superscription identifying the writer. He effaces himself, for all that matters here is to proclaim the message of deliverance. His poem consists of an interlinked series of four sections: verses 1–2, 3–5, 6–8, and 9–11. The first of these is a starting-point that determines the significance of the composition and indeed of the book as a whole. The prophet delivers God's words in the form of a cry to unspecified hearers:

> Comfort, comfort my people *(naḥămû naḥămû 'ammî)*,
> says the Lord.
> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
> and cry to her
> that her warfare is ended *(kî mālĕ'āh ṣĕbā'āh)*
> that her iniquity is pardoned *(kî niršāh 'ăwônāh)*
> that she has received from the Lord's hand
> double for all her sins *(kiplayim bĕkol-ḥaṭṭō'têhā)*.

The urgency of his tone reflects the desperate situation of the exiles: their desolation was complete, and it must have appeared that no one could comfort them. In 51:19, the prophet asks: ... *mî 'ănaḥămēk*, "... who will comfort you?"[3] In Lam 2:13b, there is a similar question: "What can I liken to you, that I may comfort you *(wa'ănaḥămēk)*, O virgin daughter of Zion?" In Lam

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> on the aged you made your yoke
> exceedingly heavy.
> You said, "I shall be mistress for ever,"
> so that you did not lay these things to heart
> or remember their end.

The charge of arrogance reappears in vv. 8 and 10: *'ănî wĕ'apsî 'ôd*, "I am, and there is no one besides me." Concerning God's attitude to Israel, the idea that God himself has delivered Israel into the hands of Babylon signifies a very distinctive theology of Hebrew prophecy (cf. 43:28; Jer 27:6).

[3] In view of the interrogative pronoun *mî*, the first person singular *'ănaḥămēk* of MT has to be rendered by the third person, as in 1QIs[a] *(ynḥmk)*.

1:2b, appears the statement: *'ên-lāh mĕnaḥēm* ..., "she has none to comfort her ..."; in Lam 1:9b, 17a: ... *'ên mĕnaḥēm lāh,* "... she has no comforter"; and in Lam 1:16b: ... *kî-rāḥaq mimmennî mĕnaḥēm* ..., "... for a comforter is far from me ..." But in these opening verses of Isa 40 the prophet announces God's proclamation vigorously: "Comfort, comfort my people ..."[4] Other passages also show that the root *nḥm* is of the utmost importance in Deutero-Isaiah. In 49:13b, the prophet declares: "For the Lord has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his afflicted." And in 51:3a, he says: "For the Lord will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places ..." In 51:12a, God himself speaks emphatically: "I, I am he that comforts you ..." (cf. Isa 12:1; Jer 31:13; Zech 1:17; Ps 86:17).

The contexts of all these statements make it plain that God alone can comfort the stricken people because the divine power and goodness alone can bring about a change in their fortunes. The anonymous prophet knows, however, that God's compassion and comfort presuppose fulfilment of certain conditions on the part of the people. Recognition that disaster was an inescapable consequence of Israel's guilt, and that it carries the mark of God's anger, signifies that real change can occur only after that guilt has been expiated. The new age, the deliverance, is essentially marked by God's forgiveness. The announcement of an imminent deliverance is occasioned by the recognition that Israel has already atoned for her guilt by protracted suffering, and that God has forgiven her evil-doing.

Just as the account of the prophet's commission is a prologue to the book as a whole, so the declaration in 40:2bc obviously provides a key to the interpretation of all declarations and statements concerning the relationship between punishment and forgiveness in Deutero-Isaiah. Directly, this proclamation of God's forgiveness concerns only the immediate future, but indirectly it implies an interpretation of past history as well as a perspective for the future. The prologue makes an indirect reply to the people's complaints about their present state, but it also affirms that the future destiny of Israel will depend on her attitude to the God of the covenant. Looking back, the prologue calls for an examination of conscience; looking forward, it points to the need for reform. How widespread the common complaints of the people were is discernible in many oracles addressed to them, and the prophet must therefore declare the word of God that Israel was fully responsible for what had happened to her (cf. 43:26–28; 47:6; 48:9–11; 50:1). In 50:1, Gad announces:

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[4] The duplication of a cry at the beginning of a particular proclamation is a distinctive stylistic device in Deutero-Isaiah. The purpose is to express the urgency of the proclamation. Cf. 43:1: "I, I am the Lord ..."; 43:25: "I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake ..."; 48:5: "I, even I, have spoken and called him ..."; 48:11: "For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it ..."; 51:9 and 52:1: "Awake, awake ..."; 51:17: "Rouse yourself, rouse yourself ..."

Where is your mother's bill of divorce,
with which I put her away?
Or which of my creditors is it
to whom I have sold you?
Behold, for your iniquities *(ba'ăwônōtêkem)* you were sold,
and for your transgressions *(ûbĕpiš'êkem)* your mother was put away ...

The recognition that a change has now taken place has resulted in declarations that God has forgiven Israel's iniquity (cf. 43:25; 44:21–22; 48:9–11; 53:5, 10–12; 54:7–8). In 44:21–22, God speaks through the prophet:

Remember these things, O Jacob,
and Israel, for you are my servant;
I formed you, you are my servant;
O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me.
I have swept away your transgressions *(pĕšā'êkā)* like a cloud,
and your sins *(ḥaṭṭō'wtêkā)* like mist;
return to me *(šûbāh 'ēlay)*, for I have redeemed you.

In the magnificent poetic oracle 54:1–10 is found the most powerful proclamation of God's forgiveness. The promise is so overwhelming that the poem begins with a hymn of praise: "Sing, O barren one ..." It ends with a proclamation that points beyond Israel's historical reality. Verses 7–10 run:

For a brief moment I forsook you,
but with great compassion *(ûbĕraḥămîm gĕdōlîm)* I will gather you.
In overflowing wrath for a moment
I hid my face from you,
but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you *(rîḥamtîk)*,
says the Lord, your Redeemer.
For this is like the days of Noah to me:
as I swore that the waters of Noah
should no more go over the earth,
so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you
and will not rebuke you.
For the mountains may depart
and the hills be removed,
but my steadfast love shall not depart from you,
and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,
says the Lord, who has compassion on you *(měraḥămēk)*.

Verses 7–8 of this oracle of salvation re-echo God's proclamation in the prologue (40:2bc). But here, the focus is not only on the recognition that God's attitude to Israel will be changed, but also on the continuance and permanence of divine love in the new age. The reference to God's promise to Noah in the Flood narrative (Gen 8:21–22) makes it plain that the present turning point is considered to be as crucial as the renewal of mankind after the great catastrophe of primeval times. The significance of comparing the two events can, however, be properly understood and appreciated only if all their concomitant circumstances are taken into account. In both cases the

promise is uttered by God the Creator, the only absolute Ruler of the world and the nations, and in both the promise follows a catastrophe of exceptional gravity. It would appear obvious that such punishment must bring about purification of the land and atonement for evildoing. In both cases, too, a remnant survived disaster, and only to them is God's promise addressed. Its proclamation was possible only after humankind had fulfilled certain conditions, and the new humanity became the sign of hoping against hope that no similar catastrophe would supervene in future.

The comparison between the crux of the Flood narrative and Deutero-Isaiah does not, however, mean that the Babylonian exile contradicts God's promise in Gen 8:21–22. It signifies rather that the promise is not unconditional. There is an analogy, but not uniformity, between the two cases. The Babylonian exile did not affect the whole of humanity, and the remnant was not just a single family but a considerable number of faithful Jews. These differences make it all the more plain that God's proclamation in both cases is unconditional only in regard to the covenant as such: *vis-à-vis* the individual it is always conditional. Only those who remain faithful to their God will partake in the glory of divine salvation.

There are two passages in Deutero-Isaiah that confirm this conclusion clearly: 48:18–19 and 55:6–9. The first of these reads:

> O that you had hearkened to my commandments!
> Then your peace would have been like a river,
> and your righteousness like the waves of the sea;
> your offspring would have been like the sand,
> and your descendants like its grains;
> their name would never be cut off
> or destroyed from before me.

This passage may have been added later, but it shows how the message of Deutero-Isaiah was understood by the faithful Jews. The declaration in 55:6–9 was most probably made by Deutero-Isaiah himself. It constitutes the first part of the epilogue to the book of Deutero-Isaiah (55:6–13) and serves a similar function to that of the prologue (40:1–11)—that of summarizing the main theme of the book as a whole. Verses 6–9 read as follows:

> Let the wicked forsake his way,
> and the unrighteous man his thoughts;
> let him return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on him
> *(wĕyāšōb 'el-yhwh wîraḥămēhû),*
> and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon
> *(wĕ'el-'ĕlōhênû kî-yarbeh lislôaḥ).*
> For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
> neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord.
> For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
> so are my ways higher than your ways
> and my thoughts than your thoughts.

1.2 *Judgment and the Grace of Forgiveness (43:22–28)*

43:22–28 and 50:1–3 are the only oracles in Deutero-Isaiah couched in the legalistic form of charge, defence, and counter-charge. Both passages reflect the complacency of the exiles about their spiritual condition. Their misfortunes provoke them to bring charges against God, justifying themselves by a reference to their sacrificial worship. God then summons the people to bring arguments against such claims and gives reasons for given actions, divine defence taking the form of counter-accusation: her sacrificial worship is marred by heartlessness and pseudo-holiness and has become not an offering but a burden upon God; the misfortunes of Israel are not an unjust punishment but an inevitable consequence of her sin. Nevertheless, the oracle is not an indictment, but rather a promise of God's forgiveness. It reads as follows:

Yet you did not call upon me, o Jacob;
but you have been weary of me, O Israel!
You have not brought me your sheep for burnt offerings,
or honoured me with your sacrifices.
I have not burdened you with offerings,
or wearied you with frankincense.
You have not bought me sweet cane with money,
or satisfied me with the fat of your sacrifices.
But you have burdened me with your sins *(bĕḥaṭṭō'wtêkā)*,
you have wearied me with your iniquities *(ba'ăwônōtêkā)*.
I, I am He,
who blots out your transgressions for my own sake
(mōḥeh pĕšā'êkā lĕma'ănî),
and I will not remember your sins.
Put me in remembrance, let us argue together;
set forth your case, that you may be proved right *(lĕma'an tiṣdāq)*.
Your first father sinned *('ābîkā hārī'šôn ḥāṭā')*,
and your mediators transgressed against me.
Therefore I profaned the princes of the sanctuary,
I delivered Jacob to utter destruction *(ḥērem)*
and Israel to reviling.

It is remarkable that the guilt of Israel, from the very start of her history, is emphasized in this fashion. Deutero-Isaiah is here entirely at one with his predecessors, endorsing their view that the people are radically unfaithful and are consequently always responsible for their own misfortunes. Their guilt means that there is no basis for doubting the divine justice, even in a moment of supreme national desolation. Verse 23b has a special importance in this context, particularly as it provides a perfect antithesis to v. 24b, which is the most original constituent part of the present text:

23b *lō' he'ĕbadtîkā bĕminḥāh*
wĕlō' hôga'tîkā bilbônāh
I have not burdened you with offerings,
or wearied you with frankincense.

24b *'ak he'ĕbadtanî bĕḥaṭṭō'wtêkā*
hôga'tanî ba'ăwônōtêkā
But you have burdened me with your sins,
you have wearied me with your iniquities.

Verse 24b is the key to understanding v. 23b. God denounces the people in spite of their diligence in offering all the sacrifices prescribed by the law. The declaration in v. 23b can hardly mean that God had not demanded sacrifices: that would have been in flagrant contradiction to the law. As elsewhere in the prophetic literature, the vital point is not sacrifices *per se* but Israel's attitude in offering them. The same applies to all other formal expressions of human attitude to God: prayer in general, penitence, fasting, tithing, etc. They are acceptable to God only if they are consonant with one's spiritual condition (cf. Gen 4:1–7; 8:20–22). The fundamental reason for the divine charges against Israel is the falsity that underlies her religious practices: the prayers and offerings that should be an expression of genuine devotion arising from pure love and gratitude for all the good things sent by God are used as a means of laying claims upon divine authority. Israel's charges against God, arising from a state of distress, disclose a wrong attitude on the part of the people: they regard prayers, sacrifices and fasting as proof of their righteousness and consider that God should reward rather than chastise them. Such an argument can be summarized as follows: you have demanded sacrifices, etc., and we have met your requirements; you are therefore our debtor; if you now fail to act in accordance with our obvious righteousness, we are justified in bringing charges against you. The outcome is that God becomes Israel's servant.

The divine declaration in v. 23b obviously refers to such selfish perversions of religion. The speaker wants to make clear to the people that God had not demanded sacrifices *in their understanding* of the word. But their perversion of such concepts has made God a servant—again not in the sense in which they understood the term, but in accordance with the very nature of divine majesty and the reality of their spiritual condition. Instead of rewarding their *soi-disant* righteousness, he had to punish them. This obligation does not proceed from the divine nature, for the only purpose of creation is salvation, and punishment is therefore a painful burden to the fundamental divine purpose. That is the obvious meaning of vv. 24b and 28. God is constrained, as a servant, to do something that contradicts the divine nature, being challenged by a people whose attitudes and intentions negate the very purpose of divine work.

That being so, it becomes all the more evident that God is willing to forgive, once the people's arrogant claims are dismissed by punishment and their sins expiated. Yet it is also made clear at this point that God is not obliged to forgive; forgiveness is motivated by the divine sovereign decision. The basis of the utterance in v. 25 is the same as in vv. 23b and 24b: God is the abso-

lute being, and humans are mortal creatures who depend totally upon divine generosity. It follows that they cannot claim either reward for their merits or forgiveness on account of their penitence. Nevertheless, God's dealings with the people always manifest divine goodness and mercy because everything, including punitive actions, has a positive aim.[5]

1.3 *The Former and the New Things (48:1–11)*

The present text clearly falls into four strophes: vv. 1–2, 3–5, 6–8, and 9–11. The first strophe opens with an address to Israel: "Hear this, O house of Jacob, who are called by the name of Israel ..." God and his prophet rightly turn to a people who still cling to their origin and tradition. The aim of the address is evident in all four strophes. Its main purpose is to announce deliverance from Babylon, but for some reason this message occasions harsh charges against Israel. In v. 1cd the people are castigated as those "who swear by the name of the Lord, and confess the God of Israel, but not in truth and right *(lō' bĕ'ĕmet wĕlō' biṣdāqāh)*."

The forceful introduction, comprising numerous appositional terms describing its audience, is followed in the second strophe by a retrospective prophecy. Verse 3 reads as follows:

> The former things I declared of old *(hārī'šōnôt mē'āz higgadtî)*,
> they went forth from my mouth and I made them known;
> then suddenly I did them and they came to pass.

The third strophe opens in striking contrast:

> You have heard; now see all this,
> and will you not declare it?
> From this time forth I make you hear new things *(hišma'tîkā ḥădāšôt mē'attāh)*,
> hidden things which you have not known.

What are these "former" and "new" things? The unspecific manner of mentioning the "former things" plus some linguistic evidence make it plain that the speaker is referring to God's past deeds in general rather than to the more recent threats (and execution) of punishment. The "new things" are obviously a reference to deliverance from slavery in Babylon. It follows that the "former things" must refer primarily to God's deeds of salvation in the past. The people of Israel had usually failed to appreciate God's acts and had not believed divine predictions of their future fate, but the trustworthiness of the latter had been established by their obvious fulfilment, and the

[5] The verb *'ābad* in vv. 23b and 24b is reminiscent of the noun *'ebed* in 52:13–53:12; in an antithetical sense, however. There we have a type of the ideal servant of God who does not make God his own servant, but rather accepts everything from him without complaint, and is willing to carry even the burdens of sins committed by his people.

people could subsequently become persuaded that God alone, and not idols or images, is the ruler of Israel and the nations. Verses 4–5 refer to this national process of acquiring a true knowledge of God.

This confirmation of God's word by fulfilment of past predictions serves, in the third strophe, as the basis for an announcement of the "new things." Emphasis is laid on the "new things" by underlining the contrast between what was and what is to be. Verse 5 says of the "former things":

> I declared them to you from of old,
> before they came to pass I announced them to you,
> lest you should say, "My idol did them,
> my graven image and my molten image commanded them."

Verses 7–8 speaks in contrasting terms of the "new things":

> They are created now, not long ago *('attāh nibrĕ'û wĕlō' mē'āz);*
> before today you have never heard of them,
> lest you should say, "Behold, I knew them."
> You have never heard, you have never known,
> from of old your ear has not been opened.
> For I knew that you would deal very treacherously *(kî yāda'tî bāgôd tibgôd),*
> and that from birth you were called a rebel *(ûpōšēa' mibbeṭen qōrā' lāk).*

Why are the "new things" described as an unheard-of, incredible novelty? Verse 8b gives a clear, if negative, explanation: they are unbelievable because Israel's unbelief is a permanent condition. Therefore an earlier announcement of the "new things" would have met the same skepticism as did the previous announcement of the "former things." There must, however, be a deeper reason for so much emphasis on novelty, and it must lie in the nature of the "new things." They are unheard of, not only because God is promising deliverance at a time when the people do not believe in miracles, but even more because the promise is being made when in truth God could well be proclaiming perdition on account of the chronic rebelliousness of Israel. Even amid all their suffering the people do not deserve deliverance. The essence of the novelty evident in the "new things" is forgiveness.

This fact is made explicit in the fourth strophe (48:9–11). The text runs:

> For my name's sake I defer my anger *(lĕma'an šĕmî 'a'ărîk 'appî),*
> for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you,
> that I may not cut you off.
> Behold, I have refined you, but not like silver;
> I have tried you in the furnace of affliction.
> For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it *(lĕma'ănî, lĕma'ănî 'e'ĕšeh),*
> for how should my name[6] be profaned?
> My glory I will not give to another.

[6] The word *šĕmî,* "my name," is lacking in Hebrew, but it can be assumed on account of the context and of the renderings in Septuagint and Old Latin.

The simile of a refining furnace is very important in this context. First, it confirms the traditional belief that the exile was a punishment of Israel's rebellious attitude to her God. Secondly, it makes plain that the purpose of the punishment was the nation's reform: like impure silver, Israel was cast into a refining furnace. Thirdly, the purpose (purification) was not achieved.

Why, then, was Israel taken from the furnace before the refining process had been completed? Why did God punish her at all in the first place instead of forgiving her? And why is this forgiveness now being offered even though Israel's attitude to her God has presumably not changed? All these questions are essentially the same, like that earlier question of why God punished mankind by the Flood, but afterwards declared: "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth..." (Gen 8:21–22). Such questions can be satisfactorily answered only if several related circumstances are taken into consideration. First, it is not entirely true that the purpose of the previous punishment was not achieved, for the prophet is speaking to an audience that is basically willing to listen to the word of God and to follow divine ordinances. Secondly and consequently, there must have been some evidence of renewal. Thirdly, these harsh words were most probably not addressed to the same hearers as the oracles that proclaimed salvation and nothing but salvation. The passage now under consideration is obviously addressed to a group of disarrayed believers rather than to a righteous remnant. Fourthly, the pressure of foreign religions in the exile was even stronger than it had been in their own country, and this must have been considered an important mitigating circumstance by God. Fifthly, a good number did in fact emerge purified from the furnace and could be considered a truly righteous remnant. In view of belief in God's holiness on the one hand, and of the attitude of the people of Israel as a whole on the other, it remains perfectly true, however, that God's forgiveness is in the end granted "for his own sake." With the imminent deliverance of Israel the Lord confirms astonishing fidelity to creation and to the long-established plan of salvation.[7]

1.4 *The Servant Voluntarily Bears the Sins of Others (52:13–53:12)*

The passage known as the fourth servant song consists of five strophes: 52:13–15; 53:1–3, 4–6, 7–10, and 11–12. The speakers are more or less clearly recognizable. In 52:13–15, God speaks, and announces the aston-

[7] The extremely harsh charges against Israel here have caused some interpreters to conclude that only the proclamation of deliverance could have been original to Deutero-Isaiah, whereas the blame must have come from later additions from other sources. But this conclusion cannot answer the important question why at the end of the editorial process different kinds of material are found interwoven in the text.

ishing exaltation of the servant, who was humiliated by many. In 53:1–10, the people confess that the servant's suffering was caused by their guilt. In 53:11–12 God speaks again, and proclaims that the servant will be exalted because he voluntarily submitted himself to death and interceded for the transgressors.

The announcement of the exaltation is in itself no surprise, for God is determined to defend Israel and the emissaries sent to her, guaranteeing their ultimate triumph. What is crucial here is the reason for the exaltation: it will reward the servant for the humiliation and rejection that, in the eyes of the people, signify divine punishment for sin. But the final outcome, the unexpected exaltation, convinces those who witness it that the exact opposite is the case: here the servant is truly righteous and has voluntarily taken upon himself the guilt of the people in order to bring about reconciliation, an unheard-of marvel that moves them to begin their account of the servant's suffering and exaltation with a rhetorical question:

> Who has believed what we have heard?
> And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

In 53:3 the people recount the servant's earlier travail:

> He was despised and rejected by men;
> a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;
> and as one from whom men hide their faces
> he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

In 53:4–6 they recognize, however:

> Surely *('ākēn)* he has borne our griefs
> and carried our sorrows;
> yet we esteemed him stricken,
> smitten by God, and afflicted.
> But he was wounded for our transgressions *(mippĕšā'ēnû),*
> he was bruised for our iniquities *(mē'ăwônōtênû);*
> upon him was the chastisement that made us whole *(mûsar šĕlômēnû 'ālâw),*
> and with his stripes we are healed *(ûbaḥăburātô nirpā'-lānû).*
> All we like sheep have gone astray;
> we have turned every one to his own way;
> and the Lord has laid on him
> the iniquity of us all *('ēt 'ăwôn kullānû).*

In 53:7–9, the people emphasize that the servant submitted to his undeserved sufferings without complaint, although he was innocent, and 53:10 runs:

> Yet it was the will of the Lord to bruise him;
> he has put him to grief;
> when he makes himself an offering for sin *('im-tāśîm 'āšām napšô),*
> he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days;
> the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

In 53:11–12 God proclaims:

> Out of the travail of his soul he shall see (light),
> he shall be satisfied by his knowledge.[8]
> As a righteous one my servant shall justify many,
> and he shall bear their iniquities *(wa'ăwônōtām hû' yisbōl).*
> Therefore I will divide him a portion with the great,
> and he shall divide the spoil with the strong;
> because he poured out his soul to death,
> and was numbered with the transgressors;
> yet he bore the sin of many *(wĕhû' ḥēṭ'-rabbîm nāśā')*,
> and made intercession for the transgressors.

Every attempt at an explanation of all the elements of the song in its entirety comes up against a series of insoluble textual problems. Despite this, the basic meaning with its fundamental emphasis is clear enough. The song opens up vistas of a profound depth and breadth that make it both permissible and necessary to draw from other parts of the Hebrew Bible and to invoke the postulates of common sense, as one seeks to encompass its entire range of meaning. With regard to the outcome of the servant's exaltation, v. 4b deserves particular attention: "Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted." This reflects the general conviction in the ancient Near East that material failure or misfortune points to the guilt of the afflicted person. Such is the assumption of Job's friends in debating the reasons for his sufferings. The outcome of the book of Job makes it clear that such a conclusion is justified if it merely draws attention to possible personal guilt in times past, but in principle permits other explanations in the light of a divine plan that encompasses the whole course of creation. In the end, an attempt to deal with suffering should not concern itself primarily with determining its cause, but rather with comprehending its purpose for the sufferer and for mankind.

The human attitude to suffering is of equal importance in relation to its cause and to its purpose or significance. If the suffering is the evident consequence of the victim's guilt, he may accept it as a call to reform; in such cases suffering seems to be an indispensable attribute of justice. And if the sufferer is basically innocent, he may accept tribulation without complaint in the belief that God moves in a mysterious, and to humankind incomprehensible, way to perform divine wonders; in the light of the divine wisdom there must be some positive purpose in suffering. The servant's song, however, offers other ways of explaining the purpose and significance of suffering: inevitable or voluntarily accepted punishment that is the consequence of the sins of others.

There is an essential difference between these alternatives. One may suffer because of the failure of attempts to escape inevitable affliction, and such

[8] The word *'ôr,* 'light,' is lacking in MT, but appears both in 1QIs[a] and Septuagint.

suffering can only increase the gravamen of guilt. In Lam 5:7 the afflicted people complain: "Our fathers sinned, and are no more; and we bear their iniquities" (cf. Jer 31:29–30; Ezek 18:2–4). The servant takes an opposite path. By voluntarily taking upon himself the guilt of others he renounces the claim of individual retributive justice, which demands that each should bear the consequences of his own sins. At the same time he transcends the inexorable natural law of collective retribution that presses upon mankind.

What are the ultimate motive and the possible justification for the servant's attitude? These questions can be answered only in the light of belief and experience, and from personal and suprapersonal perspectives. The servant's conduct displays the highest degree of intelligence and love possible in an interpersonal relationship. Experience down the centuries shows that, in the end, strict justice is not the way to deliverance from the abyss of the guilt that threatens the human race. It can and should be complemented by luminous examples of making voluntary atonement for one's own guilt and the guilt of others. Such examples often resolve apparently insoluble entanglements in interpersonal relationships and lead to true reconciliation. It appears that the summit of divine and human righteousness consists in going beyond the mechanical causal principle of retributive justice. It would appear, then, that the ultimate motive of the servant's conduct can be found in the mystery of love. He who really loves a person or the whole of humanity will participate in their suffering and always be willing to atone for their guilt in order to help to bring about healing and restoration. The greatest suffering for him must be punishment of the beloved one.

The question of vicarious suffering and atonement has to be reconsidered in the light of the glorious possibility of love, which, however, can exist only within the framework of the structure of the created world in general and of humankind in particular. The following factors must be taken into account: the positive purpose underlying the created world; the interrelation between the personal and communal levels of human existence; and (consequently) the connection between the principle and practice of individual and collective retribution. It is a matter of natural law that guilt involves punishment. No one can escape the consequences of his guilt. It follows that vicarious suffering and atonement in a strict sense are inconceivable. But it is also a matter of natural law that every sin affects not only the sinner but also the whole created order. Accordingly, everyone must suffer the consequences of his own guilt and of that of others. Suffering on account of the guilt of others does not mean suffering in their stead but rather sharing in their wretchedness. If human beings resist affliction, their suffering may not be fruitful; but if they submit themselves willingly to the inevitable, it can certainly help to bring about reconciliation and restoration both on the individual and the communal level. Willing atonement for the sins of others signifies a necessary counteraction to the "collective" character of the guilt.

Since every sin affects the sinner as well as other people, healing becomes possible if someone is willing to suffer and to atone for the guilt of others. The possibility of atonement through individual and communal suffering shows conclusively that suffering does not necessarily carry the mark of a curse. It can even signify a blessed way to bring about the healing and restoration of a world that is hurt by the guilt of all.[9]

In view of all this, the question of whether the servant is an individual or corporate person, a historical fact or a symbol, is not crucial. What really matters is the congruity of his attitude with the natural interrelation between guilt, punishment, and atonement. The more individuals and social groups become aware that every sin has a socio-communal dimension, the more the song of the servant offers the real light and hope. It bears the seal of eternity, for the attitude of the suffering servant is the most adequate response of a human being to the manifestation of God's call to repentance in order to bring about reconciliation and healing. Sharing in suffering and atoning for the guilt of others are fully justified, possible, and indeed necessary. The more it is obvious that the vicarious sufferer is righteous, the more he represents God's ways to humankind in terms of grace and mercy.

2. *Trito-Isaiah (Chapters 56–66)*

Chapters 56–66 incorporate three remarkable self-contained units that can be characterized, in a very general sense, as a call to repentance: 59:1–21; 63:7–64:11; and 65:1–25. These passages will be studied individually.

Other sayings are on a smaller scale and deal with different aspects of retribution, reward, and forgiveness. In 57:13, the prophet makes use of an antithetical structure to challenge idolaters in ironic terms and to promise blessing to those who take refuge in God. In 57:16–18, the speaker affirms that God will not be angry for ever; Israel was chastised on account of her wickedness, but now God is determined to turn and to bless the people. In the

[9] Discussions about vicarious suffering are usually one-sided. Interpreters often stress too much the view that the servant suffered instead of his people the punishment they deserved. The use of the expression "vicarious suffering and atonement" can give the impression that the sinner need not suffer. R. N. Whybray, *Isaiah 40–66,* 171–183, is certainly right in assuming that the servant's substitution for the guilty is not what is intended, but rather his sharing a common fate of suffering. One misses, however, in his explanation at least some indication that sharing in suffering and atoning for the guilt of others are not inconsistent with the usual understanding of the relationship between guilt, punishment, and atonement. H. Spieckermann pointed out that Isa 53 discloses five aspects of vicarious suffering for sin: (a) Einer tritt für die Sünden anderer ein; (b) der für die Sünden anderer Eintretende ist selber sündlos und gerecht; (c) die Stellvertretung des einen geschieht einmalig und endgültig; (d) einer tritt für die Sünden anderer aus eigenem Willen ein; (e) Gott führt die Stellvertretung des einen für die Sünden der anderen willentlich herbei. See "Konzeption und Vorgeschichte des Stellvertretungsgedankens im Alten Testament," 283–287.

speech of admonition, 58:1–14, the prophet is commissioned to proclaim to the disappointed people a conditional promise of blessing. Within the proclamation of salvation in chapter 60, God makes manifest the change in the divine attitude towards Israel: "... for in my wrath I smote you, but in my favour I have had mercy on you *(rîḥamtîk)*" (v. 10b). In 61:2 and 63:4, the traditional phrase *yôm nāqām,* "the day of vengeance," appears (cf. Isa 34:8; Jer 46:10; Prov 6:34). The idea of God's taking vengeance on Israel's oppressors is not made explicit in 61:2, but may be assumed in view of the prophetic vision of a universal divine judgment over foreign nations in 63:1–6.

The concluding chapter, 66, is a collection of disparate elements that either threaten judgment or declare universal salvation. The threat of judgment in 66:4 is a slightly modified repetition of the charges brought against Israel in 65:12. Verse 6 introduces God's judgment upon the nations and is parallel to 59:18 (cf. Jer 51:6): "Hark, an uproar from the city! A voice from the temple! The voice of the Lord, rendering recompense to his enemies *(měšallēm gĕmûl lĕ'ōyĕbâw).*" Verses 7–14 read like an oracle of salvation in relation to Zion. In 66:13, God declares: "As one whom his mother comforts *(tĕnaḥămennû),* so I will comfort you *('ănaḥemkem);* you shall be comforted *(tĕnuḥāmû)* in Jerusalem" (cf. v. 11). The next unit, 66:15–16, was probably originally the continuation of v. 6. The text describes a theophany of judgment on the nations; God will come in fire and will execute judgment upon "all flesh" (v. 16). The chapter is brought to a close by the particularly striking antithesis, everlasting worship (v. 23) // everlasting judgment (v. 24):

> And they shall go forth and look
> on the dead bodies of the men
> that have rebelled against me *(happōšĕ'îm bî);*
> for their worm shall not die,
> their fire shall not be quenched,
> and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.

2.1 *Confession of Guilt the Way to Salvation (59:1–21)*

Chapters 58 and 59 reflect very clearly a feeling among the people of disillusionment and of abandonment by God. In their distress, they even bring charges against the Lord. In chapter 58, the prophet challenges them, rejecting their false fasting and indicating the conditions for a return of God's favour as a reward of grace. Chapter 59 continues in this reproachful vein, explaining to the people that their sins have precluded God's saving intervention. Chapter 59 is, however, less homogeneous than its predecessor from the point of view of subject-matter as well as literary forms. In it the prophet and the community play equally important roles.

The charges against God, brought by the people, are not expressed di-

rectly, but indirectly in the response of the prophet. Right at the beginning (59:1–3), he gives a reply to complaints about God's inactivity, turning their charges into a grave charge against themselves:

> Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save,
> or his ear dull, that it cannot hear;
> but your iniquities *('ăwônōtêkem)* have made a separation
> between you and your God,
> and your sins *(wĕḥaṭṭō'wtêkem)* have hid his face from you
> so that he does not hear.
> For your hands are defiled with blood
> and your fingers with iniquity;
> your lips have spoken lies,
> your tongue mutters wickedness *('awlāh)*.

The prophet continues his charges against the people in 59:4–8, but here he addresses them in the third instead of the second person.

In 59:9–15a, the speaker is no longer the prophet but the people. They offer no resistance but humbly confess their sins. The first verse of this section makes it plain that they see a causal link between the preceding charge and their wretched situation:

> Therefore justice *(mišpāṭ)* is far from us,
> and righteousness *(ṣĕdāqāh)* does not overtake us;
> we look for light, and behold, darkness,
> and for brightness, but we walk in gloom.

The people acknowledge throughout the section that the reason for their sorry state lies in their sinfulness; 59:9–11 depict their miserable situation.

The prophet speaks once more in 59:15b–20, and tells of God's turn in the third person singular:

> The Lord saw it, and it displeased him
> that there was no justice.
> He saw that there was no man,
> and wondered that there was no one to intervene;
> then his own arm brought him victory,
> and his righteousness *(ṣĕdāqāh)* upheld him.
> He put on righteousness *(ṣĕdāqāh)* as a breastplate,
> and a helmet of salvation *(yĕšû'āh)* upon his head;
> he put on garments of vengeance *(nāqām)* for clothing,
> and wrapped himself in fury *(qin'āh)* as a mantle.
> According to their deeds, so will he repay
> *(kĕ'al gĕmulôt kĕ'al yĕšallēm)*,
> wrath to his adversaries, requital to his enemies
> *(ḥēmāh lĕṣārâw gĕmûl lĕ'ōyĕbâw)*;
> to the coastlands he will render requital
> *(lā'iyyîm gĕmûl yĕšallēm)*.
> So they shall fear the name of the Lord from the west,
> and his glory from the rising of the sun;
> for he will come like a rushing stream,

which the wind of the Lord drives.
And he will come to Zion as Redeemer,
to those in Jacob who turn from transgression
(ûlĕšābê peša' bĕya'ăkōb), says the Lord.

It follows from the context as well as from the parallelism with the word *yĕšû'āh* that *ṣĕdāqāh* in vv. 16b and 17a, as in most of its occurrences in Isa 40–66 when related to God, carries the significance of divine saving activity.[10]

In 59:17, God is represented as a warrior (cf. 42:13; 49:24–25; 52:10). Verse 18 emphasizes divine retribution upon enemies who are not specified,[11] a declaration partly echoed in 66:6b: *qôl yhwh mĕšallēm gĕmûl lĕ'ōyĕbâw,* "The voice of the Lord, rendering recompense to his enemies" (cf. Jer 51:6). God's deliverance of the people often implies retribution on their oppressors. It is difficult to establish with any certainty whether v. 18 refers to external foes or to the unfaithful within Israel itself. This affirmation of the principle of retribution as such is all the more effective because of its dual validity: it acts as a warning both to Israel's enemies and to Israel itself. God is ready to act provided the people have fulfilled their conditions. When sunk in sin, they must repent and turn to their God; otherwise the principle of retribution may apply to them. Verses 9–15a are crucial: they underscore the strict causal link between the unfaithfulness of the people and their present unsaved state, at the same time making it plain that in the light of belief no situation is hopeless. God wishes to intervene, but the people must first become transformed. It is sufficient if they admit their guilt and wish to reform their attitude towards God.

Chapter 59 is a curious interweaving of prophetical and liturgical elements.[12] The text as we have it discloses a clear thematic unity within which there is a sequence of ideas: the counter-charges of the prophet against the people result in their confession of guilt, which in turn evokes the promise that God will turn to the people and save them. The distinctive point of the chapter is the fact that the prophet's challenge to his people led to a positive response from them, crowned by God's forgiveness.

2.2 *Confession of Guilt and Supplication for Mercy (63:7–64:11)*

It is generally agreed that this passage is a communal lamentation in psal-

[10] See J. Krašovec, *La justice (ṣdq) de Dieu dans la Bible hébraïque et l'interprétation juive et chrétienne* (OBO 76; Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988).

[11] Verse 18 is extremely problematical from the text-critical point of view, hence a translation cannot be completely reliable. Septuagint has a shorter text.

[12] It is generally agreed that 59:21 was originally not part of the text. Its message accords, however, with the proclamation of God's turning towards his people in the preceding verses.

modic form.[13] It has two main parts: 63:7–14 and 63:15–64:11. The first of these is an account of God's acts towards Israel in the past; it could stand as an independent historical psalm. The second follows the pattern of a psalm of lamentation. The aim of the psalm as a whole is to appeal for the deliverance of the suffering people. The first part provides the theological basis for an appeal for help, for only the God who has exhibited the grace of mercy throughout all history can remedy so desolate a situation.

Remembrance of God's past deeds on behalf of Israel on the one hand and the appeal for help on the other reflect both the petitioners' view of God's attitude towards the chosen people and the attitude of the people towards their God. In this respect the psalm is quite different from the similar historical Psalm 44, where the people complain that God has totally forsaken them (vv. 9–16) in spite of their faithfulness (vv. 17–22). Ps 44:18 reads: "All this has come upon us, though we have not forgotten thee, or been false to thy covenant." In contrast, the psalm with which we are concerned acknowledges Israel's guilt throughout history. Accordingly, the petitioners do not feel they have any right to complain against God; instead, they confess their guilt and beg for mercy. This passage is primarily a confession of personal guilt within a historical perspective. Its most distinctive feature is the antithesis between the song of praise for God's manifold acts of redemption and the recognition of the sins of the fathers and of the present generation.

Verses 63:7–9 praise God's goodness to Israel in the past, and v. 8 indicates divine expectations:

> For he said, Surely they are my people,
> sons who will not deal falsely;
> and he became their Saviour.

63:10 records the betrayal of these hopes:

> But they rebelled
> and grieved his holy Spirit;
> therefore he turned to be their enemy,
> and himself fought against them.

63:11–14 recounts God's actions on behalf of Israel in leading her out of Egypt to the Promised Land.

The second section of the psalm begins with a piercing cry to God: "Look down from heaven and see, from thy holy and glorious habitation ..." (63:15; cf. Ps 80:15). The implication is that God has become indifferent to

[13] See especially the recent study by H. G. M. Williamson, *ZAW* 102 (1990), 48–58. The author brings fresh arguments "in favour of the older view that this passage originally formed part of an exilic penitential liturgy, probably recited on the ruined site of the temple. Attention is drawn to its similarities to Psalm 106 and Nehemiah 9, for which a comparable setting has been independently suggested" (summary on p. 58).

the sufferings of the people in their helpless condition. The appeal amounts to a circumspect reproach, and in 63:17 the people ask:

> O Lord, why dost thou make us err from thy ways
> and harden our heart, so that we fear thee not?
> Return *(šûb)* for the sake of thy servants,
> the tribes of thy heritage.

The form of the appeal reflects the conflicts between certain basic assumptions of Hebrew belief: divine absoluteness and goodness, human free will, the validity of the principle of retribution. The people acknowledge the justification for retributive justice, but they tend to disclaim the ultimate responsibility for their guilt. Why did God permit them to err? It seems as if God has a share in the sin of the people, for the Almighty could have prevented it, and thereby averted the resultant misfortune. The question in the Hiph'il form *lammāh tat'ēnû,* "Why dost thou make us err?" may leave the impression that the people see in God a direct cause of their aberration. However, their mindfulness of God's goodness, their confession of guilt, and their appeal for divine mercy make it evident that only an indirect divine causality is in question. The point of the psalm is the recognition that the God who permits aberration is also the source of grace. The complainants accept that the reasons for God's grace take pride of place over those for permitting hardening of their hearts.

This belief occasions the impassioned appeal for God's intervention in 63:19b–64:4a. The people long for God to descend in a new theophany as happened in times past. In 64:4b–6, they resume their confession of sin:

> Behold, thou wast angry, and we sinned *(hēn-'attāh qāṣaptā wanneḥĕṭā')*;
> in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved?
> We have all become like one who is unclean,
> and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.
> We all fade like a leaf,
> and our iniquities *(wa'ăwônēnû),* like the wind, take us away.
> There is no one that calls upon thy name,
> that bestirs himself to take hold of thee;
> for thou hast hid thy face from us,
> and hast delivered us into the hand of our iniquities *(bĕyad-'ăwônēnû).*

The section begins emphatically with the particle *hēn* disclosing the antithesis between the present state of affairs and God's earlier actions on behalf of the people. The phrase *'attāh qāṣaptā wanneḥĕṭā'* cannot be satisfactorily interpreted solely on the basis of a translation if it is understood in a causative sense.[14] God's punishment has a positive aim: it should move the guilty

[14] See the statement of B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaia,* 471–472: "In v. 4b begreift man nicht die starke Betonung des 'du' in dem *'th,* das unwillkürlich zu dem Verständnis führt: weil du zürntest, sündigten wir, worüber sich nur ein verhärteter Prädestinatianer freuen könnte."

to repentance and reform. But it usually has the opposite effect on an obstinate sinner. The situation is reminiscent of Pharaoh's hardening of his heart in response to the punishment of the plagues (cf. Exod 3:1–14:31). The phrase can, however, also be rendered: "... thou wast angry, and yet we sinned." Such a rendering signifies negatively that the punishment did not achieve its aim of moving the people to repentance, but was not necessarily an occasion for the hardening of their hearts.

Finally, the recognition of Israel's guilt poses the question of the entity to whom the sinful people can still appeal when begging for mercy. The basis of the appeal is mentioned fairly directly, and it is particularly remarkable that the petitioners call God "Father" three times in the context of their confession that the Lord is their Creator or Redeemer. In 63:16 they declare:

> For thou art our Father,
> though Abraham does not know us
> and Israel does not acknowledge us:
> thou, O Lord, art our Father,
> our Redeemer from of old is thy name.

In 64:7–8 they say:

> Yet, O Lord, thou art our Father;
> we are the clay, and thou art our potter;
> we are all the work of thy hand.
> Be not exceedingly angry, O Lord,
> and remember not iniquity *('āwôn)* for ever.
> Behold, consider, we are all thy people.

The belief in the total dependence of the people (and everything else) upon God implies an assumption that the Lord will not abandon them. Here is the real basis of the belief that God ultimately remains faithful to creation being divine work.

This belief is not, however, a mere abstract assumption. It is confirmed by experience of God's acts of redemption, something that is particularly characteristic of Hebrew festivals. Remembrance of such acts towards Israel in the past makes it possible for her to plead that God no longer recalls the many sins of the people but rather their ancient privilege of being the chosen people. Their hope is based on the belief that God will demonstrate the supreme divine righteousness, founded on unwavering faithfulness to the inheritance of divine choice.

2.3 *Punishment and Reward (65:1–16a)*

The prophecy 65:1–16a is addressed to a religiously divided community. The prophet draws a line very clearly between the apostates and the faithful and foretells their contrasting fates. The entire passage is in antithetic form.

65:1–7 speaks of the attitude and destiny of a rebellious people using the third person plural. The formula "Thus says the Lord" in v. 8 introduces a clear antithesis of vv. 8–10//11–12. In 65:8–10 God promises the fullness of blessing for the servants and chosen ones, using the third person plural or singular, while in 65:11–12 the speaker directly addresses the apostates in the second person plural, announcing their destruction and preferring charges against them. The concluding section, 65:13–16a, begins with the prefatory words "Therefore thus says the Lord God" and then takes both groups together in an alternating antithetic form.

The first section (65:1–7) lays serious charges against the apostates that uncover many aspects of their iniquity: they show little regard for a God who has always been ready to intervene on their behalf; they follow the devices and desires of their own hearts; they offer sacrifices to idols; they transgress the statutes concerning clean and unclean food. Accusation is followed by the pronouncement of sentence in vv. 6–7:

> Behold, it is written before me:
> "I will not keep silent, but I will repay *(kî 'im-šillamtî),*
> yea, I will repay into their bosom *(wĕšillamtî 'al-ḥêqām)*
> your iniquities and your fathers' iniquities together
> *('ăwônōtêkem wa'ăwōnōt 'ābôtêkem yaḥdāw),*[15]
> says the Lord;
> because they burned incense upon the mountains
> and reviled me upon the hills,
> and I will measure *(ûmaddōtî)* into their bosom
> payment for their former doings."

In 65:1–7 the bringing of charges occupies more space than the pronouncement of punishment. In the next section (65:8–12) the opposite is the case, for there the focus lies on the antithesis of blessing (vv. 8–10) and doom (vv. 11–12a). God's servants are, however, not to receive divine blessing without reason—the speaker concludes the announcement of blessing with the words "for my people who have sought me" (v. 10b). The antithesis in vv. 11–12 shows this even more clearly; it begins: "But you who forsake the Lord, who forget my holy mountain ...," offset in v. 12bc by the reason for punishment:

> ... because, when I called, you did not answer,
> when I spoke, you did not listen,
> but you did what was evil in my eyes,
> and chose what I did not delight in.

[15] It should be noted that Septuagint and Syriac have instead of the pronoun "your" in both cases "their." For interpretation of this phrase see R. N. Whybray, *Isaiah 40–66,* 271: "The author does not mean to imply that the earlier generations had not suffered punishment for their sins, but that there was a continuity of sin from one generation to another: the new generation had not changed its ways, and was to pay for the sinfulness which it had inherited."

This accusation is repeated almost word for word in 66:4.

After the essence of the division between the two groups is made plain, the concluding section (vv. 13–16a) announces their differing fates without giving reasons:

> Therefore thus says the Lord God.
> "Behold, my servants shall eat,
> but you shall be hungry;
> behold, my servants shall drink,
> but you shall be thirsty;
> behold, my servants shall rejoice,
> but you shall be put to shame;
> behold, my servants shall sing for gladness of heart,
> but you shall cry out for pain of heart,
> and shall wail for anguish of spirit.
> You shall leave your name to my chosen for a curse *(lišbû'āh)*,
> and the Lord God will slay you;
> but his servants he will call by a different name.
> So that he who blesses himself in the land
> shall bless himself by the God of truth,
> and he who takes an oath in the land *(wĕhannišbā' bā'āreṣ)*
> shall swear *(yiššāba')* by the God of truth.

3. *Conclusion*

Chapters 40–66 of the book of Isaiah show most clearly how strongly the desperate conditions that obtained after the fall of Jerusalem challenged the people of Israel and their prophets to identify the reasons for their misfortunes and to determine how best to reach a turning point. The chapters taken as a whole reflect the different views prevailing among the people. It is evident that many did not consider themselves responsible for the disaster, and tried to attribute it, albeit indirectly, to the attitude of their God towards Israel. In contrast, the prophet, called Deutero-Isaiah, and those who accepted the divine message penetrated to the very roots of Israel's calamities and were therefore able to envisage a glorious future in the light of God's mercy.

The writers of Isaiah 40–66 declare unequivocally that the destruction of Israel is an inevitable consequence of a wrongful attitude to her God throughout history (cf. 43:27–28; 47:6; 50:1; 57:17; 59:1–3; 60:10; 63:10). This view is also reflected in the people's confession of guilt in 59:9–15a and 63:15–64:11. The prophet and his disciples knew, however, that the aim of God's punishment can only be the purification and renewal of the people. It must have been obvious that this goal would sooner or later be achieved to at least some extent. The diapason of the prophecy of Deutero-Isaiah is in fact the belief that Israel's "warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins" (40:2).

This realization marked a turning point both in the vision of Israel's future and in comprehending the role of suffering: the nation's guilt was expiated not only by the people's recognition of their own individual sins, but also on the basis of the freely accepted suffering of the servant for the guilt of his people (cf. 52:13–53:12). The knowledge that God's mercy is stronger than the reasons for anger, combined with the atonement for the guilt of the people's wrongdoing, inspired the proclamation of God's compassion for them (cf. esp. 54:7–10; 57:16; 60:10).

In spite of the astonishing examples of the servant and his followers, Israel remained in the shadow of darkness after the downfall of the Babylonian empire. She continued to be the subject of prophetical charges, and to be urgently in need of repentance. Many did not return to their God sincerely, and the prophet was therefore commissioned to declare that forgiveness was due not to Israel's merit but to God's free determination (cf. 43:25–28; 48:9–11). In a religiously divided community, there was good reason for threats of punishment (65:1–7, 11–12, 13–15) and for a direct call to reform (44:22; 55:7; 58:6–14).

CHAPTER XX

PUNISHMENT OF THE NATIONS AND DELIVERANCE OF ISRAEL IN THE APOCALYPSE OF ISAIAH

The "Great Apocalypse" (chaps. 24–27) and the "Little Apocalypse" (chaps. 34–35) of Isaiah play an important part in the scheme of Isaiah's prophecies. Chapters 24–27 sum up the great themes of the preceding chapters 13–23, and chapters 34–35 bring to a close the collection of prophecies in chapters 28–33. The function of both of these texts is to set forth, from an eschatological point of view, the ultimate fate of the nations and God's future purpose for his people Israel. The great central theme is that of the punishment of oppressors and the deliverance of God's faithful people. The two passages display many striking resemblances to the characteristic features of Isaiah's general prophecies, and, as such, they can be thought of as the climax or finale of what precedes them.[1]

Nevertheless, it would appear that the "apocalypses" are not original to Isaiah. First, because the general political and social conditions reflected in them seem to indicate the post-Exilic period rather than that of the eighth century;[2] and second, because the elaborate eschatological ideas, as well as the distinctive imagery and style make it plain that these passages constitute self-contained entities. Accordingly, they should be studied separately.[3]

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[1] See the statement by F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah* (trans. from the German; CFThL IV/14; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1875), 423: "What the *finale* should do in a piece of music—namely, gather up the scattered changes into a grand impressive whole—is done here by this closing cycle."

[2] These and other reasons have led most critical scholars to the conclusion that many other passages within the collections of Isaianic prophecies also contain editorial additions that were composed gradually over a long period of time until the final form of the book of Isaiah emerged.

[3] For a more or less complete treatment of the "Apocalypse" of Isaiah, see the following special studies, in addition to commentaries on the book of Isaiah (see the chapter on Isaiah, n. 1): W. Rudolph, *Jesaja 24–27* (BWANT 62; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1933); J. Lindblom, *Die Jesaja-Apokalypse: Jes. 24–27* (LUÅ.NF Avd. 1. Bd 34. Nr. 3; Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup; Leipzig: O. Harrassowitz, 1938); O. Plöger, *Theokratie und Eschatologie* (WMANT 2; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1959); English translation by S. Rudman, *Theocracy and Eschatology* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1968), 53–78: "The Isaiah-Apocalypse (Isa. XXIV–XXVII)"; G. W. Anderson, "Isaiah XXIV–XXVII Reconsidered," *Congress Volume: Bonn 1962* (VT.S 9; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1963), 118–126; G. Fohrer, "Der Aufbau der Apokalypse des Jesajabuches," *CBQ* 24 (1963), 34–45; M.-L. Henry, *Glaubenskrise und Glaubensbewährung in den Dichtungen der Jesajaapokalypse: Versuch einer Deutung der literarischen Komposition von Jes. 24–27 aus dem Zusammenhang ihrer religösen Motivbildungen* (BWANT V/86; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1967); J. M. Schmidt, *Die jüdische Apokalyptik: Die Geschichte ihrer Erforschung von den Anfängen bis zu den Textfunden von Qumran* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969); P. D. Hanson, "Jewish Apocalyptic against Its Near Eastern Environment," *RB* 78 (1971), 31–58; H. Ringgren,

1. *Universal Judgment and the Deliverance of the Remnant (24:1–26:6)*

There are many different views regarding the origin, historical setting, and literary categories represented in the various sections of chapters 24–27. Nevertheless, commentators agree that these chapters display a basic thematic unity: the contrast between the forces of evil and the overwhelming majesty of God. They are best investigated in two parts: 24:1–26:6 and 26:7–27:13.[4]

The first unit of the first part comprises 24:1–13. The passage begins with the announcement of a universal judgment: "Behold *(hinnēh)*, the Lord is emptying the earth *(bôqēq hā'āreṣ)* and making it waste *(ûbôlĕqāh),* and he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants" (v. 1). The emphatic demonstrative interjection *hinnēh* obviously refers to a future event and implies that it is imminent and sure to happen.[5] A striking literary feature of this verse is the use of the paronomasia *bôqēq ... ûbôlĕqāh;* such Hebrew assonances cannot be echoed in translation.[6]

Verse 2 presents one of the clearest examples of multiple merism in the Hebrew Bible. The text reads:

> And it shall be, as with the people, so with the priest;
> as with the slave, so with his master;
> as with the maid, so with her mistress;
> as with the buyer, so with the seller;
> as with the lender, so with the borrower;
> as with the creditor, so with the debtor.

In the present context, even one of the six antitheses would have been enough to express the universal dimension of the coming judgment; the hammer blows of repetition make it all the more evident that the emphasis is on the universality of God's punishment. The poet is not concerned with the individual meanings of his nouns, but with the contrasts that make it

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"Some Observations on Style and Structure in the Isaiah Apocalypse," *ASTI* 9 (1973), 107–115; W. Elder, *A Theological-historical Study of Isaiah 24–27* (Dissertation, Baylor University, 1974); J. Vermeylen, "La composition littéraire de l''Apocalypse d'Isaïe' (Is. XXIV–XXVII)," *EThL* 50 (1974), 5–38 = *ALBO* V/14 (Louvain: EThL / Imprimerie orientaliste, 1974); W. R. Millar, *Isaiah 24–27 and the Origin of Apocalyptic* (HSMS 11; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1976); J. Vermeylen, *Du prophète Isaïe à l'apocalyptique: Isaïe, I–XXXV, miroir d'un demi-millénaire d'expérience religieuse en Israël,* 2 vols. (EB; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1977–1978), vol. 1, pp. 349–381: "Septième section. Isaïe, XXIV–XXVII"; J. Oswalt, "Recent Studies in the Old Testament Eschatology and Apocalyptic," *JEThS* 24 (1981), 289–302.

[4] See E. J. Kissane, *The Book of Isaiah,* vol. 1 (Dublin: Browne & Nolan, 1941), 267–303.

[5] See W. Gesenius, E. Kautzsch, and G. Bergsträsser, *Hebräische Grammatik* (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1962), § 116p; English edition, E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), § 116p.

[6] See Nah 2:11: *bûqāh ûmĕbûqāh ûmĕbullāqāh,* "There is emptiness and void and waste." Cf. Nah 2:3 and Jer 51:2.

possible to express totality within each category.[7]

Verse 3a reiterates the announcement of coming desolation, using the alliteration of two infinitives absolute, and thereby underlining the totality of the judgment: *hibbôq tibbôq hā'āreṣ wĕhibbôz tibbôz,* "The earth shall be utterly laid waste und utterly despoiled." Verse 3b adds: "For the Lord has spoken this word."

The second section (24:4–6) changes from the future to the perfect tense. In principle, these perfect tenses can be considered as prophetic of the future, but in the present context it would appear that the prophetic perfects are interchangeable with descriptions of past or recurrent present events, for the signs of the future universal judgment are already clearly visible in the present. In v. 4a new kind of the play upon words appears:

> The earth mourns and withers (*'ābĕlāh nābĕlāh hā'āreṣ*),
> the world languishes and withers *('umlĕlāh nābĕlāh tēbēl)*;
> the heavens languish together with the earth.

The phrase *mĕrôm 'am-hā'āreṣ* should be rendered as *hammārôm 'im-hā'āreṣ,* "the heavens together with the earth." It is obvious that the phrase represents a type of merism, and it fits very neatly into the generally hyperbolic description of a universal judgment. The synonymous parallelism *'ereṣ // tēbēl* and the contrast of opposites *mārôm // 'ereṣ* are used to express the universality of imminent desolation.

Verses 5 and 6 are in every respect central to the section 24:1–13, and form a complete causal stanza:

> The earth lies polluted (*wĕhā'āreṣ ḥānĕpāh*)
> under its inhabitants;
> for they have transgressed the laws,
> violated the statutes,
> broken the everlasting covenant *(hēpērû bĕrît 'ôlām).*
> Therefore a curse *('ālāh)* devours the earth,
> and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt *(wayye'šĕmû yošbê bāh)*;
> therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched,
> and few men are left (*wĕniš'ar 'ĕnôš miz'ār*).

The poet sees the cause of imminent punishment in pollution of the earth, but gives no details of this defilement. Instead, the passage adumbrates a general state of profanation, caused by transgressions of statutes and ordinances imposed by God. It is therefore unjustifiable to regard the phrase *bĕrît 'ôlām* primarily as an allusion to the Noachic covenant (see this phrase in Gen 9:16), and in particular to the prohibition to shed blood (cf. Gen 9:6).[8] In view of the universalist perspective vv. 5–6 this phrase cannot be

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[7] See J. Krašovec, *Der Merismus im Biblisch-Hebräischen und Nordwestsemitischen* (BibOr 33; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1977).

[8] An additional reason why the expression *bĕrît 'ôlām* cannot be related primarily to

limited either to God's covenant with Noah or to that of Sinai; it must relate to the whole semantic range of this word in the framework of Old Testament revelation. Everything that is contrary to God's "laws" plays its part in defiling the earth: practicing idolatry, swearing falsely, committing adultery, shedding blood, oppressing the poor, theft, etc.

Such a broad understanding of the guilt in question is required, finally, by the statement about punishment in 24:6a: *'al-kēn 'ālāh 'ākĕlāh 'ereṣ wayye'šĕmû yošbê bāh*, "Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt." This statement is clearly reminiscent of other passages in the Hebrew Bible that deal with the question of obedience to God's commandments and of faithfulness to the covenant, notably Lev 26 and Deut 28. Lev 26 is a conclusion to the Holiness Code, and this sermon sets before the people the way of life (vv. 3–13) that follows obedience to God, and the way of destruction (vv. 14–39) resulting from disobedience. Similarly, the sermon in Deut 28 is a conclusion to the Deuteronomic Code, and enumerates the "blessings" (vv. 1–14) that flow from obedience and the greater number of "curses" (vv. 15–68) that follow disobedience to God's commandments. Both concluding sermons give a solemn warning to the people to keep all the commandments contained in the respective Codes. The situation visualized by the writer of our "apocalypse" corresponds so fully to the descriptions of desolation in Lev 26:14–39 and Deut 28:15–68 that in his eyes the imminent judgment means fulfilment of those predictions.

It is natural that breaking "the everlasting covenant" must result in a "curse" as the severest possible punishment. This is particularly clearly expressed in Jer 11:1–14. The prophet is commissioned to say to the people: "Cursed be the man *('ārûr hā'îš)* who does not heed the words of this covenant ..." (v. 3). God's response to the disloyalty and apostasy of the people is as follows: "Behold, I am bringing evil upon them which they cannot escape; though they cry to me, I will not listen to them ..." (v. 11); "Therefore do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer on their behalf, for I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their trouble" (v. 14). In 23:10 Jeremiah laments: "... the land is full of adulterers; because of the curse the land mourns *(kî mippĕnê 'ālāh 'ābĕlāh hā'āreṣ)*, and the pastures of the wilderness are dried up. Their course is evil, and their might is not right ..." In Zech 5:3 the Lord declares to the prophet: "This is the curse *(zō't hā'ālāh)* that goes out over the face of the whole land; for every one who steals shall be cut off henceforth according to it, and every one who swears falsely shall be cut off henceforth according to it ..." In Dan 9:11 the

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God's covenant with Noah is the fact that in Gen 9:16 this expression is used in connection with God's promise that he will establish with a new mankind an everlasting covenant. With this promise, God does not directly impose an obligation on man. There is a similar use of this expression in 2 Sam 23:5 and Isa 55:3.

following confession of guilt and deserved punishment is found: "All Israel has transgressed thy law and turned aside, refusing to obey thy voice. And the curse and oath *(hā'ālāh wĕhaššĕbu'āh)* which are written in the law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against him." According to the account of 2 Chr 34:21, king Josiah is eager to interrogate the Lord: "Go, inquire of the Lord for me and for those who are left *(hanniš'ār)* in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that has been found; for great is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out on us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord, to do according to all that is written in this book." The prophetess Huldah is commissioned to declare God's answer: "Thus says the Lord, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place and upon its inhabitants, all the curses *(kol-hā'ālôt)* that are written in the book which was read before the king of Judah. Because they have forsaken me and have burned incense to other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands, therefore my wrath will be poured out upon this place and will not be quenched ..." (2 Chr 34:24–25).

The verb *'āšam* has two related meanings: a) to do wrong, to be guilty; and b) to be held guilty, to be condemned, to suffer for guilt.[9] This relationship is in accordance with the cause/effect sequence in natural law: punishment is a natural consequence of guilt. After Israel failed to respond to God's commandments, her fate became the very opposite of God's original plan for his people. Jeremiah states in 2:3:

> Israel was holy to the Lord,
> the first fruits of his harvest.
> All who ate of it became guilty *(ye'šāmû);*
> evil came upon them, says the Lord.

Now, Israel is delivered to the consequences of her own failure. The belief that only God is the source of life and historical experience so far as Israel's success and failure are concerned could occasion use of the verb *'āšam* in a statement of the kind found in Wisdom, and Ps 34:22–23 ends with the following antithesis:

> Evil shall slay the wicked;
> and those who hate the righteous will be condemned *(ye'šāmû).*
> The Lord redeems the life of his servants;
> none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned
> *(wĕlō'-ye'šĕmû kol-haḥōsîm bô).*

Despite its extremely universalist description of imminent judgment, the "Apocalypse" of Isaiah does not envisage total destruction. On this most important point the present "fulfilment" corresponds to the threats in Lev

[9] See P. Joüon, "Racine אשם," *Biblica* 19 (1938), 454–459.

26:14–39 and Deut 28:15–68. The former presents in view of disobedience an ever more horrifying picture of desolation, but there remains room for the phrase *hanniš'ārîm bākem* ..., "And those of you that are left ..." (Lev 26:39). Similarly, the description of "total" destruction in Deut 28:15–68 adds *wĕniš'artem bimtê mĕ'āṭ* ..., "And you shall be left few in number ..." (v. 62). The universal eschatological judgment dramatically envisaged in Isa 24:1–13 visualizes a similar outcome: the judgment will not finally result in total destruction. The writer states in 24:6b: ... *wĕniš'ar 'ĕnôš miz'ār,* "... and few men are left." And in v. 13 there reappears the figure employed by Isaiah in reference to Damascus and Ephraim (cf. 17:6).

Finally, the importance of the theme of the remnant in Isaiah and in various later passages suggests the question of their possible mutual dependence. In a living religion it seems natural that later writers should have borrowed ideas and vocabulary from earlier documents. But the constant recurrence of the theme of the remnant cannot depend solely on one particular historical source. The basis of belief that a remnant will survive despite all the horrifying scenes of judgment lies in the revelation of the One Creator and Redeemer of the world who cannot abandon his creation to primordial chaos.

The second part of chapter 24 (vv. 14–23) is a harmonious continuation of the first part, displaying the same type of universalist imagery. Its combination of themes is such that it clearly falls into three sections: vv. 14–16a, 16b–20, and 21–23. In vv. 14–16a we have a hymn of praise, vv. 16b–20 speak of the horrifying effects of judgment, and vv. 21–23 predict the downfall of the oppressor and the setting up of God's kingdom in Zion. The most striking stylistic device in each section is the use of merism, which appears to be the writer's most effective device for expressing universality or totality, and both terrestrial and cosmic contrasts are used.

In 24:14–16a the emphasis is laid on the universality of praise to God by double merism in a chiastic arrangement of prepositions: *miyyām // bā'urîm; bĕ'iyyê hayyām // mikkĕnap hā'āreṣ,* "from the sea" (west) // "in the lights" (east); "in the isles of the sea" (extreme west) // "from the ends of the earth" (extreme east). The meaning of the double merism is that "everywhere" glory should be given "to the Righteous One *(laṣṣaddîq).*"

Section 24:16b–20 opens with an original form of merism in order to describe the totality of judgment: *paḥad wāpaḥat wāpāḥ* ..., "Terror, and the pit, and the snare ..." (v. 17). In developing this paronomasia in v. 18ab the writer stresses that there is no possibility of escape: the three basic words represent all the possible circumstances in a desperate situation. In 24:18c–20a the reason is given for such a state of affairs. The contrasting phrases "... for the windows of heaven *('ărubbôt mimmārôm)* are opened, and the foundations of the earth *(môsdê 'āreṣ)* tremble" in v. 18c reveal the cosmic

dimensions of the judgment,[10] and the recurrent infinitive absolutes in 24:19–20a stress the completeness of desolation.

In the third section (24:21–23) the contrast *ṣĕbā' hammārôm bammārôm // malkê hā'ădāmāh 'al-hā'ădāmāh,* "the host of heaven in heaven" // "the kings of the earth on the earth," in v. 21 denotes the object of punishment (cf. the verb *pāqad* in 24:21–22) in its totality. In view of its stylistic function, the phrase "the host of heaven" cannot possibly denote a particular type or class of beings or objects above the earth—for instance pagan gods, angelic beings, or stars. Putting the phrase deliberately in opposition to "the kings of the earth on the earth," the poet visualizes in a most general, indefinite sense all the possible forces of evil arrayed against the kingdom of God. The universal kingdom of God in Sion will be made possible only after all the forces of evil are destroyed.

This passage discloses not only God's majesty expressed through inexorable judgment, but also the reason for punishment. In v. 16bc the exclamation of the prophet-author is found:

> But I say, "I pine away,
> I pine away, Woe is me!
> For the treacherous deal treacherously *(bōgĕdîm bāgādû),*
> the treacherous deal very treacherously *(ûbeged bôgĕdîm bāgādû).*"

The second part of the exclamation is expressed emphatically through repetition of the same root *bāgad,* thereby creating an alliterative effect.[11] The reason for punishment is the total treachery of the wicked who are, however, not yet identified.

After the description of the terrifying act of judgment in 24:17–19, we find in v. 20 a further statement concerning the reason for punishment:

> The earth staggers like a drunken man,
> it sways like a hut;
> its transgression lies heavy upon it *(wĕkābad 'ālêhā piš'āh),*
> and it falls, and will not rise again *(wĕnāpĕlāh wĕlō'-tōsîp qûm).*

These words do not allow for the survival of any remnant. The reason is made plain in the emphatic statement about treachery (24:16bc) and through identification of the wicked (24:21). The wicked are not simply the whole nation or all nations, but "the host of heaven" // "the kings of the earth", i.e., the wicked pure and simple. The rulers who worship their own power are incapable of repenting and returning to God; they must therefore be utterly

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[10] Because the antithetical pair is used in an extraordinarily emotional context and rhetorically, it would be unjustifiable to take the contrasted terms literally, or as references to any particular event like a flood or an earthquake.

[11] See Isa 21:2b: *habbôgēd bôgēd wĕhaššôdēd šôdēd,* "the plunderer plunders, and the destroyer destroys." The phrase *ûbeged bôgĕdîm bāgādû* is original here; it is omitted by the Septuagint.

condemned by the majesty of God.

Finally, a comparison between 24:1–13 and 24:14–23 shows that the nature of judgment is not the same in the two passages, even though the picture is terrifying in both. In vv. 1–13 the object of judgment is the whole land. Accordingly, judgment means destruction of the wicked and deliverance of a righteous remnant. In vv. 14–23 the object of judgment is only the wicked, whereas the righteous remnant sings praise to God (vv. 14–16a). "They *(hemmāh)* lift up their voices, they sing for joy..." (v. 14) obviously refers to the remnant mentioned in vv. 6 and 13, who sing: *ṣĕbî laṣṣaddîq,* "glory to the Righteous One" (v. 16a).[12] When referring to God, the root *ṣdq* carries a wide semantic range of meaning: God's faithfulness, his saving acts, his mercy, etc. In a context of judgment, it denotes directly only the righteous; the wicked are considered only indirectly as being excluded from the benefits of God's saving righteousness.[13]

After an inexorable judgment on the adversaries of God and his faithful people is pronounced, there is special cause to praise God on account of his saving acts performed through judgment. The text in 25:1–26:6 consists of several sections that express basically the same double aspect of God's judgment: humiliation of proud adversaries and deliverance of the humble faithful people. The passages 25:1–5 and 26:1–6 are particularly close. In 25:1–5 the prophet-author speaks in the first person, praising God in the second person: "For thou hast made the city a heap, the fortified city a ruin ..." (v. 2); "For thou hast been a stronghold to the poor, a stronghold to the needy in his distress ..." (v. 4). In 26:1–6 the song to be sung in the land of Judah is announced: "We have a strong city; he sets up salvation as walls and bulwarks" (v. 1). The "righteous nation" is called to enter this city and "trust in the Lord for ever, for the Lord God is an everlasting rock. For he has brought low the inhabitants of the height, the lofty city ..." (vv. 2–6). It is obvious that the "strong city" can only signify Jerusalem. The "fortified city" (25:2) and the "lofty city" (26:5), however, should not necessarily be identified with a particular imperial city like Babylon or the capital of Moab (cf. 25:10–12); it is probable that, in this eschatological language it symbolizes the organized power of human evil and godlessness.[14]

These passages, on account of their universalist perspective, have occasioned much discussion of whether the object of God's judgment is the whole

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[12] Once it is recognized that it is the remnant that gives praise to God, it becomes obvious that the phrase *ṣĕbî laṣṣaddîq* does not refer to the remnant but to God. Cf. other cases of referring the adjective *ṣaddîq* to God: Exod 9:27; Isa 45:21; Ps 7:10; 11:7; 116:5; Job 34:17.

[13] See J. Krašovec, *La justice (ṣdq) de Dieu dans la Bible hébraïque et l'interprétation juive et chrétienne* (OBO 76: Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988).

[14] See R. E. Clements, *Isaiah 1–39* (NCBC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1980), 211.

world or only Israel. Most modern commentators think that God's judgment is here considered as a global event, and point to the universalist imagery, to the recurring word *'ereṣ*, and to some other less striking features of the text. Nevertheless, this view cannot claim to be definitive. Commentators often fail to take sufficient account of the amount of hyperbole used in describing judgment.[15] On the other hand, they overlook the connotations of some words that point to Israel rather than to the world: *'ereṣ, 'ĕnôš, tôrāh, bĕrît.* The word *'ereṣ* does not necessarily mean the whole world; in view of its general usage, it seems to be more natural to assume that it denotes primarily Israel and those surrounding countries that constitute a natural geographical, cultural and political unity: Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia, and Egypt.[16] Again. the word *'ĕnôš* does not necessarily mean the whole world;[17] it may primarily denote the low estate of the people and their transitoriness (cf. Isa 13:12; 33:8). Words like *tôrāh* and its synonyms, and *bĕrît* traditionally relate primarily to the people of Israel.[18] All such terms, on account of their universal nature and value, can be applied only indirectly to other nations.

2. *The Guilt of Israel Will Be Expiated (26:7–27:13)*

In this section, the basic theme is maintained, but the focus is more on reflections and sayings about God's attitude to Israel and to her adversaries than on description of a universal judgment. In 26:7–19, the people or the prophet address God confessing their own guilt and God's justice; in 26:20–27:13, the prophet exhorts the people to be patient until God's anger is appeased, their guilt expiated, and the oppressor destroyed. Unfortunately, the original text often cannot be discovered or the speaker determined with any certainty. We must therefore be content with the general sense of those particular passages.

The confession of the people in 26:7–19 is a response to the temptation to question the principle of God's righteousness in dealing with his people.

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[15] R. E. Clements, *Isaiah 1–39,* 201, for instance exaggerates, when he asserts, disregarding the merism in v. 2: "No class of people will be exempt from the judgment when it comes, so that its universality and indifference to all human and religious distinctions will be made plain."

[16] See J. D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33* (WBC 24; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985), 316–318: "Excursus: The Land."

[17] See the statement by H. Wildberger, *Jesaja 13–27* (BK.AT X/2; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978), 923, 929.

[18] This view is convincingly argued by E. J. Kissane, *The Book of Isaiah,* vol. 1, 279–280: "The two words 'laws' and 'statute' indicate that the 'covenant' is one which involved the keeping of certain laws, and this can refer only to the covenant of Mt. Sinai by which the people of Israel undertook to keep the Mosaic law. This is one of the many indications that, although the terms used are universal ('earth, world') the prophet is really speaking of the world-judgment as it affects Israel."

The faithful community acknowledges the traditional belief (v. 7; cf. Ps 1:6; Prov 3:6; 4:26; 5:6, 21; 11:5), and at the same time expresses its strong desire to experience the manifestation of God's judgment (v. 8). With 26:9–10, the prophet-author introduces, within the confession of the people, a reflection on the purpose of God's discipline:

> My soul yearns for thee in the night,
> my spirit within me earnestly seeks thee.
> For when thy judgments are in the earth *(mišpāṭêkā lā'āreṣ)*,
> the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness *(ṣedeq)*.
> If favour is shown to the wicked *(yuḥan rāšā')*,
> he does not learn righteousness *(bal-lāmad ṣedeq)*;
> in the land of uprightness he deals perversely
> and does not see the majesty of the Lord.

The statements in vv. 9b and 10a represent a wisdom proverb and form an ideal antithesis. These words do not express something that might occasionally happen, but rather a universally valid human response to the manifestation of God's power and justice on the one hand, and to his favour on the other. When the writer of Ecclesiastes reflects on different aspects of his experience, he too notes this mark of human nature and produces a saying of timeless significance : "Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men is fully set to do evil" (Qoh 8:11; cf. Ps 10:4–5).

The opposing consequences of God's discipline and favour lead to the conclusion that the effects of his judgment must be utterly different for the afflicted remnant, which submitted to God's discipline, and for their triumphant enemies, who do not act in accordance with God's will and plan. In v. 11 our writer makes a direct appeal to God. The word "fire" is probably not used merely metaphorically, but in a realistic sense. The writer believes that God's power will be manifested in a striking manner in order to show how different is the fate of the faithful people from that of God's enemies. A similar desire for a different attitude to the representatives of suffering Israel and to their enemies is expressed in Jeremiah's prayer in 10:23–25 and in Ps 79:5–9. All these passages correspond to the antithetical statement in Qoh 8:12–13: "Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him; but it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God."

In 26:12–19, the community speaks in the first person plural (v. 16 has third person plural). The text is antithetical in two aspects: first, the work of Israel and that of God are contrasted; second, God's dealings with Israel's enemies is totally different from his dealings with Israel itself. In longing for peace, the faithful community confesses in v. 12. Here, the belief is expressed that God will make all things be well, as in the past. Israel in herself

can do nothing; she is totally dependent on God (26:16–19). The profound reason for Israel's hope is expressed in v. 13. In spite of all aberrations and afflictions, Israel has remained faithful to her God. Her distress, interpreted as merited chastening, has turned her more definitely to her God.

From this definite decision to trust in her God stems Israel's certainty that God's work of judgment is a matter of death and life. Verses 26:14–15 read as follows:

> They are dead, they will not live;
> they are shades, they will not arise;
> to that end thou hast visited *(pāqadtā)* them with destruction
> and wiped out all remembrance of them.

The antithesis between vv. 14 and 15 is total. In v. 14, the oscillation between the past, the present, and the future is noteworthy, as is the consistent use of the perfect in v. 15. The enemies are dead, they were visited by God, and they will be utterly destroyed, whereas Israel has increased. The interrelation between the antithetical verses means that the perfects in v. 15 are to be taken as prophetic. Both the ultimate destruction of Israel's enemies and her restoration will take place in the future. The reason why the writer uses the perfect consistently in v. 15 is his desire to present the restoration as a firm decision by God.

The faith that leads to such certainty is the only valid background for the interpretation of v. 19. There are differing views regarding the identity of the speaker and the meaning of this verse. It could have been God who spoke, or the people, or the prophet, but in view of the entire context, we may conclude that the speaker is the same as in 26:14–15. Verse 19 is at once a continuation and reinforcement of the statement in v. 15, and a marked contrast to v. 14: whereas Israel's enemies will be utterly destroyed and will never come to life, Israel will revive even though the actual situation might seem desperate. The obvious tendency to put so much emphasis on the different fates of Israel and of her enemies suggests caution when a literary interpretation of v. 19 is in question. The passage as a whole has in view the nations rather than individuals,[19] and the imagery is mainly used metaphorically. But the belief that nothing is impossible for the only Lord of the world finally legitimates the firm hope that the union of his faithful people with God will have no end.[20]

The confession and profession of the community in 26:7–19 give rise to a response in 26:20–28:1, uttered probably by the prophet. The speaker con-

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[19] See E. J. Kissane, *The Book of Isaiah,* 298; R. E. Clements, *Isaiah 1–39,* 216–217.

[20] See R. Martin-Achard, *De la mort à la résurrection, d'après l'Ancien Testament* (BTh; Neuchâtel / Paris: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1956); English trans. by J. P. Smith, *From Death to Life* (Edinburgh / London: Oliver & Boyd, 1960), esp. pp. 130–138. See also J. F. A. Sawyer, "Hebrew Words for the Resurrection of the Dead," *VT* 23 (1973), 218–234.

firms the belief that the coming judgment will bring deliverance to the people through destruction of all their enemies. He begins, however, with an instruction on how to act in the meantime when distress increases. In the following v. 21 he discloses the reason for such an attitude:

> For behold, the Lord is coming forth out of his place
> to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity
> *(lipqōd 'ăwôn yōšēb-hā'āreṣ 'ālâw),*
> and the earth will disclose the blood shed upon her,
> and will no more cover her slain.

The verb *pāqad,* 'to visit, to punish,' conveys the idea of the personal intervention of God. He will intervene to punish the iniquity *('āwôn)* of his enemies, and in particular the crime of murder. The earth will disclose all unjustly shed blood, which can then cry to heaven for vengeance on the slayer. This declaration is reminiscent of Gen 4:10; Ezek 24:7–8; Ps 9:13; Job 16:18; Rev 6:10. It makes plain that the last judgment signifies complete atonement for the guilt of mankind and the complete cleansing of the earth. And even more. God will punish *(yipqōd)* and slay Leviathan/the Dragon, which symbolizes not only the oppressors of Israel, but also the whole spectrum of the power of evil and disorder.[21] God must also destroy this last enemy in order to bring about the final turn of events in history, and to establish his universal kingdom in Mount Zion (cf. 24:21–23).

The following three sections in chapter 27, vv. 2–6, 7–11, and 12–13, make it plain that the universal final judgment should bring about a turning point in God's attitude to the people of Israel. This seems to be possible because the remnant is fulfilling the necessary conditions to ensure a gracious attitude. Humiliation and other kinds of suffering have turned the remnant more definitely to their God. Their confession "thy name alone we acknowledge" (26:13b) is the prerequisite for a reversal of God's terrifying threats and of the actual judgment. The eschatological turn of events is announced by God's declaration *ḥēmāh 'ên lî,* "I have no wrath" (27:4a). Such signals of a definite turning point produce a song of a delightful vineyard (27:2–6), providing a marked contrast to the parable of the vineyard in 5:1–7. The song annuls the verdict given in 5:6: the keeper of the vineyard will assume possession of it and will "guard it night and day" (27:3). His hostility will be turned to "thorns and briers," which obviously symbolize Israel's enemies (27:4). The vineyard will respond to its keeper's care and produce the expected fruit (27:5–6).

In the following section (27:7–11), the focus is even more explicitly on expiation of Israel's guilt. The particularly difficult 27:7–9 provide a com-

[21] See C. H. Gordon, "Leviathan, Symbol of Evil," *Biblical Motifs: Origins and Transformations* (ed. A. Altmann; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), 1–9; M. K. Wakeman, *God's Battle with the Monster: A Study in Biblical Imagery* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973).

parison between God's attitude to Israel and to her enemies:

> Has he smitten them as he smote those who smote them?
> Or have they been slain as their slayers were slain?
> Measure by measure, by exile thou didst contend with them;
> he removed them with his fierce blast in the day of the east wind.
> Therefore by this the guilt of Jacob will be expiated
> *(lākēn bĕzō't yĕkuppar 'ăwôn ya'ăqōb),*
> and this will be the full fruit of the removal of his sin:
> when he makes all the stones of the altars
> like chalkstones crushed to pieces,
> no Asherim or incense altars will remain standing.

The question in 27:7 points to the historical fact that Israel has at least survived, whereas her oppressors have mostly been completely destroyed. This historical experience and unshakable belief in God's righteousness are the basis for the prophetic message that eschatological judgment will surely bring about the end of all Israel's oppressors. The writer closes with an announcement of the final destruction of Israel's enemies, and gives his reason for this expectation (27:10–11):

> For the fortified city is solitary,
> a habitation deserted and forsaken, like the wilderness;
> there the calf grazes,
> there he lies down, and strips its branches.
> When its boughs are dry, they are broken;
> women come and make a fire of them.
> For this is a people without discernment;
> therefore he who made them will not have compassion
> on them (*'al-kēn lō'-yĕraḥămennû 'ōśēhû*),
> he that formed them will show them no favour *(wĕyoṣrô lō' yĕḥunnennû).*

The consistency of the theme of Israel's enemies (cf. 24:10–12; 25:2–3; 26:5), the unspecific imagery in the "Apocalypse" of Isaiah, and the immediate context allow us to assume that the "fortified city" does not refer to Jerusalem or Samaria, as many commentators suggest, but to Israel's external enemies.

The expiation of Israel's guilt on the one hand and the destruction of her enemies on the other make it possible, finally, to envision, within the framework of eschatological drama, restoration of Israel to the full limits of the kingdom of David. The concluding section (27:12–13) are then an expression of the ultimate eschatological hope and provide a unified perspective to the whole four chapters 24–27.

3. *Judgment upon the Nations and the Restoration of Israel (Chapters 34–35)*

It is generally recognized that these two chapters form a self-contained unit, based on an antithetical relationship. Chapter 34 deals with the complete destruction of the enemies of Israel through God's imminent judgment, while chapter 35 is concerned with the glorious restoration of Israel.[22] No reasons are given for either the punishment or the restoration,[23] and their absence is obviously due to the general historical background of the two chapters. The poet was writing at a time when his people were suffering oppression and humiliation of every kind, so he felt that their guilt has been expiated, whereas the wickedness of the oppressors was increasingly provoking God's anger. By placing his hope in God he recognizes that God will act and destroy Israel's enemies in order to save his people.[24]

Chapter 34 opens with a dramatic appeal to the whole world to hear the proclamation of God's judgment. This introduction is reminiscent of similar introductory passages elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.[25] In v. 2 the reason for summoning the nations is given:

> For the Lord is enraged against all the nations,
> and furious against all their host,
> he has doomed them *(heḥĕrîmām)*, has given them over for slaughter.

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[22] Apart from commentaries see the following studies: J. Muilenburg, "The Literary Character of Isaiah 34," *JBL* 59 (1940), 339–365; M. Pope, "Isaiah 34 in Relation to Isaiah 35,40–66," *JBL* 71 (1952), 235–243; R. B. Y. Scott, "The Relation of Isaiah, Chapter 35, to Deutero-Isaiah," *AJSL* 52 (1935–1936), 178–191; A. T. Olmstead, "II Isaiah and Isaiah, Chapter 35," *AJSL* 53 (1937), 251–253.

[23] This situation occasioned the following statement by B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaia* (BK 3/1; 5th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), 248: "Der Zorn Jahwes, der allen Menschen außer den Juden gilt, wird nicht weiter begründet, ein sicherer Beweis für den sekundären Charakter dieser Ausführungen. Es gibt für den Verf. nur Auserwählte und zur Vernichtung bestimmte Heiden."

[24] Failing to recognize the suffering of the oppressed people, B. Duhm allows himself the following remark in *Das Buch Jesaia,* 249: "Es fällt schwer, sich in dies Übermaß von Menschenhaß und Eigenliebe hineinzudenken, das noch dazu in religiösem Gewande auftritt; und wie ist es nur möglich gewesen, daß der Verf. selber glaubt, was er hier schreibt." Quite different is the statement by O. Kaiser, *Isaiah 13–39* (trans. by R. A. Wilson from the German; OTL; London: SCM Press, 1974), 355: "This poem should not be regarded as a reason to consider oneself superior to a nation which saw God as its avenger and should not be sought by those who in their own history have imagined that they had to act as avengers towards this nation and so brought shame and death to innumerable people. Anyone who is weak must trust in God in all his difficulties. Anyone who thinks he is strong must remember that his strength and superiority may tempt others to beg in the words of Ps. 94.1 for the manifestation of the God to whom vengeance belongs." See also H. Wildberger, *Jesaja 28–39* (BK.AT X/3; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1982), 1350: "Die Schonungslosigkeit dieser Ankündigung bereitet dem Ausleger Mühe, doch ist auch dieses Wort einer bestimmten geschichtlichen Situation verhaftet, es darf nicht losgelöst von der schweren Bedrängnis, ja Existenzbedrohung, verstanden werden, der Juda durch Edom zuzeiten ausgesetzt war."

[25] Cf. Deut 32:1; Judg 5:3; Isa 1:10; 41:1; 43:8–9; Mic 1:2; 6:1–2.

There is no room for reconciliation and expiation; God's anger demands total annihilation of all his enemies, and 34:3–4 even suggests that the ban should embrace the entire created order. This amounts to a vision of dramatic change in the whole cosmic order.

The writer then proclaims God's proscription of Edom. 34:5 reads:

> For my sword has drunk its fill in the heavens;
> behold, it descends for judgment upon Edom,
> upon the people I have doomed *('am ḥermî)*.

The poet describes God's avenging sword, descending upon Edom to exterminate its inhabitants (34:6–7). The land of Edom will be reduced to volcanic waste and the capital, Bozrah, will be destroyed; the resulting wasteland will become a dwelling place of unclean desert animals and demons (34:8–15). All this will certainly happen because the judgment passed upon Edom was ordained by God (34:16–17).

Chapter 35 is shorter than chapter 34, and its content is linked only with that of 34:8–17. But the sense of the two sections is diametrically opposed, and chapter 35 offers a magnificent prospect for the people of Israel: the wilderness will be transformed into a well-watered and thickly forested land, the sorrows of the people will change to joy, a holy highway will lead to Zion, and the redeemed will return to their happy land. Even though the contrast between 34:8–17 and 35:1–10 is so striking, there is an explicit link only between 34:8 and 35:4 so far as the content and vocabulary are concerned. And indeed, these two verses are in every respect central within their sections. For obvious reasons we quote these passages both in Hebrew and in English.

34:8:

> *kî yôm nāqām layhwh*
> *šĕnat šillûmîm lĕrîb ṣiyyôn*
> For the Lord has a day of vengeance,
> a year of recompense for the cause of Zion

35:4:

> *'imrû lĕnimhărê-lēb*
> *ḥizqû 'al-tîrā'û*
> *hinnēh 'ĕlōhêkem*
> *nāqām yābô'*
> *gĕmûl 'ĕlōhîm*
> *hû' yābô' wĕyōša'ăkem*
> Say to those who are of a fearful heart,
> "Be strong, fear not!
> Behold, your God
> will come with vengeance,
> with the recompense of God.
> He will come and save you."

It is obvious that the word *nāqām,* 'vengeance,' has only one possible meaning: punishment of the culpable. But the roots *šlm* and *gml* are, so far as their primary meaning is concerned, neutral. The basic sense of *šlm* is 'to be complete'; only secondarily can it signify recompense in the punitive sense. The basic meaning of *gml* is 'to render, do (good or evil)'; in 35:4c the noun *gĕmûl* signifies the positive aspect of recompense.[26]

The poet's modes of expression are essentially rhetorical. We can note his intentional play on the sound of the same words in chapter 34. There is an intimate connection between thought rhythm and sound rhythm. Paronomasia is evident in 34:3b+4a, 4b, 6c, 11b, 14a. Chapter 35 is more moderate in its use of imagery and rhetorical devices than its predecessor, and it is generally recognized that it is partly dependent on Isa 40–55. It is possible that chapters 34 and 35 were not composed at the same time and by the same author, but were subsequently juxtaposed. The hyperbolic use of imagery in chapter 34 and the universalist background of the threat of judgment in its first four verses make it plain that Edom is addressed, in 34:5–17, as a typical nation. There must have been good reasons for this choice. Quite a few prophecies elsewhere are directed against Edom,[27] and they show that Edom must have been Israel's greatest enemy, particularly in the most difficult periods of her history.

4. *Conclusion*

The theme of chapters 24–27 and 34–35 of the book of Isaiah is the universal eschatological judgment upon nations and the deliverance of the remnant of Israel. The texts of the two sections disclose an intimate connection between a particular historical background, a synthetic way of thinking, and the use of certain literary-rhetorical devices. The description of imminent judgment is more or less general so far as the naming of the object, the time, and the circumstances of the judgment are concerned.

The main reasons for this generalization are the definite monotheism and the historical circumstances that occasioned the composition of these chapters. After the total devastation of Judah and the fall of Jerusalem (587 B.C.E.), the Jews were subjected to all kinds of oppression by foreign rulers and their collaborators. They believed that their situation was totally in contradiction to the postulates of God's sovereignty and justice. So it became a

[26] See W. Eisenbeis, *Die Wurzel šlm im Alten Testament* (BZAW 113; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1969); K. Seybold, "Zwei Bemerkungen zu *gml/gmwl*," *VT* 22 (1972), 112–117; G. Gerleman, "Die Wurzel *šlm*," *ZAW* 85 (1973), 1–14; A. Lauha, "'Dominus benefecit': Die Wortwurzel גמל und die Psalmenfrömmigkeit," *ASTI* 11 (1978), 57–62.

[27] Cf. Isa 63:1–6; Jer 49:7–22; Ezek 24:12–14; 32:29; 35:1–15; Joel 4:19; Amos 1:11–12; Obad; Mal 1:2–5; Ps 137:7; Lam 4:21–22.

matter of practical reason to expect an imminent divine intervention that would lead to a final turning point in history. The more chaotic the actual situation, the stronger their expectation of an eschatological turn of events. The suffering remnant of Israel became more and more able to comprehend the widest and deepest dimensions of God's kingdom. Their beliefs opened to them infinite horizons stretching back towards the very beginning and forwards until the completion of the world. The same, or a similar, historical situation and intensive reflection produced the etiological narrative about creation in Gen 1:1–2:4a; the admiration of the Creator's timeless and transcendent wisdom in Deutero-Isaiah, Psalm 104, and Job 38–42; and the manner in which prophecies of eschatological judgment are set forth.

The intimate connection between etiological and eschatological perspectives must have been the decisive criterion in the perceiving and describing of God's imminent judgment by our writer. Challenged by the fundamental question of justice in the world, he could be certain that God would intervene and destroy all the forces of evil. At the same time he knew that God must remain totally free in determining the time and manner of this final turn of events. The certainty that the final judgment will take place on the one hand, and the uncertainty concerning the manner of God's dispensing it on the other conditioned the modes of expression used: they remained as general as possible.

The people of Israel could, however, envisage even the universal final judgment only within the framework of God's revelation to them. Accordingly, judgment must affect first of all Israel's closest enemies, because they have infringed the very foundations of God's law and his plan for Israel; and salvation will be granted first of all to the people of Israel because their guilt has been expiated. The vision of imminent judgment is based on the traditional belief that God ruthlessly destroys all who are proud and self-sufficient, but delivers the poor and the faithful who proclaim: "Thy name alone we acknowledge" (26:13b).

CHAPTER XXI

GOD'S FATHERLY CORRECTION AND THE CONVERSION OF THE NATIONS

In the Bible, Egypt and Assyria—and indeed all Mesopotamian empires—are virtually synonyms for ungodliness, oppression and perfidy. The primeval history, for instance, ends with the condemnation of the people of Mesopotamia who planned to form an enduring and coherent community and to "make a name" for themselves by building the tower of Babel (cf. Gen 11:1–9). The prophets condemned Israel's rulers because they had turned to such unacceptable sources for help (cf. Isa 18:1–7; 20:1–6; 28:14–15; 30:1–7; 31:1–3; Hos 7:11; 12:2; Ezek 16:1–43; 23:1–49; 29:16) and in so doing had become unfaithful to their people's God by placing their trust in Egypt or Assyria. Nonetheless, Isaiah 19, the book of Jonah, and some other books or passages of the Hebrew Bible (cf. Ruth; Job; Prov 1–9; Isa 2:2–4; Zech 2:13; Mal 1:11) open wide the door to an unlimited universalism: God turns to the nations in order to save them, and the result is an astounding vision of their capacity to acknowledge Israel's God and to accept divine fatherly correction. Moreover, according to the foresights of Isa 19:23–25, Egypt and Assyria will one day live in harmony because of their common submission to God, and Israel, together with them, will become the people of God.

Historical experience hardly supports the dream of an ideal community of the three peoples found in Isa 19:16–25, nor does it encourage acceptance of the book of Jonah's account of the heathen's response to the prophetic word. Nevertheless, the biblical writers manifest a spirit of certainty, because they believe that God, the Creator of the universe, transcends all human limitations and can therefore surprise us with the unexpected. Their transmission of divine ways to human beings is so clairvoyant that their vision transcends a mere contrast between traditional Jewish particularism and the final victory of ethnic universalism. They penetrate into the deepest moral predicaments natural to Hebrew monotheistic beliefs. Their point of view reflects the contrast between universal human mental and moral limitations, as reflected in animosity and alienation among human beings, and the magnanimity of divine righteousness, as manifested in acts of grace and mercy. Hence the implication that divine promises are in the last resort unconditional, even though penitence is the usual and universal condition for attaining divine forgiveness and peace. The duality of God's unconditional attachment to creation, and the conditional nature of divine promises and threats, may enhance the impression that God both afflicts and heals in a manner beyond comprehension by the human mind.

1. *The Healing of Egypt through Judgment and the Creation of a Universal Chosen People: Isaiah 19:16–25*

Isaiah 19 consists of two very different parts: the first (vv. 1–15) is a prophecy against Egypt composed in poetic form; the second (vv. 16–25) moves from poetry to prose and from judgment upon Egypt to a sweeping and almost unparalleled promise that all nations will live in harmony because of their common submission to God. The first part depicts the effects of God's visitation upon Egypt in three sections: political and social confusion (vv. 1–4); destruction of the entire country by the drying up of the Nile (vv. 5–10); and the futility of Egyptian wisdom (vv. 11–15). The second part consists of six oracles of varying length, each introduced by the phrase *bayyôm hahû'*, "In that day": Egypt under the terror (vv. 16–17); the beginning of its conversion (v. 18); the completion of that conversion and God's revelation to Egypt (vv. 19–21a); acknowledgment of God and God's blows, designed to heal Egypt (vv. 21b–22); the ending of alienation and separation by means of a highway from Egypt to Assyria (v. 23); and the "blessed" community of Egypt, Assyria, and Israel (vv. 24–25). The phrase "In that day" is a formula often used to introduce an announcement of God's intention. By employing it six times, the writer indicates an unspecified but decisive divine intervention in world affairs (cf. Isa 4:1, 2; 7:18–23; 10:20; 11:10; 17:4, 7; 24:21; 27:1, 2; 30:23; 31:7).[1]

Many interpreters have attempted to determine the historical background of the two parts, their date of composition, and their function in the overall scheme of chapters 13–23, which deal with God's judgment on the nations.[2]

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[1] For further information about the place and the import of the formula in Isaiah and elsewhere, se A. Lefèvre, "L'expression 'en se jour-là' dans le livre d'Isaïe," *Mélanges bibliques rédigés en l'honneur de André Robert* (TICP 4; Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1957), 174–179. Lefèvre sums up his findings on p. 179: the formula does not in itself have an eschatological value; it never relates to a particular date but always to a manifestation of divine power in history; it denotes conflict between darkness and light, but the victory of the light may be deferred to a remote and indefinite future ideal.

[2] Amongst commentaries on the book of Isaiah, see especially F. Delitzsch, *Commentar über das Buch Jesaia* (BC 3; Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 4th ed., 1889); B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaia* (HK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1892; 5th ed. 1968); T. K. Cheyne, *Introduction to the Book of Isaiah* (London: A & C. Black, 1895); K. Marti, *Das Buch Jesaja* (KHC X; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1900); G. B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah I–XXVII* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912); O. Procksch, *Jesaia,* vol. 1 (KAT IX; Leipzig: D. W. Scholl, 1930); E. J. Kissane, *The Book of Isaiah,* vol. 1 (Dublin: Browne & Nolan, 1941); R. B. Y. Scott, G. G. D. Kilpatrick, J. Muilenburg, and H. S. Coffin, *The Book of Isaiah* (IntB 5; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1956), 151–773; A. Penna, *Isaia* (SB; Turin / Rome: Marietti, 1958); O. Kaiser, *Der Prophet Jesaja: Kapitel 13–39* (ATD 18; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973); English translation by R. A. Wilson, *Isaiah 13–39: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1974); P. H. Kelley, *The Broadman Bible Commentary,* vol. 5 (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1971); P. Auvray, *Isaïe 1–39* (SB; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1972); A. S. Herbert, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah: Chapters 1–39* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); H. Wildberger, *Jesaja: Kap. 1–39,* 3 vols. (BK.AT X/1–3; Neukirchen-Vluyn:

The very general nature of the political allusion, however, makes it extremely difficult to come to any sure conclusion regarding the historical setting and the date of the chapter. This is particularly true of the oracles in prose (19:16–26). They have been assigned to various periods from the eighth to the third centuries B.C.E. Most exegetes think that both the style and content of this part of the chapter would best suit the early or late Persian period. But no attempt to adduce sufficient argument in favour of a particular period has gained broad agreement. One of the reasons for this difficulty in interpretation lies in the considerable differences in rendering found in some places in the ancient versions.[3]

A close reading of the text supports those who are primarily concerned with the theological outlook of the passage rather than its historical allusions, and accordingly interpret it against the background of the characteristic patterns of biblical typology.[4] The classical patterns are these: God's striking of Egypt and the first Exodus of Israel as a metaphor for a variety of types of a new exodus; the tradition of the conquest of Canaan as an image of a new conquest; God's fatherly correction of the rebellious people in order to bring about repentance and a new covenant. All these patterns of inner-biblical exegeses are based on a particular understanding of God as the Creator and Ruler of the universe. The composition of the oracles in Isa 19:16–25 clearly reflects this theological background, as it is pervaded by the fundamental duality of divine punishment and salvation. The most astonishing feature of the present passage is that the writer assigns to Egypt and Assyria the grace of divine election that was supposed to be the peculiar privilege of the people of Israel.

The present composition of 19:16–25 is characterized by tension between God's threat (vv. 16–17), the description of the effects of God's dealing with Egypt (vv. 18–22), and the promise of a new chosen people (vv. 23–25). Yet its crucial theological point shines out very clearly: the judgment upon Egypt is seen as a fatherly correction intended to move the Egyptians to repentance and to bring about a change of heart in the attitude of the whole country towards the true God. Indeed, the promise refers to realities that are beyond the record of historical experiences but are deeply rooted in

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Neukirchener Verlag, 1972–1982); R. E. Clements, *Isaiah 1–39* (NCBC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1980); J. D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33* (WBC 24; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985); J. N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39* (NIC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W .B. Eerdmans, 1986).

[3] For comparison between the MT and the LXX, see the study by A. van der Kooij, "The Old Greek of Isaiah 19:16–25: Translation and Interpretation," *LXX: VI Congress of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies: Jerusalem 1986* (ed. C. E. Cox; SeptCogSt 23; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1987) 127–166.

[4] See W. Vogels, "L'Égypte mon peuple—L'Universalisme d'Is 19,16–25," *Biblica* 57 (1976), 494–514; C. Schvindt, "Analisis literario y de la relectura de las tradiciones en Isaias 19,16–25," *RevBib* 48 (1986), 51–59.

human longing for an ideal future age; therefore it gives evidence of being of timeless significance.[5]

1.1 *The Land of Judah Shall Strike Terror into Egypt: 19:16–17*

This first statement forms a transition between the preceding prophecy of judgment against Egypt and the following oracles of salvation. It announces a visitation of Egypt by God expressed in terms borrowed from the story of the conquest of Canaan:

> In that day the Egyptians will be like women, and tremble with fear before the hand which the Lord of hosts shakes over them *('ālâw)*. And the land of Judah *('admat yĕhûdāh)* will become a terror to the Egyptians; every one to whom it is mentioned *(yazkîr)* will fear because of the purpose which the Lord of hosts has purposed over them *('ālâw)*.

Individual words, phrases or images are reminiscent of several passages from the traditions of Israel's confrontation with the Egyptians, of the conquest, and of the later history of Israel. Following the plagues, the Egyptians were terrified by the presence of the Israelites (cf. Exod 10:7; 12:33). The image of women trembling with fear evokes the two different circumstances that caused trembling among the nations: the report of the approaching people of Israel (cf. Exod 15:14–16; 23:27; Deut 2:25; 11:25; Josh 2:9–10; Ps 105:38) and the restoration of Israel (cf. Jer 33:9; Mic 7:15–17). On the other hand, Israel is mentioned as trembling like a woman in travail because of anguish inflicted on her by the nations (cf. Isa 13:8; Jer 4:31; 30:5–7; Mic 4:9–10). The female motif is further employed as a metaphor for humiliating powerlessness within the context of God's judgment upon Babylon and Nineveh (cf. Jer 50:37; 51:30; Nah 3:13). The motif of trembling, unconnected with the image of a woman, appears in Isa 41:5 in an announcement of the conversion of all nations: "The coastlands have seen and are afraid, the ends of the earth tremble ..."

The shaking of God's hand over Egypt is a motif that recalls Israel's deliverance from Egypt through God's power demonstrated in the figure of Moses at the first exodus (cf. Exod 14:26–28; 15:12; Deut 5:15; Isa 51:9–10). The writer may also be thinking of the blows caused by the ten plagues that struck the Egyptians. The exodus from Egypt became a classical typological model for promises of a new exodus: "In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant which is left of his

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[5] A. Feuillet chooses for his presentation of Isa 19:16–25 the title "Un sommet religieux de l'Ancien Testament"; see *Études d'exégèse et de théologie biblique: Ancien Testament* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1975), 261–279. Impressed by the import of the last section of the passage, I. Wilson exclaims in his article "In That Day: From Text to Sermon on Isaiah 19:23–25," *Interpretation* 21 (1967), 66–86: "Will you believe me when I tell you that no more astounding words than these have ever been spoken or written?" (p. 66).

people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Ethiopia, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea" (Isa 11:11; cf. 11:15–16; 13:2; Zech 2:13; 10:10–11). In the visions of Zechariah there is a duality in the divine attitude to the nations. In 2:13 God declares: "Behold, I will shake my hand over them, and they shall become plunder for those who served them ...". But in 2:15 the purpose of this action is revealed: "And many nations shall join themselves to the Lord in that day, and shall be my people ..." Sirach employs the image of the shaking of God's hand in relation to the nations when asking for mercy towards Israel: "Lift up thy hand against foreign nations and let them see thy might" (36:3).

In addition to the images of the trembling and shaking of God's hand, there is further evidence that the writer of Isa 19:16–17 refers primarily to the first exodus: at the "mention" of the "land of Judah" the Egyptians will be overwhelmed by fear as were Egypt and Canaan of old. According to biblical tradition, the Israelites or the "land of Judah" did not strike fear into the nations because of their own importance and power, but because of God's might (cf. Zech 12:5). The entire outlook of Isa 19:16–25 shows that the Egyptians will be terrified when they remember *(yazkîr)* "the purpose which the Lord of hosts has purposed over them." The expression *'ālâw* at the end of the two verses obviously does not relate to the fate of the Egyptians of old who resisted the divine will until they were destroyed. The writer envisions a completely different outcome of the divine judgment upon Egypt; God's purpose "over them" is a hidden purpose for salvation.[6] From the duality of the human attitude towards divine sovereignty it follows that God's ways in relation to humankind may produce a double effect: they bring about both the humiliation of human pride (cf. Jer 49:20; 50:45; Mic 4:12) and the exaltation and salvation of a willing people (cf. Isa 46:10–11; Pss 73:24; 106:13). In any case, the divine purpose fills the human mind and heart with fear, because it destroys faltering human security in order to make room for the firm foundations of the kingdom of God.

1.2 *Punishment Brings About the Healing and Conversion of Egypt: 19:18–22*

The second oracle (19:18) is the most problematic verse in the whole passage; it announces in very vague terms some kind of conversion within five Egyptian cities:

> In that day there will be five cities in the land of Egypt which speak the language of Canaan and swear allegiance to the Lord of hosts. One of these will be called the City of the Sun.

[6] It can therefore be misleading to read the word *'ālâw* in 19:17 with the RSV and some other versions as meaning "against them."

Many widely differing interpretations have been proposed: some regard "five cities" as a round figure for "a few cities"; some relate "the language of Canaan" to the Jewish diaspora in Egypt, others to Egyptians who have adopted (or will adopt) Hebrew; identification of the cities differs, especially of the one city that is named and emphasized.[7] An examination of the proposed solutions leads one to the conclusion that, in spite of some geographical and historical background, the import of the verse is primarily metaphorical (symbolical): in accordance with the context, the prophet intends to convey the idea that Egyptians (not Jews) will, at some time, turn to the true God of the Hebrews in radical fashion, even though the beginning of their conversion will not be complete.

The third and fourth oracles (19:19–22) together express the depth of the future relationship between God and Egypt:

> In that day there will be an altar *(mizbēaḥ)* to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar *(maṣṣēbāh)* to the Lord at its border. It will be a sign and a witness *(wĕhāyāh lĕ'ôt ûlĕ'ēd)* to the Lord of hosts in the land of Egypt; when they cry to the Lord because of oppressors he will send them a saviour *(môšîa')*, and will defend and deliver them. And the Lord will make himself known to the Egyptians *(wĕnôda' yhwh lĕmiṣrayim)*; and the Egyptians will know the Lord *(wĕyādĕ'û miṣrayim 'et-yhwh)* in that day and worship with sacrifice and burnt offering *(wĕ'ābĕdû zebaḥ ûminḥāh)*, and they will make vows to the Lord and perform them. And the Lord will smite Egypt, smiting and healing *(nāgōp wĕrāpō')*, and they will return *(wĕšābû)* to the Lord, and he will heed their supplications and heal them *(wĕne'tar lāhem ûrĕpā'ām)*.

Verses 19–20a mention the erection of an altar and a pillar to "be a sign and a witness" to the existence of God's worshippers among the Egyptians. The emphasis on witnessing recalls the building of an altar of considerable size by the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh in the vicinity of the river Jordan. Accused by other tribes of turning away from following the Lord, they justified their action by explaining that they were not motivated by rebellion against the Lord but by the desire to have a *witness* of unity among the tribes of the various parts of the people of Israel: the altar "is a witness between us that the Lord is God" (Josh 22:34; cf. 22:27–28). The writer of Isa 19:19–20a does not give any lengthier explanation of the erection of the altar by the Egyptians. But a kind of justification is implied, both by the reference to the episode in Josh 12 and by the favourable attitude of God towards the Egyptians. This helps us to understand why the writer even ventured to announce the erection of a pillar *(maṣṣēbāh)*, something that was once strictly forbidden in Israel (cf. Exod 23:24; 34:13; Deut

[7] According to the best Hebrew manuscripts, the city is called *'îr haheres*, "City of Destruction"; but the LXX has the rendering *pólis asedék*, "City (of) Asedek," that obviously derives from the Hebrew word *'îr haṣṣedeq*, "City of Righteousness." The Hebrew text suggests that Egyptians will swear by the name of the Lord, whereas the LXX interpreter has the Jews in mind.

7:5; 12:3; 16:22; 1 Kgs 14:23, etc.). In ancient times, the symbols of pillars were traps for Israel because of the implied pagan religious beliefs and practices. Once religious attitudes are seen to be in accordance with God's law, these same pillars may serve as the symbols of a new era of salvation. The pillar mentioned at this time is connected with the symbol of the altar, but in addition it probably demarcates the extent of the converted region.[8] Both symbols are considered as an expression of Egypt's act of entering into covenant relation with the God of Israel. In this perspective the question of whether the pillars were set up by the Jews or by the Egyptians – or by the Jews and Egyptians jointly – is not of great importance. What is crucial is the promise that they will symbolize the privilege enjoyed by both the Jews and Egyptians of being God's chosen people.

Reference to the early history of Israel is recognizable also in v. 20b. Here the writer employs the pattern expressing the relationship between God and Israel in times of oppression: the people cried out for help; in response to that cry God sent a deliverer (cf. Exod 2:23b–25; 3:7–8, 12, 16–18; 6:2–8; Judg 3:9, 15; 4:3; 6:7–10; 10:10–16; 2 Kgs 13:4–5). Sometimes it is stated (on other occasions only implied) that the affliction of Israel was unleashed by her sin. Distress and the experience of a need for divine help moved the people to repentance and submission to God's guidance. By applying the tradition of Israel's crying out for help and divine deliverance to the case of the Egyptians, the writer demonstrates that Egypt will experience God in the same way as Israel did. This similarity is striking because God first delivered the people of Israel when they cried out for help while being crushed under Egyptian oppressors: "I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians ..." (Exod 3:7–8). All the more is it manifest that the writer of Isa 19:20a must have had in mind, first of all, the conversion and then the submission of Egypt to the God of Israel.

By delivering Egypt, "the Lord will make himself known *(nôda')* to the Egyptians" (19:21a; cf. Ezek 20:5). In times past, the Egyptians were compelled to come to know God through the power of a divine judgment that broke down Pharaoh's stubbornness (cf. Exod 5:2; 7:5, 17; 8:6, 18; 9:14, 29; 10:2; 11:7; 14:4, 18; see also Ezek 29:6, 9, 16; 30:8, 19, 25–26; 32:15); but the Hebrews came to know, through the judgment upon Egypt, that God alone can save them from their slavery, as God had declared in Exod 6:6–8: "I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment *(bišpāṭîm*

[8] See A. Feuillet, *Ancien Testament,* 267.

gĕdōlîm), and I will take you for my people *(wĕlāqaḥtî 'etkem lî lĕ'ām),* and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the Lord your God *(wîda'tem kî 'ănî yhwh 'ĕlōhêkem),* who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. ..." (cf. 10:2; 11:7; 14:13, 31). "In that day" in the future, God will reveal to the Egyptians the positive side of the divine nature—mercy and salvation—by taking them as his people. In turn, "the Egyptians will know the Lord in that day and worship with sacrifice and burnt offering ..." (19:21b): they will acknowledge the Lord as the true God and the only Saviour (cf. Isa 43:10; 45:3; 60:16; Jer 9:23; Hos 2:22; 13:4, 5); they will recognize God as their ultimate authority, the source of life and the only worthy subject of their worship. The mention of worship recalls the purpose of Israel's exodus from Egypt, which was to serve the Lord (cf. Exod 3:12, 18; 4:23; 5:1, 3, 8; 7:16, 26; 8:4, 16, 21–25; 9:1, 13; 10:7–11, 24, 26; 12:32). In the days of Moses, the Egyptians did everything they could to impede Israel's worship of her God outside Egypt; "in that day" the Egyptians will worship the Lord in their own country. The very nature of the relationship between God and humankind and the sequence of God's and Egypt's knowledge suggest that God will not "make himself known to the Egyptians" as a result of their conversion and worship. Their turning to God in a radical way will be a matter for a sovereign divine decision, when the time is ripe. But the openness of the Egyptians, their capacity to learn from the divine discipline, and especially their suffering, may bring about the acceleration of the coming of such a time of grace.

The proverbial negative role of Egypt in the whole of Jewish tradition—rather than any historical allusion in Isa 19:16–25—occasions the use of the antithetic metaphors of smiting // healing in 19:22. The statement "and they will return to the Lord" clearly shows that the shift from smiting to healing is conditional. The ways used to describe Egypt in the future could not be different from those found elsewhere in the Bible. We note how Jeremiah had to proclaim the principle of God's dealing with the nations: "If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will repent of the evil that I intended to do to it. ..." (Jer 18:7–11). The returning of the Egyptians implies their cry for help—here expressed by the phrase *wĕne'tar lāhem wĕrĕpā'ām,* "and he will heed their supplications and heal them." We note that the verb *'ātar,* 'entreat,' appears in the Hebrew Bible 20 times, and 8 of these occurrences are found in the account of the conflict between Moses and Pharaoh (cf. Exod 10:4, 5, 24, 25, 26; 9:28; 10:17, 18). When Egypt had been stricken by ever harsher plagues, Moses had been repeatedly asked by the Pharaoh to entreat the Lord on behalf of the Egyptians to grant surcease of their suffering. In Exod 10:16b–17, for instance, Pharaoh begs: "I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you. Now therefore, forgive my sin, I pray you, only this

once, and entreat the Lord your God only to remove this death from me." Moses was always willing to intercede for Pharaoh and for his people, but as soon as God heeded Moses' supplication and removed a particular plague, Pharaoh hardened his heart and did not let the Israelites go. So Pharaoh's duality of purpose or outlook, stemming from his stubbornness, finally made God's accession to Moses' supplication impossible. The vision of a converted Egypt, however, puts the divine assent to such a supplication clearly in the foreground. This implies that the Egyptians are guilty but able to repent; and in the process of their conversion a new Moses will come to play an important role.

The antithetic terms of smiting // healing, or their synonyms, appear in a few passages elsewhere: Deut 31:39; Hos 6:1–2; Isa 30:26; 53:5; 57:16–19. Healing alone, in the sense of divine forgiveness and restoration, is proclaimed in Hos 14:5; Jer 3:22a; Pss 103:3; 107:20; 147:3; 2 Chr 7:14, but denied in Isa 6:10; Hos 5:13. The first two passages cited are especially illuminating for our treatment of the oracle in Isa 19:22. In Deut 32:39, for example, we discover the declaration of a principle:

> See now that I, even I, am he,
> and there is no god beside me;
> I kill and I make alive (*'ănî 'āmît wa'ĕḥayyeh*);
> I wound and I heal (*māḥaṣtî wa'ănî 'erpā'*):
> and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.

It is obvious that the two antithetic pairs function primarily as a rhetorical and stylistic device—merism—expressing the totality of God's sovereignty and power. However, the merism also implies the reasons for the opposing divine actions: either punishment of human guilt or healing after repentance. This point is brought into focus in Hos 6:1–2, which is an exhortation to return to the Lord:

> Come, let us return to the Lord *(lĕkû wĕnāšûbāh 'el-yhwh);*
> for he has torn, that he may heal us;
> he has stricken, and he will bind us up.
> After two days he will revive us;
> on the third day he will raise us up,
> that we may live before him.

1.3 *The Blessed Community of Egypt, Assyria, and Israel: 19:23–25*

In the fifth and the sixth oracles (19:23–25) the writer announces the removal of alienation between the nations as well as the formation of a new chosen people uniting Assyria, Egypt and Israel:

> In that day there will be a highway *(mĕsillāh)* from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians *(wĕ'ābĕdû miṣrayim 'et-'aššûr).* In that

> day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people *(bārûk 'ammî miṣrayim)* and Assyria the work of my hands *(ûma'ăśēh yāday 'aššûr)*, and Israel my heritage *(wĕnaḥălātî yiśrā'ēl)*."

In the remote past there existed international routes that connected Mesopotamia and Egypt. Very often they served, with the help of soldiers and chariots, to define an enmity between powers. "Highway" is a metaphor for the establishment of swift and open communication between countries, and the end-result of war was that "the highways are deserted" (cf. Isa 33:8). All the more impressive, then, is the announcement of a new exodus of the people of Israel walking on "a highway from Assyria, for the remnant which is left of his people, as there had been for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt" (Isa 11:16; cf. 35:8; 43:3; 49:11; 57:14; 62:10; Jer 31:21). In Isa 19:23 the writer announces the abolition of wars and the friendly passage of the nations to and from one another's countries on the basis of their common allegiance to God (cf. Isa 11:6; 33:8; 35:8; 40:3; 49:11; 62:10). In accordance with the entire outlook of the oracle and in reference to 19:21b, it is generally assumed that in the phrase *wĕ'ābĕdû miṣrayim 'et-'aššûr* (19:23b) the verb *'ābad* signifies worship of God; it is therefore seen as intransitive, and the particle *'et* must be taken as a preposition with the meaning 'with': Egypt shall worship (the Lord) together with Assur.[9]

19:24–25 envisages a fulfilment of the promise to Abraham. Israel is imagined as "the third with Egypt and Assyria"; so she is about to reach her ultimate role of being a blessing for the nations (cf. Gen 12:1–3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; Ps 47:7–10; see also Zech 8:13). In this sense, she can be considered *primus inter pares*. In 19:25b, we find the titles that characteristically designate the privileges of Israel: "my people" (cf. Deut 9:26, 29; 1 Kgs 8:51; Isa 10:24; 43:6, 7; Hos 1:10; 2:23; Jer 11:4); "the work of my hands" (cf. 60:21; 64:7; Pss 119:73; 138:8); and "my heritage" (cf. Deut 4:20; 9:26, 29; 32:9; 1 Kgs 8:51, 53; Mic 7:14; Pss 28:9; 47:5; 78:71; 94:5). By attributing these titles to Egypt and Assyria as synonyms, the writer announces that all three will become the people of God, permeated by a divine blessing which is the sole source of life. The phrase "the work of my hands" recalls the theme of creation in relation to Israel or to human beings in general (cf. Deut 32:6; Isa 41:20; 43:1, 15; 44:2, 24; 45:11; Ps 100:3). Its use in this context is of primary importance, for in creation lies the indisputable reason for the victory of universalism over against all kinds of ethnic particularism.

The promise in 19:23–25 has survived in its original integrity, but the authors of ancient versions have suppressed its noble universalist ideas.

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[9] See the explanation of the tribes accused in Josh 22:27: they did not build an altar for offerings, "but to be a witness between us and you, and between the generations after us, that we do perform the service of the Lord *(la'ăbōd 'et-'ăbōdat yhwh)* in his presence ..."

First, they read 19:23b as: "The Egyptians will serve the Assyrians." This rendering implies subjugation of Egypt to Assyria, something that is incompatible with the context. Verse 24, as presented in the MT, is maintained in the Targum, but the Septuagint offers a different version: "In that day Israel shall be third amongst the Assyrians and the Egyptians, blessed on the earth." Here the reference is not to the countries of Israel, Egypt, and Assur, but to their peoples; and Israel is envisaged as playing an important role among the Assyrians and the Egyptians. Accordingly, the author of the Septuagint refers 19:25 to the Jewish diaspora in Egypt and Assyria and speaks only of Israel as the blessed people: "(the earth) which the Lord Sabaoth blessed by saying: 'Blessed be my people in Egypt and among Assyrians, and my inheritance, Israel.'" The Targum, on the other hand, presents a totally different version of God's declaration of blessing in 19:25b by giving special attention to the punishment, the repentance and the salvation of Israel: "Blessed are my people whom I brought forth from Egypt; because they sinned before me I exiled them to Assyria, and now that they repent they are called my people and my heritage, Israel."[10]

2. *Salvation of the Rebellious Prophet Jonah and of the Penitent Heathen Sinners*

The book of Jonah is a didactic and satirical novella presented in a dramatic narrative rich in comic and ironic effects. The narrator shows no sign of any historical interest, for all historical details concerning Jonah's origin, the setting of his activity, or the factual circumstances of the cities mentioned are lacking. The "great city" Nineveh is not presented in the framework of its current geographical and historical situation; it stands for the essence of human self-exaltation in a great and wicked world. We note that Jonah, the son of Amittai, is the only character to be given a name.[11] The book's whole

[10] For the translation, see B. D. Chilton, *The Isaiah Targum* (AB 11; Wilmington, Del.: M. Glazier, 1987), 39; see also J. F. Stenning, *The Targum of Isaiah* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), 62.

[11] The name of the prophet Jonah is elsewhere mentioned only in 2 Kgs 14:25. This passage reveals that Jonah was a prophet of salvation when it reports that Jeroboam II (787–747) "restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher. For the Lord saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter, for there was none left, bond or free, and there was none to help Israel. But the Lord had not said that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, so he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash" (14:25–27). This passage emphasizes the bestowing of God's pity on Israel in spite of the wickedness of Jeroboam. It seems most likely that the prophet of the book of Jonah is identified with the prophet from Gath-hepher because a prophecy of salvation in favour of Israel usually implied a prophecy of doom in relation to other nations. H. W. Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, 98, claims: "These memoranda in 2 Kings

concern is concentrated on the emotional tension between the explicit divine command communicated to Jonah and his resistance to it from the beginning to the end. The narrative develops in two main parts, which can be characterized thus: Jonah is saved, in spite of his opposition to proclaiming divine judgment to the city of Nineveh (chaps. 1–2); Jonah's announcement of doom in Nineveh induces the repentance of all its inhabitants and God repents of the evil proclaimed (chaps. 3–4).

From the literary point of view the most important feature of the story is the persistent use of surprise gaps.[12] The narrator intentionally employs ambiguous statements in order to sustain the tension and to provide the reader with surprising solutions. Gradually he discloses the real motives for his earlier statements and actions. The crucial statement is the undefined divine order to Jonah in 1:2: "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness has come up before me." Only because of the narrator's statement in 3:10 and Jonah's complaint in 4:2–3 is it made clear that the burden of the divine order to Jonah was not to announce the impending doom of the Ninevites but to warn them into repentance. And this divine attitude occasions a fundamental contrast between the characters of God and Jonah.

These gaps are only partly filled in by the narrative itself; some crucial issues raised by the attitudes and the statements of the two main characters call for further clarification, even though the narrator appears omniscient and obviously favours the divine attitude as indicated in the book. It follows that any valid interpretation has to consider several sources of the crucial statements: first, the entire outlook of the story; secondly, the whole of the biblical traditions from the same period; thirdly, the predicament native to the book's underlying monotheistic beliefs.[13] Since the narrator is a master of persuasion, all possible means, and especially common sense, play their part in this interaction.

The history of the interpretation of this book shows that individual statements were misinterpreted, because they were taken out of the context of the book and of main-stream Jewish tradition. By destroying the necessary balance, some interpreters have missed the narrator's main concern.[14]

14:23–29 will have been known to our postexilic writer. An Israelite prophet of salvation fitted his story, for any such prophet was already per se a prophet of judgment for Israel's enemies."

[12] M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 318, has well discerned that the tale of Jonah "is the only biblical instance where a surprise gap controls the reader's progress over a whole book."

[13] There is a wide diversity of opinion about the date which should be ascribed to the book, but most exegetes find enough indications to justify an early or later post-Exilic period. At that time, monotheistic beliefs in Israel were not in question.

[14] For a comparison of views, see especially the following commentaries and special studies: J. A. Bewer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jonah* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912); A. Feuillet, "Les sources du livre de Jonas," *RB* 54 (1947), 161–186; idem, "Le sens du livre de Jonas," *RB* 54 (1947), 340–361 = *Ancien Testament,* 395–433: "Le livre de Jo-

2.1 *Jonah Saved despite His Rebellious Attitude: Jonah 1–2*

The opening section (1:1–3) creates emotional tension by means of hints that are easily overlooked; but when observed they may evoke various contrasting connotations and feelings:

> Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go *(qûm lēk)* to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it *(ûqĕrā' 'ālêhā);* for their wickedness has come up before me *(kî 'ālĕtāh rā'ātām lĕpānāy).*" But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.

The formula of God's address to Jonah follows the characteristic pattern of communicating the divine will to the prophets. God gives Jonah the succinct command that he should go to the "great city" of Nineveh and cry "against" it, but without an explanation of what precisely was the purpose of his commission. We note that the statement "for their wickedness has come up before me" strikingly recalls God's investigation of the situation in Sodom

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nas"; G. H. Cohn, *Das Buch Jona: Im Lichte der biblischen Erzählkunst* (SSN 12; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1969); Y.-M. Duval, *Le livre de Jonas dans la littérature chrétienne grecque et latine,* 2 vols. (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1973); J. D. W. Watts, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); L. C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah* (NIC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 1976); H. W. Wolff, *Obadja und Jona* (BK 14/3; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1977); English translation by M. Kohl, *Obadiah and Jonah: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986); E. Levine, "Jonah As a Philosophical Book," *ZAW* 96 (1984), 235–245; A. J. Hauser, "Jonah: In Pursuit of the Dove," *JBL* 104 (1985), 21–37; D. L. Christensen, "The Song of Jonah: A Metrical Analysis," *JBL* 104 (1985), 217–231; D. Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah* (WBC 31; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987); J. M. Sasson, *Jonah* (AB 24B; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1990); A. J. Band, "Swallowing Jonah: The Eclipse of Parody," *Prooftexts* 10 (1990), 177–195; T. Krüger, "Literarisches Wachstum und theologische Diskussion in Jona-Buch," *BN* 59 (1991), 57–88; J. Limburg, *Jonah: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster / J. Knox, 1993); K. M. Craig, *A Poetics of Jonah: Art in the Service of Ideology* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1993); J. Nogalski, *Redactional Processes in the Book of the Twelve* (BZAW 218; Berlin / New York: W. de Gruyter, 1993), esp. pp. 248–280; R. Lux, *Jona: Prophet zwischen "Verweigerung" und "Gehorsam": Eine erzählanalytische Studie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994); J. T. Willis, "The 'Repentance' of God in the Books of Samuel, Jeremiah, and Jonah," *HBTh* 16 (1994), 156–175; E. Beate, "'Denn die Heiden sind der Umkehr nahe': Rabbinische Interpretationen zur Buße der Leute von Ninive," *Die Heiden: Juden, Christen und das Problem des Fremden* (ed. R. Feldmeier and U. Heckel; WUNT 70; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1994), 158–176; J. G. Butler, *Jonah: The Parochial Prophet* (BBS 2; Clinton, Iowa: LBC Publ., 1994); P. Trible, *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1994); Z. H. Lifshitz, *The Paradox of Existence: A Commentary on the Book of Jonah* (Northvale, N.J.: Aronson, 1994); B. K. Smith and F. S. Page, *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah* (NAC 19B; Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 1995); R. F. Person, *In Conversation with Jonah: Conversation Analysis, Literary Criticism, and the Book of Jonah* (JSOT.S 220; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); H. J. Room, *Jona, profeet van God: Bijbelstudie over het Boek Jona* (2nd ed.; Varneveld: De Vuurbaak, 1997); T. M. Bolin, *Freedom beyond Forgiveness: The Book of Jonah Re-examined* (JSOT.S 236; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997); C. B. Houk, "Linguistic Patterns in Jonah," *JSOT* 77 (1998), 81–102.

and Gomorrah (see Gen 18:20–21; cf. Gen 4:10; 1 Sam 5:12; Lam 1:22).[15] In principle, the purpose of God's command could be an announcement of impending destruction or a warning to repent. No messenger of prophetic integrity had ever dared to disobey God's command, whatever the nature of the divine commission (cf. 1 Kgs 17:10; Amos 3:8; Jer 13:5). In moments of uncertainty, the typical attitude of the prophets was one of waiting for the revelation of God's word and an endeavour to transmit it to the people exactly in the sense of God's communication. Jonah, however, does the exact opposite; he does not wait for any further revelation, but immediately decides to flee "away from the presence of the Lord." It is generally agreed that Tarshish meant the remotest distance in the very opposite direction from Nineveh, outside God's effective control (cf. Isa 66:19). From the point of view of Hebrew monotheistic belief, Jonah's attempt to flee somewhere beyond divine reach sounds and ironic, for it is obvious beyond question that Jonah cannot hope to succeed. The appropriate attitude was that of the psalmist: "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? ..." (Ps 139:7–12).

The most striking feature of Jonah's reaction is the total silence about the motive for his decision to escape the divine presence. Was it because of direct disobedience, or out of fear of the "great city" that evoked traditional enmity and notorious wickedness? Proclaiming the impending doom of the Ninevites might incite anger and spell danger.[16] Or it might have other unpleasant implications for the prophet.[17] In any case, the reader is bound to

[15] The visit of the angels indicates that God offered the citizens a chance to disprove the rumours of their wickedness.

[16] Some interpreters assume that the true reason for Jonah's reluctance was his fear of the reaction of the angry Ninevites. Some manuscripts of Tob 14:3–4 reflect such an interpretation; Tobit suggests to his son: "Go into Media, my son, for I surely believe those things which Jonas the prophet spake of Nineve, that it shall be overthrown, and that for a time peace shall rather be in Media ..." Flavius Josephus explains Jonah's motivation more clearly in the *Jewish Antiquities 9.10.2:* "Since I have promised to give an exact account of our history, I have thought it necessary to recount what I have found written in the Hebrew books concerning this prophet. This man, then, having been commanded by God to go to the kingdom of Ninos and, when he arrived there, to preach in that city that it would lose its power, was afraid and did not set out, but fled from God to the city of Jopē, where he found a boat and embarked on it to sail to Tarsus in Cicilia." Translation by R. Marcus, *Josephus,* vol. 6 (LCL 326; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: W. Heinemann, 1987), 109–110.

[17] It is noteworthy that the aggadic work *Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer,* presumably from the ninth century C.E., finds the reason for Jonah's flight from God in fear of the negative consequences of Nineveh's repentance for himself and for Israel: "On the fifth day Jonah fled before his God. Why did he flee? Because on the first occasion when (God) sent him to restore the border of Israel, his words were fulfilled, as it is said, 'And he restored the border of Israel from the entering in of Hamath' (2 Kings XIV. 25). On the second occasion (God) sent him to Jerusalem to (prophesy that He would) destroy it. But the Holy One, blessed be He, did according to the abundance of His tender mercy and repented of the evil (decree), and He did not destroy it; thereupon they called him a lying prophet. On the third occasion (God) sent him against Nineveh to destroy it. Jonah argued with himself, saying, I know that the nations are nigh to re-

ask what is going to happen to one who has attempted to evade God's direct command, and this question will keep him in a state of suspense until the end of the narrative.

In the section 1:4–16, the narrator tries to show that the presence of the rebellious prophet on the ship must have unleashed God's angry reaction. The resistance of "nature" is so powerful that it clearly reveals a divine response to some grave sin. The might of the tempest matches this impression, one given by poetic imagery, as in the case of Jer 23:19–20. The sailors are frightened but react in an exemplary manner. They do all they can and they resort to prayer. Jonah, however, prepares another surprise: seduced by his illusion of a sure and safe escape from God, he goes down into the lowest part of the ship and falls into a deep sleep. So the activity of the sailors is contrasted with the complete passivity of Jonah. Seized by despair and hope, the captain approaches him with an indignant question and a call for prayer: "What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call upon your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we do not perish" (1:6). The use of the word "perhaps" reflects the appropriate understanding of God's sovereignty and total freedom. Keeping Jonah's sin in mind, the narrator sees no reason for the mighty tempest but the prophet's malignant presence, and concludes that Jonah is the only one who can avert the danger of their perishing. But the passenger obviously remains untouched by the panic around him. The seamen conclude that someone on board is personally responsible for their deadly peril, and argue: "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us" (1:7). Casting lots was a familiar procedure in ancient Israel both in searching out a culprit in time of crisis (cf. Josh 7:16–18; 1 Sam 14:40–42) and in choosing an appropriate servant of God (cf. 1 Sam 10:22–24; Ac 1:26). After the lot fell upon Jonah, the narrator brings into focus the eagerness of the heathen to know everything about him, and details of Jonah's origin and mission emerge. He explains: "I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land" (1:9; cf. Gen 24:3, 7; Ps 95:5). This confession of faith in the God of heaven and the creator recalls the belief that God is the ultimate

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pentance, now they will repent and the Holy One, blessed be He, will direct His anger against Israel. And is it not enough for me that Israel should call me a lying prophet; but shall also the nations of the world (do likewise)? Therefore, behold, I will escape from His presence to a place where His glory is not declared. (If) I ascend above the heavens, it is said, 'Above the heavens is his Glory' (Ps. CXIII. 4). (If) above the earth, (it is said), 'The whole earth is full of his glory' (Isa. VI. 3); behold, I will escape to the sea, to a place where His glory is not proclaimed. Jonah went down to Joppa, but he did not find there a ship in which he could embark, for the ship in which Jonah might have embarked was two days' journey away from Joppa, in order to test Jonah. What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He sent against it a mighty tempest on the sea and brought it back to Joppa. Then Jonah saw and rejoiced in his heart, saying, Now I know that my ways will prosper before me." For the translation see G. Friedlander, *Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer* (4th ed.; New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1981), 65–66.

source of power and authority.[18] The sailors do not face God directly but only through his manifestation in a powerful response of divine might to Jonah's sin in breaching God's instruction.[19]

Jonah is again the focus of a surprise. In 1:11–16, the narrator shows the contrast between the attitude of the adherents of a foreign religion and that of the Hebrew Jonah: the crew manifest a genuine fear of God and attempt to save all the passengers, sinful Jonah included; Jonah is conscious of his guilt; he sees the causal link between it and the dire effects of the storm; he knows that he is under sentence of death, and yet does not show any sign of fear of God or repentance. He says to the sailors: "Take me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you; for I know *(kî yôdēa' 'ānî)* it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you" (1:12). The sailors accept these drastic (and astonishing) instructions only after realizing that there is no other way to avert disaster. They turn to God in passionate prayer: "We beseech thee, O Lord, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood; for thou, O Lord, hast done as it pleased thee" (1:14). Their prayer reveals their desire to be agents of divine justice; but they seek a guarantee that they will not incur the curse of bloodguiltiness (cf. Deut 21:8; 2 Sam 1:16; 14:7; Jer 26:15). Finally, they threw Jonah into the sea "and the sea ceased from its raging" (1:15).[20] Their decision possibly implied an awareness that only unconditional submission to the divine will could bring about a solution.

The contrast between vv. 4 and 15 clearly discloses a concentric structure of the section 1:4–16, based on the theological pattern: guilt // punishment; removing the guilty person // reconciliation. The identification of Jonah and his guilt lies in the heart of the passage. The stilling of the sea filled the seamen with fear of God, which matched that caused by the manifestation of divine wrath (1:16a; cf. Mark 4:41 and parallels); and in response to the divine saving power manifested in deliverance from danger they "offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows" (1:16b; cf. Pss 61:8; 116:17–18); both

[18] L. C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah,* 210, says neatly of Jonah's contradictoriness: "The wonder is that Jonah can recite such a creed and yet show disrespect to the commands of the God whose sovereignty it celebrates."

[19] See the comment by J. M. Sasson, *Jonah,* 127, about the concern of the narrator: "His hero is, after all, a prophet, a man with direct access to God, and it would be unthinkable that such a person would not know what must be done. The narrator, therefore, casts the sailors not so much as independent souls who would pluck out the guilty from their midst, but rather as children who must listen attentively to a prophet's instruction."

[20] *Midrash Jonah* interprets the text strongly in the crew's favour: "They took him and placed him into the sea up to his knees, and the storm abated. They lifted him back on board, and the sea became agitated against them. They placed him back up to his neck, and the sea-storm abated. Once again they lifted him back among them, and the sea again agitated against them. Finally they cast him in entirely, and immediately the sea-storm abated." See E. Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Jonah* (2nd ed.; New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1978), 68–69. This interpretation is also cited in the *Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer;* see Friedlander's translation, p. 69.

religious actions signal their thanksgiving and trust in God.

The purpose of the dramatic scene on board ship is to show that there is no way to escape the deathly consequences of rebellion against almighty God. God's dealings with the rebellious prophet are, however, by no means at an end; for God's primary concern is not the fate of the prophet but that of the "great city." Jonah's instruction to the sailors that he should be thrown into the sea reveals that *his* first concern was not deliverance of the ship but evasion of God's commission: he prefers death to fulfilling his frightful task. This decision implies self-judgment; and one would expect that the story of Jonah would end with his self-condemnation. The book provides, however, in the section 1:7–2:10 a surprise beyond all expectation. The final redactor has in mind not only God's absolute determination to bring a prophet to Nineveh but also the importance of instructing the ignorant Jonah.[21]

In principle, there are three imaginable ways in which God could have dealt with Jonah: first, in accordance with the demands of strict justice he could have been abandoned to his self-will or explicitly condemned; secondly, he could have been forced by God against his will to fulfil the divine command; thirdly, he could have been given a fresh understanding of the good reasons for sending him to Nineveh. God chose the third option and restored Jonah undeservedly to life by an unexpected but purposefully miraculous intervention. As the narrator puts it: "And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah ..." (2:1). Three days of a "death experience" in the belly of a fish proved a turning point in the prophetic mind. The narrator introduces the psalm thus: "Then Jonah prayed *(wayyitpallēl)* to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish" (2:2). This change of heart is explained by the traumatic situation: Jonah is faced not only with a theory of life or death but has raw experience of that alternative. From a theological and psychological point of view it is crucial that Jonah should not be saved against his will and finally forced to fulfil his prophetic commission. An enforced deliverance would not bring with it true salvation, and for the people of God a persistently rebellious prophet would be of no value. All the more does it become evident that God's mercy and patience are the only way of saving human beings. After Jonah experiences God's merciful way of dealing with him in the "belly of Sheol," he at last understands why God gives to the world ever new chances to prepare their hearts for salvation. The more Jonah insisted on fleeing the divine presence, the more cogently was he reminded what it means to be committed to God.

[21] There is a wide diversity of opinion about the origin of the psalm found in chapter 2. Some exegetes have pleaded for a single authorship of the prose narrative and the psalm, but the prevailing view is that the psalm was not incorporated into the narrative by the original narrator. In any case, the psalm is right for Jonah's situation and the book was transmitted to us in its present form.

2.2 *God Repents of the Doom Proclaimed—Jonah As Rebuke: Jonah 3–4*

The first two chapters of the book of Jonah end with the narrator's succinct statement: "And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land" (2:11). This paradoxical act of salvation underlines the message that Jonah cannot escape God's power and purpose. By bringing the fugitive prophet back to dry land God signals both mercy towards him and a manifestation of the divine will. Jonah finds himself back where he started: "Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time *(šēnît),* saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you'" (3:1–2). God's command is introduced in a form typical form of prophetic speech. The literary composition exactly parallels the two opening verses of the book, but Jonah now abandons his attempt to evade the divine commission; the story continues: "So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord" (3:3a). This statement implies that the close experience of the peril of physical death and of a subsequent miraculous deliverance brought about the change in Jonah's attitude to the divine command. He reacts as should a man of prophetic integrity. But this says nothing about his inner disposition.

The story oversteps historical reality; we note the exaggeration in the description of the size of the city: "Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city *('îr-gĕdōlāh lē'lōhîm),* three days' journey in breadth" (3:3b). The phrase *'îr-gĕdōlāh lē'lōhîm* literally means 'a city great to God.' The narrator obviously points not only to the size of the city but also to the issue of God's relationship to it; God could not be indifferent to such vastness. After a day's journey, Jonah cried: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown *(nehpāket)!*" (3:4b). This terse message carries no qualification; but although it sounds like an unconditional (absolute) prediction, it can—according to common sense and Hebrew tenets of belief—be understood in a conditional way as an urgent call to repentance. The fact that the city is not to be destroyed immediately or in the very near future strongly supports this idea. *Forty days* denotes a period of time suited to a special opportunity, a retreat or fasting (cf. Exod 24:18; 1 Kgs 19:8; Mark 1:13).

The people of Nineveh understood the message as a conditional threat and reacted accordingly: they received it as the word of God; "from the greatest of them to the least of them" (3:5b); both "man and beast" (3:7–8) covered themselves with sackcloth in self-abasement and humility before God, urging: "yea, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence *(wĕyāšubû 'îš middarkô hārā'āh ûmin-heḥāmās)* which is in his hands" (3:8b). Their hope was: "Who knows, God may yet repent and turn from his fierce anger *(mî-yōdēa' yāšûb wĕnīḥam hā'ĕlōhîm wĕšāb mēḥărôn 'appô),* so that we perish not?" (3:9). We note that the verb *šwb* is used both in denoting the turning away from evil or violence by the Ninevites and a

turning away from anger by God. This account of their reaction is the greatest surprise provided by the narrator in the section 3:1–9. The completeness of Nineveh's repentance and the hope expressed imply a sound understanding of the issue of human guilt on the one hand, and of divine justice and mercy on the other: First, it shows that the people are aware that the judgment upon them is deserved; secondly, it reveals their view that *there is no inescapable link between deed and destiny;* thirdly, it shows their belief that divine grace dominates the demand for strict justice. The extraordinary exposition of their repentance implies that the real import of this fundamental tenet of faith can be appreciated only by those who are aware of their sinfulness and are ready to repent. The motions of repentance are inner signs of an urgent appeal that God's mercy should reverse the judgment. The reaction of the Ninevites is startling, especially in light of the repeated complaint of the prophets that Israel was unable to repent.

It comes therefore, as no surprise that God honoured their change of heart. The narrator reports the divine reaction only briefly:

> When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way *(kî-šābû middarkām hārā'āh),* God repented of the evil *(wayyinnāḥem hā'ĕlōhîm 'al-hārā'āh)* which he had said he would do to them; and he did not do it (3:10).

The narrator repeats the word *nḥm* from 3:9. The statement about God's "repentance" of the evil announced previously means a change of heart within God's personality. Those who see God primarily in metaphysical terms find it impossible that God could change a decision, and other statements seem to support their view—for instance, the declaration by Samuel to Saul that God will not repent, "for he is not a man, that he should repent" (1 Sam 15:29). But consideration of the Divine Being's *relations* to the created world results in a completely different point of view. The only and truly divine way of dealing both with Israel and with other nations arises out of a concern for their salvation; and this implies the will to keep them from evil. Consequently, divine threats of evil can be properly understood only as conditional. When the attitude of sinful people meets the expectations of God's holiness, it is "natural" that God will repent of the evil threatened. The primary motive of the divine dealings with humankind negates the view that God's mercy implies a lack of firmness and consistency in God's actions. It is inadequate to speak of God's determination to enforce a judgment of doom upon wicked people, when there is any hope that they may turn from their evil ways.[22]

Supporting the idea of the supremacy of God's goodness and mercy

[22] For further discussion on the issue of God's repentance, see J. Jeremias, *Die Reue Gottes: Aspekte alttestamentlicher Gottesvorstellung* (BSt 65; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1975).

against the demands of strict justice are all the exhortations to repentance in the Bible and in the later Jewish-Christian tradition. The prophet Joel announced this good news to the people of Jerusalem in highly illuminating words (2:12–14):

> "Yet even now," says the Lord,
> "return *(šubû)* to me with all your heart,
> with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
> and rend your hearts and not your garments."
> Return *(šûbû)* to the Lord, your God,
> for he is gracious and merciful *(kî-ḥannûn wĕraḥûm hû')*,
> slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love *('erek 'appayim wĕrab-ḥesed)*
> and repents of evil *(wĕnīḥām 'al-hārā'āh)*.
> Who knows whether he will not turn and repent *(yāšûb wĕnīḥām)*,
> and leave a blessing behind him,
> a cereal offering and a drink offering
> for the Lord, your God?

In this exhortation we find a formula expressive of God's nature as the merciful Being. There are other passages from the Exilic or possibly post-exilic periods where this formula occurs with minor variations (Exod 34:6; Jonah 4:2; Pss 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Neh 9:17). Moreover, parts of the formula are found in many other passages: Exod 20:5–6 (= Deut 5:9–10); 22:26; 33:19; Num 14:18; Deut 4:31; 7:9–10; Isa 48:9; 54:7–8; 63:7; Jer 15:15; 32:18; Mic 7:18; Nah 1:3; Pss 78:38; 86:5; 111:4b; 112:4b; 116:5; Dan 9:4; Neh 1:5; 9:31–32; 2 Chr 30:9; Sir 2:11.[23] It is obvious that the formula reflects a traditional belief about the essence of the divine character, and this is a central tenet of faith within the Old and New Testaments.[24]

Jonah, however, cannot identify himself with this traditional and generally accepted principle. For him the demands of strict justice are a matter of life and death. The narrator describes Jonah's disposition by playing on the word "evil" in a manner especially characteristic of the book of Jonah: *wayyēra' 'el-yōnāh rā'āh gĕdôlāh*, "it became evil to Jonah as a great evil" (4:1) Nevertheless, he claims that he "prayed to the Lord" (4:2; cf. 2:1) while revealing the mystery of his great inner suffering:

> I pray thee, Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and repentest of evil *(kî yāda'tî kî 'attāh 'ēl-ḥannûn wĕraḥûm 'erek 'appayim wĕrab-ḥesed wĕnīḥām 'al-hārā'āh)*. Therefore now, O Lord take my life from me, I beseech thee, for it is better for me to die than to live (4:2–3).

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[23] For further discussion on the formula, see H. Spieckermann, "'Barmherzig und gnädig ist der Herr ...,'" *ZAW* 102 (1990), 1–18.

[24] See the statement in 2 Pet 3:9: "The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."

We note that only in Joel 2:14 and in Jonah 4:2 does the motif of divine repentance occur in connection with the formula of divine mercy. We note also the striking contrast in the two passages: Joel expresses the hope that God may repent of evil, whereas Jonah regrets that there should be such a thing as divine repentance. Only at this point is it revealed that Jonah understood God's command (expressed in 1:2 and 3:4) in a conditional sense, and considered such an administration of justice incorrect.

Jonah's desire to die is in some ways reminiscent of the frustration shown by Moses and Elijah when they found themselves in a crisis of confidence. Moses twice asked God to end his life. In contrast to Jonah, who opposes any bestowal of God's mercy, Moses urgently appealed for forgiveness in favour of Israel who had sinned at Sinai: "Alas, this people have sinned a great sin; they have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written" (Exod 32:31–32). When facing the hardships of the desert, Moses complained before God: "I am not able to carry all this people alone, the burden is too heavy for me. If thou wilt deal thus with me, kill me at once, if I find favour in thy sight, that I may not see my wretchedness" (Num 11:14–15). The prophet Elijah demonstrated his zeal for the true God, yet he asked for death when tormented by Jezebel's wrath : "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am no better than my fathers" (1 Kgs 19:4).

In the light of Moses' and Elijah's zeal for God's cause and for the salvation of the people, Jonah appears all the more self-centred. His claim that it is better for him to die than to live reflects an emotional state of mind which betrays his concern for self-assertion.[25] This throws light, finally, on the motivation of Jonah's choosing to escape to Tarshish to avoid fulfilling God's request. At this point the emphasis is on Jonah's *knowledge* of the characteristic divine clemency in universal terms. Jonah knew very well that nothing else was to be expected. In view of this knowledge, Jonah could assume that God's threat of destroying Nineveh might be revoked (cf. Jer 18:7–11). In order to avert the occurrence of a presumably mistaken course of events, he was as apodictic as possible in his proclamation of doom (cf. 3:4). It is highly questionable whether Jonah opposed the bestowal of God's mercy only in relation to the heathen world. One would rather expect that such egocentricity as his must inevitably clash with the idea of mercy and forgiveness in relation to any unwanted person or group, within and outside

[25] Jonah's alleged wish to die may give the impression that there is a strong resemblance between his case and that of Ahithophel, who committed suicide in reaction to the mistaken strategy of his master Absalom (cf. 2 Sam 17:23). The case of Ahithophel is, however, quite different; the background of his self-judgment must have been the awareness of his free complicity in a strategy that was in the truest sense fundamentally mistaken. Jonah did nothing of that sort: he merely used mistaken theories of justice as a pretext for defending his self-confinement.

of one's own national or social framework (cf. Luke 15:29). The theory that mercy and forgiveness are in contradiction with the principle of justice is based, in the final analysis, on the presumptuous assumption that there are some righteous people in this world who do not need forgiveness.

One would hardly have expected that the actual motive for Jonah's flight to Tarshish was the positive purpose of the divine threat as regards the people of Nineveh. It is therefore all the more surprising that Jonah himself now reveals the background to his behaviour. This revelation sets in motion a retrospective adjustment of crucial statements within the whole of the narrative. Now it becomes clear why the narrator oversteps the historical reality in his grotesquely exaggerated exposition of Jonah's behaviour and the reaction of the sailors on board the ship and of Nineveh's repentance. The purpose of his hyperbole is to illuminate his guiding concern both in regard to human beings and to the divine character. On the one hand, he wants to shock the reader by pointing to two possibilities in the human mind and character: narrow-mindedness, which implies self-assertion, and a surprising docility. On the other hand, he wants to expose the utmost mystery of God's goodness, mercy and forgiveness. The emphases within the narrative converge on the one central point which resolves all the ambiguities that had occupied the mind of the reader from beginning to end: the final revelation of the equilibrium between the demands of justice and the free divine grace. The insistence on bringing the message of judgment to the "city great to God" (cf. 3:3) reveals God's extreme severity in regard to human wickedness: the city is definitely doomed unless the people repent and amend their ways. The same applies to Jonah: he would have been equally doomed were he not, in a critical test of obedience, ready to submit himself to the will of God. God's attitude to Jonah and to Nineveh marks first of all God's patience, which most clearly shows that the threat is conditional within the framework of God's unconditional attachment to the created world.

After Jonah's rebuke it is God who reacts in order to show that divine mercy implies magnanimity and long-suffering. Jonah dares to quarrel with God out of a desire to maintain his view of what is right. All the more firmly then do narrator and reader alike stand emotionally on the divine side. God is willing to teach Jonah about the justification of his anger in the light of justifying divine ways to humankind. The question "Do you do well to be angry?" (4:4b) calls attention both to the tenet of divine mercy and to the behaviour of the human characters: the ridiculousness of Jonah's reaction to the prophetic commission, the sailors' treatment of his sinful presence, and Nineveh's repentance. Can Jonah rightly resent the mercy of God shown to the nations, after having experienced a deliverance he certainly did not deserve? One would expect that the delivered sinner would be glad to see others delivered. But instead of praising God on this score Jonah "went out of the city and sat to the east of the city, and made a booth for himself there.

He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city" (4:5). This action betrays Jonah's hidden hope that his prophecy might even yet be fulfilled according to his will and the city of Nineveh be destroyed, once the time limit had expired.[26]

In the next scene he exposes himself even more to a pitying laugh. In his egocentric expectation he "was exceedingly glad" when God appointed a plant to provide a shade over his head, but "asked that he might die" when the plant withered (4:6–8). He repeats his words from 4:3b: "It is better for me to die than to live" (4:8b). God challenges Jonah by asking the same question as in 4:4—not in relation to the issue of God's mercy but to Jonah's trivial needs and cares: "Do you do well to be angry for the plant?" (4:9a). Small-minded Jonah utters his last and most ridiculous words: "I do well to be angry, angry enough to die" (4:9b). In extreme contrast to this immature attitude, the closing explanation of God's deepest intent about the important things of the world (4:10–11) sounds all the more serious to the sensitive reader:

> You pity *('attāh ḥastā)* the plant, for which you did not labour, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night, and perished in a night. And should not I pity *(wa'ănî lō' 'āḥûs)* Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?

In these concluding words, assigned to God, the narrator brings all the theological issues of the book of Jonah to their appointed goal. It is highly significant that the Ninevites' repentance is no longer given as the reason for God's compassion towards them. The emphasis is on the ultimate reason for all God's dealings with the world: the tenet of creation which implies the idea of the great intrinsic worth of all human beings.

How can this sudden shift from human actions of repentance to the source of their existence be explained?

This is the crucial question in any discussion on the justification of divine mercy and forgiveness. There is no solution to the problem of mercy and forgiveness until it is assessed on cosmological grounds or on the basis of the principle of equality. On this level, it is not possible to avoid the impression that punishment is a matter of duty and, therefore, must exclude any possibility of forgiveness. On the other hand, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that repentance is a special kind of good work, justifying forgiveness in terms of a deserved gesture. Only the confrontation with the Source of life and death and the futility of human achievements can open an adequate perspective on the relationship between God and humankind, pun-

[26] Jonah's behaviour is reminiscent of the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matt 18:23–35. Especially illuminating is the king's indignant question: "... should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?" (18:33).

ishment and forgiveness, duty and freedom. When faced with their radical dependence on the Creator and Redeemer, sinful people can perceive that they can never deserve the fruits of God's compassion, mercy, and forgiveness, but can only hope to attain them on the ground of God's unconditioned attachment to the created world. So, in the book of Jonah, God points to the crucial reason for the supremacy of mercy over the demands of strict justice: unlike Jonah, who was no devoted gardener, God as creator has a deep attachment to the created world; God is compassionate and saves "man and beast" (Ps 36:7; cf. Matt 1:29). We note that the basic message of God's last words concurs with Jonah's confession of faith as expressed in 1:9. The conflict between God's and Jonah's stances is resolved by the recognition that God was consistent throughout, whereas Jonah was both inconsistent and hypocritical. God delivered both the prophet, who deserved death rather than deliverance, and the "city great to God." At this central point of the book it is manifest that God's power and will are motivated by the purpose of deliverance.

This perspective shows that repentance is of secondary importance. It is not a subject permitting positive reasons for God's granting mercy; it concerns rather the removal of obstacles to the attaining of divine benefits. In its essence, repentance signifies the necessary conformity of human ways with the laws or guidelines stemming from the very inner nature of the Creator and creation. Since outside these laws there is no reality or truth, those who are not willing to submit to God's authority and to adjust their ways in accordance with the constitution of the world, must perish amid their illusions.

2.3 *Why Is Jonah not Punished for His Disobedience?*

We may sum up what the book of Jonah discloses in its artistic, literary form. God and Jonah are opposites from the beginning to the end: Jonah proves himself ruthless and God merciful. God's position implies at least three main theological presuppositions that are intrinsically linked: the purpose of God's dealings with the nations is to save them; consequently, God sends prophets to sinners to call them to repentance by first threatening divine punishment; from the point of view of the divine mind such threats of doom are always conditional in nature. Jonah, however, insists that a divine proclamation of doom in relation to heathen sinners should be unconditional; he therefore makes every effort to avoid proclaiming divine judgment upon the nations. So he becomes a sort of anti-hero to the story. It follows that God is merciful not only towards repentant heathen sinners but also towards the reluctant or rebellious prophet. God preserves him in his prophetic vocation and uses him as a tool by which to instruct the reader about the profound truth of divine mercy as the universal principle of God's ways of dealing with creation.

At this point, a question arises about the basis on which God can be merciful towards the disobedient prophet. The Bible, as a whole, shows in different ways that obedience to divine authority is the primary requirement of Israel or any nation, let alone of a prophet. The great prophets proved their prophetic integrity by their profound awareness that God's will is to be obeyed even when it is beyond human understanding. The case of Jeremiah may illustrate the issue. After having complained against God because of the burden of his prophetic commission (cf. 15:10–18; 20:7–18), he was warned: "If you return, I will restore you, and you shall stand before me. If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall be as my mouth. They shall turn to you, but you shall not turn to them" (15:19). A conscientious return to God is seen as the precondition for being a prophet. The necessity of obeying God is also one of the main doctrinal themes implied in the book of Jonah. Since the prophet does not "return" himself, but persists in his attitude to the end, God forces him by astonishing moves to fulfil the divine mission. It is surprising therefore that Jonah is never explicitly condemned for his refusal to obey God's command. What can be the justification for God's bestowing mercy on the rebellious prophet instead of condemning him?

We may assume that the decisive reason—from Jonah's side—is his mind-set. His attitude and actions were not motivated by the root sin of stubbornness but by a lack of appropriate knowledge.[27] Note that ignorance is mentioned also as the reason for the divine indulgence manifested towards the Ninevites: they "do not know their right hand from their left" (4:11).[28] There is no indication or hint that Jonah rejected God's authority; Jonah did not rebel against a positive divine commandment, which should be obeyed absolutely, but against a construct of his limited viewpoint about the relationship between the requirements of retribution and the justification of forgiveness. From the following evidence we may deduce Jonah's acknowledgment of God's authority: first, he declared his personal adherence to his God (cf. 1:9); secondly, he recognized his guilt and was willing to surrender to the divine judgment (cf. 1:12); thirdly, even though he did not agree with

[27] Finally, ignorance about the essence of divine justice is reflected not only in Jonah's stand but also in the justification of his deficiency in some modern interpretations. E. Levine, *ZAW* 96 (1984), 242, for instance, claims: "Jonah responds as virtually any ancient would have—particularly a prophet devoted to God. In short, he is stunned, crushed, heartbroken and rebellious. His God, the supreme moral being, is now eradicating the distinction between Good and Evil! How can an *ex post facto* repentance alter the significance of a deed, or God's appropriate response to that deed? Is this morality? Is this the way of God?"

[28] Ignorance also features as a factor in Jesus' plea on the cross: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Paul too mentions it as the reason for the granting of God's mercy in relation to his own case: "... he judged me faithful by appointing me to his service, though I formerly blasphemed and persecuted and insulted him; but I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief" (1 Tim 1:12–13; cf. Ac 3:17; 13:27; 17:23, 30).

God's attitude he "prayed to the Lord" (2:1; 4:2).[29] So the purpose of the book is not only to proclaim the conditional nature of divine threats, but also to educate the prophet about the living miracle of God's grace. The lesson given by God concerns the essence of divine righteousness and justice, hence God's patience with the prophet to the very end. This attitude is based on the grounds of a hope that Jonah may, at the last, learn God's lesson and come to his senses. Two facts lead us to deduce that the prophet's education was considered successful: first, Jonah is willing to be instructed and submits himself following God's interventions; secondly, although long persisting in a ruthless line, in the end Jonah's spirit is tempered so that he does not object to God's reference to creation as the fundamental reason for the supremacy of divine mercy over retribution.[30] In the last resort, God's word does indeed prevail, and the narrator probably thinks, both in relation to Jonah and to his hearers: *Sapienti sat.*

God's lesson to the rebellious prophet is found illuminating by a majority of exegetes. Traditional explanations concerning the purpose of the book reflect awareness that its writer favours God's position and therefore see its main purpose in an education about the ways of God's dealings with human beings in universal terms.[31] Exegetes are usually satisfied with general statements and do not try to explain or to justify God's change of heart from one of threatening doom to one of bestowing mercy on the basis of the sinners' repentance. It is, however, crucial to observe that the opposing stances of Jonah and God reflect two different concepts of the essence of justice:

[29] Even though the psalm was added to the narrative in a later stage of the Jonah tradition, in the present context it plays a crucial part. On the one hand, it testifies to the theological point of God's turning to the prophet, who is in the utmost danger of forsaking his Creator; on the other, it points to the incomprehensible capacity of human beings for changing their minds and hearts when found in "the belly of Sheol." Jonah's critical situation is an occasion for him to encounter God in a most intimate, personal way.

[30] There is no information about Jonah's reaction to God's last words, but his silence points to a growing in maturity and a final submission to God's authority rather than to persistence in blind self-assertion. This conclusion is supported by the reaction of Job to God's monologue; it implies revision of Job's understanding of what God is like (cf. 38:1–42:6). In the end, Job recognizes that silence is the most appropriate response to God's power and the divine administration of justice (cf. 40:3–5). See G. H. Cohn, *Das Buch Jona,* 102.

[31] It is hardly possible to justify the interpretation of E. Levine who concludes in *ZAW* 96 (1984), 243: "What has been universally overlooked by students of Jonah, is that the book contains *three* ideological positions. There is Jonah's position that the evil must be punished. And there is God's position that repentance itself (without righting the 'balance' through suffering, an equal measure of good deeds, or ritual expiation) warrants forgiveness: that a change of heart itself suffices. And there is also the position of the author himself. The thinker who composed the book was more disturbed by the philosophical problem than he was convinced of the concrete answer." Avoiding a concrete answer does not prove the writer's own position, which differs from God's, but rather his awareness that it is, in principle, impossible to come to terms with the issue of justice. The narrative gradually exposes the contraposition of two views: the author represents God's position by laughing at Jonah and inducing the reader to turn completely against him in light of the part played by the heathen.

Jonah advocates a mechanistic principle, which is characteristic of religions and cultures based on cosmological foundations. Since they do not recognize the existence of an absolutely personal, divine authority, they do not find any ground for divine mercy and forgiveness. Etan Levine characterizes well the point of Jonah's attitude: "For Jonah, as for all of pagan morality, a good deed must, *by necessity,* be rewarded, and an evil deed must, *by necessity,* be punished."[32] In this mechanistic philosophy, indeed, there is absolutely no place for forgiveness. It comes as no surprise, therefore, when today, as throughout human history, proponents of a mechanistic morality deny any ground for forgiveness and reconciliation.

Another reason for denying the possibility of mercy and forgiveness is an endemic human self-righteousness, which is probably even more damaging than mechanistic theories. Everyone who considers himself righteous in contrast to the sinful world finds it very difficult, even impossible, to find any justification for siding with the ideals of mercy and forgiveness.

It is at least misleading to claim, with Levine, that Jonah is presented as a prophet who adopted a pagan mechanistic morality. He is a Hebrew who is insufficiently aware of the distinctive Hebrew patterns of belief. The narrator shows in a very simple way that Jonah is a victim both of pervasive human self-righteousness and of a mechanistic or forensic interpretation of the essence of justice. So the divine lesson presented by the narrator comprises the knowledge of God as Creator and as a personal Being. The Creator is, by definition, bound to his creation. Here lies the key to understanding the essence of merit and demerit, reward and punishment, mercy and forgiveness: no created being can claim merit for what God offers; nor can a creature totally spoil God's work. The essence of obedience or disobedience, of faithfulness or unfaithfulness, is the acceptance or rejection of divine authority and guidance. There is therefore one possible way back: through one's recognition of sin and of the advantages of unity with God. Repentance is not a "good work," able to pay back for the wrong done, but consists in a dissociation from a wrong attitude towards God and the world that, in principle, implies a restoration of right relationships.[33] These presuppositions have far-reaching consequences for the issue of punishment and forgiveness: God must not punish or reward *of necessity.* The Supreme Being is *bound* only to those intrinsic motives of divine goodness that suggest choosing the best possible way of bringing about the healing of a wounded creation. This great purpose is, in the last resort, the reason for God's patience in educating prophets, the chosen people of Israel, and other nations.[34] The paradoxical

[32] See *ZAW* 96 (1984), 243.

[33] This most important aspect of repentance is best presented by J. G. Murphy and J. Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy* (CSPhL; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

[34] E. Levine, *ZAW* 96 (1984), 235–245, presents various schools of thought concerning the

unconditionality of divine goodness leaves necessary room for conditional promises and threats. When the people of Nineveh undertake acts of penitence they have no assurance of God's favourable response. But it is a matter of common sense to know that God bestows mercy only on those who manifest a sincere change of heart.

The "education" given in the book of Jonah is strongly reminiscent of the dialogue between God and Abraham in Gen 18:16–33, even though Abraham is advocating something quite opposite: divine mercy towards the whole city of Sodom because of a (presumed) considerable number of righteous citizens. Abraham appeals to the universal rule of justice: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (18:25b). But God chooses a self-illuminating way to surmise that the conditions for saving the sinful city are not fulfilled; there are not so many righteous people in the city that it should be saved on their account. So Abraham ceases to insist and becomes a witness to the destruction of a city in which there are no signs of fear of God or repentance. It must have become clear to him that human beings cannot judge the ways of divine righteousness or justice.[35]

The book of Jonah, to some degree, recalls the traditions about Balaam collected in Numbers 22–24 (J and E). The Moabite king Balak requests the heathen prophet Balaam to declare Israel's doom and persists in his wilfulness. Balaam is reluctant but performs his assigned task by claiming that he cannot say anything other than what God commands. This claim, however, is at the least ambiguous; the very fact that he allowed himself to be hired by Balak means that he followed his own will and, in principle, intended to

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book of Jonah in the course of the centuries under the titles: the historical school; the mystical school; the Jewish religious school; the Christian religious school; the history of religion school; the humanistic school. After a critical assessment of various views, he concludes that "all are *fundamentally inadequate*. Now we must consider the Book of Jonah in a completely new light: as a philosophical treatise written in narrative style" (p. 241). Unfortunately, the article shows that Levine's point of view, rather than that of the traditional interpretations, is the fundamentally inadequate one. First, Levine sees the essence of justice in a mechanistic theory of *quid pro quo*. On this foundation, he justifies Jonah's position: "And since he has seen God complicate the entire moral process by introducing the element of repentance, and since he has been forced to participate in a mission which to him is patently unjust, Jonah concludes his words with, 'Please God, take my life. For I would rather die than live'" (p. 243). On p. 244 (n. 30), Levine reveals what would appear to be a totally unacceptable distinction between "natural" and "covenantal" laws: "We should add that Jonah is not condemned for his refusal to obey God's command because, in fact, he is not obligated to obey God's command ... Biblical law is strictly covenantal ... Jonah does not have to obey God's command because there is no covenant between God and he *[sic]* on that!" Levine's point of view is best evaluated in one line of his statement: "Unfortunately, the author failed in his attempt ... his Book of Jonah has been used to illustrate and bolster a wide range of simplistic answers, while failing to see the essential question of the book, i.e., the nature of justice" (p. 244).

[35] See J. Krašovec, "Der Ruf nach Gerechtigkeit in Gen 18,16–33," *Die Väter Israels: Beiträge zur Theologie der Patriarchenüberlieferungen im Alten Testament* (ed. M. Görg; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1989), 169–182. See also T. M. Bolin, "'Should I Not Also Pity Nineveh?': Divine Freedom in the Book of Jonah," *JSOT* 67 (1995), 109–120.

curse Israel without reasonable ground. But God impedes implementation of the curse in drastic fashion: "But God's anger was kindled because he went; and the angel of the Lord took his stand in the way as his adversary. Now he was riding on the ass, and his two servants were with him. And the ass saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road, with a drawn sword in his hand ..." (22:22–35).

Instead of cursing, Balaam blesses Israel after each attempt by Balak to enforce his compliance. So the meeting between the two becomes a conflict between the self-will of a ruler, supported by a prophet, and the will of God who brings Balak's strivings to naught. The comparison between Jonah and Balaam is striking: both prophets know that they must obey the divine will, yet yield to the demands of human reasoning. The relationship between Israel and the heathen world is very different: on the one hand, a Hebrew prophet and heathen sinners facing divine judgment; on the other, a heathen prophet and the fate of Israel determined by God. But on one point there is a radical difference: Jonah acts out of ignorance, whereas Balaam yields to an evil impulse to curse the nation that was destined to be blessed. So God's compelling Balaam to bless Israel instead of cursing her was the greatest possible punishment for both the Moabite kings and the prophet (cf. Num 31:8, 16).[36]

3. *Conclusion*

A comparison between Isa 19:16–25 and the book of Jonah shows that the two have some similarities: the principal concern of both transcends any particular historical situation; both are based on predicaments native to monotheistic belief; both reflect the polarity between the conditional and unconditional natures of divine decisions relating to human fortune or misfortune. This polarity is dictated by the supremacy of the divine purpose and power over a human capacity for righteousness and a propensity for estrangement. Divine sovereignty manifests itself in various ways: in establishing the universal moral order; in bestowing divine grace and mercy upon all nations; in choosing appropriate times for extraordinary events; in selecting Israel and individuals for special commissions; in calling sinners to repentance; in an evaluation of whether stipulated conditions have been fulfilled.

From these situations various possibilities arise with regard to the outcome of human history: God may disclose that human empires are doomed

[36] See the remarks on the fate of Balaam by M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 315: "Having disregarded the warning against mischief given him en route to Moab by an angel 'with his sword drawn in his hand,' he now appropriately dies 'by the sword' in the aftermath of the Midianite plot."

to destruction, or surprise mankind with an announcement that the time is ripe for an era of peace and a new, universal chosen people; or endemic alienation among the nations may be overcome by mysterious divine intervention. The magnificent announcement of a new era in Isa 19:16–25 cannot be adequately interpreted as the result of any human endeavour; it clearly signals the miracle of divine providence acting within human history.

Isa 19:16–25 and the book of Jonah express the fundamental rules of divine government: on the one hand, God is not obliged to punish sinners; on the other hand, bestowal of divine mercy may be motivated by repentance, but it can never be considered as something owed to human merit. The two texts point to God's sovereignty and to the mystery of God's administration of justice. In this respect, the story of Balak and Balaam in Num 22–24 is also illuminating: Israel is blessed not on account of her merit but because of a sovereign divine decision. It is all the more clear that the promise of universal peace and of a new chosen people is the subject matter of God's dealings with creation.

The guiding concern of the book of Jonah is the manifestation of the supremacy of divine grace and mercy over the requirements of strict justice. In this universal framework, the character of Jonah plays an important role in portraying in satirical, literary form the narrow-mindedness and selfishness inherent in human nature rather than in any particular Jewish tradition. The preservation and survival of this book among the sacred scriptures of the Hebrew Bible indicates that the Jews themselves saw in Jonah's actions and attitudes a universal human figure rather than a representative of Jewish particularism.[37]

[37] H. W. Wolff is probably right when he argues in *Obadiah and Jonah*, 123–124: "The self-revelation of God in Israel and Israel's election to God's service as messenger in the Gentile world is the essential presupposition of the story, and it is carried through consistently throughout the whole narrative. The satire merely lends spice to the bitter teaching. The heathen are undoubtedly more humane, more active, wiser, and also more devout. And Jonah is undoubtedly exposed to ridicule. And yet it is only he who can tell the other how they have to behave. Much though he would prefer another course, there is nothing else he can do." The issue of election may be, however, overstepped when he claims that "Jonah as prophet and Jonah as a typical representative of Israel can hardly be separated from one another in the story" (p. 99; cf. his remark on 1:9 on p. 109). We must take into account the following facts; first, Jonah is an exception among the Hebrew prophets as regards obedience to God's commission and understanding of its universal meaning; secondly, the whole of the Bible manifests the universal validity of God's revelation within the people of Israel and the nations. We should be aware that all Hebrew prophets on the one hand and all apostates of Israel on the other are, in the last resort, represented as figures exemplifying a right or wrong human attitude towards God rather than as *typical representatives of Israel.* The question of right and wrong is the primary issue which goes beyond that of election.

PART FOUR

THE HOLY WRITINGS (HAGIOGRAPHA)

Characteristic of the section called the Writings is a huge range and variety of the material: hymns, confessions, laments, wisdom sentences, historical narratives and homiletic reflections on historical events. Equally diverse is the treatment of the themes of reward, punishment and forgiveness. This is especially true of the Psalms, a book which contains all the major themes and literary forms of the Hebrew Bible.

The themes of recompense and forgiveness are prominent in a number of psalms of different genres. In the wisdom poems on the other hand, emphasis is on the traditional belief that the righteous will prosper, while the wicked will ultimately perish (Pss 1; 37; 49; 73). Many psalms appeal to God to condemn his and Israel's enemies and enforce justice on the earth (Pss 5; 7; 9/10; 58; 82). The more personal modes of confessions and lamentations are permeated by a profound consciousness of human sinfulness, which leads to a renewed appreciation of the need for divine mercy (Pss 32; 51). The question of God's ultimate reason for forgiveness is examined in the historical meditations on Israel's apostasy and of divine mercy (Pss 78; 106). The experience of forgiveness dictates the whole hymnal mode of Psalm 103.

The book of Proverbs, on the other hand, is the Bible's most comprehensive and consistent advocate, of the natural law of recompense. The book of Job challenges this view. It describes Job's intense struggle to come to terms with what he perceives as unjustly inflicted suffering. His misfortunes lead him to criticize God himself. In Qohelet this issue of recompense is presented in a different light. By questioning the value of prosperity in this world, Qohelet minimizes the significance of the difference fates of the righteous and the wicked. The book of Lamentations sees in the confession of guilt the true way out of despair—in this case Israel's—because of the hope of forgiveness and consequent survival, which it brings.

The variety of themes and literary forms of the Writings make a corresponding variety of methods of analysis advizable. An internal holistic literary analysis seems to be the best approach to studying the Psalms. The book of Job the instructional part of the Proverbs, and the the Lamentations all call for an inner-textual approach. The couplets of the "wisdom" part of the Proverbs, on the other hand, require a distinctively individual treatment. Qohelet, which seems to be unified on the basis of the key statements, can be treated as a self contained whole.

CHAPTER XXII

REWARD AND PUNISHMENT IN THE BOOK OF PSALMS

The book of Psalms is a synthesis of several varieties of religious experience—contemplation, reflection, testimony and protest. It therefore contains reports or descriptions of past events, addresses to the people on diverse matters, and theological reflections on fundamental issues of human life. The dominant characteristic is, however, prayer. All kinds of prayer may reflect a particular historical or personal situation, but equally the motivation—praise, petition, reflection or protest—may transcend the challenge of a specific situation. The same is true of literary patterns in the Psalms: the spirit of prayer transcends the rules that govern conventional literary genres. Most psalms cover a wide range of feelings, moods and thoughts, and very often several literary genres are combined in ways that are inexplicable on merely rational considerations.[1]

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[1] For discussion on questions concerned, see especially commentaries and cognate studies: F. Delitzsch, *Commentar über den Psalter* (Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1859); H. Hupfeld, *Die Psalmen* (Gotha: F. A. Perthes, 1870); F. Baethgen, *Die Psalmen* (HK II/2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1897); C. A. Briggs and E. G. Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms,* 2 vols. (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1906–1907); R. Kittel, *Die Psalmen übersetzt und erklärt* (KAT 14; Leipzig: A. Deichertsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1914); E. König, *Die Psalmen* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1927); H. Gunkel, *Die Psalmen* (HK II/2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1929, 1968); H. Schmidt, *Die Psalmen* (HK 15; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1934); J. Calès, *Le livre des psaumes,* 2 vols. (2nd ed.; Paris: G. Beauchesne, 1936); E. J. Kissane, *The Book of Psalms,* 2 vols. (Dublin: Browne & Nolan, 1953–1954); H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms* (London: Evangelical Press, 1959, 1972); A. Weiser, *Die Psalmen* (5th ed.; ATD 14/15; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959); English translation by H. Hartwell, *The Psalms* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1962); A. Barucq, *L'expression de la louange divine et de la prière dans la Bible et en Égypte* (Cairo: Inst. Français d'archéologie orientale, 1962); W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Psalms* (London: S.P.C.K., 1962); S. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship,* 2 vols. (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1962); G. Castellino, *Libro dei Salmi* (SB; Turin / Rome: Marietti, 1965); A. Maillot and A. Lelièvre, *Les Psaumes,* 3 vols. (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1961–1969); M. Buttenwieser, *The Psalms* (LBS; New York: Ktav, 1969); M. Dahood, *Psalms,* 3 vols. (AB 16–17A; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965–1970); A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms,* 2 vols. (NCBC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972); N. H. Ridderbos, *Die Psalmen: Stilistische Verfahren und Aufbau mit besonderer Berücksichtigung von Ps 1–41* (BZAW 117; Berlin / New York: W. de Gruyter, 1972); J. W. McKay, *Psalms,* 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); L. Jacquet, *Les psaumes et le coeur de l'Homme: Étude textuelle, littéraire et doctrinale,* 3 vols. (Namur: Duculot, 1977); E. Beaucamp, *Le Psautier,* 2 vols. (SB; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1976–1979); H.-J. Kraus, *Psalmen,* 2 vols. (5th ed.; BK.AT XV/1–2; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1961–1978); English translation by H. C. Oswald, *Psalms 1–59* (ConC; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1993); idem, *Psalms 60–150* (ConC; Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Fortress, 1989); idem, *Theologie der Psalmen* (BK.AT XV/3; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1979); English translation by K. Crim, *Theology of the Psalms* (ConC; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1992); G. Ravasi, *Il Libro*

Several psalms reflect a profound concern with justice vis-à-vis the forces of oppression. In situations of conflict, whether caused by exterior or interior factors, their authors express indignation, protest, petition or assurance concerning the past, present, and future. Quite often there are calls for appropriate retribution to be visited on those who oppose God and God's faithful people.[2] The Wisdom tradition finds expression in claims that the righteous are sooner or later rewarded and the wicked punished.

1. *Condemnation of God's and Israel's Enemies*

There are two possible sources of indignation, protest, or condemnation of hostile powers: God and the psalmist. The forces of evil are sometimes well defined; on other occasions they are obscure. Several psalms give the impression that God's and Israel's enemies act mysteriously—in a manner reminiscent of numinous, chaotic forces. When God reacts or the psalmist utters a supposed divine response, the emphasis is on power, absolute sover-

dei Salmi: Commento e attualizzazione, 3 vols. (Bologna: Centro editoriale dehoniano, 1981–1984); P. C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50* (WBC 19; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1983); M. E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100* (WBC 20; Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1990); L. C. Allen, *Psalms 101–150* (WBC 21; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1983); J. C. MacCann, *Psalm 73: An Interpretation Emphasizing Rhetorical and Canonical Criticism* (Duke University, Diss., 1985); L. Sabourin, *Le Livre des Psaumes* (Montreal: Bellarmin; Paris: Cerf, 1988); R. G. Bratcher and W. D. Beyburn, *A Translator's Handbook on the Book of Psalms* (New York: UBS, 1991); L. Alonso Schökel and C. Carniti, *Salmos,* 2 vols. (NBE; Estella: Editorial Verbo Divino, 1992–1993); H.-L. Hosfeld and E. Zenger, *Die Psalmen,* vol 1: *Psalm 1–50* (NEB; Würzburg: Echter, 1993); Y. Avishur, *Studies in Hebrew and Ugaritic Psalms* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1994); A. R. Ceresko, *Psalmists and Sages: Studies in Old Testament Poetry and Religion* (IThS.S 2; Bangalore: St. Peter's Pontifical Institute, 1994); M. Girard, *Les psaumes redécouverts: De la structure au sens,* 3 vols. (Québec: Bellarmin, 1994); P. Auffret, "Et moi sans cesse avec toi: Étude structurelle du Psaum 73," *SJOT* 9 (1995), 241–276; K. Seybold, *Die Psalmen* (HAT I/15; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1996); S. R. Hirsch, *Sēfer Tehillîm = Psalmen* (Basel / Zurich: Verlag Morascha, 1995); M. D. Goulder, *Studies in the Psalter* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1996); R. K. Moore, *The Psalms of Lamentation and the Enigma of Suffering* (MBPS 50; Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen Biblical Press, 1996); D. Schneider, *Das Buch der Psalmen* (Wuppertal / Zurich: Brockhaus, 1996); N. C. Merrill, *Psalms for Praying: An Invitation to Wholeness* (New York, N.Y.: Continuum, 1996); J. E. Smith, *The Wisdom Literature and Psalms* (Joplin, Mo.: College Press, 1996); H. Smith, *Les psaumes* (Vevey: Bibles et Traités Chrétiens, 1996); M. Poorthuis (ed.), *Mijn God, mijn God, waarom hebt gij mij verlaten: een interdisciplinaire bundel over psalm 22* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1997); D. C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms* (JSOT 252; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997); P. W. Flint, *The Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls and the Book of Psalms* (STDJ 17; Leiden / New York / Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1997).

[2] It is noteworthy that the question of retribution has attracted the attention of some scholars: B. Romberg, "Die Vergeltungslehre in den Psalmen," *NKZ* 41 (1930), 539–566; B. Hall, "The Problem of Retribution in the Psalms," *Scripture* 7 (1955), 84–92; E. Pax, "Studien zum Vergeltungsproblem der Psalmen," *SBFLA* 10 (1959–1960), 56–112; G. Sauer, *Die strafende Vergeltung Gottes in den Psalmen* (Erlangen: Dissertation, 1961); J. K. Kuntz, "The Retribution Motif in Psalmic Wisdom," *ZAW* 89 (1977), 223–233.

eignty, and justice. Hence the petition for retribution on the evil-doers or that God should put to shame those who plan evil against the forces of righteousness, whether divine or human (cf. Pss 21:9–14; 28:4; 31:18; 35; 40:14–17 + 70; 59:6, 11–14), and the assurance that God will judge and humiliate the wicked (Pss 75; 76). Elsewhere, the community or individuals in distress complain of their extreme affliction and cite the law of retribution; in a situation of weakness God is their only ground of hope. In an emotional outburst they cry for divine intervention, either demanding retaliation (cf. Pss 79:12; 94:1–2, 23; 137:8) or simply expressing hatred (cf. Ps 139:19–22). Finally the people are called to praise God as the giver of victory over their enemies (cf. Ps 149).

These are general points; some psalms of petition call for more detailed treatment: Psalms 5; 7; 9/10; 58; 82.

1.1 *Prayer for a Demonstration of the Righteousness of God: Psalm 5*

Psalm 5 is a "prayer song" that deals with God's relationship with both the wicked and the righteous. The general character of its petition and reflection makes it difficult to determine the date of its composition. It consists of five strophes: 2–4; 5–7; 8–9; 10–11; 12–13. The first of these contains several invocations uttered in the temple during the offering of the morning sacrifice. The second provides a general reflection on God's attitude towards the wicked and their doings: God and evil are incompatible and this implies good grounds for the hope of protection. The main argument of the psalmist's prayer is that the accusations of boasters and slanderers are not justified, so the wicked cannot be admitted to the sanctuary. In the third strophe the psalmist says: "But I through the abundance of thy steadfast love *(bĕrōb ḥasdĕkā)* will enter thy house ..." (v. 8). The emphasis is on his awareness that the privilege of praying in the sanctuary is not due to his own righteousness but signals bestowal of divine grace. Such humility is possibly the surest indication that the psalmist has been faithful to God. In the fourth strophe castigation of the wicked is resumed with the emphasis laid upon their wickedness of speech. God is entreated to pass judgment on them: "Declare them guilty *(ha'ăšîmēm),*[3] O God; let them fall by their own counsels; because of their many transgressions cast them out *(bĕrōb piš'êhem haddîḥēmô),* for they have rebelled against thee" (v. 11). The play of phrases *bĕrōb ḥasdĕkā* (v. 8a) and *bĕrōb piš'êhem* (v. 11b) is of some theological significance. The petition in v. 11b points to the causal link between declaration of guilt and punishment. Once guilt is recognized, punishment is unavoidable; it follows from the very nature of the rebellious attitude. The im-

[3] In contrast to the rendering "Make them bear their guilt" in the RSV we follow C. A. Briggs, *The Book of Psalms,* 38, 40.

pending punishment of the wicked opens the way to the joy of the righteous in the concluding strophe: the demand for the justice of divine judgment implies the assurance that God will bless the faithful.

1.2 *Appeal to the Righteous Divine Judge: Psalm 7*

Psalm 7 is the lament of a man who feels oppressed without justification and calls to the judge of the world to redress his complaint. The structure of the psalm is clear and simple: in the opening verses (2–3) its author seeks refuge in God; in vv. 4–6 he protests his innocence; in vv. 7–12 he appeals to the righteous divine judge; in vv. 13–17 he affirms the principle of poetic justice: the wicked is dogged by the effects of his wickedness; and in v. 18 the psalmist vows that he will testify to the righteousness of God. He underlines his innocence by inviting retribution if he is in fact guilty (vv. 4–6), which prepares the way for his appeal: "Judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness *(kĕṣidqî)* and according to the integrity that is in me" (v. 9b). The keystone of the psalmist's righteousness is obviously his attitude towards God and his fellow-men. At the same time, the psalmist's declarations *'ĕlōhîm ṣaddîq,* "thou righteous God" (v. 10b) and *'ĕlōhîm šôpĕṭ ṣaddîq,* "God is a righteous judge" (v. 12a) express his conviction that God's dealing with human beings is right in every respect. From this premise it follows that God must enchain the wicked but deliver the righteous. Punishment is unavoidable if the wicked do not change their ways, as the psalmist says in v. 13a: "if he does not repent *('im-lō' yašûb),*" i. e., if he does not "turn away" from his wickedness. In v. 17 the same verb is used to bring home the unavoidable consequence of human obstinacy: "His mischief returns upon his own head *(yāšûb 'āmālô bĕrō'šô),* and on his own pate his violence descends" (cf. Pss 9:16–17; 35:8; 57:7; Prov 26:27; Sir 27:25–27). The concluding doxology "I will give to the Lord the thanks due to his righteousness *(kĕṣidqô)* ..." (cf. 5:9a) does not refer to vindicative justice but to divine righteousness in the most general sense, which lays bare the virtue of the righteous and the guilt of the wicked, thus emancipating the former.[4]

1.3 *The Judgment of God: Psalm 9/10*

Psalm 9/10 is a prayer of supplication that focuses on past manifestations of God's saving power. The alphabetical sequence of the acrostic scheme embracing the two, their common diction and style, the fact that some Hebrew manuscripts, the Septuagint, and the Vulgate treat them as one psalm, and the

[4] See the petition in Ps 5:9a: "Lead me, O Lord, in thy righteousness *(bĕsidqātekā)* ..." For further evaluation of the judgment in Ps 7, see B. Janowski, "JHWH der Richter—ein rettender Gott: Psalm 7 und das Motiv des Gottesgerichts," *JBTh* 9 (1994), 53–86.

lack of title or superscription to Psalm 10 show that they are to be regarded as a literary unity. The acrostic pattern and certain other features indicate a late date.

The following thematic groups can be identified: a promise to praise God (9:1–4); a historical reference to destruction of the nations (9:5–6); God's eternal kingship is founded on righteousness (9:7–8); God is a fortress for the oppressed (9:9–10); a call upon the congregation to sing to the Lord (9:11–12); the supplication of the afflicted (9:13–14); the nations perished because of their sins (9:15–16); a petition for divine judgment on the nations (9:17–20); the psalmist's lamentation about the suffering inflicted by wicked enemies (10:1–11); an appeal to God (10:12–15); an assurance that his prayer will be answered (10:16–18). The purpose of this congeries of praise, historical references, and personal thoughts and feelings is to gain inner mastery over affliction by strength derived from memories of the salvation history.

The prayer in 9:13–14 shows that the writer is under pressure from his adversaries, but the knowledge that God has exercised his supreme judicial authority in the past gives him confidence that his cause, too, will be vindicated by divine judgment. As in the parallel case in Psalm 7, the statement that God is *šôpēṭ ṣedeq,* "a righteous judge" (9:5b) and that *hû' yišpōṭ-tēbēl bĕṣedeq,* "he judges the earth in righteousness" (9:9a) does not refer to vindicative justice but to the general nature of divine righteousness. At the heart of the psalms is the faith that God is supreme and therefore the defender of the redemptive order, valid for the righteous alone. This primary concern of divine righteousness implies, however, use of the principle of retribution in relation to evil-doers who challenge the very foundations of divine sovereignty and justice. In conflict, God allocates right exclusively to the righteous: the wicked cannot stand before the master of the world. It is this postulate with its positive and negative aspects that is the background to recollections of the salvation history and to hopes for the future. The universal Redeemer is *dōrēš dāmîm,* "an avenger of blood" (9:13a) for all the afflicted who seek deliverance from the talons of the wicked.

1.4 *Entreaty That God Enforce Justice on Earth: Psalm 58*

Psalms 58 and 82 reflect special concern for justice in a seemingly hopeless situation and exude powerful religious and moral force. They refer to the problem of theodicy that stems from the fact that ungodly rulers have shaken the foundations of the moral order. To appreciate both the similarity and the difference between the two psalms it is necessary to analyze their individual structures and other linguistic, literary and thematic features.

Psalm 58 has a clear structure and thought sequence: the gods are castigated for their wicked rule (vv. 2–3); their natural depravity is described (vv. 4–6); God is entreated to execute judgment by exterminating the evil-doers

(vv. 7–10); and the righteous are vindicated (vv. 11–12). The opening verse contains an incongruous form of the word *'ēlem.* In modern exegesis the pointing is often changed to *'ēlīm* as a defective spelling for *'ēlîm,* 'gods.' Another suggestion is to treat *'lm* as a doubly defective spelling for the well attested *'êlīm,* 'rams,' which metaphorically designates "nobles, leaders, lieutenants" (cf. Exod 15:15; 2 Kgs 24:15; Ezek 17:13).[5] Are the denounced judges human or divine? The ambiguity of the key-word *'lm* precludes the possibility of any sure conclusion on this point, and a similar uncertainty attends the questions of whether a particular situation lies behind the scenes of the psalm, and the date of its composition.

All the more significant is the underlying general situation regarding the issue of justice in the world, the psalmist's mode of protest, and his expectations. The psalm clearly reflects desperate conditions, which are attributed to corrupt rulers. But for an afflicted people the crucial issue is not whether their rulers are human or divine, but whether there exists One who holds in his safe hands the moral order of humankind. It goes without saying that in a cultural environment that strongly favoured a dualistic explanation of the origin of evil it was easy to despair not only of human but also of divine justice. The psalmist, however, feels that he must react as a prophet should. His unshakable belief that there is God, the One and Only, who governs the universe and its rulers, inspires him with dramatic, poetic powers of denouncement, imprecation and entreaty. Oppression can be ended only by a divine verdict that renders powerless or destroys the source of injustice, for the wicked rulers "go astray from the womb *(mērāḥem),* they err from their birth *(mibbeṭen),* speaking lies" (v. 4). His word-pictures and comparisons are employed to express a profound knowledge of the nature of deception, rebellion and hardness of heart characteristic of perverse rulers. His petition that the wicked judges be destroyed (vv. 7–10) seeks to remove from God's dominion incorrigible rebels.

The divine judgment will have powerful consequences for the righteous:

> The righteous *(ṣaddîq)* will rejoice when he sees the vengeance *(nāqām);*
> he will bathe his feet in the blood of the wicked *(hārāšā').*
> Men will say, "Surely there is a reward for the righteous *('ak-pĕrî laṣṣaddîq);*
> surely there is a God who judges on earth."

The metaphor of satisfaction about the foreseen "revenge by footbath" expresses primarily the totality of the demand for justice and divine victory over the wicked in their capacity as rulers. The vindication of divine justice implies a counterpoise of retribution and recompense: the more complete the overthrow of the evil-doer, the clearer the justification of the righteous. This

[5] See G. R. Driver, "Notes on the Psalms. I. 1–72," *JThS* 43 (1942), 157; M. Dahood, *Psalms,* vol. 2, 57.

equilibration follows from the principle of justice, which is the very foundation of world order. Thus the exclamation *'ak-pĕrî laṣṣaddîq* transcends any desire for an identifiable, specific reward; it refers to the inherent expectation that human righteousness will in the end somehow prove profitable and successful (cf. Isa 3:10–11; Ps 128:2; Job 4:8; Prov 11:30; Gal 6:7).[6]

1.5 *The Vision of God's Judgment of the Divine Judges: Psalm 82*

Psalm 82 is perplexing in terms of situation, genre, composition and function. It has variously been seen as a didactic psalm, a prophetic speech, a cultic-prophetic utterance, a lament, or a vision. It is obvious that the elements of prophetic speech are present, but that alone could not explain the intent of the psalm; we must also take into consideration its setting, theme, and form of address. The psalm is a poetic protest against the intolerable fact that the weak are frequently deprived of justice. It is essential to note that the psalmist does not proclaim that this problem will be solved today or tomorrow but envisages an *ultimate* vindication of righteousness by God in an undefined future time. The persistence of oppression, attributed to the activities of forces hostile to God, precludes any imminent solution to the problem of theodicy. The key to proper understanding of the psalm is found in its last verse, with its urgent appeal to God to rise up in judgment (v. 8):

> Arise, O God, judge the earth;
> for to thee belong all the nations![7]

This appeal reflects the profound belief that God the Most High alone can resolve the issue of justice on the earth. How, then, can the main body of the psalm be explained?

In view of the concluding verse it seems appropriate to see vv. 1–7 as an account of a vision of God standing forth in the midst of a celestial company (cf. 1 Kgs 22:19–23; Isa 6; Job 1:6–12; 2:1–6; Pss 29:1; 58:2; 103:19–22; 148:2; Dan 7:9–10).[8] The psalmist was probably thinking of divine servants or intermediaries who were entrusted with the office of judge; they may also be regarded as demoted gods of the nations or as angels. It is taken for granted, however, that they perform judicial functions. Since the tradition of a

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[6] See the statement by K. Seybold, "Ps LVIII: Ein Lösungsversuch," *VT* 30 (1980), 61: "Dabei ist der Gerechte als Verhaltenstyp gemeint, der als ethisches Vorbild vor den Menschen, der ganzen Menschheit *('ādām)* steht. Es ist insofern ein universelles, ja prinzipielles Thema, das sich zugleich auch zu der Frage nach den Störungen der Gerechtigkeitsordnung hinwendet ..."

[7] See M. Tsevat, "God and the Gods in Assembly: An Interpretation of Psalm 82," *HUCA* 41–41 (1969–1970), 131: "What makes this poem a psalm, i.e., an address in poetic form by man to God, is the last verse ... This verse has an importance, moreover, which goes beyond even the function of constituting the poem as a psalm. For it plays a key role in the answer to the question, What specific genre confronts us in the psalm?"

[8] See M. Tsevat, *HUCA* 40–41 (1969–1970), 131–134.

divine court in heaven is to be found in all periods of Canaanite and Israelite history, the dating of the psalm remains open. The vision of judgment among the gods suggests the period when Israelite monotheism was well established. The vision is of a verdict being delivered on divine judges who are absolutely responsible to God, the Most High, which implies that other gods are dependent upon the supreme divine authority for their very existence.

The first part of the psalm (vv. 1–4) reports the author's vision of a heavenly court and the accusation of "the gods":

> God stands in the divine council *(ba'ădat-'ēl):*
> in the midst of the gods *(bĕqereb 'ĕlōhîm)* he holds judgment:
> "How long will you judge unjustly
> and show partiality to the wicked?
> Defend *(šipṭû)* the weak and the fatherless;
> maintain the right *(haṣdîqû)* of the afflicted and the destitute.
> Rescue the weak and the needy;
> deliver them from the hand of the wicked."

The phrase *'ădat-'ēl* is unique in the Hebrew Bible, although equivalents are to be found elsewhere: *sôd 'ĕlōah,* "the council of God" (Job 15:8); *sôd yhwh,* "the council of the Lord" (Jer 23:18); *sôd-qĕdōšîm,* "the council of the holy ones" (Ps 89:8). Similarly, the Ugaritic texts contain the terms *pḫr ilm = p/ḫ/r. bn ilm = mpḫrt bn il,* "the assembly of the gods."[9] The assertion in Ps 82:2 that God "stands" in the assembly of the gods signals an extraordinary judgmental event (cf. Isa 24:21).[10]

God's celestial subjects are called to account because they have misused their authority in the direction of justice. The requirements that it be administered in conformity with the divine order of righteousness was continually proclaimed by the prophets in relation to human rulers; here it is applied to the world of the gods. The rhetorical question asked in v. 2 implies an unacceptable answer and thus uncovers a guilt that requires the intervention of the supreme divine authority. Verses 3–4 comprise a set of commands to the heavenly assembly. It is worth noting that the imperative verb *šipṭû* (v. 3a) and the jussive verb *haṣdîqû* (v. 3b) do not refer to the legal or formal administration of justice but to the fundamental order of divine righteousness, which holds good in heaven and on earth. To "defend" the defenseless and to "maintain the right" of those who are devoid of it implies effecting the deliverance of the afflicted, i. e., turning the divine salvific will into accomplished fact. The higher the rank of the divine intermediaries, the more is expected of them.

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[9] See C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* (AnOr 38; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965, 1998), *Texts* 17:7; 51:III:14; 107:3 and *Glossary,* Nr. 2037.

[10] See the statement by M. Tsevat, *HUCA* 40–41 (1969–1970), 127: "... standing is a sign of an extraordinary event. The meaning, then, of the psalm's opening is that what might normally be a routine assembly, where the gods report or participate in deliberations, has unexpectedly turned into a tribunal; God has stood up to judge the assembled."

Verse 5 describes in language vivid with irony the lamentable state of the gods. The identity of the speaker here is uncertain; it may be God, or the psalmist, or an anonymous member of the heavenly assembly. The passing of the judgment recalls the description of the wicked judges in Ps 58:4. It is not clear whether the speaker envisions those who are criticized as "inherently incapable of grasping the issue"[11] or as subjects who deliberately reject the divine moral order. In any event, the result is that "the foundations of the earth are shaken."[12] Chaos threatens, and the conflict between the Most High and the powers of darkness appears total. So God must finally act in order to ensure the salvation of the world.

The trial typically ends with the pronouncement of judgment on the gods (vv. 6–7) in which past divine rank is juxtaposed with the future lot of ordinary mortals:

> I say, "You are gods *('ĕlōhîm 'attem),*
> sons of the Most High *(bĕnê 'elyôn),* all of you;
> nevertheless, you shall die like men *(kĕ'ādām),*
> and fall like any prince *('aḥad haśśārîm).*"

A similar form of antithesis is found in Isa 49:4; Jer 3:19–20; Zeph 3:7; Pss 31:23; 66:18–19; Job 32:7–8. All these passages share a general pattern: erroneous earlier thinking needs correction. Past error may have taken the form of an imagination that was in conflict with reality (Isa 49:4a; Pss 31:23a; 66:18; Job 32:7) or a groundless expectation (Zeph 3:7ab). But it may also have been characterized by solid determination, even though some condition is implied (Jer 3:19). In the first case the corrective statement means amendment of a mistaken evaluation, in the second one relegation of a decision or promise because the required conditions were not met; fulfilment may be made impossible by the wrong reaction of some chosen instrument (Jer 3:20). The prophetic-visionary message of Ps 82:6–7 shares the same moral background as Jer 3:19–20. In both cases God speaks of a firm determination, but from the divine nature it follows that the deliberation implies fulfilment of moral conditions on the part of the bearer of the divine commission or promise. Unfaithfulness or corruption alone can make fulfilment of God's promise uncertain. This kind of relationship between the Most High and the gods necessarily implies that God is absolute Lord of all other beings. Moreover, it rests on the axiom: *summum esse summum bonum.* The concept of God Most High involves an inherent or "ontological" unity with absolute standards of righteousness. It follows that God is the only true model for human righteousness. And such a model implies an inbuilt obligation to imitate it. Intrinsic faithful-

[11] See M. Tsevat, *HUCA* 40–41 (1969–1970), 128.

[12] See the remark by A. Weiser, *The Psalms,* 560: "No wonder that the foundations of the moral order on earth are shaken when those who had been appointed to act as the heavenly guardians of God's order of the universe themselves do not even know and obey that order!"

ness or obedience to the Creator is in fact the determinant of whether the people will increase in exaltation or suffer sudden decline.

This recognition provides the only possible clue to the question of whether the terms *'lm* in Ps 58:2a and *'ădat-'ēl, 'ĕlōhîm* and *bĕnê 'elyôn* in Ps 82:1a, 6 imply divine or human judges. Both alternatives have been supported by attractive arguments, but the majority of commentators have interpreted these psalms as referring to Israelite judges. The psalms give the impression, however, that the issue at stake is the confrontation of two fundamentally different ideas of God: on the one hand a strong polytheistic framework based on a dualistic conception of the world, on the other a profound monotheism given expression by the psalmist. The polytheistic view was obviously highly relevant to the nations as well as to Israel, because the persistence of evil was a dramatic actuality.[13] "Other gods" were for the Jews of the Old Testament realities that attracted the compass needles of their minds.[14] The Hebrew prophets saw only one solution: the way of divine judgment in the near or distant future. The psalmist was a realist and knew that no real solution was imminent, but his faith opened up vistas of expectation or hope that God would some day restore the original order by destroying evil-doers. God is the Holy One and can not therefore tolerate any kind of injustice.

On the other hand, the greatness of the Most High implies benevolence towards all other divine and human beings who sustain the right. There can be no suggestion of a challenge to divine authority here, for the divine assembly and humankind exist because their Creator so determined. The relationship between creation and election is very close. The mention of the divine assembly in various contexts implies the belief that God created superhuman beings, which must by definition be immortal. But immortality in a different mode is also promised to human beings. God created man "in his own image, in the image of God he created him" (Gen 1:27; cf. Wis 2:23). This privilege implies the promise of deathlessness, but its fulfilment is contingent upon obedience. God said to Adam: "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (Gen 2:17; cf.

[13] For the fact of the persistence of evil, see the illuminating contribution by J. D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (London / San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988). See further H. R. Page, *The Myth of Cosmic Rebellion: A Study of Its Reflexes in Ugaritic and Biblical Literature* (VT.S 65; Leiden / New York / Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1996).

[14] H.-J. Kraus is probably right when he says in *Psalms 60–150:* "Psalm 82 can be understood only when we recall the harsh contests which Israel had to endure against the pretenses of power of the heathen gods." See also the statement by M. Tsevat, *HUCA* 40–41 (1969–1970), 125: "In most of the nonprophetic books of the Bible, we have actuality pitted against actuality and not actuality against nonactuality. If the modern reader is disillusioned with the polytheism and occultism of some parts of the Bible, let him consider that it is the aspect of actuality (reality) against actuality that makes the Bible a living book; where the issue is actuality against nonactuality, interest flags because battle with a strawman is no battle at all."

3:3–5). Messiah can sit on the right hand of God (Ps 2:7), and David received the promise of an eternal covenant (2 Sam 7:14–16; Ps 89:19–37). So far as God's nature, intentions, and activity are concerned, there is no clear boundary between divine and human beings; all of them are, in the divine plan, in some fashion immortal. The boundary is drawn when created beings misuse their prerogatives or commissions and rebel against their Creator. The critical point is therefore obedience: beneficiaries who rebel against their master or misuse their position are judged and stripped of their dignity. According to Psalms 58 and 82 God calls "gods" to account because they have not fulfilled their duty of enforcing justice among humans. But the verdict is communicated to the earthly rulers who rely on them and who must learn that a similar inescapable downfall will befall themselves should they follow their chosen models and persist in rebellion. The issue of faithfulness or unfaithfulness, of obedience or disobedience, and of justice or injustice is a matter of life or death in the strict sense of the phrase.

As for trends in exegesis, it seems that most exegetes tend to argue for an extrinsic or forensic interpretation of Psalms 58 and 82. This may be the main reason why there are two groups, one applying "gods" and its associated vocabulary to superhuman beings and the other identifying them with human rulers. It is vital to examine the intrinsic criteria on which this judgment is based, for they alone can indicate where the truth lies.[15] The decisive point is that both superhuman and human beings are bound by the same moral standards. Faithfulness to the Origin of the moral order is the only way in which they can achieve some kind of immortality.

The midrashic interpretation of Psalm 82 is highly illuminating on this question of immortality and mortality. There is a clear indication that intrinsic (i. e., moral) grounds alone are pertinent to the question of whether and in what sense created beings can be considered deathless. In the early Jewish traditions the theme of immortality and downfall as envisioned in Psalm 82 attracted a great deal of attention. "Gods" in Psalm 82 was understood to refer to angels, Melchizedek, the judges, or Israel at Sinai,[16] and this last reference is especially noteworthy. Several passages in midrashic literature claim that Israel resumed at Sinai the "image and likeness of God" given to humankind at creation but lost at the fall. God's statement in Ps 82:6a, "I say,

[15] H. Niehr, "Götter oder Menschen—eine falsche Alternative: Bemerkungen zu Ps 82," *ZAW* 40–41 (1969–1970), 94–98, rejects the alternative gods // humans and proposes a middle way: on the basis of recognition that superhuman realities are in the Bible presented analogically he assumes that the terms denoting "gods" refer to both gods and humans. But his argument is still basically extrinsic or forensic; consequently it cannot provide sufficient ground for an adequate interpretation.

[16] See especially A. Hanson, "John's Citation of Psalm LXXXII Reconsidered," *NTS* 13 (1966–1967), 363–367; J. S. Ackerman, "The Rabbinic Interpretation of Psalm 82 and the Gospel of John," *HThR* 59 (1966), 186–191; J. H. Neyrey, "'I said: You Are Gods': Psalm 82:6 and John 10," *JBL* 108 (1989), 647–663.

'You are gods,'" is held to apply to this exaltation with its implications of immortality. According to this interpretation the Angel of Death should have had no dominion over Israel, but her people committed the sin of apostasy by worshipping the golden calf and consequently suffered the penalty of death; as God declared in Ps 82:7: "You shall die like men." Let us cite one of the early midrashim:

> You stood at Mount Sinai and said, "All that the Lord hath spoken will we do, and obey" (Exod 24:7), (whereupon) "I SAID: YE ARE GODS" (Ps 82:6); but when you said to the (golden) calf, "This is thy god, O Israel" (Exod 32:4), I said to you, "NEVERTHELESS, YE SHALL DIE LIKE MEN" (Ps 82:7).[17]

Apostasy at Sinai is reminiscent of disobedience in the primeval history, and is regarded as a new Fall story. Adam was created in holiness and so was deathless; yet sinned by eating the forbidden fruit and died. Israel at Sinai was reconstituted in holiness and so became deathless; yet sinned by worshipping the golden calf and died. This parallelism shows how crucial is the demand for obedience in both stories. Obedience to the supreme divine authority or inner unity with God alone leads to holiness, godlikeness, and deathlessness. This principle is valid for all created beings: gods and humans alike. And this principle follows from the inner structure of the relationship between the Most High and the created world. Even when made deathless, the gods remained less than God and therefore liable to undoing.

2. *Wisdom Reflections on Recompense and Retribution*

In a number of psalms the question of recompense or retribution is dealt with summarily. In Psalm 18 the king thanks God for bestowing saving grace, and in v. 21 he says: "The Lord rewarded me *(yigmĕlēnî)* according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he recompensed me *(yāšîb lî)*" (cf. v. 25). Righteousness is certainly not seen here as merit—something that God was obliged to reward. Since human righteousness is the only appropriate response to manifestations of divine grace, it can be primarily understood as the favourable factor that allows God to be ever more gracious. In the acrostic Wisdom Psalm 34 the 1 operation of recompense and retribution is affirmed in antithetic statements (vv. 11a//11b, 16//17, 18–21//22). In Psalm 52 an address to the boasting slanderers takes the form of a prophetic

[17] See *Sifre: A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy,* Piska 320 (translated by R. Hammer; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 329. For similar statements, see *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael,* tractate *Bahodesh* 9; The Babylonian Talmud, *'Abodah Zarah* 5a; *Midrash Rabbah Exodus* 32:7; *Midrash Rabbah Leviticus* 11:3; *Midrash Rabbah Numeri* 16:24; *Midrash Rabbah Qohelet* 3:16; *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* 47; *Pesikta Rabbati* 1:2; 13:10; 33:10; *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* 4; *Eliyyahu Zuta* 4; *Eliyyahu Rabbah* 24.

reproach (vv. 3–6), followed by a forecast of sudden downfall: "But God will break you down for ever; he will snatch and tear you from your tent, he will uproot you from the land of the living" (v. 7). The image of uprooting is contrasted with that of a green olive tree signifying the true permanence of the psalmist who trusts in God: "But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God ..." (v. 10; cf. Jer 11:16; Ps 1:3).

The author of Psalm 62 expresses his confidence in God in face of human hostility. The ultimate motivation of his trust is reliance on the justice of divine judgment; in its closing verses (12–13) he summarizes the characteristics of God's justice: "Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God; and that to thee, O Lord, belongs steadfast love *(ḥesed)*. For thou dost requite a man according to his work *(kî-'attāh tĕšallēm lĕ'îš kĕma'ăśēhû)*" (cf. v. 13b with Prov 24:12b). God's *ḥesed* signifies divine loyalty towards the faithful, and this implies that the verb *šlm* (Pi'el) in this context refers both to recompense or security of the faithful and the doom or sterility of the wicked. The psalmist can trust in God above all things, because he knows "that power belongs to God" (v. 12b). In Psalm 63, a prayer of confidence that has a Davidic context, the suppliant enters into an inner spirituality as he yearns for the intervention and nearness of God; he closes his prayer with a declaration about the ultimate prospects for the prevaricators and for the righteous king respectively: "They shall be given over to the power of the sword, they shall be prey for jackals. But the king shall rejoice in God; all who swear by him shall glory; for the mouths of liars will be stopped" (vv. 11–12). The psalmist's faith that God will give judgment in favour of Israel's loyal servants follows as the night the day from the nature of the underlying concept of divine integral power and righteousness. It may therefore be considered as a matter of natural religious sentiment and of reflection on God's all-embracing rule.

The community lament of Psalm 90 deserves close attention because it presents the inherent or "ontological" unity between human guilt and punishment. The poem contains a hymnic introduction, addressed to God (vv. 1–2), reflections on God's eternity and the transitory and sinful nature of human life (vv. 3–12), and pleas that God's grace and "gladness" be proportionate to the duration of affliction (vv. 13–17). In vv. 7–12 the praying community identifies the moral reasons for the antithesis between God's eternity and the frailty and shortness of human life. The reflective language matches its theme: "For we are consumed by thy anger; by thy wrath we are overwhelmed. Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance. ... Who considers the power of thy anger, and thy wrath according to the fear of thee? So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom." The entire section implies an awareness that God's anger is justified and punishment deserved. This profound awareness of the ultimate relationship between human mortality and sin inspires the

prayer that God may grant the praying community the wisdom that begins with the fear of God and lead them to new life. The major concern of the prayer is God's mercy: "Return *(šûbāh),* O Lord! How long? Have pity *(wĕhinnāḥēm)* on thy servants! ..." (v. 13).

In his vigorous encouragement of faith, the author of Psalm 91 selects for emphasis certain aspects of reality; one of these is the deliverance of the faithful and the passing of judgment on the ungodly. In vv. 7–8 he uses markedly metaphorical language to express the certainty that God will manifest divine power in distinguishing between the righteous and the wicked: "A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand; but it will not come near you. You will only look with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked *(wĕšillumat rĕšā'îm tir'eh)*" Psalm 112, a Wisdom poem, magnifies the qualities and the blessings of the righteous, ending with an affirmation of reward to the godly and the frustration of the wicked: "His heart is steady, he will not be afraid, until he sees his desire on his adversaries. He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures for ever *(ṣidqātô 'omedet lā'ād);* his horn is exalted in honour. The wicked man sees it and is angry: he gnashes his teeth and melts away; the desire of the wicked man comes to naught" (vv. 8–10; cf. Prov 10:24, 28; 11:7).

The theme of recompense receives further exposure in the liturgical Psalm 132. As part of an appeal to God in its first major part (vv. 1–10) the community prays for divine blessings on the reigning king on account of David's loyalty. The prayer ends: "For thy servant David's sake *(ba'ăbûr dāwîd 'abdekā)* do not turn away the face of thy anointed one." God's answer (vv. 11–18), vouchsafed through the instrumentality of a cultic prophet, begins with the assurance: "The Lord swore to David a sure oath *(nišba'-yhwh lĕdāwîd 'ĕmet)* from which he will not turn back: 'One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne. If your sons keep my covenant and my testimonies which I shall teach them, their sons also for ever shall sit upon your throne.'" These words recall the basic promise made through Nathan (cf. 2 Sam 7:1–17; Ps 89:20–38). There is, however, an important difference in the presentation of the nature of the divine promise to the Davidic dynasty. In contrast to the unconditional oath posited in 2 Sam 7:14–15 and Ps 89:29–38, the promise affirmed in Ps 132:11–12 is casuistic in form, and consequently conditional in nature: covenant fidelity and obedience to the law are prerequisites for the fulfilment of God's promise in relation to the descendants of David. The origin, development and validity of the three passages are matters of dispute, but whatever conclusions are reached, the different forms and emphases applied to the same promise suggest the possible part played by human agents in the sacred history. What is at issue is the question of the continuity of that history, and not just of individual fates. The sovereign divine decision concerning the basic sacred course of history and the obligations imposed on the human agents involved inevitably resulted in severe tensions.

Psalm 145, a liturgical hymn in acrostic form, contains among other current religious ideas a statement about God's righteousness in the characteristic vindicatory, redemptive sense. In v. 17 the psalmist affirms: "The Lord is just *(ṣaddîq)* in all his ways, and kind in all his doings." In vv. 18–20a he praises God's fatherly care and saving protection in relation to the faithful. But care for the righteous implies exclusion of the wicked from the benefits of salvation; in v. 20b the poet declares, in an adversative clause, God's judgment upon the wicked: "... but all the wicked he will destroy." A similar affirmation of God's care for the weak appears in Psalm 146: in v. 9 the poet expresses God's discrimination in an antithesis : "The Lord watches over the sojourners, he upholds the widow and the fatherless; but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin." This generalization is based on an awareness that God is the one "who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith for ever *(haššōmēr 'ĕmet lĕ'ōlām)*" (v. 6). Finally, individual retribution of this kind is mentioned in the liturgical hymn Psalm 147. In v. 6 the poet declares antithetically: "The Lord lifts up the downtrodden, he casts the wicked to the ground."

In three cases the theme of recompense and retribution dominates the whole structure of the psalm, and these must be analyzed in more detail: Psalms 1; 37; 73.

2.1 *The Blessedness of the Godly Life and the Futility of Godlessness: Psalm 1*

Psalm 1 is a didactic composition, contrasting the happiness of the righteous with the ultimate wretchedness of the wicked. This polarity of individuals and their destinies is dealt with in an antithetical composition comprising two main sections (vv. 1–3//4–5) and a summary (v. 6).[18] The first section (vv. 1–3) opens with a congratulatory formula, speaks of the exemplary behaviour of the righteous, and illustrates their prosperity with the simile of a tree "[trans]planted by streams of water":

> Blessed is the man *('ašrê hā'îš)*
> who walks not in the counsel of the wicked *(ba'ăṣat rĕšā'îm),*
> nor stands in the way of sinners *(bĕderek ḥaṭṭā'îm)*
> nor sits in the seat of scoffers *(bĕmôšab lēṣîm);*
> but *(kî 'im)* his delight is in the law of the Lord,

[18] See N. H. Ridderbos, *Die Psalmen: Stilistische Verfahren* ..., 119–120. For various attempts to characterize the structure of the psalm, see especially J. A. Soggin, "Zum ersten Psalm," *ThZ* 23 (1967), 81–96; R. Lack, "Le psaume 1—Une analyse structurale," *Biblica* 57 (1976), 154–167; P. Auffret, "Essai sur la structure littéraire du Psaume 1," *BZ* 22 (1978), 27–45; J. T. Willis, "Psalm 1—An Entity," *ZAW* 91 (1979), 381–401; R. P. Merendino, "Sprachkunst in Psalm 1," *VT* 29 (1979), 45–60; W. Vogels, "A Structural Analysis of Ps 1," *Biblica* 60 (1979), 410–416.

and on his law he meditates day and night.
He is *(wĕhāyāh)* like a tree
planted *(šātûl)* by streams of water,
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.

The admirable conduct of the righteous is painted both in negative and positive terms. Negatively, the good man avoids all facets of the way of the sinful: "walking in the counsel of the wicked," i.e., heeding their advice (cf. Mic 6:16; Jer 7:24); imitating their conduct; and participating in their assemblies.[19] Positively, he finds delight in the law of the Lord (cf. Pss 19:8–11; 119:92) and devotes his time, day and night, to its study. Constant reflection on the meaning of the law as the intelligible expression of the divine will is generally strongly recommended to the tribes of Israel: "This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success" (Josh 1:8). On the other hand, the Qumran scroll *Rule of the Community* (1QS) 6:6–8 points to the importance of an equally devoted scribe within the local community: "Where there are ten (members) there must not be lacking there a man who studies the Torah day and night continually, each man relieving another. The Many shall spend the third part of every night of the year in unity, reading the Book, studying judgment, and saying benedictions in unity."[20] All these passages reflect the desire that the faithful should yield continuously to the will of God and let that will ever pervade their whole being.

Verse 3 iterates the consequences of exemplary conduct. The introductory verb *wĕhāyāh* is usually rendered by "He is," which one might call the present tense of timelessness. It has been suggested, however, that it may be understood as a perfect consecutive pointing to the future,[21] an interpretation possibly buttressed by an eschatological understanding of vv. 3 and 6. Hence the debatable conclusion that the verb *šātal* means 'transplant,' rather than 'plant' and has an eschatological connotation.[22] It seems safer, however, to retain the

[19] The three parallel lines in v. 1 are not to be taken separately but as a rhetorical figure: merism. They express the totality of one root-sin: rebellion against God. See G. W. Anderson, "A Note on Psalm I 1," *VT* 24 (1974), 231–233: "It has often been claimed that this verse describes three possible stages in the deterioration of a man's conduct and character. ... But this is not a necessary interpretation. The phrases may be synonymous; and, since there is no strong indication elsewhere in the verse of a climactic progression, they probably are" (pp. 231–232). See also A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms,* vol. 1, 58–59; P. C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50,* 60.

[20] Translation of E. Qimron and J. H. Charlesworth, *The Dead Sea Scrolls,* vol. 1 (ed. J. H. Charlesworth; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (P. Siebeck); Louisville: Westminster J. Knox Press, 1994), 27.

[21] See D. Michel, *Tempora und Satzstellung in den Psalmen* (Bonn: H. Bouvier, 1960), § 15, pp. 108–111; M. Dahood, *Psalms,* vol. 1, 3.

[22] See M. Dahood, *Psalms,* vol. 1, 3.

traditional use of *wĕhāyāh* in v. 3a "to express facts which have formerly taken place, and are still of constant recurrence, and hence are matters of common experience (the Greek *gnomic aorist*)."[23] The statement in v. 3 implies that the health of the tree is not due to its own vitality but results from the nature of the ground. This applies also to the simile of the tree in Jer 17:8 in relation to him who trusts in the Lord. From the association between the law (or trust in God) and the plantation of the tree near water it follows that the law is the ground where a human being can best flourish and produce fruit in due time. Unarguable evidence from the material world provides a metaphor *par excellence* for the life of loyalty or obedience on the personal-spiritual level. The righteous prosper because they permit themselves to be pervaded by the divine resources of life. And so, ultimately, the association implies that anything done apart from God's will is bound to fail.

All the more striking is the negation at the beginning of the second section (vv. 4–5), which paints a sombre picture of the wicked: "The wicked are not so *(lō'-kēn hārĕšā'îm),* but are *(kî 'im)* like chaff which the wind drives away." Verse 4 is not related to the whole of the first section but only to the simile of the tree in v. 3. The psalmist is not discussing the conduct of the wicked but pointing to their fate: they yield no fruit and, in contrast to the firmly grounded and fruitful tree, are without real substance or worth. Instead of v. 3's vertical perspective of stability there is here a horizontal plane of instability and flatness, illustrated by the simile of chaff that cannot withstand the wind on the threshing floor (cf. Isa 17:13; Hos 13:3; Ps 35:5; Job 21:18). The psalmist, unlike the author of the Wisdom saying in Jer 17:5–8, does not employ the metaphor of a shrub in the desert that in Jeremiah provides a direct antithesis to a tree planted near water.

The simile of the chaff that underlines the sterility of the wicked is followed by a statement on judgment. Verse 5 reads:

> *'al-kēn lō'-yāqûmû rĕšā'îm bammišpāṭ*
> *wĕḥaṭṭā'îm ba'ădat ṣaddîqîm*
> Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
> nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

Here the poet has returned to the theme of vv. 1–2 to emphasize the incompatibility of the wicked with the community of the righteous. Anyone loyal to God cannot stand in the way of the wicked (v. 1). On the other hand, the wicked cannot stand (or rise up) in "the judgment" and have no access to the congregation of the righteous (v. 5); on the day of judgment they will be conclusively removed from among the faithful. The characterization of the conduct and fate of the righteous and the wicked results in some chiastic

[23] See E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (15th impr.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), § 106k.

correspondence between the first and second sections of the psalm: A (vv. 1–2) – B (v. 3) – B' (v. 4) – A' (v. 5).

The concluding verse (6) relates only to the fates of the two categories and summarizes them in a fine example of antithetic parallelism:

> For the Lord knows *(kî-yôdēa' yhwh)* the way of the righteous,
> but the way of the wicked will perish *(tō'bēd).*

In vv. 5 and 6 the psalmist makes an important theological point: the prosperity of the righteous and the barrenness of the wicked are not just the natural outcome of particular ways of life but are sanctioned by the sovereign Lord of the universe. By employing the causal particle *kî* and involving the name of God the poet points in v. 6 to the direct connection between the fates of the righteous or wicked and divine authority, power and sanctity. The verb *yāda'* may have a connotation of care or protection (cf. Hos 13:5; Amos 3:2; Pss 9:11; 31:8; 37:18), and the context of Psalm 1 certainly suggests that that is the primary meaning here: God accepts the righteous and cares for them. On the other hand, it is not necessary to claim that God brings the way of the wicked to naught, because their failure is the unavoidable result of their rebellion against the will of God, who constitutes the foundation of the world and all moral order. By rejecting divine guidance in their lives they also repudiate God's concern for them.

It is noteworthy that the first and last words of the psalm start with the first and last letters of the alphabet: *'ašrê ... tō'bēd;* and that the synonymous phrases *derek ḥaṭṭā'îm* (v. 1b) and *derek rĕšā'îm* (v. 6b) form "an *inclusio,* a rhetorical device also called 'cyclic composition,' in which the author returns to the point where he began."[24] Individual words, and grammatical and literary forms provide a basis for interdependence of the various parts on one another. On the other hand, the argument of the psalmist reappears as promise and warning or as blessing and curse in many biblical passages. This explains why the psalm serves as a prologue to the whole Psalter. The simile of the tree and the basic form of antithesis are in themselves universal in nature, just as various forms of opposition among human beings on ethical and theological levels are universal. So we find the contrasting of the ways in Jer 21:8 and Matt 7:13–14. There is a further striking similarity to Ps 1:3–4 and Jer 17:5–8 in the fourth chapter of the Instruction of Amen-em-Opet, contrasting the fates of the man of volatile temper with that of him who is self-controlled; both are engaged in the service of the temple:

> As for the heated man of a temple,
> He is like a tree growing in the open.
> In the completion of a moment (comes) its loss of foliage,
> And its end is reached in the shipyards;

[24] See M. Dahood, *Psalms,* vol. 1, 5.

(Or) it is floated far from its place,
And the flame is its burial shroud.

(But) the truly silent man holds himself apart.
He is like a tree growing in a *garden.*
It flourishes and doubles its yield;
It (stands) before its lord.
Its fruit is sweet; its shade is pleasant;
And its end is reached in the garden. ...[25]

It seems that the theology of Amen-em-Opet is essentially monotheistic, and the last line of this particular chapter probably proclaims belief in life after death.[26]

All the more is it questionable whether it is appropriate to interpret the psalm in a narrow and therefore one-sided fashion, as some exegetes do. There is marked disagreement as to whether the statements about yielding fruit and standing in the judgment (vv. 3, 5, 6) relate to the present time or to eschatological events in the future.[27] On the other hand, some scholars link the doctrine of the psalm with natural retribution,[28] whereas others see it primarily in the context of God's personal care for the created world and humankind.[29] We may conclude that the writer of the "précis of the Book of Psalms"[30] sees the fundamental issue of human existence in the light of the traditional Hebrew belief in the One and holy God who is Creator and Redeemer of the world, the nations and Israel. This belief implies the total incompatibility of divine holiness with any kind of alienation or rebellion. Observations concerning the prosperity of the righteous and the frustration of the wicked are not primarily a result of examination of how retribution is

[25] Translated by J. A. Wilson, "Egyptian Instructions," *ANET,* 422. See D. Winton Thomas, *Documents from Old Testament Times* (London: T. Nelson, 1958), 178.

[26] See the statement by D. Winton Thomas, *Documents from Old Testament Times,* 178: "The underlying idea is the garden of trees in the realm of the blessed dead. In contrast to line 6, where the burial shroud of the hot-headed man is the destroying flame, the self-controlled man may expect after death revivification in the garden of the gods."

[27] It is striking that in M. Dahood, *Psalms,* vol. 1, 1–5, every allusion to the fruit or judgment is interpreted as indicating eschatological time: "vs. 3 *wĕhāyāh* refers to future time, namely, when the just man, like a tree, shall be transplanted to the Elysian Fields"; "*šātal* could also be used for the transference of the just to the abode of the blest"; in the statement "and its leaf does not wither" (v. 3b) M. Dahood sees "a symbol of immortality"; the metaphor of the chaff which the wind drives away he interprets as "the description of the wicked being driven into Sheol"; the word *mišpāṭ* (v. 5a) he relates to the final heavenly place of judgment: "As the final judgment will take place in the heavenly council, to which the wicked will not be admitted, they will be condemned *in absentia.*" On the other hand, P. C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50,* 61, claims: "The wisdom, as expressed in this psalm, is essentially related to the present life; the psalm does not clearly evince any doctrine of future life. The anticipated prosperity is in the present life, just as the failure of the wicked is to be a present reality."

[28] See especially P. C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50,* 60–61.

[29] See J. W. Rogerson and J. W. McKay, *Psalms 1–50,* 17, in relation to v. 3: "The lesson of the metaphor is that spiritual happiness is God-given, not naturally attained."

[30] See M. Dahood, *Psalms,* vol. 1, 1.

working in the course of day-to-day routine. The background of the Wisdom statements is a vision of faith that penetrates the profound places of human nature and englobes the whole of history. Only the faithful are capable of seeing that the way of the wicked unavoidably leads to destruction, because they cut the ground from under their feet. At the same time, the righteous can be sure of their prosperity, because their lives are based on a divine power and a concern for them that infinitely transcend their own merit and the hurtful contrariety of the wicked. It follows that every confrontation of divine and human righteousness carries unmistakably the overtones of final judgment.

2.2 *Recompense and Retribution Will Be Meted Out in Due Season: Psalm 37*

The author of Psalm 37 is addressing those members of the covenant community who are tempted to judge God's governance of the world on the basis of temporal affairs. In the manner of the Wisdom literature, he speaks *sub specie aeternitatis,* and his statements reflect traditional belief in God's justice in dealing with the righteous and the wicked. The psalmist refers to his personal experience, however, revealing that he is of advanced years (v. 25). Since the psalm is composed in the form of an alphabetical acrostic, the individual sections are only loosely connected with each other. Nevertheless, its 22 strophes manifest an underlying unity of theme: recompense and retribution. This in itself offers little help in dating the psalm, which could have been characteristic of any stage in Israel's history. The certainty of the psalmist's own faith and his call to trust (vv. 3, 5), personal commitment (v. 5), and expectant hope (vv. 7, 9, 34) indicate, however, that his thought is totally permeated by the mature monotheism and the sense of community characteristic of a later period rather than by the Near Eastern cosmological and rational orientation typical of approaches to the issue of retribution.

Even though this collection of statements and proverbs deals with one central theme as a continuous whole, the psalm can be divided into four main sections: exhortations not to envy the wicked, but to trust in God, who will ultimately impose judgment (vv. 1–11); an account of the devices of the wicked and the inevitable collapse of their fortunes (vv. 12–20); a promise that the righteous shall be blessed and preserved for ever, while the wicked shall be cursed and doomed to destruction (vv. 21–31); a final contrast between the recompense of the righteous and the devastation of the wicked (vv. 32–40).[31]

[31] N. H. Ridderbos, *Die Psalmen,* 268–269, proposes a slightly different division: 1–11; 12–20; 21–29; 30–40. This division was adopted also by P. Auffret, "'Aie confiance en lui, et lui, il agira': Étude structurelle du Psaume 37," *SJOT* 2 (1990), 13–43.

The first section reflects the struggle of the believer against the assertive human ego. In the opening strophe, Aleph, the psalmist exhorts his hearers:

> Fret not yourself because of the wicked *('al-tiṯḥar bammĕrē'îm),*
> be not envious of wrongdoers!
> For they will quickly *(mĕhērāh)* fade like the grass,
> and wither like the green herb.

The reason why feelings of envy and chagrin should be avoided is stated in the form of a simile: the evil-doer is like grass—of short duration (cf. Pss 90:5–6; 103:15–16; 129:6; Isa 40:6–8; Job 14:2; Matt 6:30; Jas 1:10–11). The opening *'al-tiṯḥar* is repeated in vv. 7b and 8b, showing that it plays a crucial role in Psalm 37. Elsewhere in the Bible, the expression occurs in Prov 24:19 within a similar passage counselling against envy of the evil (cf. Prov 23:17; 24:1), an exhortation based on the retribution argument which employs the simile of a lamp:

> Fret not yourself because of evildoers,
> and be not envious of the wicked;
> for the evil man has no future;
> the lamp of the wicked will be put out.

In strophe Beth (vv. 3–4), the speaker turns from the wicked to God using positive terminology:

> Trust in the Lord, and do good,
> settle in the land and pasture faithfulness *('ĕmûnāh).*
> Take delight in the Lord,
> and he will give you the desires of your heart.

In the MT, v. 3b runs in parallel with v. 3a. There is no compelling reason to interpret it consequentially as the RSV does: "so you will dwell in the land, and enjoy security."[32] Dwelling in the land is a divine blessing conferred in response to human obedience and faithfulness towards God; but present possession implies an obligation to fulfil a task allotted to the people by God. Verse 9b shows that there is an inner connection between the trust in God and occupancy of the land: "those who wait for the Lord, shall possess the land." That everything depends on a right relationship to God is also corroborated by the statement in v. 9a that "the wicked shall be cut off." It is not clear whether the exhortation "and pasture faithfulness" relates to divine or human faithfulness. If the former, it would mean God's blessing bestowed in the form of the land; if the latter, "faithfulness" can be understood as a synonym for trust in God. In v. 4, the psalmist connects "delight in the Lord" (cf. Isa 58:14; Job 22:26; 27:19) and assurance of recompense: "... and he will give you the desires of your heart" (cf. Pss 20:5–6; 21:3). The Lord will fulfil the deepest le-

[32] The Septuagint renders the colon basically in accordance with the MT, but instead of *'ĕmûnāh* we find there *ploûtos,* 'riches.'

gitimate desires of the human heart when they are inspired by attachment to God and reliance upon the divine guidance of history.[33]

In strophe Gimel (vv. 5–6), the exhortation reaches its climax:

> Commit your way to the Lord *(gôl 'al-yhwh darkekā);*
> trust in him, and he will act *(wĕhû' ya'ăśeh).*
> He will bring forth your vindication *(ṣidqekā)* as the light,
> and your right *(ûmišpāṭekā)* as the noonday.

Verse 5a reads literally: "Roll your way upon the Lord" (cf. Ps 22:9a; Prov 16:3; 1 Pet 5:7). This expression is reminiscent of the similar phrase in Ps 55:23: "Cast your burden on the Lord *(hašlēk 'al-yhwh yĕhobkā),* and he will sustain you ..." In v. 5b, the psalmist connects trust in God with divine action in favour of a faithful people. This implies that God does not act where there is disbelief (cf. Matt 13:58), or he acts in anger (cf. Ps 78:21–22). Of course, it is not always evident that God responds to faith with action, but the psalmist firmly believes in divine intervention on behalf of the righteous. In Prov 16:20, the Wisdom teacher likewise connects trust in God with prosperity: "He who gives heed to the word will prosper, and happy is he who trusts in the Lord."[34] The simile in v. 6 recalls passages in Isa 58:10; 62:1; Jer 51:10; Job 11:17; and Matt 13:43. Since the psalmist defends God's righteous rule in the world, the subject of the word pair *ṣedeq // mišpāṭ* is certainly God; the first noun signifies salvation and the second the Lord's just rule.[35]

From what is said in strophe Gimel, the exhortation of strophe Daleth naturally follows (v. 7) to wait patiently and trustfully for God's vindication (cf. Isa 7:4; 30:15). Strophe He (vv. 8–9) reiterates the warning of vv. 1–2, 7 and explains that allowing oneself to be ruffled by the wicked tends to encourage evil (v. 8b), an attitude that involves rebellion against God's rule.[36] The psalmist's teaching is that God will ensure just discrimination in due course: "For the wicked shall be cut off; but those who wait for the Lord shall possess the land" (v. 9; cf. Isa 57:13; 60:21; 65:9; Pss 25:13; 140:13; Prov 2:21; 10:30; Matt 5:5). The word *krt*, 'cut off,' is used in Deut 12:29; 19:1 in relation to the nations of Canaan who were dispossessed by Israel. In

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[33] In Ps 4:8, the psalmist extols the gladness which God has put in his heart as a result of his reliance upon him. In Matt 6:33, the inner connection between trust in God and abundant blessing is expressed thus: "... seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well."

[34] Prov 28:26, on the other hand, states the opposite case: "He who trusts in his own mind is a fool; but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered."

[35] See the comment by A. Weiser, *The Psalms,* 317: "For his life is sustained by the hope that God's salvation will rise over him like the sun, and that his just cause, which, after all, is nothing other than the cause of God, will triumph."

[36] See the appropriate explanation by A. Weiser, *The Psalms,* 318: "In his seemingly righteous indignation at the sinners the godly man by that conduct unwittingly puts himself in the same attitude of mind which the sinners have adopted, that is, he opposes God and is disobedient to him."

v. 9b, the pronoun *hēmmāh,* 'they,' is probably a pronoun of emphasis: "those who wait for the Lord," and no one else, shall possess the land. This promise is expanded in strophe Waw (vv. 10–11) which foretells a reversal of conditions: the wicked will soon be no more (cf. Isa 29:20), while "the meek shall possess the land" and enjoy abundant prosperity.[37] It should be noted that vv. 2a and 10a (cf. also vv. 13, 36) emphasize that the demise of the wicked will take place suddenly or in the near future: *měhērāh,* "quickly" (v. 2a) or *'ôd mě'aṭ,* "yet a little" (v. 10a). A similar statement is to be found in Prov 6:15; 29:1.

The second section (vv. 12–20) asserts the impotence of the wicked in their schemings against the righteous. Strophe Zayin (vv. 12–13) contrasts the enmity of him who gnashes his teeth at the righteous like a beast of prey (cf. Pss 35:16; 112:10; Job 16:9; Lam 2:16) and God who laughs at him (cf. Ps 2:4), "for he sees that his day is coming" (cf. 1 Sam 26:10; Obad 12; Job 18:20). Strophe Heth (vv. 14–15) makes much of poetic justice; the very nature of evil action turns the armoury of the wicked against themselves:

> The wicked draw the sword and bend their bows,
> to bring down the poor and needy,
> to slay those who walk uprightly;
> their sword shall enter their own heart *(ḥarbām tābō' bĕlibbām),*
> and their bows shall be broken.

This "boomerang principle" is expressed with the help of various metaphors in many other places: Isa 31:1; Hos 8:7; 10:13; Pss 7:15–17; 9:16; 57:7; Job 4:8; 15:35; Prov 1:17–18; 5:22; 14:32; 22:8; 26:27; 28:10; 29:5; Qoh 10:8–9; Esth 7:10; 9:1; Dan 6:24; Wis 11:16; 12:23; Sir 27:25–27; Tob 14:10.

The conviction that the evil devices of the wicked carry within themselves the seeds of their own destruction is expressed in strophe Teth (vv. 16–17). The psalmist sets more value on the little he possesses than on the ill-gotten opulence of the powerful wicked (cf. Prov 15:15; 16:8, 19), "for the arms of the wicked shall be broken; but the Lord upholds the righteous" (v. 17).[38] The word *zĕrôa',* 'arm,' is here probably a symbol of strength or might (cf. Pss 77:16; 89:11).[39] The motif of breaking the "arms" of the wicked or one's enemies appears in various forms (cf. Jer 48:25; Ezek 30:21; Ps 10:15; Job 38:15; 1QH 8:33). The antithetic parallelism in v. 17 is expanded in strophe

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[37] The mention of *'ănāwîm,* 'meek' (v. 11a) has attracted attention among Christian exegetes, because it is reminiscent of the beatitude concerning the "meek" in Matt 5:5 and offers good foundation for a spiritual-eschatological interpretation. See E. Prinzivalli, "'Vinea spiritalis intellegentiae': l'interpretazione omiletica dei *Salmi* in Origene. Un'indagine a partire dalle omelie sui *Salmi* 36, 37, 38," *AnStEs* 7 (1990), 397–416; A. Ricciardi, "Los pobres y la tiera segun el Salmo 37," *RevBíb* 41 (1979), 225–235.

[38] We note that the word *zĕrôa',* 'arm,' is often a symbol of strength or might (cf. Pss 77:16; 89:11).

[39] M. Dahood, *Psalms,* vol. 1, 229, interprets the word here and in Job 22:8, 9 metaphorically as denoting 'resources.'

Yod (vv. 18–19), assuring the prosperity of the righteous, whereas the antistrophe Kaph (v. 20) promises a distressing end to the wicked. On the one hand, the promise that "their heritage will abide for ever" (v. 18b) recalls the repeated assurance that the godly shall possess the land (vv. 9b, 11a, 22a, 29a, 34b); on the other, the similes of short-lived flowers of the pasture lands and of smoke (cf. Pss 68:3; 102:4) evoke the abrupt fading of the wicked forecast in v. 2.

In the third section (vv. 21–31), the psalmist draws a contrast between the worthlessness of the wicked and the firmness of the righteous. The divine judgment is made especially clear in two antithetic parallelisms (vv. 22, 28b):

> ... those blessed by the Lord shall possess the land,
> but those cursed by him shall be cut off.
>
> The righteous shall be preserved for ever,
> but the children of the wicked shall be cut off.

In the fourth section (vv. 32–40), this much-repeated contrasting and opposing reaches its climax. In strophe Qoph (v. 34), the exhortation to wait for the Lord is reiterated:

> Wait for the Lord, and keep to his way,
> and he will exalt you to possess the land,
> you will look on the destruction of the wicked.

In strophe Resh (vv. 35–36), the psalmist appeals to his own observation of the fortunes and misfortunes of the wicked. The simile is of a tall tree that disappears, implying that it could not live because it had no constant supply of water and no protection against drought. In strophe Shin (vv. 37–38), the psalmist draws his series of contrasts and comparisons to an end:

> Mark the blameless man, and behold the upright,
> for there is posterity *('aḥărît)* for the man of peace.
> But transgressors shall be altogether destroyed;
> the posterity *('aḥărît)* of the wicked shall be cut off.

The word *'aḥărît* has the indefinite meaning of 'end.' In view of the importance of progeny in ancient Israel it can be taken to mean "posterity"; total deprivation of descendants virtually amounted to personal annihilation. The psalmist may, however, have had in mind a "future" for the righteous and an "end" for the wicked in a more radical, eschatological sense.

This analysis of the psalm has perhaps helped to clarify the situation that occasioned the psalmist's outpourings and the scale of values underlying his teaching on recompense and retribution. The situation is unequivocal. The psalmist speaks to the covenant community dwelling in the land of Israel but faced with the might of men who prosper despite their wickedness. This transcends historical circumstance and amounts to a fundamental human

situation of crisis. The members of the community are in danger of judging God's rule according to their selfish expectations and current curiosity. Since their desires clash with reality, they lose confidence in God and become more and more prey to deeply seated human anxiety and resentment.

What the psalmist has to say reflects both negative and positive aspects of the argumentation. Negatively, he warns against fretting and seemingly righteous indignation, for this "tends to evil" (v. 8b). This admonition draws attention to the manifold human temptations to judge God's rule by the standards of one's own limited knowledge and by the passions of self-righteousness and self-assertion. This may undermine true faith and a genuine relationship towards God, and such a disposition is a much more deadly enemy to the covenant community than foreign foes and tyrant rulers who oppress their people. Human rebellion may be a last resort: taking justice into one's own hands in physical terms. But the Wisdom teacher knows that there is only one true solution: the attention must be turned away from the narrow corridors of passion and resentment to the spacious halls of righteousness found within the kingdom of God. He promises discrimination between the righteous and the wicked in due season but does not identify a specific type of enemy nor predict the time of judgment; even the use of *'aḥărît,* 'end,' in vv. 37–38 does not convey any certainty about the timing of God's judgment.[40]

The Wisdom teacher has something much more important in mind: the operation of the hidden inner forces of morality. He knows that the antithesis between right and wrong is absolute and that every sinful action carries within it the virus of its own destruction. Hence the absolute assurance that a godly life alone is worthy of a human being, independently of the outcome of the struggle in any given situation. He knows that the triumph of the godly is sure, even though they must experience "evil times" or "the time of trouble" (vv. 19a, 39). In the final analysis, the question of recompense and retribution is a fundamental matter of principle, the to be or not to be of God's existence. Nevertheless, the psalmist probably does not have in mind

[40] It is noteworthy that the *pešer* of Ps 37 (4 Q p Ps 37) relates the statements of vv. 14–15 to the "wicked of Ephraim and Manasseh who were looking for the occasion to send hand on the priest and the men of his council in the time of trial that came upon them ..."; v. 22b to the "wicked of Israel who will be cut off and exterminated for ever"; vv. 23–24 to the "priest, the teacher of righteousness"; and vv. 32–33 to the "wicked priest." Further applications are ruled out, because the manuscript is damaged in several places. See H. Stegemann, "Der *pešer* Psalm 37 aus Höhle 4 von Qumran (4 Q p Ps 37)," *RdQ* 14 (1963), 245–276. It is characteristic of the history of Jewish exegesis that in the early period the wicked were identified with the sinners within the people of Israel rather than with foreign foes, while later identification with non-Jewish enemies, especially with Edom symbolizing the Roman/Christian world power, predominates. The solution is expected in eschatological-apocalyptic terms of a final divine intervention. See J. Maier, "Auslegungsgeschichtliche Beobachtungen zu Ps 37,1.7.8," *RdQ* 13 (1988), 465–479.

primarily the operation of an impersonal principle in nature, but rather God's personal concern for righteousness which results in discrimination in due season between the good and the bad. Since the oppositeness of God and the evil devices of earthly powers is absolute, the faithful should hold their peace in "evil times"; belief in God should become the governing principle and inner motivation of their whole lives, even though they cannot forecast the time of harvest with any precision. There is no need to attach high importance to temporal affairs or to envy the seeming prosperity of the wicked, for they are doomed to perish by their own evil machinations (cf. Wis 2:12–24). The nature of the arguments the psalmist uses in warning the godly against impatience and exhorting them to cling to their trust in God is clear evidence that he is speaking from the standpoint of a mature monotheistic belief that predicates the total unity of cosmological and personal aspects of divine righteousness.[41]

2.3 *The Final Punishment of the Wicked and the Eternal Union of the Righteous with God: Psalm 73*

Psalm 73 is clearly related to Psalms 37 and 49, as well as to Jer 12:1–6 and the book of Job. The theme of theodicy unmistakably points to a didactic character and a post-Exilic origin. Universal Wisdom features, however, come to expression in an original antithetic structure, which shows that the main concern of the psalm is not to teach universal concepts of philosophy but to confess the opposed experiences that result from the psalmist's conflicting states of mind and heart. The emphasis is on his account of a radical shift from an erroneous to a true understanding of the fate of the wicked, the self, and the presence of God. This abrupt mutation marks one of the high points of Old Testament faith. It is especially noteworthy that the triumph of faith is the point of departure and the cornerstone of the whole psalm. In the introductory verse the psalmist exclaims:

> How good *('ak ṭôb)* God is to Israel,
> to those who are pure in heart *(lĕbārê lēbāb)!*

The body of the psalm consists of four strophes arranged in two antithetical pairs. The wicked and the "I" of the psalmist are contraposed: they succeed

[41] We may point to the appropriate judgment of the underlying theological postulates as indicated by A. Weiser, *The Psalms*, 316–317: "The poet is firmly convinced that the sinner, because he rebels against God, *cannot* last. That conviction is but the fundamental postulate of the belief in God which sees and judges all things from the standpoint of eternity and, in consequence, must not stop at the things which are transient like the grass that speedily fades away. It would, in fact, be only a sign of faint-heartedness and lack of trust if the godly were to anticipate hastily the decision which belongs to God alone. ... True confidence consists in leaving the things which are not under the control of man confidently and patiently to him who has all things in his hand."

in everything despite their wickedness (vv. 3–12), while he fails despite his righteousness (vv. 13–16). Verse 17 is the turning point—and a dramatic one—at which the psalmist perceives that the end of the godless is destruction (vv. 18–22), while he will always enjoy God's presence (vv. 23–26). The antithetic parallelism of the final verses (27–28) presents a summary of the second part of the psalm (vv. 18–26). The axis of this structure is the change of time "beginning" // "end" with regard to the psalmist's feelings about the fate of the wicked. When impressed by their outward prosperity, the psalmist was tempted to talk and argue as they did; but after gaining a new insight by virtue of God's revelation (v. 17) he recognizes that God's nearness is worth more than all that the worldling's life can offer.

The basic thematic structural division of the psalm is defined by various linguistic and stylistic elements that not only divide it into its parts, but also serve to unite it into an organic whole: particles, pronouns, the use of tenses, and certain terms and phrases in their relation to each other. The most conspicuous of these is the particle *'ak* and its variants. In the form *'ak* it ushers in three thematically different units: in v. 1b the confession of faith, in v. 13a the second main part of the psalm, and in v. 18a the third. The last of these is additionally emphasized by the particle variant *'êk* that follows in v. 19a with the same purpose. In view of the relationship between the units 1//2–12//13–16, these particles have a distinctly antithetical function. The introductory verses 13//18+19 are antithetically associated only in theme, but vv. 1//13 also display a relatively strong formal antithetical correspondence. In v. 11 we find the particle variant *'êkāh* with its exclamatory function. All three particle forms serve to accentuate a certainty or a basic fact. The other particles are not of such primary significance for the fundamental antithetical structural division of the psalm.

Psalm 73 contains some phrases and terms that play a particularly significant role in its structural division into four contrasting units. The first of these is found in vv. 5 and 14, each of them occurring in a contraposed unit and forming a very clear antithetic relationship. The godless are not stricken "at all," while the psalmist is stricken "all the day long." In the first half of the psalm a similar relationship can also be discerned between vv. 1b, 7b, and 13a. They speak of the different qualities of "heart": in the first of these the expression "pure in heart" is used; then the psalmist mentions the "follies of heart" of the godless; and finally he recalls the "purity of his heart" in the past. A more obvious antithesis is found between vv. 9 (part I) and 25 (part IV): the one affirms the arrogance of the godless, while the other declares the complete submission of the psalmist.

The contrast in terms of time is fundamental in this psalm. In v. 12b the psalmist complains that the wicked are "always *('ôlām)* at ease, they increase in riches"; in v. 19a, however, he exclaims in astonishment: "How they are destroyed in a moment *(kĕrāga')* ..." The revelation mentioned in v. 17

discloses in the psalmist's mind and heart the contrast between the *'aḥărît,* 'end,' of the wicked (v. 17b) and his belief expressed in v. 24b: "... and afterward *(wĕ'aḥar)* thou wilt receive me to glory." The final doom of the wicked results in a total reversal of fates: the godless will be destroyed "in a moment" (v. 19a), while the psalmist says happily: "But I am continually *(tāmîd)* with thee ..." (v. 23a); "... but God is the rock of my heart and my portion for ever *(lĕ'ôlām)*" (v. 26b).

In this context it is clear that v. 17 holds a very special place in Psalm 73. It constitutes the *terminus ad quem* as well the *terminus a quo* of the whole. The sombre thinking that precedes "until I went into the sanctuary of God ..." (v. 17) relates to times past. What follows may apply to the past as well as to the present or future. It is not possible to determine from these eight words which time perspective is meant or which is predominant, for now we are no longer dealing with empirical happenings, but with an expression of faith in an operation of God's justice transcending the routine flow of events. This change of mind and heart can be made only on the basis of a new conviction, a new perception and sensibility in the inner life of the poet.

The temporal opposition "beginning" // "end" constitutes the background of the double antithetical structure. The contrast between the individual parts is not only sequential, but moves forward in leaps: sequential in parts I // II; III // IV, inter-sequential in I // III; II // IV. As already mentioned, the concluding antithetic parallelism (vv. 27–28) is a summary of the third and fourth parts. The sequential/inter-sequential antithetic arrangement of the four parts can be illustrated as follows, clearly establishing v. 17 as the centre and axis of the psalm:

The beginning:

The godless thrive despite their wickedness (vv. 2–12)	The psalmist suffers despite his "purity of heart" (vv. 13–16)

The turning-point (v. 17)

The end:

The godless perish (vv. 18–22)	The psalmist is for ever in communion with God (vv. 23–26)[42]

We can see now more clearly that the opening ascription of praise (v. 1) represents a distillation of the experience gained by the psalmist of other human beings and of his God within life's antinomic fabric. From his own

[42] For a more detailed analysis of this psalm, see my study *Antithetic Structure in Biblical Hebrew Poetry* (VT.S 35; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984), 38–59. Here we consider the antithetic structure only so far it is necessary to show the main theological concern of the psalm.

temptation to assess God's rule in the light of appearances he has learned that theodicy is not an issue in God's treatment of Israel, or of human beings in general, but a problem of Israel's ways to God. Recognition of the divine goodness "to those who are pure in heart" cannot possibly refer primarily to God's recompense of the righteous, but to a prodigious generosity that transcends human capacity to merit it. On the other hand, God's patience towards the rebellious wicked transcends human capacity to appreciate the reasons for it. The temptation to judge God on the basis of the human idea of retribution is the radical sin of human self-assertion. The psalmist's account up to v. 17 shows that a consideration of prosperity had occasioned a crisis in his faith; he had failed to see how good God was to Israel. To be "pure in heart" means first of all to trust in God as the ultimate authority and the arbiter of right and wrong. His dilemma is this: will he take right into his own hands and attempt to dictate to God, or will he leave everything to divine authority and wisdom?

The new insight mentioned in v. 17 may well have taken the form of a revelation directly from God. But was it a single and unique act of revelation? Perceiving it so would challenge its rationality and universality.[43] It seems more likely that to gain a new understanding of one's self, of other people, and of God's rule in the world is not a unique event but part of a sustained process generated by the divine Presence in the human heart—a process greatly supported by the distinctive character of Hebrew monotheistic faith as a covenant religion. It is not primarily a matter of rational perception, although it is unthinkable without rationality. It involves a total vision englobing all possible options, both complementary and contradictory, a vision that reflects a living relationship to the divine Person who penetrates the profoundest mysteries of the human heart, as well as a synthetic perception of an unmoved Mover and the ultimate rational foundation of the universe. The more a person is "pure in heart," i.e., open to God's inspiration, revelation and guidance, the more efficacious the correction of partial, mechanistic, and rationalistic ways of perceiving God's ways to the people; the greater also the sense of community responsibility.[44]

The psalms are not just accounts of Israel's history or theoretical reflections on the great problems of human existence, but a prayer book. A prayerful temperament is therefore the key to understanding the main concern of Psalm 73. Such a disposition involves the harmonious interaction of all hu-

[43] It is questionable what A. Weiser, *The Psalms,* 511, says to this issue: "The poet has arrived at his new religious insight not by means of his own thinking and laborious meditation (cf. v. 16), but by virtue of God's revelation in his judgment on the wicked and in his salvation for the godly."

[44] Having in mind this interaction we may point to the appropriate statement about faith by A. Weiser, *The Psalms,* 318, in his exegesis of Ps 37: "Faith in the biblical sense requires the utmost exertion of strength and the highest degree of activity."

man capacities, both on the intellectual and moral levels. This interaction helps the psalmist to resist and to conquer the temptation to accuse God. The author of Psalm 37 was content to draw on his mature experience that the wicked have no future, while the "end" of the righteous is glorious. Such statements are based on the conviction that the nature of wickedness precludes a happy outcome. But Psalm 73 goes further, penetrating the depths and uncovering the infinite value of God's presence in life. For its writer, a personal encounter with the living God is the only real solution of the problem of theodicy. This discovery recalls the Copernican revolution accomplished by Job in his encounter with God's greatness and nearness (cf. 40:1–5; 42:1–6); here time is superseded by an experience of eternity. Only invisible resources of communion with God resulting in inner conviction of the soul can produce unsurpassable affirmations of trust such as those found in vv. 21–26:

> When my soul was embittered,
> when I was pricked in heart,
> I was stupid and ignorant,
> I was like a beast toward thee.
> Nevertheless I am continually *(tāmîd)* with thee;
> thou dost hold my right hand.
> Thou dost guide me with thy counsel *(ba'ăṣātĕkā tanḥēnî)*,
> and afterward thou wilt receive me to glory *(wĕ'aḥar kābôd tiqqāḥēnî)*.
> Whom have I in heaven but thee?
> And there is nothing upon earth that I desire besides thee.
> My flesh and my heart may fail,
> but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.

The grandeur of this confession of faith is that it bears witness to a most complete and genuine encounter between heaven and earth, between time and eternity. Any rupture between prevailing religious experience and the expectations of eschatological time would demolish the very foundations of a true encounter with a personal God. How is belief in things eschatological possible unless there has been a genuine experience of things temporal in the sense of v. 25? Any religion or theology that does not lead to personal faith is useless or even injurious. Sooner or later it must result in a person becoming "a beast" in his or her dealings with both God and humanity (cf. vv. 21–22).

It is generally recognized that the verb *lāqaḥ,* 'take,' in v. 24 is a *terminus technicus* for the idea of taking up to heaven. Exegetes find strong support for this interpretation in the accounts of the translation of Enoch and Elijah to heaven as "a being taken" (cf. Gen 5:24; 2 Kgs 2:1–14), and also in Ps 49:15–16. This last source is especially noteworthy, because the confession of faith in vv. 15–16 comes after a painful consideration of the prosperity of the wicked similar to that in Psalm 73. Even though the exact meaning of these verses is far from clear, the radical contraposition between the ultimate fate of the wicked and that of the faithful psalmist is evident:

Like sheep they are appointed for Sheol;
Death shall be their shepherd;
straight to the grave they descend,
and their form shall waste away;
Sheol shall be their home.
But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol,
for he will receive me *(kî yiqqāḥēnî)*.

All these "eschatological" passages reflect the infinite value of communion with God in the present. The driving force of this experience is a solid ground for hope of the consummation of this communion after death. The author of Psalm 73 expresses something that is valid for other similar cases: "Life proceeds towards a hidden glory, and the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with that glory which shall then be revealed. Even death itself does not set a limit to that hope. Faith overcomes death in the light of the eternal presence of God."[45] The experience of communion with God fills the human heart with a glimpse of eternity. It inspires a daring hope that death is transcended by the power of the living God, but offers no established doctrine of the afterlife.[46]

3. *Conclusion*

The main characteristic of the book of Psalms' presentation of the themes of reward and punishment is that it is a book of prayer. Individual psalms are motivated by basic situations encountered in human life—distress, the experience of deliverance, the tendency to reflection, etc.—and inspired by profound personal religious sentiment; but they also use traditional ideas and expressions which they blend together into unique compositions. The psalmists extol God as the Creator and hence the Source of life and the ultimate basis of human hope, remember God's past saving acts, are aware of current divine activity, and envision a final judgment. At the centre of their attention stand

[45] See A. Weiser, *The Psalms,* 514.

[46] See the opposite standpoint of A. Weiser, *The Psalms,* 514–515: "It is a question not worth asking whether the poet conceived the overcoming of death as a 'translation' (cf. Enoch, Gen. 5.24) or as eternal life or as a resurrection after the manner of the hope developed in the mystery cults of his time; here, too the question of how this will come to pass has not been asked by the Psalmist. He allows the divine mystery to remain a mystery and does not presume irreverently to push open the gates which God still keeps closed. This, too, is an essential mark of his faith." See further the closing paragraph of the remarkable article by M. Buber, "The Heart Determines: Psalm 73," *Theodicy in the Old Testament* (ed. J. L. Crenshaw; IRTh 4; Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press; London: SPCK, 1983), 109–118: "Separate souls vanish, separation vanishes. Time that has been lived by the soul vanishes with the soul; we know of no duration in time. Only the 'rock' in which the heart is concealed, only the rock of human hearts, does not vanish. For it does not stand in time. The time of the world disappears before eternity, but existing man dies into eternity as into the perfect existence" (p. 118).

faithful people who are oppressed by powerful but ungodly forces and who long for a radical distinction to be made between the righteous and the wicked.

Recompense and punishment are by nature personal issues. As such they come to expression in various psalms in various ways: as short emotional outbursts or Wisdom sentences; as sustained, dynamic appeals to God, the ultimate Judge over earth and heaven (cf. Pss 5; 7; 9/10; 58; 82); and as subjects of reflection for those who were faced with the seeming prosperity of the wicked while themselves suffering hardships (cf. Pss 1; 37; 73). Appeals to this universal Judge and reflections on the contrasting situations of the good and the evil regarding the present and the future reveal the profound attachment of the psalmists to God as a Person and their ability to discern the divine presence in the lives of the faithful. In their comprehensive knowledge of God's dealings with humankind originates their awareness that God will personally intervene as the universal Judge whenever ungodly forces oppose divine authority and law. Nevertheless, they are also aware that the solution of the problem of theodicy should not be expected to come from a changing outward situation: the faithful must penetrate behind appearances to the heart of the relationship between good and evil and to the experience of personal community with God. In the final analysis, the greatest reward the righteous can win is the privilege of nearness to God. Such a fellowship opens infinite horizons and makes it possible to experience eternity in the present. This encounter is so profound that even in analogy it is ineffable. Finally, the greatest punishment, i.e., the curse, of the ungodly is that their deliberate persistence in self-assertion leads to ever greater estrangement from God. Once the faithful have experienced God's nearness and faced the merciless power of death in terrestrial terms, they need no "rational" proof for the axiom that all collective and individual creatures of evil are doomed to destruction.

In their final form, the psalms were composed against a background of matchless Hebrew monotheism. They reflect an unshakable belief that God is one, the source of cosmic and spiritual law, the ultimate authority and the only proper goal of every living being. The comprehensive experience and vision of the psalmists imply a complete antithesis between God and any form of evil. The more the praying faithful faced the seeming permanence of evil in the present situation, the more they believed that God will in the "end" subdue it in all its forms and establish the kingdom of righteousness. Their certainty about the ultimacy of God's judgment is founded on an inner demand for justice, on the interaction of the theological presuppositions of Hebrew monotheism, and—most of all—on the profound experience of community with God.

The composers of the psalms did not attempt to build up any sort of theological system. Traditional ideas were tested in their personal crises when they plumbed the depths of suffering. So they are organically incorporated in their personal testimonies which transcend the possibility of rational ex-

planation in separation from the evidence of the human heart. Rational arguments are supported by a miraculous knowledge of God and the deepest experience of peace deriving from their community with the divine. Placing the psalms in any individual or historical situation is not, therefore, of great help in determining their fundamental message. Confidence in the ultimate Judge of the Universe and unshakable inner peace triumph over all the outward circumstances of human existence. The essence of the righteous is that he transcends appearance and "dies into eternity as into the perfect existence" when suffering hardships caused by the power of evil here and now.

CHAPTER XXIII

MERCY AND FORGIVENESS IN THE BOOK OF PSALMS

In contrast to most other books of the Hebrew Bible, the Psalms holds the balance between retribution and mercy or forgiveness fairly evenly; or, more precisely, the themes of divine mercy and forgiveness assume unexpected prominence. The main reason for this is the distinctively "prayerful" character of the book. Prayer is essentially an expression of feelings and needs stemming from the intimate relationship of suppliants to their God, and the faithful, in their unique spiritual disposition or in their practice of daily prayer, were at least as much concerned with their own shortcomings as with Israel's defection from God, transgression of divine commandments, reflection on the principle of retribution, and exposition of various alien forces of evil. Knowledge of the uniqueness and holiness of Israel's God combined with the spirit of prayer to evoke in the faithful reverence towards God and praise of divine goodness and mercy, expressed in invocative formulations. At the same time, it awakened a consciousness of inherent human sinfulness. Various distressful situations—illness, persecution by enemies, and exile—challenged the suppliants' conscience and prompted an encounter with their own estrangement and lack of salvation. The perception of the contrast between human frailty and divine firmness emerges in penetrating analyses of the inwardness of sin and the sublime nature of divine forgiveness, couched in the form of humble supplications. The penitential psalms are without doubt the most universal expression of the human condition viewed in the light of God's steadfast love and mercy.

Prayers of petition or lamentation arouse the controversial issue of the causality of sin and affliction—for instance, suffering derived from illness. For some people the connection between sin and suffering is a dogma. This view entails a clear distinction between the inner and external experiences of a broken or restored relationship between the faithful and God. We must therefore consider the whole range of literary, rhetorical and stylistic devices employed in order to determine whether talk of sickness is to be taken literally in relation to external suffering, or metaphorically as an expression of anguish stemming from the inmost recesses of the human soul and transcending the outward world of appearances. On the other hand, it is appropriate to consider the connection between the language of divine goodness or salvation in general and divine mercy and forgiveness in particular; all the more so since formulaic language and the break-up up of stereotyped

phrases are characteristic of the Psalms.[1]

In the last two centuries the Sumero-Accadian hymns and psalms of lamentation from the old Babylonian period (1750–1600 B.C.E.) and the period from 1460 B.C.E. to the Seleucid era, as well as a small group of Egyptian hymns and prayers from the nineteenth Dynasty (ca. 1350–1200 B.C.E.) have attracted the attention of scholars.[2] One of the striking features of Sumero-

[1] For discussion on questions raised below, see especially the following commentaries: F. Delitzsch, *Biblischer Commentar über die Psalmen* (BC; Leipzig: Dörflin & Franke, 1873); F. Baethgen, *Die Psalmen* (HK II/2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1897); C. A. Briggs and E. G. Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms,* 2 vols. (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1906–1907); R. Kittel, *Die Psalmen übersetzt und erklärt* (KAT 14; Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1914); E. König, *Die Psalmen* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1927); H. Gunkel, *Die Psalmen* (HK II/2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1929, 1968); H. Schmidt, *Die Psalmen* (HK 15; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1934); J. Calès, *Le Livre des Psaumes,* 2 vols. (2nd ed.; Paris: G. Beauchesne, 1936); E. J. Kissane, *The Book of Psalms,* 2 vols. (Dublin: Browne & Nolan, 1953–1954); A. Weiser, *Die Psalmen* (5th ed.; ATD 14–15; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959); English translation by H. Hartwell, *The Psalms* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1962); W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Psalms* (London: S.P.C.K., 1962); S. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship,* 2 vols. (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1962); G. Castellino, *Libro dei Salmi* (SB; Turin / Rome: Marietti, 1965); A. Maillot and A. Lelièvre, *Les Psaumes,* 3 vols. (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1961–1969); M. Buttenwieser, *The Psalms* (LBS; New York: Ktav, 1969); M. Dahood, *Psalms,* 3 vols. (AB 16–17A; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965–1970); A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms,* 2 vols. (NCBC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972); J. W. Rogerson and J. W. McKay, *Psalms,* 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); E. Beaucamp, *Le Psautier,* 2 vols. (SB; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1976–1979); H.-J. Kraus, *Psalmen,* 2 vols. (5th ed.; BK.AT XV/1–2; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1961–1978); English translation by H. C. Oswald, *Psalms 1–59* (ConC; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1993); idem, *Psalms 60–150* (ConC; Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Fortress, 1989); idem, *Theologie der Psalmen* (BK.AT XV/3; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1979); English translation by K. Crim, *Theology of the Psalms* (ConC; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1992); G. Ravasi, *Il Libro dei Salmi: Commento e attualizzazione,* 3 vols. (Bologna: Centro editoriale dehoniano, 1981–1984); P. C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50* (WBC 19; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1983); M. E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100* (WBC 20; Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1990); L. C. Allen, *Psalms 101–150* (WBC 21; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1983); L. Sabourin, *Le Livre des Psaumes* (Montreal: Bellarmin; Paris: Cerf, 1988); L. Alonso Schökel and C. Carniti, *Salmos,* 2 vols. (NBE; Estella: Verbo Divino, 1992–1993); H.-L. Hosfeld and E. Zenger, *Die Psalmen: Psalmen 1–50,* vol. 1 (NEB; Würzburg: Echter, 1993).

[2] See especially E. R. Dalglish, *Psalm Fifty-One in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Patternism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962). See further: A. Falkenstein and W. von Soden, *Sumerische und akkadische Hymnen und Gebete* (Zurich / Stuttgart: Artemis, 1953); J. A. Wilson, "Egyptian Hymns and Prayers," *ANET,* 365–381; R. K. Ritner, "Egyptian Hymns," *The Context of Scripture,* vol. 1: *Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World* (ed. W. W. Hallo; Leiden / New York / Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1997), 37–47: F. J. Stephens, "Sumero-Akkadian Hymns and Prayers," *ANET,* 383–392; B. R. Foster, "Akkadian Hymns and Prayers," *The Context of Scripture,* vol. 1 (ed. W. W. Hallo, 1997), 416–422; W. Heimpel, "Sumerian Hymns," *The Context of Scripture,* vol. 1 (ed. W. W. Hallo, 1997), 526–532; A. Goetze, "Hittite Prayers," *ANET,* 293–401; G. Beckman, "Hittite Prayers," *The Context of Scripture,* vol. 1 (ed. W. W. Hallo, 1997), 156–160; O. Keel, *Die Welt der altorientalischen Bildsymbolik und das Alte Testament: Am Beispiel der Psalmen* (Zurich / Einsiedeln / Cologne: Benziger Verlag; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1972); W. Mayer, *Untersuchungen zur Formensprache der babylonischen "Gebetsbeschwörungen"* (StP.SM 5; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1976); G. R. Castellino, *Testi sumerici e acadici* (Turin: UTET, 1977); M. E. Cohen, *The Canonical Lamentations of Ancient Mesopotamia,* 2 vols. (Potomac, Md.: Capital Decisions, 1988); W. H. P. Römer, "Hymnen, Klagelieder

Accadian psalms of lamentation is the doctrine of the causal relationship between sin and suffering. On the other hand, they clearly have a polytheistic orientation and magical allusions are frequent. In identifying similarities we have to take into consideration not only the common proto-Semitic inheritance or mediated cultural influence of the ancient Near East as a whole, but also the universal characteristics of human perception and feeling. It is natural that there should be some similarities of literary type, rhythm and parallelism, phraseology and idiom, religious thought and cultic provenance. In spite of them, however, it is normal that the overall nature of a particular literature should remain distinctive in terms of its religious and psychological character. Many scholars recognize that the differences between the biblical and non-biblical psalms of lamentation are far more remarkable and significant than the affinities. To appreciate both the similarities and differences one must consider the component themes and forms in the context of the whole cultural background of individual literatures. Since adequate discussion of the extra-biblical material is impossible within the framework of this study it is all the more necessary to concentrate on the biblical psalms and to make clear the creative genius of Israel's psalmists: their literary qualities, the greatness of their theological ideas, and the profundity of feeling embodied in their individual statements and larger structures.

1. *General Observations*

The treatment of God's mercy and forgiveness is not limited to particular words and literal meanings. In addition to proper and related abstract terms there are other modes of expression—notably figurative expressions and imagery.[3] Apart from a number of psalms where the terms or imagery with which we are concerned occur only in individual verses or small sections, usually as Wisdom or confession statements, there are three psalms where the themes of mercy and forgiveness are central and closely connected with an awareness of the persistent or even inherent sinfulness of the people. This state of affairs suggests that we must first identify the place of individual terms and imagery within the Psalter as a whole. In subsequent sections we shall analyze the individual structures of these three particularly noteworthy psalms: Psalm 51, which is the most important of the seven penitential psalms; and Psalms 78 and

und Gebete in sumerischer Sprache," *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments,* vol. II/5*: Lieder und Gebete,* vol. 1 (ed. O. Kaiser; Gütersloh: G. Mohn, 1989), 645–717; K. Hecker, "Akkadische Hymnen und Gebete," *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments,* vol. II/5, 718–783; A. Ünal, "Hethitische Hymnen und Gebete," *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments: Lieder und Gebete,* vol. II/6 (ed. O. Kaiser; Gütersloh: G. Mohn, 1991), 791–817.

[3] See J. J. Stamm, *Erlösen und Vergeben im Alten Testament: Eine begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Bern: A. Francke, 1940).

106, which present a survey of Israel's history in contraposition to an incredible divine grace, mercy and forgiveness, and to Israel's repeated backsliding.

1.1 *Terminology and Imagery of God's Mercy and Forgiveness*

The proper term for divine mercy is *rḥm,* which is used as either a noun or a verb. Since the singular form of the noun *reḥem* or *raḥam* designates 'womb,' the plural form *raḥămîm* basically means 'motherly feeling, compassion'; the same applies to the verb. The noun occurs in the following psalms: 25:6; 40:12; 51:3; 69:17; 77:10; 79:8; 103:4; 106:46; 119:77, 156; 145:9. In Pss 25:6; 40:12; 51:3; 69:17; and 103:4 the word stands in parallel with *ḥesed,* 'steadfast love'; in Ps 40:12 with the pair *ḥesed* and *'ĕmet,* 'faithfulness'; in 77:10 with the infinitive construct *ḥannôt* (hapax legomenon) of the word *ḥnn,* 'be gracious'; and in Ps 145:3–10 within a word field of several terms designating divine goodness and saving deeds. In Pss 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 112:4; and 145:8 we find the formulation in the following or the reverse sequence: *raḥûm wĕḥannûn,* "[God, the Lord] is merciful and gracious" (cf. Ps 116:5; Exod 34:6; Deut 4:31; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Neh 9:17; 2 Chr 30:9). The verb form occurs in Ps 102:14, in parallel with the word *ḥnn,* in Pss 103:13 (twice) and 116:5 as a participle and in parallel with *ḥannûn,* 'gracious,' and *ṣaddîq,* 'righteous.' In Pss 90:13 and 106:45 the idea of divine mercy is expressed by the word *nḥm* (in Niph'al), 'be sorry, repent, relent.'

The proper Hebrew term for forgiveness is the word *slḥ* in various forms, which is quite frequent in the Hebrew Bible, mainly in Deuteronomistic and P passages. It is used only in the abstract sense of forgiveness; it is therefore impossible to determine its etymology and follow the development of its meaning. Within the Psalter *slḥ* occurs in Pss 25:11 (precative perfect); 86:5 (adjective); 103:3 (participle); 130:4 (noun). In Ps 86:5 the adjective *sallāḥ* appears (hapax legomenon), 'forgiving,' in parallel with *ṭôb,* 'good,' and *rab-ḥesed,* 'abounding in steadfast love.' In Ps 103:3 the participle *sollēaḥ* stands in parallel with *rōpē',* '[who] heals.'[4] The word *kpr* has a wide se-

[4] Outside the Psalter the stem of *slḥ* appears in earlier and later documents. To the earlier passages we can allot: Exod 34:9 (petition of Moses); Num 14:19 (petition of Moses after citing the retribution formula in v. 18 containing the verb *nś'* for forgiveness); 2 Kgs 5:18 (twice); Amos 7:2 (petition of the prophet). Jeremiah: 5:7 (rhetorical question); 31:34c (an eschatological event in parallel with *l' zkr*); 36:3 (conditioned by repentance to avert imminent doom). From the time of the Exile or after it: Deut 29:19 (no pardon unless after true obedience); Isa 55:7b (in parallel with *rḥm*); Jer 33:8 (in parallel with *ṭhr*); 50:20. Significant are repeated occurrences in the Deuteronomistic prayers on the occasion of the consecration of the temple in 1 Kgs 8:14–66 (= 2 Chr 6:3–42); forgiveness implies suspension of merited punishment and affliction, in 8:50 the verb stands in parallel with *rḥm* related to "those who carried them captive." As the Deuteronomistic interpretation of the "sins of Manasseh" in 2 Kgs 24:1–4 shows, forgiveness was not impossible in the time of Jehoiakim (v. 4). In Lam 3:42 the community confesses: "We have transgressed and rebelled, and thou hast not forgiven." The Priestly prescriptions in Leviticus and Numbers employ the term *slḥ* (in Niph'al) in connection with sin

mantic scope and denotes primarily 'to make expiation, atonement for.'[5] It is, therefore, not properly used to mean forgiveness; only in a few places does the verb denote forgiveness in relation to guilt or sin: Isa 22:14; Jer 18:23; Ezek 16:63; Pss 65:4; 78:38; 79:9; and 2 Chr 30:18. It is noteworthy that in Ps 78:38 the verb occurs within the phrase *wĕhû' raḥûm yĕkappēr 'āwôn ...,* "Yet he, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity ...," and in Ps 79:9 the imperative *kappēr* stands in parallel with *haṣṣîlēnû,* "deliver us."

In addition to derivatives from these two words, a number of metaphorical terms express the idea of forgiveness. At the head of the list stand verbal forms of *nś'*. Since its basic meaning is 'to lift (up),' its metaphorical purport in the context of forgiveness is 'to take away' or 'to carry away (one's guilt).'[6] This usage is exemplified in Pss 25:18; 32:1, 5; 85:3; 99:8.[7] Other words designating forgiveness metaphorically in relation to "guilt, sin" are: *ksh,* 'to cover' (Pss 32:1; 85:3); *nqh* (Pi'el), 'to acquit, hold exempt from punishment' (Ps 19:13); *mḥh* in its metaphorical use of 'to blot out, exterminate' (Pss 51:3, 11; 109:14);[8] *kbs,* literally 'to tread' or 'to wash by treading,' and metaphorically (in Pi'el) 'to clean' (Ps 51:4, 9);[9] *ṭhr* (Pi'el), 'to cleanse' (Ps 51:4).[10] Another way of expressing the idea of forgiveness is by description: *l' ('al) zkr,* 'not remember [the sins]' (Pss 25:7; 79:8);[11] *l'*

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and guilt offering for unintentionally committed sins in formulaic conclusions: Lev 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:6, 10, 13, 16, 18, 26; 19:22; Num 15:25, 28; 30:6, 9, 13 declares divine forgiveness for a wife who made vows without the consent of her father or her husband. The latest passages employ the substantive *slîḥāh,* 'forgiveness': Ps 130:4; Dan 9:9 (in parallel with *raḥămîm*); Neh 9:17 (together with *ḥannûn wĕraḥûm*); Sir 5:5.

[5] See the detailed study of the word by B. Janowski, *Sühne als Heilsgeschehen: Studien zur Sühnetheologie der Priesterschrift und zur Wurzel KPR im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament* (WMANT 55; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1982).

[6] The opposite meaning comes to the fore in case of sin or guilt; the sinner has to "bear" or "take upon himself guilt (sin)," and this implies punishment: Exod 28:38, 43; Lev 5:1; 7:18; 16:22 (the goat); 17:16; 19:8; 20:20; 22:9; 24:15; Num 5:31; 9:13; 14:34; 18:1, 22; Isa 53:12 (the servant of God); Ezek 23:49; 44:10.

[7] Outside the Psalter the meaning of the stem is attested in relation to human beings, angels, and God; when the subject of forgiveness is God there is no indication in parenthesis: Gen 18:24, 26; 50:17 E (Joseph's brothers // Joseph); Exod 10:17 J (Pharaoh // Moses); 23:21 E (subject angel); 32:32; 34:7; Num 14:18, 19; Josh 24:19; 1 Sam 15:25 (Saul // Samuel); 1 Sam 25:28 (Abigail // David); Isa 2:9; 33:24; Hos 1:6 (denial emphatically by the infinitive absolute, in parallel with *rḥm*); 14:3; Mic 7:18; Job 7:21 (in parallel with *'br*).

[8] Literally *mḥh* means to 'wipe' in reference to a dish, the mouth, or tears from one's face (2 Kgs 21:13; Isa 25:8; Prov 30:20); or 'to blot out, exterminate' a name or memory (Exod 32:32–33; Num 5:23; Deut 9:14). Metaphorically it is used in relation to the name or memory (Exod 32:32–33; Deut 9:14; Ps 109:14) and sin or transgressions (Isa 44:22; Jer 18:23; Ps 109:13). The name or transgressions may be written or inscribed in the book of divine records (Exod 32:32–33; Num 5:23). In Ps 69:29 the suppliant demands for the persecutors: "Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, let them not be enrolled among the righteous." For the motif of divine books with their records for life or of good and evil deeds see further: Isa 4:3; 65:6a; Mal 3:16; Ps 56:8; Dan 7:10; Neh 13:14.

[9] Elsewhere attested: Jer 2:22 (in a negative sense); Mic 7:19.

[10] Outside the Psalter: Jer 33:8 (in parallel with *slḥ*); Ezek 36:33.

[11] Elsewhere Jer 31:34 (in parallelism with *slḥ*); Ezek 33:16; Trito-Isaiah (Isa 64:8).

ḥšb, 'not impute [the guilt]' (only in Ps 32:2); *rp',* 'heal' (Pss 41:4; 103:3; 107:20; 147:3). It is worth noting that in Pss 32:1 and 85:3 the word stands in parallelism with *ksh,* and in Ps 13:3 there is a parallel between *slḥ* and *rp'*. Equally significant is the use of two terms in Ps 109:14 in the petition for a hereditary curse to be preferred to forgiveness: "May the iniquity of his fathers be remembered *(yizzākēr)* before the Lord, and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out *('al-timmāḥ)!*"

As the unavoidable connection between sin and suffering suggests, forgiveness is in its essence the healing of a soul tormented by the sins of self-assertion and obstinacy. This becomes particularly clear as one studies certain psalms and many passages in other books that use the terminology of healing. We shall now consider passages where that terminology provides a figurative expression of forgiveness: Psalms 41; 103; 107; and 147.[12] Psalm 41 connects sin, forgiveness, and healing primarily with the physical condition. It is dominated by three main themes: praise, in didactic form (vv. 2–4); laments about illness and the hostility of enemies and former friends (vv. 5–11); and expressions of confidence and certainty (vv. 12–13).[13] In v. 5 the psalmist prays:

> As for me, I said, "O Lord, be gracious to me *(ḥonnēnî);*
> heal me *(rĕpā'āh napšî),* for I have sinned against thee!"

There is a clear indication that the psalmist is suffering serious illness (cf. especially v. 9). The general impression given is that he is praying for forgiveness in the belief that it is an agent of physical healing. On the one hand he confesses his sin "against" God (cf. 2 Sam 12:13; Ps 51:6a), but on the other claims: "Thou hast upheld me because of my integrity *(bĕtummî)* ..." (v. 13). Moreover, in relation to his enemies and his perfidious "familiar friend" he asks: "But do thou, O Lord, be gracious to me *(ḥonnēnî),* and raise me up, that I may requite them *(wa'ăšallĕmāh lāhem)!*" (v. 11). Is it possible to reconcile such contrasting attitudes? The answer is that we must consider not only the psalmist's present state but also his remembrance of things past and the main purpose of his petition. There is no question of two different conceptions of guilt: what we have are the psalmist's consciousness of his true guilt and false accusations by his enemies. This fact is understandable only against a background of a total antithesis between divine righteousness and human wickedness; the truly faithful are aware of all the reasons for confessing their manifold sins before God. The petition for healing is an appeal for forgiveness, which implies restoration for the sufferer as a whole. All the more is it impossible to countenance the triumph of the psalmist's enemies in the light of their wickedness, which implies a will to conceal their sins. The

[12] In Ps 30:3 the word of healing is employed without direct connection with sin and forgiveness. The imagery of divine mercy in v. 6a may somehow signal this connection.

[13] The final verse (14) is the doxology concluding the first book of the Psalter.

point of vv. 12–13 is that an enemy should not triumph over the suffering faithful on a basis of fabricated suspicions and accusations. The desire for retribution (v. 11) is justified, provided there is no flavour of malice in the heart. Its exact nature remains unspecified, but the key to understanding it is the recognition of genuine sins; malicious retribution is unthinkable. The key to the psalm is ours if we connect its author's desire for retribution in v. 11 with the expectations of his enemies in vv. 6 and 9. Sufficient punishment of the enemy would be frustration of his joyful malice.[14]

In Psalm 103 the poet proclaims divine mercy and forgiveness from various standpoints; in v. 3 he uses parallelism: forgiving and healing contrast with iniquity and disease. Psalm 107, a paean of thanksgiving, links healing with sin in vv. 17–22:

> Some were sick through their sinful ways,
> and because of their iniquities suffered affliction (v. 17); ...
> he sent forth his word, and healed them *(wĕyirpā'ēm),*
> and delivered them from destruction (v. 20).

It seems that the psalmist understands physical affliction as a consequence of "their sinful ways." In Psalm 147 the situation is different; since the hymn speaks of God's gracious nature and praises various saving acts, the description in v. 3 is obviously figurative and relates to all kinds of human affliction and divine help:

> He heals *(hărōpē')* the brokenhearted,
> and binds up their wounds.

Disease is conceived basically as a distortion of the relationship between God and the people. The terminology of healing, therefore, expresses more than just forgiveness: the emphasis is on renewal of life and thus the restoration of the covenant relationship; in the final analysis, it means true salvation. Moreover, the figurative expression "so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's" in Ps 103:5b may envisage the same sense of renewal as the petition for the re-creation of a steadfast spirit in Ps 51:12b. Some passages in the books of Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah show that healing has many connotations. Even though Hosea does not use the terminology of forgiveness, it is evident that to him healing involves both forgiveness and renewal. In 5:13 the prophet complains that Israel was looking to other nations, who could not heal her sickness. In 6:11b–7:1a God's desire to bring about the restoration and healing of the people is prominent: "When I would restore the fortunes of my people, when I would heal Israel, the corruption of Ephraim is revealed ..." In

[14] E. J. Kissane, *The Book of Psalms,* vol. 1, 184, puts it in this way: "It probably means nothing more than his desire to taunt them with their disappointment." Similarly L. Jacquet, *Les Psaumes et le coeur de l'Homme,* vol. 1, 826: "Ceux-ci, confondus en leurs soupçons injurieux et déçus en leur souhait, ont ainsi reçu *leur juste salaire.*"

14:5 the Lord looks to the future: "I will heal their faithlessness; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them." Isaiah uses the same term when he realizes that his prophetic commission will only bring about a hardening of heart, so that his people will not turn to be healed (6:10). In Jer 3:22a God says: "Return, O faithless sons, I will heal your faithlessness." In the fourth "Servant Song" in Deutero-Isaiah an astonished people realize: "But he was wounded for our transgressions, ... and with his stripes we are healed" (Isa 53:5). In Isa 57:17–18 there is an explication of past punishment and a promise of future healing. And the prophetic liturgy in Isa 33:24 concludes: "And no inhabitant will say, 'I am sick'; the people who dwell there will be forgiven their iniquity."

The use of imagery to express mercy and forgiveness is limited to a few passages. In Ps 6:2 the speaker pleads for divine mercy indirectly by asking that God should not punish him in anger, a supplication that implies an admission that punishment would be justified; bestowal of mercy and forgiveness is purely a matter of divine grace. In Ps 30:6 the psalmist says of God:

> For his anger is but for a moment,
> and his favour is for a lifetime.
> Weeping may tarry for the night,
> but joy comes with the morning

This statement is reminiscent of Isa 54:7–8: "For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer." Both statements declare the triumph of God's mercy over the reasons for punishment, and this implies that the purpose of divine punishment is to prepare the people for penitence and for a turning point in their fortunes. According to Isa 38:17 Hezekiah uses another type of imagery: "... thou hast held back my life from the pit of destruction, for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back." Micah, on the other hand, uses more elaborate, poetic language when he envisages an eschatological manifestation of divine mercy and forgiveness; in 7:19 he says: "He will again have compassion upon us, he will tread our iniquities under foot. Thou wilt cast all our sins into the depths of the sea."

After this examination of the terminology and imagery of forgiveness as it occurs within individual statements and their immediate contexts, we now turn to Psalm 103, which contains the Psalter's greatest concentration of language and images related to healing and forgiveness in combination with terms associated with God's steadfast love and kindness. The psalm is post-Exilic in origin and is at once a hymn and a song of thanksgiving for manifestations of divine grace and mercy. There is, however, no suggestion of the psalmist thanking God for a recovery from sickness, as a number of modern exegetes claim; his gratitude is expressed in general terms, and we

may note especially the hymnic use of the participle in Hebrew in vv. 3–6. As various commentators have noted, it is difficult to find reliable criteria for determining the structure of the psalm. Its stylistic and thematic properties justify to some extent the recently proposed division of the psalm into five strophes: the hymnic call to bless the Lord, who is forgiving and redeeming (vv. 1–5); God's merciful way to Israel as reflected in the nation's history (vv. 6–10); the overwhelming completeness of God's loving care and compassion for Israel (vv. 11–14); the contrast between transitory human beings and the eternal God enthroned in heaven (vv. 15–19); and a concluding appeal to the angels and all the hosts to unite in praising what God has done (vv. 20–22). We should note especially the twin portals that enclose the psalm: the opening and concluding summons to bless the Lord: the focus of the psalm is on glorifying the many works of grace and mercy that reveal the divine character.[15]

After the opening summons the poet expresses in 103:3–5 continuous divine bestowal of pardon and healing through the medium of a number of parallel terms in the participle active:

... who forgives *(hassōlēaḥ)*[16] all your iniquity,
who heals *(hārōpē')* all your diseases,
who redeems *(haggô'ēl)* your life from the Pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy
(hamĕ'attĕrēkî ḥesed wĕraḥămîm),
who satisfies you with good *(hammaśbîa' baṭṭôb)* as long as you live
so that your youth is renewed *(tiṭḥaddēš)* like the eagle's.

Strophe II begins with the statement: "Salvific deeds *(ṣĕdāqôt)* does the Lord perform and justice *(ûmišpāṭîm)* for all the oppressed." The context shows unambiguously that the word *ṣĕdāqāh* denotes here divine works of salvation and *mišpāṭîm* (both in the plural), divine decisions in favour of the oppressed. Mention of revelations of God's ways to Moses in v. 7 clearly points to the tradition of renewal of the covenant after apostasy at Sinai (cf. Exod 33:12–34:7), for 103:8 is obviously a quotation from Exod 34:6 with the last word omitted:

raḥûm wĕḥannûn yhwh
'erek 'appayim wĕrab-ḥāsed
The Lord is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

This statement appears in seven passages usually assigned to exilic or possi-

[15] For a fairly detailed analysis of the structure, see T. M. Willis, "'So Great Is His Steadfast Love': A Rhetorical Analysis of Psalm 103," *Biblica* 72 (1991), 525–537.

[16] See E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (15th impr.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), § 116a: "The *participle active* indicates a person or thing conceived as being in the continual uninterrupted *exercise* of an activity."

bly post-Exilic periods: Exod 34:6; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Pss 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Neh 9:17. It is therefore obvious that the statement is a theologically highly important formula based on ancient convictions about the essence of the divine character. The fact that the formula appears predominantly in texts of the psalmic genre justifies the assumption that it passed through a long history of formation until it won a place in oral formulaic religious language. This assumption is all the more warrantable because we find part of the formula in many other passages.[17] Its present form should therefore be considered not only as the pivotal statement about the divine character in Psalm 103 but also as a central statement about God's gracious nature *par excellence* within the Old Testament.[18]

In the continuation of strophe II and in strophe III the poet illustrates the general character of the formula by the use of various terms and imagery, and ends by pointing to the fundamental reason for divine forbearance:

> He will not always chide,
> nor will he keep his anger for ever.
> He does not deal with us according to our sins,
> nor requite us *(gāmal 'ālênû)* according to our iniquities.
> For as the heavens are high above the earth,
> so great is his steadfast love *(ḥasdô)* toward those who fear him;
> as far as the east is from the west,
> so far does he remove our transgressions from us.
> As a father pities *(kĕraḥēm 'āb)* his children,
> so the Lord pities *(rîḥam yhwh)* those who fear him.
> For he knows our frame;
> he remembers that we are dust (103:9–14).

We may conclude this section with the observation that the vocabulary and imagery of mercy and forgiveness often occur in parallelism or within a framework of terms denoting divine goodness. Goodness is generic, whereas mercy and forgiveness are specific. To remember divine goodness means to bear in mind the foundation of God's salvific plan for the whole of the created world. This implies that remembrance of fundamental human weakness is another notable reason for sparing human beings (cf. Pss 78:39; 103:14). The faithful who pray are constantly aware of the antithesis: divine might and righteousness against human weakness and unrighteousness. This antithesis is so dominant that the perception of one's sinfulness cannot but penetrate the inmost recesses of the soul. Before the Holy One no human being can appear sinless (cf. 1 Kgs 8:46; Pss 130:4; 143:2; Prov 20:9).

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[17] Cf. Exod 20:5–6 (= Deut 5:9–10); 22:26; 33:19; Num 14:18; Deut 4:31; 7:9–10; Isa 48:9; 54:7–8; 63:7; Jer 15:15; 32:18; Mic 7:18; Nah 1:3; Pss 78:38; 86:5; 111:4b; 112:4b; 116:5; Dan 9:4; Neh 1:5; 9:31–32; 2 Chr 30:9; Sir 2:11.

[18] See H. Spieckermann, "'Barmherzig und gnädig ist der Herr ...,'" *ZAW* 102 (1990), 1–18.

1.2 *Relationship between Sin, Retribution and Forgiveness*

When terms designating mercy or forgiveness are found not in isolation but as part of the cornucopia of words denoting divine generosity, their writer obviously wants to emphasize the completeness of divine grace—which comprehends mercy and forgiveness—rather than to provide signposts for determining the meaning of individual terms. One example of this is the post-Exilic acrostic Psalm 25, which combines in its contrived form of prayer traditional expressions of trust with elements of Wisdom imagery. In the opening vv. 1–3 the poet declares his trust in God and brings out the significance of the retribution principle in relation to one's enemies on the one hand and to those who wait upon God on the other. The theme of trust in the face of numerous enemies, however, recurs in the closing section (vv. 19–21). Elsewhere the psalmist combines prayer for guidance (and especially for forgiveness) with characteristic statements about divine righteousness and the rewards open to those who "fear" God. The plea for forgiveness predominates, for it appears in three places: vv. 6–7, 11, and 18. Psalm 25 displays a concentric structure a (1–3), b (4–7), c (8–10), d (11), c (12–14), b (15–18), a (19–21).[19] The plea in 25:11 is central from both the structural and thematic points of view:

> For thy name's sake *(lĕma'an-šimkā)*, O Lord,
> pardon my guilt *(wĕsālaḥtā la'ăwônî)*, for it is great.

In 25:6–7 the psalmist cries:

> Be mindful of thy mercy *(zĕkōr-raḥămêkā)*, O Lord,
> and of thy steadfast love *(waḥăsādêkā)*,
> for they have been from of old.
> Remember not *('al-tizkōr)* the sins of my youth, or my transgressions;
> according to thy steadfast love remember me *(kĕḥasdĕkā zĕkor-lî-'attāh)*,
> for thy goodness' sake *(lĕma'an ṭûbkā)*, O Lord!

The use of *zkr* in positive and negative senses makes clear the foundation of the writer's petition for mercy: God may "not remember" human sin because of a remembrance of divine mercy and steadfast love. Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible the phrase *l' ('l) zkr* in the sense of forgiveness is found in Isa 43:25; 64:8; Jer 31:34; Ezek 33:16. In Isa 43:25 God declares: "I, I am He who blots out *(mōḥeh)* your transgressions for my own sake *(lĕma'ănî)*, and I will not remember *(lō' 'ezkōr)* your sins." Jeremiah employs the phrase in 31:34 in parallel with *slḥ:* "... for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

The petitions of Ps 25:6–7 and some of these statements are strongly reminiscent of the passionate communal lament over the desecration of the

[19] See L. Ruppert, "Psalm 25 und die Grenze kultorientierter Psalmenexegese," *ZAW* 84 (1972), 576–582. Verse 22 is probably a later liturgical addition.

temple in Psalm 79, which reflects the distress of the Exile, or occasioned by Gentile assault upon Judah in the post-Exilic period. In 79:8–9 the community pleads:

> Do not remember against us *('al-tizkor-lānû)* the iniquities of our forefathers,
> let thy compassion *(raḥămêkā)* come speedily to meet us,
> for we are brought very low.
> Help us, O God of our salvation,
> for the glory of thy name *('al-dĕbar kĕbôd šĕmekā),*
> deliver us, and forgive our sins *(wĕhaṣṣîlēnû wĕkappēr 'al-ḥaṭṭō'tênû),*
> for thy name's sake *(lĕma'an šĕmekā)!*

Note the repetition of "for thy name's sake" and similar phrases: "for thy goodness' sake" and "for the glory of thy name." Ps 106:8 affirms that God saved the Israelites "for his name's sake." That phrase, "for his (my, thy) name's sake," appears occasionally elsewhere as a motive for God's forgiving mercy (Isa 48:9; Jer 14:7, 21; Ezek 20:9, 14, 22, 44; Pss 25:11; 79:9) or for divine guidance or goodness in general (Pss 23:3; 31:4; 109:21; 143:11). The expression *lĕma'ănî,* "for my own sake," has a similar or identical function when referring to God (2 Kgs 19:34; 20:6; Isa 37:35; 43:25; 48:11). All these ways of expressing the inner motivation of God's mercy and forgiveness indicate that the divine nature itself is the main and decisive reason for exercising these two qualities.

All the more must those who pray become sensitive to the true significance of the consciousness and effects of divine mercy and the forgiveness of sins. As the speaker of the second of the seven penitential psalms, Psalm 32, exclaims:

> Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven *(nĕšûy peša'),*
> whose sin is covered *(kĕsûy ḥăṭā'āh).*
> Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity
> *(lō' yaḥšōb yhwh lô 'āwôn),*
> and in whose spirit there is no deceit (vv. 1b–2).

Common experience, reminiscent of Wisdom literature, shows that "Many are the pangs of the wicked" (v. 10a). Any attempt to conceal sin results in heightened tribulation, and the first step to betterment must be confession of past deviations. A deep knowledge of the estrangement caused by sin, of the will to turn from illusion to salvation, and of the miracle of divine forgiveness combined to inspire the magnificent confession of 32:3–5:

> When I declared not my sin, my body wasted away
> through my groaning all day long.
> For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me;
> my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.
> I acknowledged my sin to thee *(ḥaṭṭā'tî 'ôdî'ăkā),*
> and I did not hide my iniquity *(wa'ăwônî lō'-kissîtî);*
> I said, "I will confess *('ôdeh)* my transgressions to the Lord";

then thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin
(wĕ'attāh nāśā'tā 'āwôn ḥaṭṭā'tî).

The psalmist's recognition that confession of sin is the only exit from a grave impasse is reminiscent of Psalm 38, another of the penitential psalms. The suppliant is burdened by grievous illness and the animus of triumphant enemies. There is clear evidence that the writer regarded his pains as a punishment inflicted upon him by God; in 38:4–6 he exclaims:

There is no soundness in my flesh
because of thy indignation;
there is no health in my bones
because of my sin *(mippĕnê ḥaṭṭā'tî).*
For my iniquities have gone over my head *(kî 'āwônōtay 'āwĕrû rō'šî);*
they weigh like a burden too heavy for me.
My wounds grow foul and fester
because of my foolishness *(mippĕnê 'iwwaltî).*

Patient trust springing from true repentance and a spirit of prayer inspired by a true relationship with a personal God confirm the fundamental experience that clinging to sin leads to spiritual narrowness, whereas a will to return to God brings liberation. The role of affliction is, then, to make human beings more sensitive to their sinful state and to persuade them to confess their sins. The still centre of the psalm is the suppliant's asseveration: "I confess my iniquity *(kî-'āwônî 'aggîd),* I am sorry for my sin" (v. 19). In the end, humans are always sinful enough to need confession. As Psalm 19 shows it is proper to ask God's forgiveness even for hidden faults: "But who can discern his errors? Clear thou me *(naqqēnî)* from hidden faults" (v. 13).

The lament of Psalm 90, probably of late post-Exilic date, expresses a peculiar kind of distress rooted in feelings of guilt. The poem considers the transitoriness and emptiness of human beings when viewed *sub specie aeternitatis*, and there is a strong sense of the might of the divine anger (vv. 7, 11). In 90:8 the psalmist says:

Thou hast set our iniquities before thee,
our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.

The essence of the unspecified affliction that occasions the lament is that God is remote and utterly "other," but hunger for the divine presence makes the suppliants all the more deeply repentant and hopeful that God's redemptive work may be made manifest anew. They pray in 90:13:

Return *(šûbāh),* O Lord! How long?
Have pity *(hinnāḥēm)* on thy servants!

The solemn and serious spirit of the lament shows clearly that the connection between affliction and evil-doing is not due to a vague suspicion that where there is distress there must be guilt. The opposite must have been the

case: the prayer that is Psalm 90 is set against a stark background of fundamental human limitation and the experience of sin, which is real and palpable, and therefore malignly affects the human situation.

Finally, there is the profound post-Exilic Psalm 130, the sixth of the penitential psalms of the ancient Church. The repentant sinner expresses with unsurpassed simplicity his hope in the unfailing mercy and forgiveness of God; in 130:3–4 he declares:

> If thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquities *('ăwônôt),*
> Lord, who could stand?
> But there is forgiveness with thee *(kî-'immĕkā hassĕlîḥāh),*
> that thou mayest be feared.

The noun *sĕlîḥāh* is found only in later biblical texts: in Ps 130:4 and Sir 5:5 in the singular; in Dan 9:9 and Neh 9:17 in the plural. The belief that there is forgiveness with God enshrines the ultimate, the humanly incomprehensible truth about God's greatness. The more the suppliant recognizes that God alone has power to overcome sin by forgiveness, the more he is aware of the seriousness of that sin; hence the final sentence: "... that thou mayest be feared."[20] The underlying idea is that God's kindness should lead humans to repentance (cf. Rom 2:4). It follows that it is not external suffering that is the essence of adversity. The tribulation of the faithful has much deeper roots that grow from the knowledge that human sin leads to estrangement from the Source of life. The penitent therefore perceives the wonder of forgiveness as an act of divine steadfast love and redemption. The final words of appeal (130:7–8) form the clearest expression of his hope:

> O Israel, hope in the Lord!
> For with the Lord there is steadfast love *(haḥesed),*
> and with him is plenteous redemption *(pĕdût).*
> And he will redeem *(yipdeh)* Israel
> from all his iniquities *(mikkōl 'ăwônōtâw).*

2. *Prayer for Forgiveness of Guilt and Inner Renewal in Psalm 51*

We come now to one of the most profound, meaningful and memorable documents in the entire Bible. The religious thinking, the depth of theological insight, and the extraordinary wealth of imagery of Psalm 51 are so evocative of the prophetic and Wisdom literature of the seventh and (especially) sixth

[20] See the explanation by A. Weiser, *The Psalms,* 774: "The belief in the forgiveness of sins is an entirely serious matter; the grace of God cancels sin, but not its seriousness. Indeed, the claim of the holy God upon man's obedience, far from being reduced by his grace, only becomes weightier than ever." See further the article by F. Sedlmeier, "'Bei dir, da ist die Vergebung, damit du gefürchtet werdest': Überlegungen zu Psalm 130," *Biblica* 73 (1992), 473–495.

centuries that there is widespread agreement that it should be dated within that period. The psalm is an individual prayer and provides little evidence of a particular *Sitz im Leben.* Nevertheless, it has sometimes been argued that it must be interpreted against a background of external circumstance—the distress caused by the Exile perhaps, or physical suffering such as serious illness. Those who have seen the Exile as a potent factor have advocated a collective interpretation. As long ago as the fourth century Theodore of Mopsuestia (350–428) held that the psalm referred to Israel during the Babylonian Exile, and in recent times the collective interpretation has again found proponents.[21] Their basic thesis is that the prayer represents a suffering people in Exile who confess to earlier sins and express hope of miraculous restoration as a sign of divine forgiveness. The majority of exegetes, however, favour an individualistic interpretation and regard the poem as an expression of the psalmist's personal awareness of sin and petition for forgiveness.

A number of points have not been adequately treated either in commentaries or in special studies. The sharpness of the divide between collective and individualistic interpretations and other either/or alternatives stem from insufficient consideration of literary devices, the psalm's immediate and larger contexts, the evaluation of "parallels," the theological presuppositions of contemporaneous Hebrew monotheism, and psychological motifs. In this exploration of the meaning of the psalm we shall therefore repeatedly encounter the question: what can and what cannot be deduced from its thematic, linguistic, literary, and stylistic properties?

It is generally recognized that its present composition comprises the title (51:1–2), which is a later addition; the original psalm (51:3–19); and the concluding intercession for Jerusalem (51:20–21), which also seems to be of later date, but does not concern us in the context of this study. The thought-sequence and literary matching suggest a division of the original psalm into nine strophes of two distichs: invocation of God and a cry for cleansing from sin (vv. 3–4); further confession of sin against God (vv. 5–6a); God's sentence and the inherent sinfulness of the suppliant (vv. 6b–7); petition for the revelation of wisdom and for cleansing (vv. 8–9); petition for joy and the cancellation of sin (vv. 10–11); plea for a clean heart and enjoyment of the presence of God (vv. 12–13); plea for restoration of joy and the consequent prospect of converting sinners (vv. 14–15); plea for preservation of life and expression of the desire to praise God (vv. 16–17); and thoughts about proper offerings (vv. 18–19).[22] There is clear literary and thematic evidence

[21] See C. A. Briggs and E. G. Briggs, *The Book of Psalms,* vol. 2, p. 3: "Ps. 51 is a penitential prayer of the congregation in the time of Nehemiah"; F. Baethgen, *Die Psalmen,* 146: "Israel fleht zu Gott um Vergebung seiner Sünden ..."; R. Preß, "Die eschatologische Ausrichtung des 51. Psalms," *ThZ* 11 (1955), 241–249; A. Caquot, "Purification et expiation selon le psaume LI," *RHR* 85 (1966), 133–154.

[22] Regarding this basic division we follow the proposition of BJ.

that the original psalm was composed of two parts. The first part (strophes I–V, vv. 3–11) forms a prayer for forgiveness of sin; the second part (strophes VI–IX, vv. 12–19) shifts the emphasis to restoration of a right relationship with God.[23]

2.1 *Prayer for Forgiveness of Guilt (Ps 51:3–11)*

In the opening invocation (vv. 3–4) the poet uses a basic terminology that will recur in the body of the psalm; he affirms his knowledge of divine grace in relation to various modes of separation from God:

> Have mercy on me *(ḥonnēnî)*, O God, according to thy
> steadfast love *(kĕḥasdekā)*;
> according to the abundance of thy compassion *(kĕrōb raḥămêkā)*
> blot out my transgressions *(pĕšā'āy)*.
> Wash me thoroughly from my guilt *(mē'ăwônî)*
> and from my sin *(mēḥaṭṭā'tî)* cleanse me!

Both verses display a concentric chiastic arrangement which shows that the emphasis is on divine steadfast love/mercy on the one hand and on the psalmist's guilt/sin on the other. The basic meaning of the word *ḥnn* is 'to show favour,' but in this context the reading 'to have mercy' is appropriate. The word *ḥesed* normally denotes a relationship between two parties, but when applied to God signifies primarily strength or might, loving kindness and loyalty.[24] Since the singular form of *reḥem* or *raḥam* means 'womb,' the plural form *raḥămîm* stands for 'motherly feeling, compassion.' Both attributions point to the very foundations of the divine nature, and it is all the more obvious that these three terms for God's love are antithetical to the three terms for sin,[25] although the psalmist is probably more concerned with the absoluteness of divine grace on the one hand and the completeness of his separation from God on the other, than with the precise meanings of particular words.

The use of the three mediating terms for cleansing spiritual stain—*mḥh,*

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[23] See J. Magne, "Répétitions de mots et exégèse dans quelques psaumes et le Pater," *Biblica* 39 (1958), 177–197, esp. pp. 179–186. Regarding the division of the psalm Magne remarks (p. 181): "La division du psaume en deux grandes parties, entre les versets 11 et 12, ne peut être méconnue." P. Auffret, "Note sur la structure littéraire de Ps LI 1–19," *VT* 26 (1976), 142–147, however, finds it difficult to reconcile vv. 10–11 with the proposed division; he sees in vv. 10–11 "une charnière articulant entre eux 3–9 et 12–19. La purification (3–9, 11) s'achève en restaueration (10, 12–19)."

[24] See N. Glueck, *Das Wort ḥesed im alttestamentlichen Sprachgebrauche als menschliche und göttliche gemeinschaftsgemäße Verhaltungsweise* (BZAW 47; Gießen: A. Töpelmann, 1927); English translation by A. Gottschalk, *Ḥesed in the Bible: With an Introduction by G. A. Larue* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1967; New York: Ktav, 1975); C. F. Whitley, "The Semantic Range of *ḥesed*," *Biblica* 62 (1981), 519–526; S. Romerowski, "Que signifie le mot *ḥesed*?," *VT* 60 (1990), 89–103.

[25] For the meaning of the terms for sin, see especially R. P. Knierim, *Die Hauptbegriffe für Sünde im Alten Testament* (Gütersloh: G. Mohn, 1965).

'to blot out,' *kbs,* 'to wash out,' and *ṭhr,* 'to cleanse'—implies a conviction that only God can restore the broken relationship. The verb *mḥh* calls for attention in view of the context of the psalm and of other passages in which it occurs. The word here probably refers not to transgressions recorded in sacred works, as is often claimed,[26] but rather to those engraved in the human heart. That this imagery was also discernible in the ancient idea of a register is clearly attested in Jer 17:1: "The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron; with a point of diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their heart *(ḥărûšāh 'al-lûaḥ libbām),* and on the horns of their altars." The context of the psalm in general and the parallelism with the words *kbs* and *ṭhr* in particular powerfully support this idea. The suppliant does not ask that his transgressions should be washed from a book; his prayer embraces the essence of an inherent sinfulness, which could not be removed by any ordinary rinsing (cf. v. 7). Jeremiah says in 2:22: "Though you wash yourself *(tĕkabbĕsî)* with lye and use much soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me." Malachi, on the other hand, says starkly: "For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' *(mĕkabbĕsîm)* soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier *(mĕṭahēr)* of silver, and he will purify *(wĕṭīhar)* the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver ..." (3:2b–3). In the knowledge that God alone can remove an inherent personal uncleanness amounting almost to defilement, the psalmist entrusts himself totally to the divine mercy: *herebh*[27] *kabbĕsēnî mē'ăwônî ûmēḥaṭṭā'tî ṭahărēnî,* "Wash me thoroughly from my guilt, and from my sin cleanse me!" (v. 4) We observe here a chiasm and an assonance created by words ending with the first person singular suffix. The concentric chiastic arrangement and the use of the preposition *mīn* before the words guilt/sin shows that the emphasis is deliberately placed on washing/cleansing "from" guilt/sin.[28] This assonance stands in sharp contrast to the second person suffix of the offended divine person in v. 6.[29]

In strophe II (51:5–6ab) the psalmist expresses his awareness of his guilt and a deep insight into the nature of sin. He says: "For I know my transgressions *(pĕšā'ay),* and my sin *(wĕḥaṭṭā'tî)* is ever before me" (v. 5). Note the plural "my transgressions" and the singular "my sin." The proper meaning of the word *peša'* is 'rebellion'; theologically it means a wilful, self-assertive defiance of God. The psalmist has committed many rebellious acts, but

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[26] See the conclusion—after an unspecified survey of passages from the Bible and non-biblical documents—by E. R. Dalglish, *Psalm Fifty-One,* 88: "... The transgressions (v. 3b) and the iniquity (v. 11b) of the psalmist have been divinely recorded; the prayer is that their writing may be blotted out or canceled." See further H. Gunkel, *Die Psalmen,* 222; A. Weiser, *The Psalms,* 402; A. A. Anderson, *Psalms (1–72),* 392.

[27] Ketib *harbēh.*

[28] It is noteworthy that ancient translations (Targum, Septuagint, Vulgate) considered the chiastic arrangement, whereas many modern ones do not.

[29] See M. Dohoad, *Psalms,* vol. 2, p. 3.

in his penitence comprehends them in the singular "my sin." The figurative expression *negdî tāmîd,* "is ever before me," reinforces the claim that he "knows" his transgressions, although it may also imply their corporal consequences (cf. v. 10). In v. 6 the penitent continues his lament: "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned *(lĕkā lĕbaddĕkā*[30] *ḥāṭā'tî),* and done that which is evil *(hāra')*[31] in thy sight." The first part of the confession (v. 6a) displays a striking similarity to David's confession in 2 Sam 12:13: "I have sinned against the Lord" (cf. Gen 39:9; Ps 41:5b), while the second part (v. 6b) is reminiscent of Nathan's rebuke to David's adultery: "Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight?" (2 Sam 12:9). These similarities can be explained primarily by correspondences of situation and a characteristic ancient patternism. Given the fact that creation and the covenant are the foundations of universal solidarity between God and humankind, all sin can be considered as an act against God, because it disrupts the moral order upheld by its Creator (cf. Prov 14:31; 17:5). It follows that confession of sin is a way of honouring the majesty of God and acknowledging divine righteousness (cf. Josh 7:19; Dan 4:37; Ezra 10:10–11). In the final analysis, awareness of the seriousness of God's will implies acknowledgment of the supremacy of divine authority.

Strophe III (51:6cd–7) organically continues the statement that precedes it, using a conjunction that has occasioned much diversity of opinion. Verse 6b reads: *lĕma'an tiṣdaq bĕdobrekā tizkeh bešopṭekā,* which the RSV renders: "so that thou art justified in thy sentence and blameless in thy judgment." The bone of contention is the meaning of *lĕma'an.* The major dictionaries and grammars point to an association or connection between the two statements concerned. The history of the interpretation of the conjunction in Psalm 51 shows that the link between them has been understood in two different ways: some maintain that the conjunction expresses the *purpose* of the foregoing confession of sin, others that it introduces a *consequence* clause. The telic interpretation rendering *lĕma'an* as 'in order that' is already prominent in the ancient translations and some of the Midrashim. The Targum has: *mn bgll dtzky yty bmllwtk tbrwr yty kd tdyn,* "in order that you may be justified in your speaking, be pure when you judge."[32] The Septuagint gives: *hópos an dikaiothês en toîs lógois sou kaì nikéses en to krínesthai se,* "That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged." Symmachus says: *héneken tou dikaiothénai se en toîs lógois sou nikân*

[30] In the Psalter the adverb *lbd* is used only of God in connection with the second or third person suffix: Pss 51:6; 72:18; 83:19; 86:10; 136:4; 148:13.

[31] See the statement by M. Dahood, *Psalms,* vol. 2, p. 4: "The use of the definite article in *hāra'* seems to point to a specific crime."

[32] See E. Nestle, *Psalterium Chaldaicum ex Lagardiana Recensione* (Tubingae: Fr. Fues, 1879); idem, *Psalterium Tetraglottum: Graece, Syriace, Chaldaice, Latine* (Tubingae: Fr. Fues, 1879), 53.

krínonta, "for the sake of justifying you in your words, of prevailing when judging." The proponents of the consequential or resultant interpretation render *lĕma'an* as "so that, then too." In the first millennium there were not many of them, but in the second they have increased in number until recent times.[33]

What is the bearing of this diversity of opinion on the understanding of the verse and of the psalm as a whole? The main difficulty of the telic interpretation is its assumption of causal connection between the psalmist's sin and the justification of God's treatment of him; i.e., it holds that the sense of the statement is: "I sinned in order that thou mightest be just and clear in thy sentence." Such language could well have a blasphemous ring to it unless it is interpreted in the light of the psalms as a whole. For this and other reasons some exegetes prefer a so-called elliptical interpretation; they see in the conjunction *lĕma'an* an exercise of poetic license and argue that the causal connection between v. 6ab and v. 6cd does not relate to sinning but rather to the confession of sin.[34] Proponents of the telic interpretation tend to accentuate the paradox of v. 6: in the shadowlands of the psalmist's sin the light of divine righteousness shines more brightly. The basic meaning of the resultant interpretation, however, could be rendered thus: the psalmist has sinned; whatever God does will be fully justified. But what kind of divine move can be expected in such a situation on the spiritual chessboard?

This is the crucial question attending the meaning of Ps 51:6, but the solution cannot be derived from individual words alone. The conjunction *lĕma'an,* for instance, cannot bear the weight generally imposed upon it. The structure of the psalm and the underlying spirit of prayer provide more important criteria than it and other terms. In general, exegetes take into account the fact that the psalmist sinned and conclude that the essence of divine justification is appropriate condemnation and punishment. They are inclined to array the words *ṣdq* (v. 6c), *zkh* and *špṭ* (v. 6d) in judicial robes.[35] Moreover, the

[33] N. H. Ridderbos, "Psalm 51:5–6," *Studia Biblica et Semitica: Theodoro Christiano Vriezen* (Wageningen: H. Veenman, 1966), 299–312, defends this interpretation and mentions names like Theodoretus, Bellarminus, Calvin, Cocceius, Wutz, etc. (p. 305). M. Dahood, *Psalms,* vol. 2, p. 4, comments: "*lĕma'an* expresses consequence rather than purpose."

[34] See C. A. Briggs and E. G. Briggs, *The Book of Psalms,* vol. 2, p. 6: "Final clauses, not dependent on the act of sin as if the commission of sin was in order to justify God in dealing with it; but on the confession of sin against God only"; R. Kittel, *Die Psalmen,* 206: "... Es bleibt daher nur die elliptische Redeweise: 'ich sage das, damit ...'. Der Zweck dieser hier überraschenden Erklärung, nicht der Zweck des Sündigens soll ausgesprochen werden"; E. R. Dalglish, *Psalm Fifty-One,* 111: "The elliptical view appears to the writer to be the most satisfactory since it preserves the telic force of *lĕma'an,* which admittedly is its normative meaning, while at the same time it obviates the theological difficulties involved in the telic view"; A. A. Anderson, *Psalms (1–72),* 394–395: "Perhaps the best solution is to take verse 4cd as a final clause, and to assume that either a phrase (such as 'I confess this so that ...') has been omitted for poetical reasons, or verse 4cd resumes the thought of verse 3."

[35] E. R. Dalglish, *Psalm Fifty-One,* 111, thinks that the psalmist is simply saying: "I have sinned against thee; whatever punishment you mete out is fully deserved." On pp. 112–113 he interprets the terms in the forensic sense. A. A. Anderson, *Psalms (1–72),* 395, claims: "The

proponents of the telic interpretation emphasize divine triumph contrasted with human depravity. The Septuagint rendering varies the original statement in favour of the concept of a tribunal before which God could be tried: "That thou mayest be justified in thy words, and prevail when thou art judged." Over against the judicial interpretation of divine justification it has been claimed that v. 6cd does not in fact proclaim divine judgment, condemnation and punishment–but pardon. But this proposal, too, does not fit the context of the psalm and the basic meaning of the terms involved. Espousal of antithetical alternatives is usually due to a one-sided approach.[36] The basic structure of the world in its totality requires an awareness of greater complementarity.

What is the probable significance of the parallelism *tiṣdaq* and *tizkeh* vis-à-vis *bdbrk* and *bšpṭk?* The basic meaning of *ṣdq* in its verbal form is 'be in the right'; *zkh* means literally 'be pure, clean' and metaphorically 'be pure, innocent, blameless'; *dbr* has a wide range of meanings with the general sense of 'speak';[37] and *špṭ* basically denotes 'govern, judge, decide (in dispute).' This last term is by definition connected with authority and power. When God fills the role of "judge" it is usually assumed that the resulting decisions are always perfect, while it is expected of human judges that they should judge according to divine norms of righteousness.[38] Abraham relies on this generally agreed principle when he asks that all be spared because there are a considerable—if diminishing—number of righteous: *hăšōpēṭ kol-hā'āreṣ lō' ya'ăśeh mišpāṭ,* "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen 18:25). The basic meaning of *špṭ* itself does not, then, point to condemnation or punishment directly. The best decision in any dispute between the righteous and unrighteous always has a double function: the good must be confirmed and supported, and the evil condemned. This double function of *špṭ* has "ontological" grounds, for any pronouncement of judgment implies involvement in a world where right and wrong exist side by side. In other words, it is "in principle two-sided."[39]

Psalm 51:6 offers, however, special underpinning for the idea that *špṭ* has

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point of verse 4 (MT 6) is that, whatever punishment the Psalmist may have received (see verse 8, MT 10), and whatever further judgment Yahweh may pronounce upon him, Yahweh has been both right and just." M. Dahood, *Psalms,* vol. 2, 4, refers only to the word *zkh,* 'be blameless,' and comments: "No one can bring a legitimate claim against you." See further J. S. Kselman, "A Note on Ps 51:6," *CBQ* 39 (1977), 251–253.

[36] See E. Beaucamp, "Justice divine et pardon: ut justificeris in sermonibus tuis (Ps., LI,6b)," *A la rencontre de Dieu: Mémorial Albert Gelin* (BFCThL 8; Le Puy: X. Mappus, 1961), 129–144.

[37] We note that the usual verb form of the word *dbr* is Pi'el; the qal infinitive form *bdbrk* is unique and is probably due to the parallelism with *bšpṭk* in the desire to create assonance.

[38] See J. Krašovec, *La justice (ṣdq) de Dieu dans la Bible hébraïque et l'interprétation juive et chrétienne* (OBO 76; Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 255–258.

[39] See the appropriate interpretation concerning *špṭ* by N. H. Ridderbos, *Studia Biblica et Semitica,* 305–306.

a double function. The psalmist cannot possibly have had in mind a divine separation of sheep from goats: the issue at stake is surely the question of divine freedom in relation to an unrighteous suppliant who knows that God is in principle totally free to choose between condemnation and mercy. Of course, the attitude of the human side can play a significant role. Obstinacy invites condemnation and punishment, while sincere contrition and penitence may move God to mercy and forgiveness. The double function of divine judgment in such a context may be seen as a matter of decision between obstinacy and humility on the one side and between apparent and true penitence on the other. The point of Ps 51:6d is in one way similar to the case of Gen 18:25—part of Abraham's plea for Sodom (18:16–33)—with the difference that God has to teach Abraham something that the suppliant in the psalm takes for granted. God's instructive answer to Abraham's argument is that the Lord is totally free to bestow mercy; not least because divine wisdom alone can determine whether the preconditions for mercy exist on the human side.

The positive side of *špṭ,* i.e., recognition of the rights of the righteous, corresponds to the basic meaning of the word *ṣdq*: be righteous, have right, declare righteous, defend, deliver.[40] The word *ṣdq* has no juridical connotation, because it is used only in relation to those who are righteous and are entitled to be helped and delivered. The word does not in principle involve condemnation and deliverance, but may do so by implication: deliverance of a righteous person is often possible only by the humiliation and punishment of a transgressor. Again, the context of the psalm is different. The psalmist does not expect manifestation of the divine righteousness to take the form of confrontation with an oppressor but to show itself in relation to himself as a depraved sinner. Unlike Abraham he does not argue with God, for he does not count himself among the righteous as Abraham obviously did. The only course that remains open to him is submission to the divine judgment in the belief that God will certainly make *the best possible decision for him.* The point of Ps 51:6 is not the establishment of alternatives: either condemnation or forgiveness. Something more important is at stake: the very foundation of divine righteousness, which intends salvation in a global sense, whatever the means to that end. Verse 6cd may be rendered literally: "in order that (so that) you get right when you speak, and are blameless when you make (any) decision." This sentence is probably intended to have general application rather than a direct relationship to the psalmist's sin; but the sin is a paradoxical confirmation of the principle. It should be noted that *ṣdq // zkh* appear twice in parallel in the book of Job: 15:14 (in reverse order) and 25:4; in both instances disclaiming human righteousness in principle. In 25:4

[40] See J. Krašovec, *La justice (ṣdq) de Dieu;* H. Ringgren and B. Johnson, "*ṣādaq,*" *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament,* vol. 6 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1989), 898–924.

Bildad asks: "How then can man be righteous before God? How can he who is born of woman be clean?"

It is obvious that Paul understood very well what the second half of Ps 51:6 meant, even though he quotes the Septuagint rendering. He uses it to support his thesis of the confirmation of divine righteousness by human unrighteousness: "Let God be true though every man be false ... But if our wickedness serves to show the justice of God, what shall we say? ... But if through my falsehood God's truthfulness abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner?" (Rom 3:4–7). Recognition of the general rightness of divine dealing with human beings serves, of course, as the basis of the psalmist's hope that God might be merciful towards him. His prayer starts with an appeal to divine mercy, and its whole emphasis is on that mercy and the psalmist's renewal. As for the interrelation between sin, confession, and the hope of mercy we may summarize the message of the psalm thus: the more visible the psalmist's sin, the more evident the divine rightness or righteousness; since God is not only *summum esse* but also *summum bonum* there is every justification for total confidence on the part of a contrite heart; the bestowal of mercy for which the suppliant pleads is to be seen as a supreme confirmation of divine righteousness. Against the background of these interrelated theological presuppositions all proposed interpretations of the conjunction *lĕma'an* are acceptable.[41]

This all-embracing theological perspective offers a secure stance from which to interpret the meaning of Ps 51:7: "Behold, I was brought forth *(ḥôlālîtî)* in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me *(yeḥĕmatnî)*." It is plain that the parallelism of the verbs *ḥwl* (Po'lal perfect), 'whirl, dance,' and *yḥm* (Pi'el), 'be in heat, conceive (being hot),' has negative connotations. The word *yḥm* is elsewhere employed in reference to animals (Gen 30:41 [twice]; 31:10);[42] *hrh* is normally used for human conception. Nevertheless, some modern interpreters tend to muffle any negative background noises by pointing to the conspicuously positive attitude of the Old Testament regarding marital relationships.[43] Moreover, the reference to the psalmist's mother is taken as an argument against a collective interpretation of the psalm.[44] It is appropriate, however, to keep an eye open for all the

[41] E. Beaucamp, *À la rencontre de Dieu: Mémorial Albert Gelin,* 129–144, comes through a somewhat one-sided presentation of individual words to the conclusion that v. 6cd refers directly to divine forgiveness. But this seems unlikely.

[42] F. Baethgen, *Die Psalmen,* 148, remarks: "Augenscheinlich hat der Dichter absichtlich den drastischen Ausdruck gewählt."

[43] E. R. Dalglish, *Psalm Fifty-One,* 119, recognizes rightly that "everything pertaining to sexuality rendered the Hebrew ceremonially unclean ..."; but he concludes: "The penitent stands wholly in the center of the drama; everything else is but background. We may conclude, therefore, that any exegesis of the confession in v. 7 which refers to maternal conception as sinful must appear inadequate." See also A. A. Anderson, *Psalms (1–72),* 396.

[44] See H. Gunkel, *Die Psalmen,* 226: "Die Deutung des 'Ich's auf die Gemeinde wird

factors that might have played a role in the composition of the psalm. We have to consider the sense of identity with the community that prevailed in ancient Israel, the interrelation of individual and communal responsibility, the presentiment of conditions beyond the sphere of human merits and demerits, and—all the more—the diversity of symbols and metaphorical language employed. Taking these factors into account, behind the obvious focal points of the foreground we can discern in the background various dimensions of the human phenomenon.[45] As a consequence, an exclusive alternative: particular sin versus inherent sinfulness, is unjustified. The psalm as a whole reflects an awareness of sin in its total historical and existential context: the suppliant has committed many transgressions (cf. 51:5a); he has done that which is evil *(hāra')* in divine eyes (51:6b); and he cannot transcend his innately sinful origins. His confession could not, in fact, be more comprehensive or profound. And the mutual relationship between the universal experience of ever-increasing human corruption (cf. the primeval history) and the persistence of unfaithfulness in the history of Israel is brought into focus. The psalmist may speak from the point of view of his total involvement in human sinfulness, often encountered elsewhere in various literary forms: Gen 6:5; 8:21; 1 Kgs 8:46; Isa 6:5; Jer 17:9; Pss 57:4; 130:3; 143:2; Job 4:17; 14:4; 15:14; 25:4; Prov 20:9; Qoh 7:20;[46] but he must also have observed that same miserable condition in the history of Israel. Such an experience is especially strongly reflected in Ezekiel's presentation of the inherently rebellious attitude of Israel. In the allegory of chapter 16 the emphasis is on the congenital sinfulness of Jerusalem: "Your origin and your birth are of the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite, and your mother a Hittite ..." (Ezek 3; cf. Ezek 23; Isa 50:1; Jer 50:11–12).[47]

This awareness of origins and general moral limitations, of course, implies a hunger for mercy. Such a hope is fully in line with the traditional Hebrew view that one of the reasons for divine mercy and forgiveness is inherent human frailty (cf. Gen 8:21; Pss 78:39; 103:14). On this ground God declares in Ezekiel's prophecy forgiveness "for my name's sake" (especially Ezek 20; cf. Isa 48:1–11). The consciousness of a bond between sin and hu-

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durch den Hinweis auf die Mutter des Betenden 7 widerlegt und würde nur die Tiefe des Gebetes zerstören."

[45] It is noteworthy that there is a considerable variety in the interpretation of v. 7 in Judaism and Christianity. See the survey by A. Feuillet, "Le verset 7 du 'Miserere' et le péché original," *ScR* (1944), 5–26; J. K. Zink, "Uncleanness and Sin: A Study of Job XIV:4 and Psalm LI:7," *VT* 17 (1967), 354–361.

[46] See the paraphrase by R. Kittel, *Die Psalmen,* 207: "Ich bin ein Sünder und schon meine Eltern waren Sünder – nichts, gar nichts will ich beschönigen."

[47] A. Caquot, *RHR* 85 (1966), 145, gives preference to this line of interpretation: "Ces parallèles semblent plus topiques que les références au lieu commun de la peccabilité humaine généralement citées."

man nature occasioned the significant promise transmitted by the Yahwist that God would never again destroy the earth by flood: "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination *(yēṣer)* of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen 8:21).[48] The greatness of the theme and the universality of the confession, however, preclude the psalmist from offering any excuse for his private and particular rebellion, yet the correlation of individual and collective aspects of confession does not weaken the sense of personal responsibility. On the contrary, it reinforces it by setting it in a framework of universal solidarity and communal responsibility for the miserable situation that has transpired. In his own way he expresses what Isaiah, with his sense of total solidarity, exclaims: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips ..." (6:5). But from the universality of the psalmist's confession is derived the universal scope of prayer for the gifts that God alone can provide: mercy, forgiveness (implied metaphorically), cleansing, and renewal of the innermost self (cf. vv. 3, 4, 9, 11, 12, 14). Thus, total and pitiless confession reveals that over and above the sinful condition and disposition there is a greater force: the potency divine of primal Source, able to raise an individual or an entire people from the dead and bring them to ultimate perfection. That starlike glory lies at the heart of the psalm.

Strophe IV (8–9) brings this idea to expression by contrasting with confession of sin the knowledge of divine truth and wisdom, which motivates a petition for cleansing:

> Behold, thou desirest truth *('ĕmet)* in the inward being,
> and in what is secret you teach me wisdom *(ḥokmāh tôdî'ēnî).*
> Purge me *(tĕḥaṭṭĕ'ēnî)* with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
> wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

The antithetic vv. 7 and 8 both begin with the same particle *hēn,* 'behold.' In the first of them the suppliant speaks in the first person of his sinful origin; in the second, on the other hand, he addresses God in the second person and is driven by a consciousness of the divine expectations.[49] Verse 8 is the turning point. The word *'ĕmet* means literally firmness and metaphorically faithfulness; it stands in parallel with the characteristic Wisdom term *ḥokmāh,* which may denote primarily "the fear of the Lord" (cf. Ps 111:10). The psalmist knows that God not only desires but also teaches (literally "makes to know") firmness/wisdom, which in any case is not the result of human

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[48] For the understanding of *yēṣer hāra'*, 'the evil inclination,' in Judaism, see G. H. Cohen Stuart, *The Struggle in Man Between Good and Evil: An Inquiry into the Origin of the Rabbinic Concept of Yeṣer Hara'* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1984).

[49] See E. R. Dalglish, *Psalm Fifty-One,* 123. A. A. Anderson, *Psalms (1–72),* 396, puts it: "Verse 6 (hebr. 8) offers a contrast to verse 5 (hebr. 7); the latter describes what man is, while the former shows what God desires from man."

cerebration. This knowledge lies behind the series of vigorous petitions that opens in v. 9 and occupies the rest of the psalm.[50] The confession of congenital sinfulness in v. 7 underlies the prayer for cleansing in vv. 9–11, while the integrity of mind of v. 8 finds expression in the prayer for firmness of the spirit in vv. 12–14. In v. 9 the poet echoes the petition of v. 4, using the imperfect form as a stylistic variant to the imperative; he also introduces the term "hyssop" and the metaphor of the whiteness of snow (cf. Isa 1:18). "Hyssop" is obviously taken from ancient cultic cleansing practices (cf. Exod 12:22; Lev 14:4–5, 49–53; Num 19:6, 18); here it is used as a metaphor for that inward cleansing which God alone can effect. The Pi'el privative of the word *ḥṭ'* literally means "de-sin, un-sin." Verse 9b intensifies the petition by means of the comparative degree: "wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." The force of the comparative is all the more evident when the passage is collated with the declaration in Isa 1:18: "... though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow *(kaššeleg yalbînû)*."

Strophe V (51:10–11) occupies a central position and connects the two halves of the psalm. Verse 10 relates thematically and linguistically to vv. 12–19, while v. 11 echoes the themes of vv. 3–9.[51] Verse 10 introduces some new literary patterns, whereas v. 11b revives the image of v. 3b:

> Let me hear joy and gladness *(tašmî'ēnî śāśôn wĕśimḥāh);*
> let the bones which thou hast broken rejoice *(tāgelnāh 'ăṣāmôt dikkîtā).*
> Hide thy face from my sins *(hastēr pānêkā mēḥăṭā'āy),*
> and blot out all my iniquities *(wĕkol-'āwōnōtay mĕḥēh).*

The Syriac version has instead of *tašmî'ēnî,* "let (make) me hear," the reading *taśbî'ēnî,* "satisfy me." Since the MT has the support of many ancient versions we should follow it. The pair *śāśôn wĕśimḥāh* is taken from the formulaic language of poetry. In Isa 35:10 (= 51:11) and 51:3 it is used in the contexts of the promise of return and the renewal of Sion; in Isa 22:13, on the other hand, the setting is a condemnation of hedonism: in the day when God called the people to "weeping and mourning" there was "joy and gladness ..." The pattern phrase clearly implies utterance and the hearing of festal voices.[52] The expression "Let me hear joy and gladness" in Psalm 51 probably also has a feast in mind. In spite of the "parallels," the basic orientation of the petition

[50] Some translators (cf. RSV) and exegetes think that the petition begins in the second colon of v. 8. Their interpretation seems reasonable in spite of doubt expressed by E. R. Dalglish, *Psalm Fifty-One,* 126–127.

[51] See P. Auffret, *VT* 26 (1976), 146: "Ainsi les vv. 10–11 apparaissent-ils comme une charnière articulant entre eux 3–9 et 12–19. La purification (3–9, 11) s'achève en restauration (10, 12–19), laquelle implique ce passage douloureux. Particulièrement significatifs pour le sens de l'ensemble du psaume, les enchaînement 9/19, 10/11, et 11/12 méritent toute l'attention du lecteur."

[52] Note that the strange voices of the perversion of a feast attracted the attention of Moses when he returned from Sinai to meet the people: "It is not the sound of shouting for victory, or the sound of the cry of defeat, but the sound of singing that I hear" (Exod 32:18).

and the following colon 10b suggest that the imagery of the feast is used simply as a metaphor to highlight the radical change of situation, although it may relate to the institution of proclaiming a divine oracle of salvation (forgiveness) through the mediation of a priest or cultic prophet.

Verse 10b has caused some gnawing of that bone of contention: the relationship between sin and physical affliction. It has been suggested that the expression "the bones which thou hast broken" refers to some kind of physical trauma;[53] most interpreters, however, see it as a reference to the blight upon the psalmist's soul.[54] It is usually overlooked that the colon forms a parallelism with the previous one. The idea of the petition is that the "bones," i.e., the inmost self of the psalmist, experience gladness.[55] It is recognised that they were supposed to be the seat of sensation and therefore relate to the whole being (Jer 20:9; 23:9; Pss 6:3; 22:15; 32:3; 35:10; 38:4; 102:4; Job 4:14; 20:11; 30:17, 30; Prov 3:8). Since most such passages use highly poetic language, a metaphorical interpretation is much more appropriate than a literal one.[56] The writer of Psalm 51 relates the issue of gladness to his sin (cf. Pss 32:3; 38:4) and continues: "Hide thy face from my sins." This expression is both metaphorical and paradoxical; it does not, of course, propose a withdrawal of divine favour but, on the contrary, an overlooking or disregarding of sins. And this is another conception of divine forgiveness. The overlooking or disregarding of sins is strongly reminiscent of the image of Ps 32:1: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered *(kĕsûy ḥăṭā'āh).*"

2.2 *Prayer for Inner Renewal (Ps 51:12–19)*

Strophe VI (51:12–13) focuses exclusively on the theme of renewal; the petition in v. 12 is expressed in the parallelism of two positive and (in v. 13)

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[53] See H. Gunkel, *Die Psalmen,* 224; *The Oxford Annotated Bible.* H. Gunkel directly advocates this interpretation, but concludes his argument: "Bezeichnend ist für ihn aber wie für manche andere dieser Betenden, daß er auf dies Äußere nur anspielt."

[54] See especially R. Kittel, *Die Psalmen,* 208–209; A. Weiser, *The Psalms,* 406; M. Dahood, *Psalms,* vol. 2, p. 7; J. W. Rogerson and J. W. McKay, *Psalms 51–100,* 19. M. Dahood is resolute in his conviction: "... the psalm provides no further evidence of physical distress. The psalmist's anguish is strictly spiritual." E. R. Dalglish, *Psalm Fifty-One,* 142, states in relation to the passages containing the word "bone" in the Hebrew Bible: "The concept formulated by this pertinent nuance embraces physical health or sickness as its basic notion but moves to a large degree in the psychical or metaphoric category."

[55] The observation by C. A. Briggs and E. G. Briggs, *The Book of Psalms,* vol. 2, p. 7: "Even *the bones* exult in sympathy with the exhilaration of the soul" may be misleading when "the bones" are understood in a vulgar physical sense.

[56] J. W. Rogerson and J. W. McKay, *Psalms,* vol. 2, p. 19, are obviously right when they comment on the present verse: "His whole frame *(bones)* has been shattered by the awareness of God's displeasure and he longs for the healing of forgiveness that will permit his spirit to *dance* and rejoice once more."

two negative sentences. The plea of 51:12 reads:

> A clean heart create in me *(lēb ṭāhôr bĕrā'-lî),* O God,
> and a steadfast spirit make anew within me *(wĕrûaḥ nākôn haddēš bĕkirbî).*

Verse 12 is very clear in the light of the previous confession of inward sinfulness. The psalmist prays for a renewal that God alone can effect. The verb *br'* is characteristic of the Priestly source's account of creation (Gen 1:1–2:4a) and the theological argumentation of Deutero-Isaiah. It is highly significant that the subject of the verb is always God.[57] It follows that the meaning of the parallel verb *ḥdš* in Pi'el (cf. Hithpa'el in Ps 103:5b) is the same. The word "make anew/renew" in this context does not ask that God may bestow on the psalmist something he previously possessed but has lost by sinning; such an idea is incompatible with v. 7. What is sought is the transformation of his former heart and spirit into entirely different entities (cf. 1 Sam 10:6, 9; Jer 31:31–34; 32:39; Ezek 11:19; 36:26; possibly also Ps 87:4–7). The parallelism of *lēb // rûaḥ* here and in v. 19 suggests that the emphasis, once again, is not on the exact meanings of individual words but on the totality of human existence and the inner life. The pair obviously exemplifies the rhetorical figure of merism: a way of expressing totality by using terms that describe parts.[58] This interpretation is supported both by the traits that mark the psalm as a whole and the parallelism *lî,* "in me (for me)" // *bĕqirbî,* "within me" (lit. "in my midst"). It is customary to connect the notion of cleanness with the heart and the concept of firmness with the spirit, although in Pss 78:37 and 112:7 we find "steadfast heart." Cleanness and firmness are of course causally connected; an unclean heart (spirit) cannot be firm.

In 51:13 the twin negatives in two parallel sentences are introduced by the prohibitive particle *'al-:*

> Cast me not away from thy face,
> and thy holy spirit *(rûaḥ qodšĕkā)* take not from me.

The first sentence reads literally: "Cast me not away from before your face." The reference may be to possible banishment "from the sacred places of worship in Jerusalem";[59] but it seems more likely that the suppliant is concerned with the loss of a living communion with a God who is the source of true life and joy (cf. Gen 4:14, 16; Exod 33:14–15; Deut 4:37; 1 Sam 26:19–20; 1 Kgs 9:7b; 2 Kgs 13:23; Jer 23:39; Pss 11:7; 16:11; 21:7; 140:14; 2 Chr 7:20). The negative wish in the second part of v. 13 uses the rare expression "thy holy

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[57] See especially P. Humbert, "Emploi et portée du verbe bârâ (créer) dans l'Ancien Testament," *ThZ* 3 (1947), 401–422.

[58] That this pair forms a merism in vv. 12 and 19 has been noticed by A. Caquot, *RHR* 85 (1966), 134, 143. For more detailed information about merism, see my study *Der Merismus im Biblisch-Hebräischen und Nordwestsemitischen* (BibOr 33; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1977).

[59] This is the view of C. A. Briggs and E. G. Briggs, *The Book of Psalms,* vol. 2, 8.

spirit" which occurs elsewhere only in Isa 63:10–11; there "his holy spirit" points to the presence of the God who led the Israelites out of Egypt into the Promised Land. The parallelism "thy face" // "thy holy spirit" clearly indicates that here too the expression signifies the presence of the holy God; the withdrawal of the divine holy spirit would leave the suppliant desolate. Similar petitions are found in Ps 27:9 and 71:9. It has been argued that the petition in Ps 51:13 and the account in Isa 63:10–11 may refer to specially chosen persons (a king, Moses) inspired by the holy spirit; for "throughout the Old Testament there is no suggestion that the spirit was bestowed nationally but was reserved for a select company - the early judges, skilled workmen, the prophets, and the king."[60] This argument is, however, incomplete, for by assuming uniformity of divine communication with the people it fails to take into account some aspects of plurality and universality, such as the Hebrew concept of corporate personality (representative figures are selected for particular missions on behalf of the people), special emphasis on the divine presence during the wilderness period, and the universal nature of the prayer. The divine presence or spirit is always the same; on the other hand, there are reasons as plentiful as blackberries for the fear that God could cast away chosen persons or an elected people and remove "his holy spirit" from them. The most illuminating examples can be provided by the crisis at Sinai (Exod 32–34) and the case of Saul, who was "turned into another man" by virtue of his selection and endowment with the divine spirit (cf. 1 Sam 10:6, 9), but thanks to his subsequent demoniac display of self-will and self-glorification "the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him." (1 Sam 15:14–15; cf. 16:23; 18:10, 12; 19:9).

Strophe VII (51:14–15) is thematically and linguistically strongly connected with strophe VIII (51:16–17); in this section the terminology of deliverance and salvation predominates:

> Restore to me *(hāšîbāh lî)* the joy of thy salvation *(śĕśôn yiš'ekā)*,
> and uphold me with a willing spirit *(rûaḥ nĕdîbāh)*.
> Then I will teach transgressors thy ways,
> and sinners will return to thee *('ēlêkā yāšûbû)*.
> Deliver me from blood *(haṣṣîlēnî middāmîm)*, O God,
> thou God of my salvation *('ĕlōhê tĕšû'ātî)*,
> and my tongue will sing aloud of thy righteousness *(ṣidqātekā)*.
> O Lord, open thou my lips,
> and my mouth shall show forth thy praise *(tĕhillātekā)*.

The verb *šwb*, used at the beginning (v. 14a) and end (v. 15b) of strophe VII is inclusive in function: the argument behind the petition for the restoration of the psalmist's fellowship with God is that he will then become a fitter instrument to bring sinners back to God. The verbal form *yāšûbû*, "will return," is

[60] E. R. Dalglish, *Psalm Fifty-One*, 158–159.

used in relation to transgressors and sinners and does not necessarily refer to the prophetic controversy regarding Israel's current incapacity to turn to her God. The fundamental burden of the prayer suggests that the suppliant is concerned with sinners in general: he knows that for them the only way to salvation lies through reform. They should come to recognize what they are and what God can offer them. It goes without saying that the psalmist accepts fully the usual Hebrew concept of communal solidarity, but at this point he gives an explicit indication of his cohesion with the people. The parallelism of a "clean heart" and a "willing spirit" in vv. 12a and 14b is an example of merism and designates the totality of the human race. Further, the suppliant seeks more than a temporary state of salvation; he aspires to the re-establishment and continuance of his fellowship with God. *Rûaḥ nĕdîbāh* may be regarded as synonymous with *rûaḥ nākôn,* "steadfast spirit," in v. 12b and with *rûaḥ qodšĕkā,* "thy holy spirit," in v. 13b.[61] In any case the "spirit" in question is expected to be conferred by God, and the petition is strongly reminiscent of the prayer in Ps 143:10: "Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God! Let thy good spirit *(rûḥăkā ṭôbāh)* lead me on a level path!"

Such a petition witnesses to the sincerity and spiritual greatness of its begetter. It suggests the psychological effects of sin and restoration by forgiveness. Inward sinfulness and particular sins lead to a multifaceted estrangement, whereas purification and restoration of living communion with God create a fathomless assurance of solidarity. The joy of salvation must be communicated to others. A profound personal experience of the truth regarding a relationship to the Source of life offers the best—indeed the only—escape from individualism into a community of shared salvation and joy. Such prayer is personal in nature, whether human beings pray as individuals or as a community. The very nature of penitential prayer disallows the either/or alternative of collective/individualist interpretations. Confrontation with one's inner enemy, i.e., with inherent sinfulness, is the only complete lesson of true solidarity—descent in deep humiliation followed by ascent to a shared joy in salvation. Since this is not theory but a living communication through prayer we are faced here with the existential or "ontological" foundations of community.

Strophe VIII (51:16–17) opens with a petition that reads literally: "Deliver me from blood, O God." The plural *dāmîm* is so ambiguous that it has resulted in an extraordinary variety of interpretations. All exegetes who assume a Davidic authorship naturally have seen in the word an allusion to the murder of Uriah, but in recent times it has been argued that it may relate to

[61] C. A. Briggs and E. G. Briggs, *The Book of Psalms,* vol. 2, 8, point to ancient translations and render v. 14b as synonymous with v. 13b: "and with the princely Spirit uphold me." M. Dahood, *Psalms,* vol. 2, 2, 8, proposes the same parallelism and renders v. 14b: "and by your generous spirit sustain me."

an unspecified "bloodguilt" of the suppliant's or to crimes perpetrated by the entire people. Others have translated it as "bloodshed" or "death" resulting from sickness or blood feuding. All those proposals make sense provided that the balance between the confession of sin committed and inherent sinfulness is not affected. In view of the burning desire of the suppliant to escape from his distress, however, it seems most likely that he is concerned with his own death which would negate the possibility of praise.[62] At the heart of his petition lies his main purpose: to bring sinners back to God and to sing aloud God's righteousness. The expression "thy righteousness" (v. 16b) appears in parallel with other terms related to salvation; consequently, its primary sense is obviously divine saving acts. The force of the petition for deliverance and of the praise of God equates with the completeness of confession of the suppliant's specific sinfulness.

Strophe IX (51:18–19) is introduced by the particle *kî* to confer even greater emphasis on the aspect of divine grace in the previous petition:

> For *(kî)* thou hast no delight *(lō'-ṯaḥpōṣ)* in sacrifice;
> were I to give *(wĕ'ettēnāh)* a burnt offering, thou wouldst
> not be pleased *(lō' tirṣeh).*
> The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit *(rûaḥ nišbārāh);*
> a broken and contrite heart *(lēb-nišbār wĕnidkeh),* O God,
> thou wilt not despise.

It seems reasonable to attribute to *kî* the function of an explicative conjunction.[63] Verse 18a is, then, a statement as it stands, forming a clear parallelism with v. 18b on the basis of *lō'-ṯaḥpōṣ // lō' tirṣeh.* The imperfect form *wĕ'ettēnāh* functions as a protasis that can be rendered "were I to give" (cf. Ps 55:13).[64] It is worth noting that the Septuagint provides a different rendering of v. 18 without changing the sense of the MT: "For should you be pleased, a sacrifice indeed would I offer; in burnt offerings you do not have pleasure."[65] Verse 19 displays a clear parallelism *rûaḥ nišbārāh // lēb-nišbār (wĕnidkeh),* an obvious merism that stands for the human race's inner life (cf. v. 12).

We may conclude that the poet is contrasting the inadequacy of sacrifice to

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[62] See A. Weiser, *The Psalms,* 408–409: "... the poet thinks of the preservation of his won life at the very moment when his whole being is deeply affected by the awareness of the new life granted him by God, and of his new task." H. Gunkel, *Die Psalmen,* 227, claims: "Die 'Bluttat' könnte hier nur eine solche sein, die dem Sänger droht ..."; he proposes the reading *middumām,* "vor der Stille, dem Schweigen," as a designation of the underworld (cf. Ps 94:17). M. Dahood, *Psalms,* vol. 2, p. 8, proposes, however, the reading *damnîm,* "the tears of death" by relating the noun to *dāmam,* 'to weep.'

[63] This is the proposal by A. Caquot, *RHR* 85 (1966), 142, against E. R. Dalglish, *Psalm Fifty-One,* 189, who takes it as an emphatic particle with an intensive force "Yea."

[64] See E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (15th impr.: Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), § 108f.

[65] M. Dahood, *Psalms,* vol. 2, pp. 2, 9, basically follows this rendering.

penitence. Does this imply a relative or even absolute denial of the value of sacrifice? Careful investigation of prophetic passages that disparage sacrifice shows that the prophets did not repudiate the institution in principle, but condemned the people's perverted attitudes to it. The psalmist, who is not a prophet but a suppliant deeply sorrowful, is above any direct involvement in such controversy. The gravity of his rebellious acts, and especially the awareness of his inward sinfulness, must have it him absolutely clear to him that no "formal" act of atonement could suffice. It is crucial to consider the evidence that the suppliant is praying not only for forgiveness but also for the renewal of the innermost recesses of his soul in a process of new creation. To see things thus removes all justification for postulating a particular historical situation or personal setting. At this point it is perhaps relevant to note that the brightness of a full life, illuminated by the highest possible purpose, is the most effective revelation of the misery of darkness: sin and death.

This does not preclude the idea that the psalm was composed when its author was ringed around by a suffering people during the Babylonian exile. It seems inherently likely that the psalmist was praying in the name of the entire suffering community, nominating their suffering as a substitute for formal sacrifices that were not then possible, and yearning for restoration of their national and religious substance.[66] We should not, however, claim that the prayer's function is collective *tout court.* It must be borne in mind that no distress, neither sickness nor exile, adequately explains the ultimate motive and goal of this petition. The attempt of the elders in Exile to dispute with the prophet about divine justice (cf. Ezek 20), the theodicy of Deutero-Isaiah, and many other biblical documents show that external circumstances such as distress did not move the majority of the people to true repentance; many sinners become in such circumstances even more obstinate. Not many are capable of confessing their sins in full sincerity. All the more does it follow that the penitent of Psalm 51 is unique both as regards his point of departure and his goal.[67] The writer of the psalm is indisputably a genius—an individual genius. All the more is it clear that the very nature of his recognition of sin and of the way to deliverance motivates him to embrace, in a passion of prayer, not only the whole of his own people but also the whole of humankind.

[66] This is the view of A. Caquot, *RHR* 85 (1966). On p. 144 he argues: "... Pour lui, Dieu ne peut pardonner que s'il reçoit une victime. Or l'autel des sacrifices est détruit, l'expiation rituelle est impossible. Pour se sauver du désespoir, le psalmiste propose à Dieu une victime de substitution qui n'a pa besoin de l'autel pour être immolée. Cette victime, c'est lui-même, c'est-à-dire la collectivité juive déportée au nom de laquelle il parle et qui endure la 'mort' de la captivité à Babylone."

[67] Considering the main emphases of the psalm it seems most likely that vv. 20–21 are a later liturgical addition, as most exegetes assume.

2.3 Concluding Considerations

What can be deduced from the thematic, linguistic, and stylistic properties of the psalm? The most important observation to be made concerns the function of Psalm 51 as prayer. True prayer is the most genuine form of dialogue with God, oneself and other people, but its motif and object may be to differing degrees worthy and realistic. The suppliant of Psalm 51 stands before the mirror of his sinfulness and the knowledge of divine holiness; he is highly unusual in his petitionary attitude, for he does not pray for the punishment of enemies or the restoration of material goods but for something new in substance resulting in the stability and continuance of his fellowship with God. The recognition of inherent human sinfulness is strikingly realistic; it is not surprising that there are many passages that point to this fact. On what ground, then, can the suppliant expect a radical change in the nature of his fellowship with God?

This crucial question requires an evaluation of various aspects of "realism" within the human soul and in the realm of the divine dispensation of grace: the soul's hunger for transcendent realities; the historical experiences of the minority of the righteous, and especially of its representative figures; and the presuppositions of pure monotheism. The polarity between the soul's immanent and transcendent properties results in perpetual tension between "already" and "not yet" in the sphere of God's promises, and the human "ought to be" in the fluidity of transition between present and "eschatological" realities. Were eschatological truths only a matter of promise or theological reflection but not latent in this present life, they could be labelled not merely *theoria sine praxis* or utopian but as simple illusion. But the Bible records a number of figures who witness to their mysterious experience of eschatological actualities—always as part of a profound encounter with divine holiness and grace. Their individual experience and outlook were at once so rare and so real that they saw in it something universal, indeed the only true model of human life. Thanks to the individual and communal nature of a human being, they felt all the more urgency that their experience of the divine presence and their consciousness of personal responsibility should be multiplied among their people. The main purpose of their mission was to convince sinners that fellowship with God is the only way to salvation.

It is essential to recognize that the most worthy representative figures of Israel's religion were profoundly conscious of their unworthiness. But their very vocation by free divine decision meant that eschatological promises became realized in their inner transformation and in continuance of their steadfast fellowship with God. Accounts of prophetic commissioning clearly demonstrate this fact. In the present context Isaiah is especially illustrative. The prophet exclaims: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the

King, the Lord of hosts!" (Isa 6:5). In response one of the seraphim comes to him, touches his mouth with a burning coal and says: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven" (v. 7).

The main perspective of Psalm 51—renewal of the psalmist's inner life and the sustaining of a new relationship with God—can be adequately compared with only a few passages in the Hebrew Bible: Jer 31:31–34; 32:39; Ezek 11:19; 36:26; and even there only in certain respects. It is sometimes argued that, like these passages, Psalm 51 displays an eschatological orientation.[68] But what bearing could such passages have on the people of a given age if eschatological expectations could not be fulfilled to some extent there and then? The suppliant is in fact praying for his imminent "re-creation" and he must have had some presentiment of this new reality. The object of his prayer may be compared with the "vision" of a solution in Ps 73:25; there the suppliant overcomes distress through recognition of the supreme value of the true fellowship of God, so that he exclaims: "Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is nothing upon earth that I desire besides thee." The writer of Psalm 51 prays for such happiness, using sentiments of total estrangement; nevertheless, his prayer implies that a great measure of grace has been given to him already: the miraculous breakdown of self-assertion and self-will, and of any ideological concept of the human being.

The historical note in the title of the psalm referring to David's adultery with Bathsheba (cf. 2 Sam 11–12) is for some exegetes an indication that the poem in its original form was composed by David—or at least in pre-Exilic times—but has undergone later modifications. The expression of the profound personal consciousness of sin and of the need for forgiveness precludes, however, limitation to any particular kind of sin recorded in the history of Israel. Many worse crimes than that were committed, but apart from David there are hardly any notable examples of an adequate response of penitence. All the more is it evident how uniquely profound was the religious insight of the poet who speaks in Psalm 51. Even though it seems most unlikely that David was the author of the psalm, the attribution of so profound a penitential attitude to him could hardly be accidental. If it is true that he was capable of such contrition it becomes clear that he was not of an age but for all time; and this explains why he could become a model for messianic expectations. The petition of the psalm emerges from the inmost recesses of the human mind and soul in their striving for an utterly genuine relationship with God. The great gap between the abyss of the penitent's sin and the lifting up of human eyes to divine grace transcends any possible setting in life. The psalm is an expression of universally applicable truth. It applies to any individual, to any community, that displays a similar spirit of faith and prayer.

[68] See R. Preß, *ThZ* 11 (1955), 241–249.

3. *History of Israel's Apostasy and God's Mercy*

The book of Psalms contains several examples of historical recitation: Psalms 78; 105; 106; 135; and 136. In addition to recalling times past, Psalms 78 and 106 are similar in their presentation of the contrast between God's ways to the chosen people and Israel's response. Both poems show how a disobedient people failed to acknowledge salvific deeds but how God's resolve to destroy them gave way to a manifestation of incredible grace. Naturally, the issue of punishment and forgiveness is at the centre of these two psalms.

3.1 *Psalm 78*

Psalm 78 uses the ancient history of Israel as a lesson to her people in present and future generations. The poem is an original literary composition with the substantial unity of an antithetical structure and its subject-matter can be broken down as follows: a didactic opening comprising a poetic enigma and admonition (vv. 1–8); the people forgot God's past miracles (vv. 9–12); God delivered them at the Red Sea (vv. 13–16); they then tested God (vv. 17–20); God responded with anger (vv. 21–31); intermediary reflection (vv. 32–39); the people rebelled (vv. 40–43); God performed miracles in Egypt (vv. 44–55); the people tested God (vv. 56–58); God rejected Ephraim and elected Judah, Zion, and David (vv. 59–72). The main body of the psalm can be divided into three major parts: vv. 9–39, 40–58 and 59–72.[69] The poem is an impressive combination of historical, didactic, and hymnic motifs, but the didactic purpose clearly dominates. Can we therefore conclude that Psalm 78 "belongs to the form group of didactic poetry"?[70] The nearest "parallel" in this group is chapter 32 of Deuteronomy. The sequence of punishment and repentance in Ps 78:32–39 and other linguistic evidence have induced many scholars to assume that the author was close to deuteronomistic literary circles. More detailed literary analysis discloses, however, that the psalm was probably composed in the early monarchic period and reassessed in some respects in the period of the deuteronomistic school.[71]

The introduction begins with the common opening formula "Give ear" (cf. Gen 4:23; Judg 5:3; Isa 28:23; Ps 49:2; Prov 7:24) and the apostrophe of

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[69] We may note that P. Auffret, *Voyez de vos yeux: Étude structurelle de vingt psaumes dont le Psaume 119* (VT.S 48; Leiden / New York / Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1993), 175–236: "Lui et eux: Étude structurelle du Psaume 78," offers a detailed study of the structure of the psalm. His primarily formal orientation is, however, in general beyond our limited thematic concern.

[70] See H.-J. Kraus, *Psalms 60–150,* 122. For the question of a mixture of literary genres and the place of Psalm 78 among the historical psalms, see J. Kühlewein, *Geschichte in den Psalmen* (CThM A/2; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1973), 85–100.

[71] See the study by A. F. Campbell, "Psalm 78: A Contribution to the Theology of Tenth Century Israel," *CBQ* 41 (1979), 51–79. According to Campbell only vv. 5–8, 10, 37, 56b, and 58 can be assigned to the Deuteronomistic redaction.

Israel as "my people," which is a comparatively rare expression in the Hebrew Bible. In 78:2 the speaker starts to unfold his purpose, and the verse obviously refers to all that follows:

> I will open my mouth in a parable *(māšāl);*
> I will utter dark sayings *(ḥîdôt)* from of old ...

The word *māšāl* has a complex semantic background, but is usually rendered as "parable, proverbial saying." The word *ḥîdôt* (in the plural) can be construed as "riddles, perplexing questions, insinuations, ambiguous sayings." The verses that follow make it clear that in the present context it means "mysterious workings of God in times past."[72] The poet sees history as the ground of both hopes and warnings for those who follow "that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation ..." (78:8).

In the beginning of the first major section (78:9–39) the most obvious of the "riddles" appears: the question of the fate of the tribe of Ephraim as a result of disobedience to God. "The Ephraimites, armed with the bow, turned back on the day of battle. They did not keep God's covenant, but refused to walk according to his law" (78:9–10). Which "day of battle" is this? The text gives hint of a convincing answer. Instead of an account of historical events the speaker meditates on the crisis in the relationship between God and Israel in the days of Moses when divine salvific deeds were extraordinary both in their nature and their profusion. Instead of inducing faith and gratitude, these tangible proofs of divine grace resulted in rebellion and ever greater avidity: the Israelites "forgot" the miracles wrought in the course of Israel's deliverance from Egypt and the divine guidance in the wilderness (78:11–16); they "sinned still more against him," they "tested God in their heart," and they demanded ever stronger evidence of divine support (78:17–20). God responded "full of wrath" and punished them after giving them satiety (78:21–31). But divine punishment did not break the power of sin: "In spite of all this they still sinned ..." (v. 32). Only once is repentance mentioned (78:34–35):

> When he slew them, they sought for him;
> they repented *(šābû)* and sought God earnestly.
> They remembered that God was their rock,
> the Most High God their redeemer.

Yet their penitence was insincere, their professions of fidelity and obedience false (78:36–37). In spite of it all, God shows self-restraint in relation to the people in view of their weakness and mortality (78:38–39):

> Yet he, being compassionate *(wĕhû' raḥûm),*
> forgave their iniquity *(yĕkappēr 'āwôn),*

[72] See A. A. Anderson, *Psalms (73–150),* 563.

and did not destroy them;
he restrained his anger often,
and did not stir up all his wrath.
He remembered that they were but flesh,
a wind that passes and comes not again.

This and the similar argument in Ps 103:14–16 are of fundamental importance to the issue of divine mercy and forgiveness.

The second major section (78:40–58) is chiastic in structure: at the beginning (78:40–42) and end (78:56–58) the speaker accuses the people of rebellious attitudes and of testing God; the gap between them is filled with reflections on breaking the power of Pharaoh by the plagues in Egypt, divine guidance in the wilderness, and settlement in and allotment of the Promised Land. It is obvious that the double accusation of Israel's rebellion and apostasy serves as the justification of the striking verdict of rejection in v. 59, which opens the third major section (78:59–72): "When God heard, he was full of wrath, and he utterly rejected Israel *(wayyim'as mĕ'ōd bĕyiśrā'ēl).*" In 78:60–64 it becomes clear that the psalmist must have been impressed by a particular historical event, which has induced a theological interpretation of rejection. It seems most probable that the psalmist is not referring to the fall of the Northern Kingdom, as many exegetes assume, but either to the downfall of Shiloh in Ephraim (1 Sam 4)[73] or to the death of Saul on the "the day of battle" in the mountains of Gilboa (1 Sam 31; cf. 1 Sam 15).[74] The verdict of rejection in v. 59 follows up the mention of Ephraim in v. 9, so that the two verses form chiasmus. The rejection signalled a dramatic break in Israel's history: little wonder that it occupied the psalmist's mind.

All the more important is the turning point indicated in 78:65–66: "Then the Lord awoke as from sleep, like a strong man shouting because of wine ..." The emphasis is not only on the mystery of the rejection of Ephraim, but also, and especially, on that of the election of Judah. Both facets of divine intervention are expressed in the form of antithetic parallelism (78:67–68):

He rejected *(wayyim'as)* the tent of Joseph,
he did not choose the tribe of Ephraim;
but he chose *(wayyibḥar)* the tribe of Judah,
Mount Zion, which he loves.

The election of Judah, Zion, and David is not a simple restoration of the *status quo,* for God's departure from Shiloh is not revoked. Since the event of rejection took place at the end of a sequence of rebellion, testing and rejection by Israel—in spite of repeated proofs of forgiving mercy—the divine

[73] See A. F. Campbell, "Psalm 78: A Contribution to the Theology of Tenth Century Israel," *CBQ* 41 (1979), 51–79, esp. pp. 60–61.

[74] See A. Weiser, *The Psalms,* 540. R. P. Carroll, "Psalm LXXVIII: Vestiges of a Tribal Polemic," *VT* 21 (1971), 145, keeps interpretation open for both events.

rejection must presuppose the total apostasy of Israel in the time of the Philistines. The awakening "as from sleep" indicates a new beginning. God resumes relations with Israel by the election of Judah, Zion, and David, thus indicating that the future of Israel will have the figure of David writ large upon it. This divine act of election may be considered as a new creation, providing new ground for hope.

It is surely clear by now what is meant by "parable" and "riddles" (v. 2). The antithetic structure of the psalm brings into focus the characters of God and of the people: the one gracious and merciful, the other faithless and rebellious. God forgives where defiant attitudes are corrigible, but in cases of persistent stubbornness and apostasy the divine grace may turn away from the original beneficiary of the promise. This does not, however, mean that all is at an end, for God may choose a new people and another instrument to carry on the story of the divine redemptive work. The riddles posed by the mystery of divine activity hidden in the history of Israel are communicated to present and future generations in order to excite their admiration for God's grace and to warn them against possible apostasy. A verdict of rejection can be repeated if those currently enjoying divine blessings will not learn the necessary lessons of the past.

The fact that remembrance of the rejection of one tribe is linked with an account of the election of another is in line with various biblical theological statements and testimonies that God can never totally reject the whole body of the chosen people. This is also implied in the crucial justification of the bestowal of divine mercy in the past in 78:38–39. These two verses disclose the solution of the riddle regarding God's ways to the chosen people: God cannot deal with frail mortals by deploying absolute power. Quite apart from that argument there is, however, a more fundamental reason for divine forgiveness: the Creator cannot abandon the created order in its totality.[75] All the more so when God is free to elect a particular tribe, place, or person. Of course, such an election implies "love" (v. 68); but this does not mean that the new divine love could not turn to anger. The people of Judah and their rulers will certainly not be sinless. Correspondingly, God will often be "full of wrath," but will forgive provided that the new bearer of the divine salvific order does not fall away as Israel did in the time of the Philistines.

The link between rejection and election shows clearly that divine promise and election are unconditional in relation to the whole body of divine creation, but conditional in relation to particular groups or individuals. We can see, therefore, the heart of the message in the fact that God has established a new order associated with Judah, Zion, and David, once the old or-

[75] A. F. Campbell, *CBQ* 41 (1979), 58, seems to refer to this theological presupposition when he says regarding the rejection pronounced in vv. 59–67: "So terrible a statement of rejection might never have come to expression were it not to be followed by the claim of election."

der associated with Shiloh in Ephraim had passed. This is surely the main point of the "parable" and "riddles" mentioned in the opening section of the psalm. We note that the purpose of remembering various periods of Israel's history in the light of the people's unfaithfulness and God's faithfulness is to reform the people.[76]

3.2 *Psalm 106*

It is obvious that Psalms 105 and 106 were composed on the basis of a unified historical outline covering the whole of Israelite history from Abraham to the Exile. Psalm 105 deals with the period from the patriarchs to the Exodus, and Ps 106 carries the story from then until the entry to the Promised Land. Some scholars have therefore concluded that the two were originally one.[77] Most exegetes have recognized, however, that Psalm 106 uses the history of Israel for a quite different purpose from that of its predecessor. As Artur Weiser puts it: "In Psalm 105 the thanksgiving for the saving acts of God in history and therefore the obedience owed to him are central; in Psalm 106, on the other hand, the ingratitude and disobedience of the people are at the centre, so that it is more closely related to Psalm 78 and in its basic mood is to be compared rather with a national penitential lament."[78] The consensus is that vv. 27, 46 and 47 refer to the deportation and dispersion of the Jews among the nations; hence most exegetes propose a date in the time of Exile after 587 B.C.E.

The Dead Sea scrolls have helped advance this discussion. Some scholars in days long gone pointed out that Psalms 105 and 106 put together are strongly reminiscent of the annual renewal of the covenant described in the Qumran *Rule of the Community* 1:16–2:18. The first four of the seven elements of this document show considerable similarity to the two psalms: 1. The priests and Levites sing the praise of God in a hymn; 2. the priests recite the divine saving deeds; 3. the Levites recite Israel's sins; 4. those who "enter into the Covenant" confess their sins. These striking resemblances have encouraged the assumption that Psalms 105 and 106 were simply utilized by the Qumran Community for their liturgical purposes; or more generally speaking: an older cultic usage must lie behind the Qumran liturgy.[79] It is

[76] See the solid argument by E. L. Greenstein, "Mixing Memory and Design: Reading Psalm 78," *Prooftexts* 10 (1990), 197–218. He concludes: "... The psalmist does not ruminate on the past; he addresses the present and, like a prophet, seeks to transform the future" (p. 209).

[77] See C. A. Briggs, *The Book of Psalms,* vol. 2, 339–356. For the broader background of Psalm 106, see V. Pröbstl, *Nehemia 9, Psalm 106 und Psalm 136 und die Rezeption des Pentateuchs* (Göttingen: Cuvillier, 1997).

[78] See *The Psalms,* 679.

[79] See F. Baumgärtel, "Zur Liturgie in der 'Sektenrolle' vom Toten Meer," *ZAW* 65 (1953), 263–265; A. Weiser, *The Psalms,* 679–680; P. Wernberg-Møller, *The Manual of Discipline* (STDJ 1; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1957); A. R. C. Leaney, *The Rule of Qumran and Its Mean-*

very likely that Psalm 105 reflects the first part and Psalm 106 the second part of a liturgy of this type. More recent studies of the canonical shape of the Psalms' texts from Qumran cave 11, however, prompt reconsideration of the composition and place of Psalm 106 in the late Second Temple period. First, Psalm 106 is not cited in any psalmodic manuscript from Qumran, whereas Psalm 105 is found in two of them. Secondly, such texts from Qumran as the *Rule of the Community,* the *Temple Scroll,* the *Damascus Document,* and the *Book of Jubilees* share with Psalms 105 and 106 various parts of the Pentateuch and a particular Levitical and Priestly slant. It follows that all these texts may have been compiled and passed on by the same or a similar group; Psalm 106 may have been composed at the beginning of the second century B.C.E. or slightly earlier.[80]

The contrast between God's acts and the people's response yields the following division of Psalm 106 opening verses, comprising a hymnic call to praise (vv. 1–3) and a personal prayer (vv. 4–5); a historical recitation (vv. 6–46); a concluding prayer (v. 47); a doxology (v. 48), which also functions as a climax to the fourth book of Psalms. It is noteworthy that the concluding prayer and the doxology are also to be found in 1 Chr 16:35–36. The call to praise in vv. 1–2, using the words *hôdû,* "Praise," and *tĕhillātô,* "his praise," matches the statement of motives in the concluding prayer: "... that we may praise *(lĕhôdôt)* thy holy name and glory in thy praise *(bitĕhillātekā)*" (v. 47b). This shows that praise is the main purpose of the psalm. But is this compatible with the recital of Israel's sins and the then current situation?

The nature of the prayer in relating to the dispersion of the Israelite community provides a clue to an adequate answer. The faithful soul in its distress addresses God with the opening petition: "Remember me, O Lord, ... that I may see the prosperity of thy chosen ones, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thy heritage" (106:4–5). And at the end the community prays: "Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the nations ..." (106:47). As so often in the Psalms and elsewhere in the Bible the people of faith find a basis for their petition for a dramatic improvement in their situation in the high drama of what God has done in the past. Praise the Lord, urges the psalmist, "for he is good *(kî ṭôb)* ... for his steadfast love endures for ever *(kî lĕ'ôlām ḥasdô)*" (v. 1). This statement makes clear the point of view from which the history of Israel is recounted in the body of the psalm: the main emphasis is on manifestations of the inexhaustible goodness of God, which includes the incredible divine willingness to forgive a sinful people.

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ing: Introduction, Translation and Commentary (NTL; London: SCM Press, 1966), esp. pp. 104–107; J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Rule of the Community and Related Documents,* vol. 1 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck]; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster J. Knox Press, 1994), 1–51.

[80] See the illuminating presentation of recent studies and views by G. J. Brooke, "Psalms 105 and 106 at Qumran," *RdQ* 14 (1989), 267–292.

This is linguistically demonstrated by the use of the verb *zākar,* 'to remember,' and the noun *ḥesed,* 'the steadfast love,' in describing two opposing attitudes: in 106:7 there is a statement about rebellion: "... they did not remember the abundance of thy steadfast love," while v. 45 summarizes the manifestation of divine mercy: "He remembered for their sake his covenant, and relented *(wayyinnāḥēm)* according to the abundance of his steadfast love." The antithesis between God's faithfulness and the people's lack of it invites an exhortation in congratulatory form: "Blessed are they who observe justice *(mišpāṭ),* who do righteousness *(ṣĕdāqāh)* at all times!" (106:3). The Hebrew terms for "justice, righteousness" relate primarily to an adequate human relationship to God and express above all faith in recollected divine deeds, obedience to divine commandments, and true faithfulness in the covenant relationship. In the final analysis, this means praising God out of gratitude. The sins of the fathers only confirm the premise that the people have no right to demand from God anything whatsoever. But a proper attitude of repentance, gratefulness and praise allows them to hope that the divine saving deeds of the past, intended to establish the people in the Promised Land, may again materialize in the national restoration.[81]

It is noteworthy that the historical recitation opens with a general and explicit confession of sin that embraces both past and present: *ḥāṭā'nû 'im-'ăbôtênû he'ĕwînû hiršā'nû,* "We have sinned together with our fathers; we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly" (106:6). The linkage with preceding generations is impressive. Such a confession probably implies the idea of "collective" or hereditary punishment and communal responsibility, for whoever is conscious of his own sin must know that his iniquity affects not only himself but also others. It is certain that we all suffer the consequences of our ancestors' transgressions, and that our sins in turn afflict our descendants.

The first section of the historical recitation (106:7–12) recounts the Exodus story. The attitude of the Israelites is depicted in terms of negligence and rebellion. Nevertheless, God saved them "for his name's sake *(lĕma'an šĕmô),* that he might make known his mighty power" (v. 8). The association of the phrase with a demonstration of divine power may invite the conclusion that the motivation of divine goodness and mercy is primarily extrinsic. But the whole theological perspective of the text shows that the foundations of mercy in the divine nature are ultimately intrinsic. This is a matter of common sense, bolstered by the opening proclamation of divine goodness (v. 1) and by the statement in v. 45b that God "relented according to the

[81] W. Beyerlin, "Der nervus rerum in Psalm 106," *ZAW* 86 (1974), 50–64, has correctly seen that the key to the interpretation of the psalm lies in the call to praise God, i.e., in its "Anfang" (vv. 1–3): "In *ihm* liegt der nervus rerum, der alle Teile des Textes als ein organisches Ganzes belebt, relativ deutlich zutage" (p. 55).

abundance of his steadfast love." At the same time, the phrase also implies a failure of repentance on the part of the Israelites. It was only after experiencing divine wonders that "they believed his words; they sang his praise *(tĕhillātô)*" (v. 12). The reference is not only to a common liturgical tradition, mirrored in the Song of the Sea (Exod 15:1–21), but also to the main theme of the psalm as indicated in the introduction and the conclusion: the ideal attitude of the covenant people is one of praise.

The second major section (106:13–33) is concerned with God, Moses, and Israel in the wilderness. The speaker enumerates the Israelites' sins in the context of traditional events: the story of the quails (vv. 13–15); Dathan and Abiram (vv. 16–18); the golden calf (vv. 19–23); the refusal to believe the spies (vv. 24–27); the defection to the idolatry of Baal Peor (vv. 28–33); the irritation of Moses at the waters of Meribah (vv. 32–33). This series of conclusions includes some general statements: the people "forgot" God (vv. 13a, 21a); they "put God to the test" (v. 14b); they "believed not his word" (v. 24b). But the main purpose of the recitation is to reveal God as Saviour of a sinning people, and it is in this section that the importance of intercession comes into the foreground. In v. 23 the speaker refers to the tradition of Moses' intercession (cf. Exod 32:11–14, 30–34): "Therefore he said he would destroy them—had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him *('āmad bappereṣ lĕpānâw),* to turn away his wrath from destroying them." The metaphor here is that of a warrior stepping into a breach in the defences, but what were Moses' weapons in the face of the divine anger? As the Mosaic tradition shows, all he had was his total faith and obedience to the divine will. He was the only exception among a myriad of defectors, but he by himself was enough to save the sum of them. The reference to Moses' intercession implies, then, the decisive role of a righteous minority in sparing the people.

There is a second and similar case of intercession in 106:30–31, which is related to the idolatrous Moabite worship of Baal Peor reported in Num 25:

> Then Phinehas stood up and interposed *(wayĕpallēl),*
> and the plague was stayed.
> And that has been reckoned to him as righteousness *(wattēḥāšeb lô liṣdāqāh)*
> from generation to generation for ever.

The basic idea is the same as in v. 23: Phinehas stepped into the breach in a critical situation similar to that of Moses. It is, however, not clear what was the point of his interposition, expressed by the verb *pll* (Pi'el). Translators and exegetes propose different solutions. The Septuagint chooses the verb *exiláskesthai,* 'to make atonement' (cf. Sir 45:23). This corresponds to the version in Num 25:13, which uses instead of *pll* the verb *kpr:* "... he was jealous for his God, and made atonement *(wayĕkappēr)* for the people of Israel." Modern versions and scholars render the verb *pll* variously: 'give judgment,

make justice';[82] 'adjust, settle (by arbitration)';[83] 'interpose, intervene';[84] 'intercede';[85] and 'bring atonement.'[86] There are, however, good reasons for preferring "interpose, intervene" in the sense of intercession: First, the context makes it the likeliest; secondly, the Hebrew version of Sir 45:23 relating to the same event has: *wayya'ămōd bĕpereṣ 'ammô,* "and he stood in the breach of his people," which clearly implies intercession; thirdly, the verb *pll* in 1 Sam 2:25a has most probably the meaning of mediating intercession; fourthly, the ancient versions support this rendering.[87] The differences that attend v. 30a do not, however, spill over into v. 31a. The statement "And that has been reckoned to him as righteousness" is reminiscent of what was said of Abraham in Gen 15: 6: "And he believed the Lord; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness *(wayyaḥšĕbehā lô ṣĕdāqāh)*" (cf. 1 Macc 2:52). The question in both cases is whether the "reckoning as righteousness" means recognition of Abraham's/Phinehas's righteousness or a promise of God's righteousness. It seems likely that the reference is to God's righteousness as the divine dispenser of benefits; in this sense the word "righteousness" could mean some kind of reward.[88]

The third section (106:34–46) recounts the mingling with the nations, human sacrifices and idolatry in the Promised Land. The deuteronomistic understanding of history is clearly visible in the sequence: Israel's defection—God's punishment (delivering her into the hands of the nations)—the penitent cry of the people–God's saving help (implying forgiveness). The section closes with a statement of God's mercy (106:44–46), thus showing once again that mercy and forgiveness are the basic themes of the historical recitation:

> Nevertheless he regarded their distress,
> when he heard their cry.
> He remembered for their sake his covenant,
> and relented *(wayyinnāḥēm)* according to the abundance
> of his steadfast love.
> He caused them to be pitied *(wayyittēn 'ôtām lĕraḥămîm)*
> by all those who held them captive.

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[82] See Vulgata iuxta hebr.; ZB; Einheitsübersetzung; R. Kittel, *Die Psalmen,* 386; A. Weiser, *The Psalms,* 678; H.-J. Kraus, *Psalms 60–150,* 314; G. Castellino, *Libro dei Salmi,* 714; L. Alonso Schökel and C. Carniti, *Salmos,* vol. 2, 1327.

[83] See TOB.

[84] See RSV; NIV; C. A. Briggs and E. G. Briggs, *The Book of Psalms,* vol. 2, 341; M. Buttenwieser, *The Psalms,* 822.

[85] See NEnglB; M. Dahood, *Psalms,* vol. 2, 65.

[86] See H. Gunkel, *Die Psalmen,* 463.

[87] See Vetus Latina *(exorare),* Vulgata iuxta LXX *(placare),* Targum and Peshitta (*ṣly* pa., 'pray, intercede'). A more detailed discussion about the issue is to be found in B. Janowski, "Psalm CVI 28–31 und die Interzession des Pinchas," *VT* 33 (1983), 237–248.

[88] See H. Gunkel, *Die Psalmen,* 467.

It is appropriate at this point to draw special attention to certain recurrent terms that play a major role in determining the structure of the psalm. The tripod on which it stands consists of: the psalmist's voice in the introduction and conclusion; the account of the works of divine goodness; and the account of Israel's defection. Psalm 106 calls the people to praise God's steadfast love (v. 1b); but the Israelites "remember it not" (v. 7b); God, however, "remembered for their sake his covenant, and relented according to the abundance of his steadfast love" (v. 45). The psalmist in his prayer speaks of "thy people" (v. 4a) and "thy heritage" (v. 5b); God's anger rose against "his people" and "his heritage" (v. 40). God saved Israel "for his name's sake" (v. 8a); the psalmist pleads for salvation, "that we may give thanks (praise) to thy holy name" (v. 47). To sum up: we may conclude that the community looks for relief from its present distress exclusively on the basis of its past experience of God. The more it is realized that God has been merciful in spite of the sinfulness of Israel, the more hope there is for the future. Expectation does not, however, mean calculation, because the sense of praise prevails totally over the temptation to subject God to human arithmetic—the main source of sin. To praise the Lord, to give thanks to the divine holy name, is the hallmark of human greatness. It is therefore most urgent that the extolling of salvific deeds, which reach their climax in bestowing mercy and forgiveness, should include confession of defection.

4. *Conclusion*

The Psalter contains statements, reflections and judgments in a variety of literary genres that reflect a miscellany of sentiments, experiences and beliefs; but its dominant feature is prayer arising from a direct address by the individual or the community of Israel to God. The themes of mercy and forgiveness are prominent mainly in individual or communal laments, hymnic praises of the divine character and deeds, historical accounts, and Wisdom writing. Statements that fall into these last three categories are general in nature. This holds especially true of formulaic passages that obviously attained their present form over the centuries. Such passages show that recognition of divine generosity and mercy constitutes one of the essential aspects of the Israelite credo (cf. Exod 34:6; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Pss 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 112:4; 145:8; Neh 9:17; 2 Chr 30:9). In addition to similar formulaic statements, there are several passages that exhibit parallelism between divine *ḥesed,* 'steadfast love,' or its synonyms and various attributes of divine mercy resulting in forgiveness and renewal. Belief in and experience of divine mercy and forgiveness belong therefore to the most prominent passages devoted to praising divine goodness (cf. Ps 103). The individual and communal laments of the fourth category, however, are formulated as distinctive

personal prayers against a background of distress.

Many of these lamentations and supplications reflect the recognition that a causal connection may exist between guilt and misfortune. Literary factors preclude, however, any certainty in the matter. In the Hebrew Bible a personalist view of religion made possible the liberation from strict causality in this sphere as only one perspective in the multiple vista of God's mysterious dealing with human beings: hence the tendency towards a figurative use of sickness. The emphasis is not on the question of the origin of evil but on the conviction that God alone can provide healing. Many Israelites thought that physical distress was a direct result of some transgression, but more important is the belief that every sin brings about sickness in the inmost recesses of the human soul; the penitential psalms are the most conspicuous of all testimonies to this conviction. To emphasize the external side of human life would therefore mean undermining the personalist foundations of the Hebrew religion, which in turn implies subversion of the underpinnings of true prayer. The more urgent the question of the relationship between external and inner experience in the sequence sin / trouble / confession / salvation, the more necessary it is to take into account the poetic aspects of the Psalms.

Experience of the burden of sin and the lightening of forgiveness, as well as the historical accounts of divine mercy and Israel's defection, imply a close relationship between forgiveness and deliverance. Those who are faithful but in a state of estrangement from God are delivered after having confessed their sins and experienced divine forgiveness (cf. Ps 32). Equally, God's resolve to destroy Israel is rescinded after consideration of the ultimate reasons for forgiveness (cf. Pss 78; 106). The correlation of forgiveness and renewal in Ps 51 is a very special case of the interrelation of the forgiveness and redemption (cf. Ps 130); true deliverance of those burdened by sin is impossible without its forgiveness. The longing for deliverance does not always imply expectation based on external evidence; as the penitential psalms show, renewal of heart and intrinsic reconciliation are the greatest gifts of salvation. Such reconciliation is, in the final analysis, the ultimate motive of divine mercy and forgiveness. The Psalter contains explicit statements about the reasons for God's forgiveness, the most conspicuous being overwhelming generosity and faithfulness. The assurance that God is acting "for his name's sake" (cf. Pss 25:11; 79:9; 106:8) indicates an insistence on the positive direction of creation and of all history. The same conclusion can be reached from a consideration of human weakness (cf. Pss 78:39; 103:14). Only in the universal perspective of God's power, righteousness and steadfast love is the recognition of reasons for divine forgiveness adequately clarified.

At this point it is manifest that the Hebrew Bible's attitude to sin, punishment and forgiveness is characterized by sober realism as against ancient pessimism or unrealistic modern optimism. Biblical penitents recognize with pitiless acuity mankind's true general and particular personal condition be-

fore God and point to the solution: sincere penitence. This realism makes possible a harmonious correlation between individual and communal prayers as well as between present and eschatological realities. The prayer of an individual may speak for the community, but this may be shown by the content, valid equally for all, rather than by formal signposts. On the other hand, the terminology and imagery of renewal may indicate eschatological realities, but these are "real" only when so perceived in an experience of community with God marked by divine grace, mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation (cf. Ps 51).

CHAPTER XXIV

THE LIMITED VALIDITY OF RETRIBUTION IN THE BOOK OF JOB

The book of Job begins with an account of its central figure that suggests he is in every respect an ideal man. Indeed, Satan uses this unblemished virtue and prosperity as a point of departure for an attack that is directed equally against God and Job himself: "Does Job fear God for naught? Hast thou not put a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land" (1:9–10). It seems plain to Satan that Job's attitude to God is based on self-interest, since in his eyes it is impossible for human beings to do otherwise. And that is not all. Satan also reproaches God directly, claiming that, by rewarding Job's fear of God generously in material terms, his attitude of reverent fear has been made far too easy a posture to adopt.[1]

[1] For individual questions concerning the book of Job, see especially the following commentaries and studies: S. R. Driver and G. B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1921); C. J. Ball, *The Book of Job: A Revised Text and Version* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922); P. Dhorme, *Le livre de Job* (EB: Paris: J. Gabalda, 1926); English translation by H. Knight, *A Commentary on the Book of Job* (London: T. Nelson, 1967); A. Weiser, *Das Buch Hiob* (ATD 13; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1951); S. Terrien and P. Scherer, *The Book of Job* (IB 3; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1954), 877–1198; G. Fohrer, *Das Buch Hiob* (KAT XVI; Gütersloh: G. Mohn, 1963); M. H. Pope, *Job* (AB 15; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965); N. H. Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job: A New Commentary* (Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1967); F. Horst, *Hiob* (BK XVI/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1968); H. H. Rowley, *Job* (CeB; London: T. Nelson, 1970); R. Gordis, *The Book of Job* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978); L. Alonso Schökel and J. L. Sicre Diaz, *Job: Comentario teológico y literario* (Madrid: Ediciones Christiandad, 1983); N. C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1985); J. E. Hartley, *The Book of Job* (NIC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 1988); Saadiah ben Joseph Al-Fayyūmī, *The Book of Theodicy: Translation and Commentary on the Book of Job* (trans. from the Arabic with a philosophic commentary by L. E. Goodman; New Haven / London: Yale University Press, 1988); C. Cox, "Vocabulary for Wrongdoing and Forgiveness in the Greek Translations of Job," *Textus: Studies of the Hebrew University Bible Project,* vol. 15 (ed. E. Tov; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1990), 119–130; G. Moretto, *Giustificazione e interrogazione: Giobbe nella filosofia* (Napoli: Guida ed., 1991); K. J. Dell, *The Book of Job As Sceptical Literature* (BZAW 197; Berlin / New York: W. de Gruyter, 1991); G. Fuchs, *Mythos und Hiobdichtung: Aufnahme und Umdeutung altorientalischer Vorstellungen* (Stuttgart / Berlin / Cologne: W. Kohlhammer, 1993); W. A. M. Beuken (ed.), *The Book of Job* (BEThL 114; Leuven: University Press / Peeters, 1994); G. Langenhorst, *Hiob unser Zeitgenosse: Die literarische Hiob-Rezeption im 20. Jahrhundert als theologische Herausforderung* (ThLit 1; Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1994); H.-P. Müller, *Das Hiobproblem: Seine Stellung und Entstehung im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament* (EF 84; 3th ed.; Damrstadt: Wiss. Buchges., 1995); J. Lamb, *Rhetoric of Suffering: Reading the Book of Job in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); M. A. Corey, *Job, Jonah, and the Unconscious: A Psychological Interpretation of Evil and Spiritual Growth in the Old Testament* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1995); D. Wolfers, *Deep Things out of Darkness: The Book of Job; Essays and a New English Translation* (Grand Rapids,

Satan's reproach reflects an opposite extreme to the usual biblical demand for an unconditional loyalty to God, flowing from a sincere heart and free from self-interest. Mirrored in it even more evidently is a complete contrast to the biblical postulate of the sublimity and utter freedom of God's activity. Satan envisages a God dependent upon external human deeds—one who is consequently a servant of humans. According to him, God deals with mundane activities on the characteristically human principle of the quid pro quo. Satan therefore presents an unavoidable challenge as much to Job as to God. Both will reply, God speaking only when Job has finished. Job will first make clear his point of view in a series of stressful dialogues with his friends. God will then reply, speaking alone and in sovereign might.

The entire weight and conviction of the book of Job lie in the fact that its protagonist's response does not have its origin in that condition of blessedness that had been Satan's starting point, but in his subsequent state of "condemnation." Job must prove his fear of God at a time when he has been divested of everything and is at the brink of death, a situation that gives rise to the most extensive and most characteristic discussion of divine retribution in the entire Bible. Let us first consider the dialogues between Job and his friends, and we shall then be in a position to assess their standpoints critically in the light of God's reply.

1. *Understanding of God's Retribution in the Dialogues*

The three cycles of dialogue between Job and his three friends (chaps. 3–28), Job's soliloquy (chaps. 29–31), and Elihu's speeches (chaps. 32–37) range over the spectrum of divine and human activity, but all alike serve to illustrate differing views of God's retribution. This is the core of the colloquy.

1.1. *The First Cycle of Dialogues (Chapters 3–11)*

Out of distress of unsurpassable intensity, Job curses the day of his birth. He has sensed that the terrible hand of God has struck him (chap. 3). Eliphaz attempts to reawaken his hope with a declaration on the law of retribution. In 4:7–8 he says:

> Think now, who that was innocent ever perished?
> Or where were the upright cut off?

Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 1995); Y. Hoffman, *A Blemished Perfection: The Book of Job in Context* (JSOT.S 213; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); D. Leduc-Fayette, *Pascal et le mystère du mal: La clef de Job* (CFi 198; Paris: Cerf, 1996); P. Cazier, *Le cri de Job: Approche biblique, mythologique et littéraire du problème de la souffrance du juste* (Arras: Artois Presses Univ., 1996); S. B. Noegel, *Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job* (JSOT.S 223; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

As I have seen, those who plough iniquity
and sow trouble reap the same.

Eliphaz also emphasizes that humans cannot be righteous before God (4:17) and that they cause their own misfortunes (5:6–7). He advises Job to turn to God, who knows punishment but also mercy (5:8–27).

Job replies dejectedly: neither meaning nor hope remains for him (6:2–13), and his friends are heartless as they secretly accuse him (6:14–30). Life is harsh beyond measure (7:1–10), and his desire is to talk with God in order to find out why the Lord is so hard upon him and does not pardon his iniquity if he has truly sinned (7:11–21).

Bildad, who follows, defends God's righteousness. Referring to the principle of retribution, he twice uses antithetic parallelism: 8:4//5–6; 8:21//22. His thesis is that the godless cannot succeed, whereas Job will enjoy happiness once more if he seeks God and begs him for mercy.

At this point Job offers no reproaches to his friends, but accuses God of injustice. Because of his might, God is claimed to be always in the right, humans never. This means that God is unjust. Bildad's theory of just retribution therefore lacks force, and his advice to Job to turn to God has no sound basis (9:2–32). Job is left to accuse God of destroying God's own work. Despite his fear of death, Job wishes he had never been born (10:1–22).

Zophar speaks next and rejects Job's claim to innocence, in effect saying that God himself could have taught him the opposite. He also points to the incomprehensibility of the divine activities. A human being is helpless before God on account of his own guilt (11:2–12). The only thing left for Job is to turn from iniquity and towards God; he will then enjoy good fortune, for misery afflicts only the wicked (11:13–20).

1.2 *The Second Cycle of Dialogues (Chapters 12–20)*

Job's fourth speech (chaps. 12–14) is ironical and concentrates its acid on his friends, whose attitude, he feels, is appropriate neither to his situation nor to God's action. Because their comfort is so cold, he intends to turn to God in search of an acknowledgement of his innocence in a way more suited to a legal dispute. Job's position is consequently hopeless.[2]

Eliphaz no longer replies soothingly as he did in his first speech (chaps. 4–5), but rebuts Job's claim to innocence in harsh terms (14:2–16). He numbers him among the godless who resist God, thereby deserving the punishments with which they are afflicted (15:17–35).

Job ironically rejects Eliphaz's stand. Again he turns to God accusingly and challenges him in a drastic manner to avenge the wrong, which he holds

[2] See C. Chin, "Job and the Injustice of God: Implicit Arguments in Job 13.17–14.12," *JSOT* 64 (1994), 91–102.

to be against God himself. He hopes by this means to force God into a solemn admission of his servant's innocence (chap. 16). He then rails against his own wretched state which denies him all hope (chap. 17).

Bildad again comes forward and replies sharply and without pity. Once more he invokes the law of retribution, speaking of the inevitable misfortune of the wicked. Their final fate is destruction and their names perish (chap. 18).

Job replies with the reproach that his friends are deriding him; that God has put him under pressure and does not hear him; and that those closest to him have turned from him (19:2–20). Movingly he pleads with his friends to have mercy upon him and not to persecute him as God is doing (19:21–22). He wants his words to be engraved forever in the rocks as a memorial (19:23–24). At the same time he declares, against all hope, that his Redeemer lives (19:25–27) and will affirm his innocence (19:23–27), although his friends will suffer their deserved punishment (19:28–29).

Then Zophar speaks again. His attitude is similar to that of Bildad (chap 18), and the whole burden of his discourse is on the retributive justice of God as demonstrated by the fate of the wicked. Despite its poetical style and the general nature of its tirade, we can sense an implication for Job (chap. 20).

1.3 *The Third Cycle of Dialogues (Chapters 21–28) and Job's Soliloquy (Chapters 29–31)*

The central theme in the discourses of Job's friends, the conviction that only the wicked are struck by misfortune, finally opens to Job a convincing avenue of reply (chap. 21). Experience, he says, shows that their thesis is invalid. They can see for themselves that the wicked, even the most godless, sometimes succeed admirably in life. Even death does not take on the form of a punishment: their funerals bear witness to the popular support they enjoyed. In view of all this, Job can justifiably conclude that he is not godless, as his fate is largely different from that of the wicked.

For the third time Eliphaz speaks, but in contrast to his two earlier speeches he now directly accuses Job of impiety, the true reason for his misfortune. If Job refuses to recognize God's judgment on him, he will only increase his affliction to the point of final destruction (22:2–20). Having identified a mechanical causal link between adversity and wickedness, Eliphaz is convinced that a return to God offers the sole possibility for the cessation of Job's troubles (22:21–30).

Job rejects yet again the validity of this view of retribution and the advice to reform himself and thereby guarantee his path to happiness. He states that he has always held to God's ways (23:2–12), and complains that God does what he will with humans thanks to his superior might. Afflicted by so powerful a hand, nothing remains to Job but complaint (23:13–17). Chapter 24 offers nothing particularly new.

Job's insistence on his personal innocence elicits the short and sharp reply from Bildad that no one can appear righteous in the face of God's sanctity (25:2–6).

Job persists in defending his integrity, even permitting himself an oath that he will never agree that his friends are in the right (27:2–6). This is the only passage until chapter 29 that touches upon the present theme.

In his concluding soliloquy, Job once again speaks of his own innocence as he recalls his past (29:12–17; 31:1–40), and his complaint about his present situation (chap. 30) is all the more moving. These chapters are Job's final appeal to God to appear and to speak.

1.4 *Elihu's Speeches (Chapters 32–37)*

The introduction (32:1–6) demonstrates the cause and aim of Elihu's appearance on the scene. Elihu's holy wrath has been ignited against Job as much as against his three friends. "He was angry at Job because he justified himself rather than God; he was angry also at Job's three friends because they had found no answer, although they had declared Job to be in the wrong" (32:2b–3).

In his first speech, Elihu begins by justifying his intervention (32:7–22), and then turns to Job. He rejects Job's accusation that God deals in the same way with the innocent as with his adversaries (33:8–12). Elihu's thesis is that suffering must be understood as God's warning against deeds that lead to death (33:13–24). If one heeds the warning, admitting his own guilt and begging God for mercy, God returns his righteousness to him (33:25–30).

Elihu goes a step further in his second speech, rejecting Job's accusation of God (34:5–9) with a defence of the divine righteousness in the name of the principle of retribution (34:10–12):

> Therefore, hear me, you men of understanding,
> far be it from God that he should do wickedness,
> and from the Almighty that he should do wrong.
> For according to the work of a man he will requite *(yĕšallēm)* him,
> and according to his ways he will make it befall him.
> Of a truth, God will not do wickedly,
> and the Almighty will not pervert justice.

Elihu continues in conformity with this principle, talking of the justified sovereignty of God's judgment. Job's accusation of God signifies an intensification of his guilt, and it is plain that he must undergo severe tribulation.

The theme of retribution reappears in the fourth speech. Elihu asserts the differing fates of the wicked and the righteous in the light of God's judgment, using antithetic parallelisms (36:6//7, 11//12, 13–14//15). He then tells Job to realize and recognize the righteousness of God's actions. He concludes his final speech in 37:23–24 with the words:

The Almighty—we cannot find him;
he is great in power and justice *(mišpāṭ)*,
and abundant righteousness *(ṣĕdāqāh)* he will not violate.
Therefore men fear him;
he does not regard any who are wise in their own conceit.[3]

2. *A Critical Assessment of the Viewpoints*

If we analyze the contents of these dialogues and monologues, we discover above all internal consistency on the part of both Job and his friends. The viewpoints of the two sides pose the question of who is more in the right when one takes into account the starting point, the method of argumentation, and the characteristic postulates of biblical belief. The first two of these factors reveal the limits of human understanding, demonstrating how necessary and indeed urgent a response from God is in its revelation of the whole horizon of theological postulates and subsequently of the ultimate and decisive criteria for an assessment of human thinking and attitudes.

2.1 *Job's Friends' Point of View*

Job's friends take as their starting-point the principle of retribution, several times using the characteristic Hebrew device of antithetic parallelism to express it. Sometimes the principle is treated as an axiom, and occasionally his defenders also refer to experience.

Job's friends play an apologetic role, their intention being to defend the righteousness of God. The "axiom" that God blesses only the righteous leads them to the unambiguous conclusion that Job's misfortune can be explained only by an assumption of his guilt. To them misfortune is indisputable proof of wrongdoing. That God would otherwise deal so harshly with Job is unthinkable, since God would then be unjust. There is, however, no consensus that Job's fate is sealed: on the contrary, the same premise reveals to them where Job's best hopes lie. If guilt brings misfortune, its removal must bring betterment. Their reasoning permits only one conclusion: Job must turn and be converted.

Is their thinking adequate?

A reply to this question is possible only if the belief in God's retribution that permeates the Old Testament, the postulates of biblical theology in general, and the perspective of God's response in the book of Job are all taken into account.

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[3] For a more detailed presentation of the issue, see H.-M. Wahl, "Ein Beitrag zum alttestamentlichen Vergeltungsglauben am Beispiel von Hiob 32–37," *BZ* 36 (1992), 250–255.

Because passages dealing with the theme of retribution are strikingly numerous, it is possible to determine by the comparative method at least the first outline of a reply. The Old Testament contains passages in which God's punishment takes the form of catastrophe: e.g., the Flood and the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. But the starting-point there is not the same as that of Job's friends. Guilt is not automatically deduced from the fact of disaster—quite the opposite: the earlier writers, being cognizant of the general corruption of the people, see a causal link between guilt and fate. General statements of this theme—frequently in the form of antithetic parallelism—threats, and promises abound in the Old Testament. The point principally emphasized in these statements is that God punishes wickedness and blesses righteousness. In wisdom literature declarations that wickedness and righteousness of themselves result in evil or good for humans also appear. In both categories, the writers start from human vice or virtue, and are in no doubt that only a dire fate awaits the wicked. They do not, however, specify either the timing or the nature of such chastisement. The same applies to the threats and promises characteristic of prophetic literature. The conviction that misfortune will befall the people if they do not turn from evil is unshakable. The success of the wicked is short-term and their good fortune only apparent.

Does all this add up to the same viewpoint as that taken by Job's friends? It would be so if the customary biblical assumption that human wickedness inevitably brings misfortune in its wake included a corollary that prosperity or affliction is exclusively the result of uprightness or evil-doing. However, this is not the case. In principle, other reasons also exist for human suffering and misfortune, and these are usually impossible to comprehend. Consequently, the objective fact of a particular human misfortune does in principle permit the possibility that it derives from human guilt, but in no way proves that it does so. An automatic diagnosis of culpability reached from examining an experience of misfortune and suffering is in contradiction to fundamental biblical postulates–such as, for example, God's freedom, and the impossibility, in a contingent world, of inferring with any certainty from external phenomena to a cause that is essentially transcendental in nature. The principle that God punishes evil allows him total freedom as to the means he uses and also leaves open the possibility of forgiving the sinner. The principle that one's evil-doing is the sole reason for his misfortune, however, would set limitations upon God's actions in the world—limitations defined by human measures and aims. The main difficulty here is that we have no reliable touchstone with which to establish what conditions in the world are bad or good for humankind in the cosmic context, in the life of the individual, or in that of the community. A human being is an inadequate measure of all things.

2.2 *Job's Point of View*

The argumentation employed by Job's friends gives him an adequate platform for his rebuttal. His objections are particularly convincing when he rejects their empirical arguments. If to them experience confirms the validity of the principle of retribution and thus the righteousness of God, to him another facet of experience—the prosperity of the wicked—proves exactly the opposite.

Nevertheless, Job does not take the decisive step out of the enchanted circle. The reason is that in controverting proofs based on experience, he does not at the same time reject the law of divine retribution absolutized in principle. He convincingly dismisses the view that from the external flow of events—i.e., human worldly fate—it is possible to infer with certainty human righteousness or wickedness, but the principle of retribution retains its absolute status in his eyes. His point of view, particularly his accusation, derives from an *a priori* demand: God must safeguard the righteous from misfortune and suffering. Herein lies the reason for Job's persistent aspiration and endeavour: he seeks recognition by God and by his friends of his own rectitude. Thus the question of his righteousness becomes the nub of the quarrel between Job and his friends, who deny his righteousness because they believe that misfortune is of itself proof of God's displeasure. Job categorically rejects their thesis, at the same time amplifying his complaint that his friends and acquaintances are changing from comforters into torturers, thus exacerbating his woes.

One hope still remains: the God who created him, and who should first admit Job's uprightness and then end his distress. With this, the problem becomes one of theodicy–of God's righteousness. If the demand for a causal link between righteousness and fate is absolute, God must inevitably be shown to be unjust, inasmuch as Job's fate will not alter when his innocence is proved. Job's titanic effort to persuade God to affirm this innocence is witness to the power of his faith in God's righteousness. Yet his terrible suffering drives him to complain that God is making merciless use of his all-surpassing power. Almighty God is a despot in Job's eyes.

Is Job's viewpoint more logically argued and more in accordance with the postulates of Hebrew belief than that of his friends? In one respect certainly: Job is indubitably in the right when he rejects the thesis that fortune or misfortune is an infallible indicator of individual righteousness or wickedness. Yet he fails to establish any general ascendancy over his friends. The two sides share a common starting-point, but take off in diametrically opposed directions. Job's friends must deny his rectitude, even if they have to resort to chimeras in order to defend the righteousness of God. And Job must accuse God of injustice despite his belief in the divine unfathomableness, in order to defend his own uprightness, and must hope against hope for radical rehabili-

tation. The paths of logic lead from a shared, absolutized starting-point in opposite directions and to a *reductio ad absurdum* in each case.

Yet Job, relentlessly trying to achieve recognition of his personal righteousness in order to regain his former happiness, continues to suffer, and is no longer able to accept the God of his fathers as his God. God remains the Highest and the Almighty, but lacks the love that gladdens the human heart. Thus Job's ultimate cry that God at least should stand on his side, ends with the lament that for a human being with a foretaste of death in his mouth there is no hope. The word *tiqwāh,* 'hope,' is in fact the word most characteristic of the book of Job (4:6; 5:16; 6:8; 7:6; 8:13; 11:18, 20; 14:7; 17:15; 19:10; 27:8; cf. adjectival form in 3:9; 6:19; 7:2; 17:13; 30:26). Job's friends use it when recommending conversion to him, implying that only for the wicked is there no hope. The more his pain intensifies the more Job rejects this, and the wider his estrangement from his God. It seems as if only death can empty the pail and rub clean the state.

2.3 *God's Answer—a Solution to the Problem*

As the parties to the debate lose themselves in their blind alleys, we naturally expect an answer "out of the whirlwind" (cf. 38:1). Yet God's intervention takes a surprising form. He does not appear to judge between the disputants. He has nothing to say about the question of Job's righteousness or the validity of the principle of retribution. He does not indicate whether Job is justified in expecting a divine volte-face or not. What he says concerns Job alone (38:1–42:6). The second verse (38:2) runs:

> Who is this that darkens counsel
> by words without knowledge?[4]

This question fully confirms the judgment of Maimonides concerning the story of Job: "The most marvelous and extraordinary thing about this story is the fact that knowledge is not attributed in it to *Job.* He is not said to be a *wise* or a *comprehending* or an *intelligent man.* Only moral virtue and righteousness in action are ascribed to him. For if he had been *wise.* his situation would not have been obscure for him, as will become clear."[5] Being a man "without knowledge" Job has erred in choosing a route to a solution of the

[4] Another source, however, offers a different tradition concerning Job's understanding. In 42:7–8 we read: "After the Lord had spoken these words to Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite: 'My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.'"

[5] See *The Guide of the Perplexed* III.22; Translated with an Introduction and Notes by S. Pines, vol. 2 (Chicago / London: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 487.

problem. God does not make promises, or talk down to Job about his duties; he lets slip an avalanche of graphic questions, to which he demands replies, and shows Job a surprising new direction in which to search for a resolution of his quandary: he is ignorant of both the laws of the universe and the rules of life and the activity of individual creatures; how then can he take the measure of God the Creator?

Job's response is unexpected. As if he has forgotten the horrors of his suffering, his accusation of God changes key into a moving repentance "in dust and ashes" (42:3–6):

> Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?
> Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
> things too wonderful for me, which I did not know ...

Job has evidently realized that the Creator of the Universe must remain utterly free, elevated above all the measurings of human intellect, and that humans must bow to him whenever God's way of acting does not match his imaginings and expectations. Job's declaration demonstrates that he has accepted God wholeheartedly, even though nothing has altered outwardly.[6] Simultaneously, he has abandoned his own demands: his final attitude signifies a revocation of all earlier resistance, and a recognition that humans cannot appear before God as they do before their fellows. There is no justification for invoking his own rectitude and so questioning the divine righteousness. God's perfection is unassailable, his righteousness absolute.[7]

Does not such a response, however, amount to mindless hoping against hope–without any ingredient of understanding? If the reader has regard solely to Job's concluding response to God's speech, without linking it to the earlier stages of the debate, such an impression might perhaps be justified. But the structure of the whole book shows that a proper comprehension of God's speech and Job's ultimate declaration of faith is dependent upon the depth and breadth of one's understanding of the dialogues between Job and his friends. They provide a negative preparation for a positive reply–but God's reply is positive only for those who, like Job and his friends, have weighed all the other explanations and found them wanting. Job's efforts to

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[6] G. Fohrer, *Das Buch Hiob,* 559, concludes the section "Die endgültige Antwort des Buches Hiob" with these words: "An der äußeren Lage Hiobs ändert sich zunächst nichts ... Aber dies alles bleibt weit hinter ihm. Er spürt sein Leid nicht mehr und empfindet sein Schicksal nicht mehr als die bösartige Verfolgung eines feindseligen Gottes. Denn jetzt schaut er die Wirklichkeit dieses Gottes und erfährt seine Nähe. Äußerlich hat sich noch nichts, innerlich alles geändert."

[7] See the statement by R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1990), 110: "Job surely does not have the sort of answer he expected, but he has a strong answer of another kind. Now at the end he will no longer presume to want to judge the Creator, having been brought through God's tremendous poetry to realize that creation can perhaps be sensed but not encompassed by the mind ..."

persuade God of his righteousness and to make God return to him all that he has lost ultimately demonstrate the futility of searching for a solution on the basis of human righteousness. Job's brush with death is not an uncommon occurrence but one inherent in the human condition. This fact transcends the usual categories of the righteous and the wicked. It is independent of the law of retribution. Job's rescue from suffering could only mean a deferment of death but never a deliverance from it. Maimonides judges the issue very well: "While he had known God only through the traditional stories and not by the way of speculation, *Job* had imagined that the things thought to be happiness, such as health, wealth, and children, are the ultimate goal. For this reason he fell into such perplexity and said such things as he did."[8] Viewed thus, Job appears as mankind's true epitome.

His experience of the proximity of death presents Job with a fundamental choice: ultimate despair, or hope in a Creator who is above and beyond all happenings. Total despair is inhuman. Hoping against hope is the natural response of human senses and intellect when faced by those final alternatives. It offers the sole possible escape from the abyss of death into infinite spaciousness and the embrace of God's love. Job's response to God's reply is short and direct, signifying his sudden comprehension after a long quest for a solution within the stultifying framework of human systems. Job, on the brink of despair, at last found the key that had eluded him during his dialogues with his friends and grasped it with the whole of his being, no longer concerned to achieve a definition of his personal fate.

It is obvious that descent into the abyss does not of itself provide an adequate incentive for a subsequent ascent. What matters ultimately is the horizon above the abyss. Experience of the abyss simply demonstrates more clearly the grandeur of that over-arching horizon. God draws Job's attention to the marvels of the created world so that he will remark the wonders of his Creator. The distance between the abyss and the sky, between death and life, between despair and hoping against hope can only be assessed in the light of God's miracles, and this distance demonstrates where the promise of salvation for humans actually lies. The marvels of God's creation are such that suffering can play a positive role within it. The Gordian knot of "hoping against hope" is unravelled: it is a matter of the hope of an all-exceeding transcendental intelligence on one side against the structure of a human being and his limited comprehension on the other. The solution lies in the fusion of human and divine intelligence—in the belief that leads to happiness despite pain, to adoration without coercion, to love without end. At the same time the antithesis between human and divine righteousness is resolved. Human beings achieve righteousness only when they comprehend and avow

[8] See *The Guide of the Perplexed* III.23, vol. 2, p. 493.

God's righteousness, whose nature is such that God is always correctly active, in harmony with the entire plan of the universe. Human righteousness is valid only if founded on belief and trust in God's righteousness and in the love derived from the union between divine and human righteousness. This union is possible because the aim of God's righteousness itself is the vital dialogue between a personal God and human beings.

CHAPTER XXV

REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS IN PROVERBS

Almost the whole of the book of Proverbs consists of collections of sayings in two different genres: the "instructional" part—argumentative, descriptive, and pedagogic (chaps. 1–9; 22:17–24:34; and 31:1–9); and the couplets of the "Wisdom" passages (chaps. 10:1–22:16 and 25:1–29:27). The separate collection of sayings (chap. 30) and the evocation of the wife of many parts (31:10–31) differ markedly from the rest of the book.[1] The most obvious distinction in form between the "instruction" and the "Wisdom" sections is that the former is imperative or jussive and the latter indicative or affirmative; the one takes the form of an intimate address to a pupil, inculcating certain cardinal social virtues and warning against the corresponding vices, while the other is in the impersonal form of a statement that assumes the acceptance of certain facts and truths.[2]

This important distinction results in a considerable difference in attitude to expectations and to the law. In the instruction passages rewards are used

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[1] The theme of recompense is virtually absent from chaps. 30 and 31; the only notable exception is the saying in 30:10.

[2] For treatment of the book of Proverbs, see especially F. Delitzsch, *Das Salomonische Spruchbuch* (BC; Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1873); C. H. Toy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs* (ICC; Edinburgh; T. & T. Clark, 1899, 1970); C. T. Fritsch and R. W. Schloerb, *The Book of Proverbs* (IntB 4; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1955), 767–957; H. Ringgren, *Sprüche* (ATD 16/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), 1–122; B. Gemser, *Sprüche Salomos* (HAT 16; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1963); M. Dahood, *Proverbs and Northwest Semitic Philology* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1963); A. Barucq, *Le livre des Proverbes* (SBi; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1964); R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs / Ecclesiastes* (AB 18; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965); W. McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1970); R. N. Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972); O. Plöger, *Sprüche Salomos (Proverbia)* (BK XVII; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984); L. Alonso Schökel and J. Vilchez, *Proverbios* (Madrid: Ediciones Christiandad, 1984); D. A. Hubbard, *Proverbs* (CC 15A; Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1989); R. N. Whybray, *The Composition of the Book of Proverbs* (JSOT.S 168; Sheffield: ISOT Press, 1994); S. L. Harris, *Proverbs 1–9: A Study of Inner-Biblical Interpretation* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1995). Mention may be made also of J. A. Gladson, *Retributive Paradoxes in Proverbs 10–29* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms International, 1991), which deals with the issue of retribution in a rather general way; D. Parker, *Syntactic and Poetic Structures in Proverbs 10:1–22:16* (microfiche edition; Los Angeles, Univ. of California, Diss., 1992); R. N. Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs: A Survey of Modern Study* (HBIS 1; Leiden / New York / Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1995); C. Maier, *Die "fremde Frau" in Proverbien 1–9: Eine exegetische und sozialgeschichtliche Studie* (OBO 144; Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995); G. Baumann, *Die Weisheitsgestalt in Proverbien 1–9: Traditionsgeschichtliche und theologische Studien* (FAT 16; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1996); J. Cook, *The Septuagint of Proverbs: Jewish and/or Hellenistic Proverbs? Concerning the Hellenistic Colouring of LXX Proverbs* (VT.S 69; Leiden / New York / Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1997).

as promises and punishments as threats, while in the wisdom couplets the results of good or bad conduct are merely stated.[3] It is striking that men are always judged according to their conformity to common sense or to the commands of God, rather than according to any possible regret for aberrations and subsequent reform. Consequently, the themes of mercy and forgiveness are *rarae aves* in the book of Proverbs.

1. *Instruction Passages*

The instruction passages are based on the concept of wisdom as the guiding principle of life. They exhibit a clear syntactic structure, combining commands, exhortations, and warnings with reasons for them in subordinate, final, and consecutive clauses. Among these reasons are the themes of punishment or curse, and reward or blessing. The most conspicuous stylistic feature of the instruction in the book of Proverbs is the vocative "my son." There are both structural and thematic reasons for discussing the instruction passages in four distinct sections: chaps. 1–4, 5–7, 8–9 and the passage 22:17–24:34.

1.1 *Chapters 1–4*

The passage 1:8–19 exhibits a formal structure of imperatives, the conditional *('im)* and the motive *(kî)* clauses using the analogy of hunting to express figuratively a precisely measured correspondence between a crime and its punishment. The sustained conditional clause in 1:11–14 reports the tempters' invitation to robbery and murder, the twin imperatives in 1:15 warn against them, with a twofold supporting argument in 1:16–18, followed by the sober conclusion of 1:19. There is measure-for-measure correspondence between the enticing words of 1:11–12 and the recoil upon the criminals' heads in 1:17–18:

11 If they say, "Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood,
let us wantonly ambush the innocent;
12 like Sheol let us swallow them alive
and whole, like those who go down to the Pit ...

17 For in vain is a net spread
in the sight of any bird;
18 but these men lie in wait for their own blood,
they set an ambush for their own lives.

[3] The giving of motives or reasons for threats and promises in instruction passages, and statements about the good or bad results of human behaviour in single wisdom sentences often express general or universal facts and truths. It is not surprising, therefore, that similar threats, promises, wishes, and statements are found elsewhere in the Bible and in other literatures.

There is an obvious correspondence between vv. 11 and 18, but what are the role and meaning of 1:17? Taken by itself, it could refer either to the fate of the victim or to that of the robbers themselves. In the former case it would imply the futility of laying a net "in the sight of any bird": when a bird sees the net it avoids it. It seems much more likely, however, that the phrase is a metaphor illustrative of 1:18. This view is supported by the Septuagint's version "for not in vain are nets spread for birds." By converting the positive into a negative (omitting "the sight of"), the Greek version emphasises the certainty that the criminals will be brought to justice. The original statement reflects, however, a profounder insight into the mystery of their blindness and the necessary connection between act and consequence. Just as the birds in their blindness may fall into a net, though it is laid in their sight, so the criminal falls into the net of his desire for gain, which brings destruction upon him.[4] The basic imagery of the statement is reminiscent of the same or similar motive elements in Prov 7:23; 23:28; Ps 64:5; and Lam 4:19b; but even more striking is the thematic correspondence with Ps 37:14–15, which depicts exact retribution by employing the imagery of the recoiling weapon: "The wicked draw the sword and bend their bows, to bring down the poor and needy, to slay those who walk uprightly;[5] their sword shall enter their own heart, and their bows shall be broken."

Prov 1:8–19 is followed by an independent section, 1:20–33, employing prophetic forms of address. According to the formal structure of the passage, personified Wisdom stands "everywhere"[6] in the town's public places (1:20–21; cf. 8:2–3) like a teacher demanding, in hortatory tones, attentiveness to her words (vv. 22–23). The invitation and admonition turn abruptly into denunciation of disobedience, which results in condign punishment. The denunciation of disregard for Wisdom's teaching and an affirmation of the result are divided into three parts: vv. 24–28, 29–31, and 32–33. The sub-sections vv. 24–28 and 29–31 each consist of a causal and a consequential clause, while 1:32–33 closes the section.

It may be noted that both causal clauses, each introduced by a causal particle *(ya'an, taḥat),* make it plain that the refusal of Wisdom's invitation is a de finite fact: they rejected her, neglected "all" her advice, and would have none of her reproof (1:24–25); they hated knowledge and chose not the

[4] See W. McKane, *Proverbs,* 271: "The bird has been given every reason to exercise prudence and caution; its suspicions should have been awakened, but it is so much the slave of its appetite that it follows a compulsive desire to eat the grain. So it is with the highwaymen who cannot control their appetite for wealth and who are incapable of benefiting from the warnings which would deter reasonable and disciplined men from courses of action which must inevitably destroy them."

[5] For this image see also Ps 11:2: "... the wicked bend the bow, they have fitted their arrow to the string, to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart."

[6] It is most likely that the pairs "streets // squares" and "top of the walls // entrances of the city gates" are used as a concrete meristic mode of expressing the abstract term "everywhere."

fear of the Lord, they would have none of her advice, they despised "all" her reproof (1:29–30). The nature of their punishment corresponds exactly to their conduct:

26 I also will laugh at your calamity;
I will mock when panic strikes you,
27 when panic strikes you like a storm,
and your calamity comes like a whirlwind,
when distress and anguish come upon you.
28 Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer;
they will seek me diligently but will not find me.

31 ... therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way
and be sated with their own devices.

The concluding resumptive antithetic parallelism (1:32–33), introduced by the particle *kî,* 'for,' states the general rule about the treatment of those who reject and those who heed wisdom.

Even though the passage adopts prophetic modes of address, its thematic scope remains that of wisdom teaching. It does not reflect a passionate struggle for Israel's reform, but rather the general considerations of God's call for repentance in corrective discipline and the fact of an unreceptive audience. This explains the reason for the abrupt transition from the admonition (1:22–23) to the recital of disobedience resulting in punishment (1:24–33).

Chapter 2 exemplifies the process of formal development from a distinctly authoritative instruction that communicates its directives by imperatives to the more diffuse religious and moral preaching of the sages. Instead of commands and exhortations followed by subordinate clauses, the structure employed in this chapter consists of a protasis (2:1–4) and a long apodosis (2:5–22), each containing subdivisions and being linked to what goes before by a connective particle. Introduced by the vocative "My son," the protasis contains three conditional *('im)* clauses directing attention to the teaching of wisdom as a principle of religious and moral knowledge. The apodosis is divided into a series of consequential *('āz)* clauses (2:5, 9), motive *(kî)* clauses (2:6, 10, 18, 21), and a final *(lĕma'an)* clause (2:20). Their purpose is to make clear that the pursuit of wisdom is necessary because, being God-given (2:6), it encompasses the fear of the Lord or knowledge of God, comprehension of probity, moral protection, and various blessings. The closing motivation (2:21–22) is arranged antithetically to set forth the immediate outlook for the upright and the wicked with regard to the possession of the land:

For the upright will inhabit the land,
and men of integrity will remain in it;
but the wicked will be cut off from the land,
and the treacherous will be rooted out of it.

Chapter 3 consists of three independent discourses, each introduced by "My son": vv. 1–10, 11–20, and 21–35. These sections contain subdivisions, some of them being apparently editorial insertions. The common feature of the chapter is an exhortation to follow the teaching of the sage and God's wisdom in order to secure the benefits that naturally flow from trusting God and doing right. Only after the last exhortation (3:31) is there an extended motivation comprising statements of punishment and reward in a series of antithetic parallelisms (3:32–35). In the first section the exhortations in imperatives or jussives (3:1, 3, 5–6a, 7, 9) alternate with motivations assuring the reward by a motive *(kî)* clause (v. 2) and by a number of consequential clauses introduced by *waw* (3:4, 6b, 10) or in one instance without *waw* (3:8). In each case benefits are conceived in terms of material prosperity, in keeping with the traditional view of the chief blessings of the righteous: a long and peaceful life (3:2); favour and good success in the eyes of God and man (3:4); guidance through life (3:6b); a healthy and happy physical condition (3:8); and abundant crops, corn, and wine (3:10).

The second section comprises three distinct sub-sections: vv. 11–12, 13–18, and 19–20. In the first of these two imperatives appear (v. 11), followed by a motive (*kî*) clause affirming, in contrast to the old view, that suffering should be regarded as punishment for sin, that God's chastening can be motivated by love. The second sub-section is introduced by the exalted hymnic exclamation "Happy is the man who finds wisdom ..." (3:13) and is followed by a succession of motive clauses setting forth various benefits conferred by wisdom (3:14–18). Verse 14 reads:

> for the gain *(saḥar)* from it is better than gain from silver
> and its profit *(tĕbû'āh)* better than gold.

The third sub-section (3:19–20) honours God's wisdom as displayed by the creation.

The formal structure of the third section is similar to that of the first one: partly extended exhortations in imperatives and jussives (3:21, 25, 27–31) are supported by predominantly extended reward or retribution argument in consequential (*waw* and *'āz*) clauses (3:22–23) and motive *('im* and *kî)* clauses (3:24, 26, 31–35). The double motivation in 3:24 takes the form of protasis and apodosis. The extended and antithetically arranged motivation in 3:32–35 is different from all preceding recompense arguments in the chapter because it does not see the beneficial consequences of a righteous life as flowing naturally from a positive attitude but sets up retribution as a generally valid principle (cf. Ps 18:25–26), thus supporting all the preceding exhortations and motivations:

> for the perverse man is an abomination to the Lord,
> but the upright are in his confidence.
> The Lord's curse is on the house of the wicked,

but he blesses the abode of the righteous.
Toward the scorners he is scornful,
but to the humble he shows favour.
The wise will inherit honour,
but fools get disgrace.[7]

Chapter 4 is similar in form to its two predecessors, and consists of three exhortations: vv. 1–9, 10–19, and 20–27. In the first section the sage gives reasons why his teaching should be followed by referring to what he learned from his father. The teacher communicates his ideas to a class of young men in imperatives sustained by final, motive and consequential clauses. The motivation of reward is first encountered in v. 1b: "... that you may gain insight." In 4:4c the sage cites his heritage from his father: "... keep my commandments, and live."[8] Verse 6 reads: "Do not forsake (wisdom), and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you." In 4:8–9 there is an extended motivation based on the benefits that flow from loving wisdom. The second section also contains a few cases of reward motivation dependent on imperatives. In 4:10 the sage adjures: "Hear, my son, and accept my words, that the years of your life may be many." Verses 12–13 read: "When you walk, your step will not be hampered; and if you run, you will not stumble. Keep hold of instruction, do not let go; guard her, for she is your life." In 4:14–17 the teacher warns against association with the wicked, reinforcing his admonition by the general principle of retribution stated antithetically in 4:18–19:

The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn,
which shines brighter and brighter until full day.
The way of the wicked is like deep darkness;
they do not know over what they stumble.

In the third section the succession of imperatives is sustained by assurance of reward in two motive clauses and one consequential clause: "For they are life to him who finds them, and healing to all his flesh" (4:22); "... for from it flow the springs of life" (4:23b); "... then all your ways will be sure" (4:26b).

1.2 *Chapters 5–7*

Chapters 5–7 differ from their three predecessors in two ways. First, their exhortations and advice are less general in nature and concentrate on the dan-

[7] For the interpretation of the principle, see C. H. Toy, *Proverbs*, 81: "A *curse* in the mouth of God is a sentence or pronouncement of evil; in the mouth of man it is an imprecation, an invocation of divine punishment. Similarly God *blesses* by pronouncing good, man by invoking good from God ... The representation of God as acting toward men as they act toward him rests on an ancient anthropomorphism, which in Pr. is probably purified by the conviction that God, as just, must be hostile to evildoers; but the thought never rises to the point of conceiving of him as merciful to fools and sinners."

[8] The Septuagint omits "and live."

gers of the seductions of a "strange woman" *('iššāh zārāh)* or a "foreigner" *(nokriyyāh),* previously mentioned in 2:16–19. Secondly, the motivation of exhortations, warnings, and advice refers more often to the seductive charms of this woman than to the fatal consequences of the path followed by her and her associates. All the more striking, therefore, is the sharp contrast between the present delights promised by the temptress and the ultimate consequences of relations with her, which are depicted as the natural outcome of sin. The motivation of the first section of chapter 5 (vv. 1–6) reads: "For the lips of a loose woman drip honey, and her speech[9] is smoother than oil; but in the end *(wĕ'aḥărîtāh)* she is bitter as wormwood *(la'ănāh),*[10] sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol; she does not take heed to the path of life; her ways wander, and she does not know it" (5:3–6; cf. 2:18–19; 9:18 and the contrast to 9:6 in 4:26).

The imperatives of repeated warning against the seductive woman in the second section of chapter 5 (vv. 7–14) are based on the negative final clause introduced by the particle *pen,* 'lest,' rejecting a consequence that might follow: "Lest you give your honour to others and your years to the merciless; lest strangers take their fill of your strength, and your labours go to the house of an alien; and at the end of your life you groan *(wĕnāhamtā bĕ'aḥărîtekā),* when your flesh and body are consumed,[11] and you say, 'How I hated discipline *(mûsār),* and my heart despised reproof *(tôkaḥat)!* I did not listen to the voice of my teachers or incline my ear to my instructors. I was at the point of utter ruin in the assembled congregation'" (5:9–14). This warning reflects general experience: a man's association with loose women is ultimately punished by exhaustion and ruin.[12] One may argue whether the phrase *bĕ'aḥărîtekā,* "at your end," refers to the end of the victim's life or to the point at which the deadly consequences of his conduct show themselves. But in either case common sense suggests that the failure of a human life after he has broken the

[9] Literally *palate.*

[10] The word *la'ănāh* appears elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible as a symbol for the result of man's unfaithfulness and injustice, in most cases in parallelism with the word *rō'š,* 'poison': in Deut 29:17 Moses warns his people not to turn away from the Lord "lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit"; in Jer 9:14 and 23:15 the threat of God's punishment reads: "Behold, I will feed this people (them) with wormwood, and give them poisonous water to drink"; in Amos 5:7 the prophet exclaims: "O you who turn justice to wormwood, and cast down righteousness to the earth!" and in 6:12 he reproaches his hearers: "But you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood"; in Lam 3:15 the poet complains about God's punishment: "He has filled me with bitterness, he has sated me with wormwood" to beg in Lam 3:19: "Remember my affliction and my bitterness, the wormwood and the gall!"

[11] The Septuagint differs slightly in v. 11 assuming the verb *nḥm* (in Niph'al), 'to repent': "and thou repent *(kaì metamelethése)* at last when the flesh of thy body is consumed."

[12] See the statement of C. H. Toy, *Proverbs,* 109: "This is the sting of his doom, that his toil goes to build up not his own house but another's, and his life thus becomes a failure. The point of view is external—there is no reference to corruption of soul; that is no doubt assumed, but the moralist uses what he thinks the most effective deterrent argument, the social destructiveness of the vice in question."

covenant and displayed his aversion to discipline and his contempt for reproof is so complete that there is for him no going back; in such cases sorrow or regret "at the end" comes too late.[13] Severe punishment in the form of loss of social position and wealth may of course move the fool to undertake a gradual reform of his soul; but that is beyond the horizons of the present sage.

The next section of chapter 5 opens with a figurative exhortation to conjugal fidelity (vv. 15–17), followed by a literal interpretation (vv. 18–20), and ends with general theological and moralistic reflections on the fate of the wicked (vv. 21–23). The conclusion is reminiscent of its counterparts in chapters 1–3, but the earlier ones are antithetical in form, whereas this one speaks only of punishment of the wicked: "For a man's ways are before the eyes of the Lord, and he watches all his paths. The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is caught in the toils of his sin. He dies for lack of discipline, and because of his great folly he is lost" (5:21–23). Even though in 5:22 the figure of a net in which an animal is trapped is used to illustrate how the wicked become entangled in the cords of their own wrongdoings, the interpretation nevertheless suggests that the punishment is ordained by the judgment of God.

Chapter 6 is clearly divided into five discourses: against standing surety (vv. 1–5), against sluggardliness (vv. 6–11), against mischief-making (vv. 12–15), against seven specified sins (vv. 16–19), and against adultery (vv. 20–35). The theme of retribution appears in the third and fifth sections. The vignette of a man whose gestures and speech indicate a malicious spirit and deep-seated moral perverseness ends with an abrupt declaration of punishment: "Therefore calamity will come upon him suddenly; in a moment he will be broken beyond healing" (6:15).

The characteristic exhortation against association with the evil adulteress in 6:20–35 is motivated by the verdict that follows: "... None who touches her will go unpunished *(lō' yinnāqeh*[14] *kol-hannōgēa' bāh).* Do not men despise a

[13] The groan produced by the unhappy man in 5:14, "I was at the point of utter ruin in the assembled congregation," reflects the involvement of the community in the verdict. In the book of Sirach there is a passage which points to such a practice. The writer declares of the man or the woman who breaks his or her marriage vows: "This man will be punished in the streets of the city, and where he least suspects it, he will be seized. So it is with a woman who leaves her husband and provides an heir by a stranger. For first of all, she has disobeyed the law of the Most High; second, she has committed an offence against her husband; and third, she has committed adultery through harlotry and brought forth children by another man. She herself will be brought before the assembly, and punishment will fall on her children. Her children will not take root, and her branches will not bear fruit. She will leave her memory for a curse, and her disgrace will not be blotted out. Those who survive her will recognize that nothing is better than the fear of the Lord, and nothing sweeter than to heed the commandments of the Lord."

[14] The verb *nqh* in Niph'al signifies 'be free from punishment, be held innocent or guiltless.' An overview of the passages concerned shows that this form and meaning of the word appears most often in the book of Proverbs: 1 Sam 26:9; Jer 2:35; 25:29; 49:12; Zech 5:3; Ps 19:14; Prov 6:29; 11:21; 16:5; 17:5; 19:5, 9; 28:20.

thief if he steals to satisfy his appetite when he is hungry? And if he is caught, he will pay sevenfold *(šib'ātāyim);* he will give all the goods of his house. He who commits adultery has no sense, he who does it destroys himself. Wounds and dishonour will he get and his disgrace will not be wiped away. For jealousy makes a man furious, and he will not spare when he takes revenge *(wĕlō'-yaḥmôl bĕyôm nāqām).* He will accept no compensation, nor be appeased though you multiply gifts" (6:29b–35). It seems unlikely that the statement about a sevenfold penalty in 6:31 refers to the legal rules governing restitution (cf. Exod 21:37–22:8), but rather that it is a metaphorical expression for restitution on a large scale—thus accentuating the contrast between the fate of the thief (6:30–31) and that of the adulterer (6:32–35): "a thief suffers disgrace, but escapes with loss of money; an adulterer gets disgrace and blows, and no money-payment atones for his offence."[15]

The warning against the adulteress in chapter 7 contains three sections: vv. 1–5, 6–23, 24–27. The first follows a succession of imperatives (7:1–4) with a final clause "to preserve you from the loose woman, from the adventuress with her smooth words" (7:5). The second is an imaginative description of a young man wandering through the streets at night (7:6–9) who meets a woman dressed as a harlot, and her devices of seduction (7:10–20); the youth responds to her blandishments and his destruction ensues (7:21–23): "All at once he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a stag is caught fast till an arrow pierces its entrails; as a bird rushes into a snare; he does not know that it will cost him his life" (7:22–23). The concluding warning (7:24–25) seems all the more appropriate and is followed by the motivation pointing to her destructive potential: "for many a victim has she laid low; yea, all her slain are a mighty host. Her house is the way to Sheol, going down to the chambers of death" (7:26–27; cf. 2:18–19; 5:5; 9:18). At that point there is no possibility of correction, mercy, and forgiveness.[16]

1.3 *Chapters 8–9 and 22:17–24:34*[17]

Chapter 8 consists of four sections: Wisdom personified issues her summons to people in public places and proclaims her moral excellence and incomparable value (vv. 1–11),[18] her prominence and her noblest fruit (vv. 12–21),

[15] See C. H. Toy, *Proverbs,* 140.

[16] See the comment by W. McKane, *Proverbs,* 341: "To be led away by desire for her is to take the road to Sheol and to arrive at the point of no return. This is a deviation from the way of life which does not admit of subsequent correction; it is a commitment to death and there is no way back to a safe road."

[17] The form and content of individual sections in these chapters are in general less unified than in chaps. 1–7. In 31:1–9 the theme of recompense does not appear.

[18] For the figurative meaning of public places mentioned in 1:20–21 and 8:2–3, see the note to 1:20–21.

and the precedence of Wisdom and her presence at the creation of the universe in close relationship with God (vv. 22–31). This is followed by a concluding exhortation and admonition (vv. 32–36). The second section ends with a description of material rewards: "I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me. Riches and honour are with me, enduring wealth and prosperity. My fruit *(piryî)* is better than gold, even fine gold, and my yield *(ûtĕbû'ātî)* than choice silver. I walk in the way of righteousness, in the paths of justice, endowing with wealth those who love me, and filling their treasuries" (8:17–21). In the concluding exhortation Wisdom demands that men should heed her instruction and gives her reasons in antithetically arranged motive clauses, setting forth the general rule of compensation: "For he who finds me finds life and obtains favour from the Lord; but he who misses me injures himself; all who hate me love death" (8:35–36). Contrasting the wages of virtue and vice at the end of a discourse is characteristic of the instruction genre (cf. 1:32–33; 2:21–22; 3:32–35; 4:18–19).

Chapter 9 falls into three sections: the invitation of Wisdom (vv. 1–6) with the enticements of the Foolish Woman as its antithetic parallel (vv. 13–18); the gap is filled by six couplets (vv. 7–12). It is obvious that the "Foolish Woman" represents the adulteress who emerged in 2:16–19 and became a central figure in chapters 5, 6, and 7 (cf. 23:27–28).[19] These passages show that "Folly" is primarily used as a moral term symbolising unlawful pleasures. Both Wisdom and Folly address "whoever is simple *(mîpetî)*" and "lacks sense *(ḥăsar-lēb)*" (9:4, 16), but Wisdom does so openly and in public places, whereas Folly prefers the privacy of her house. The content of the invitations and therefore their consequences are diametrically opposed: the question, indeed, is one of life or death. Wisdom's invitation runs: "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Leave simpleness and live *(wīḥyû)*, and walk in the way of insight" (9:6). Folly's offer is: "Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant" (9:17), followed by the comment: "But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol" (9:18; cf. 2:18–19; 5:5; 7:27).[20] The last of the six sentences in 9:7–12 states the principle of recompense in

[19] It may be noted, however, that the word *kĕsîlût,* 'insolence, folly, stupidity,' occurs only in Prov 9:13.

[20] The Septuagint adds here a hortatory complement (for the translation, see C. H. Toy, *Proverbs,* 192):

> But turn away, linger not in the place,
> Nor set thine eye on her;
> Nor thus wilt thou go through alien water,
> And pass over an alien stream.
> But abstain from alien water,
> Drink not of an alien fountain,
> That thou mayst live long,
> That years of life may be added to thee.

conditional form: "If you are wise, you are wise for yourself *(lāk);* if you scoff, you alone *(lĕbaddĕkā)* will bear it" (9:12). Here the principle of individual responsibility is "expressed under the form of moral isolation."[21] Such a form does not, however, necessarily imply that man's conduct has good or bad consequences only for himself and does not affect his fellows.[22] The clear emphasis here is simply that it must be above all else in the pupil's interest to be wise.

The collection of sentences in 22:17–24:34 differs from those that precede and follow it in that its instruction form is framed in imperatives or jussives, with motive *(kî)* clauses (22:18, 23; 23:5, 7, 9, 11, 21, 27; 24:2, 13, 16, 20, 22), final clauses (22:19, 21), and negative final *(pen,* 'lest') clauses (22:25; 24:18). The theme of recompense appears, in various forms, in the following passages: 22:23; 23:11, 18; 24:12d, 14bc, 16, 18, 20, 22, 24–25, 29.[23] Two imperatives in 22:22,[24] are commended by the double motive clause (22:23): "for the Lord will plead their cause *(yārîb rîbām)* and despoil of life those who despoil them *(wĕqāba' 'et-qob'êhem nāpeš).*" The word *qāba'* occurs elsewhere only in Mal 3:8–9 in a context that suggests the meaning of the semantic field: 'cheat, despoil, rob.'[25] By using the same verb for an oppressor's dealings with the poor and God's dealings with the oppressor, the writer in fact employs the principle of the *lex talionis.* The saying in 23:10–11 (for 23:10 cf. 22:28) also concerns the weak and defenceless: "Do not remove an ancient landmark or enter the fields of the fatherless;[26] for their Redeemer is strong; he will plead their cause against you

[21] See C. H. Toy, *Proverbs,* 195.

[22] See the Septuagint version (translation by C. H. Toy, *Proverbs,* 195): "If thou be wise, for thyself thou shalt be wise and for thy neighbors, but if thou prove evil, thou alone shalt bear the evil."

[23] See also the statement about the self-destructive effects of drunkards' and gluttons' behaviour in 23:21.

[24] The opening lines of chap. 2 of the Egyptian *Instruction of Amenemope* (2.4–9) contain a similar exhortation, but without any motivation like that of Prov 22:23. See J. A. Wilson, "Egyptian Instructions," *ANET,* p. 422. For the translation, see M. Lichtheim, "Instruction of Amenemope (1.47)," *The Context of Scripture,* vol. 1: *Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World* (ed. W. W. Hallo; Leiden / New York / Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1997), 116:

> Beware of robbing a wretch,
> Of attacking a cripple;
> Don't stretch out your hand to touch an old man,
> Nor open your mouth to an elder.
> Don't let yourself be sent on a mischievous errand,
> Nor be friends with him who does it.

[25] *A Hebrew & Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament* (Leipzig: B. Tauchnitz; London: Williams & Norgate, 1871) by J. Fuerst (trans. by S. Davidson) assumes the same meaning as for *'āqab:* 'to intertwine, to plait into each other, to bind together, to spin'; hence 'to plan a cunning device, to deceive, to defraud, to overreach.' Some recent dictionaries assume an intended metathesis of *'āqab* into *qāba'.*

[26] Chapter 6 of the *Instruction of Amenemope* contains a similar warning, but again without

(hû'-yārîb 'et-rîbām 'ittāk)." The saying 23:17–18 reads: "Let not your heart envy sinners, but continue in the fear of the Lord all the day. Surely[27] there is a future *('aḥărît),* and your hope will not be cut off." The motivation "there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off" is repeated in 24:14bc to reinforce the advice to eat honey, which is here a metaphor for wisdom. The argument promises the reward to the righteous, but says nothing of future punishment for sinners who prosper and seem to be immune from it; the punishment of the wicked goes without saying. It is made explicit, however, in 24:19–20: "Fret not yourself because of evil-doers, and be not envious of the wicked; for the evil man has no future *('aḥărît);* the lamp of the wicked will be put out *(nēr rĕšā'îm yid'āk).*" The use of this particular metaphor echoes 13:9; 20:20; and Job 18:5–6; 21:17.[28]

The retribution saying in 24:12d is theological in nature and refers to the obligation to help the innocent who are going to their deaths, a duty enjoined by imperatives in 24:11, and to possibly feigned ignorance of the situation (24:12a). The sage reinforces his attribution of responsibility by asking: "... Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not requite man according to his work *(wĕhēšîb lĕ'ādām kĕpo'olô)?*" (24:12b). The saying of 24:15–16 is a warning against assailing a righteous man, motivated by an antithetically arranged recompense statement: "... for a righteous man falls seven times *(šeba'),* and rises again;[29] but the wicked are overthrown by calamity." The contrast in the fates of the righteous and the wicked is reinforced by the disparity of numbers: "seven times" is obviously a term used symbolically for an unlimited number of times, in contrast to "calamity," which involves a single and decisive instance.

Chapter 24:17–18 warns against rejoicing in the misfortunes of an enemy, the reason being given in the negative final clause: "lest the Lord see it, and be displeased, and turn away *(wĕhēšîb)* his anger from him." The essence of the warning is that such rejoicing is morally bad (cf. 24:29). The negative final clause implies, then, that not only may God's anger "turn away from" the defeated enemy but that it may "turn to" upon him who gloats.[30] Such a change

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out motivation; see J. A. Wilson, "Egyptian Instructions," *ANET,* p. 422. For the translation, see M. Lichtheim, "Instruction of Amenemope (1.47)," *The Context of Scripture,* vol. 1, p. 116:

> Do not move the markers on the borders of fields,
> Nor shift the position of the measuring-cord ...

[27] In Hebrew there are two particles here: *kî 'im,* "for if." The Septuagint adds ... *teréses autá,* "for if you have regard to it."

[28] In contrast to these passages, in 2 Sam 21:17; 1 Kgs 11:36; 15:4; Ps 132:17 the metaphor of the lamp has a marked positive significance in reference to David.

[29] Cf. Mic 7:8: "Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise ..."

[30] See C. H. Toy, *Proverbs,* 448–449. W. McKane, *Proverbs,* 404, represents another view that is untenable: "... the conclusion which is drawn from this is not that mercy should be shown to a defeated enemy, but that one should refrain from gloating over him so that

in God's attitude is understandable only in the light of punishment producing some sign of penitence in one party and guilty gloating in the other. The saying of 24:21–22 reflects the belief that the authority of the king is supported both by God's authority and by historical experience, which demonstrates that disobedience to them both may result in sudden ruin.

The appendix (24:23–34) begins with an antithetical statement about judicial partiality, employing the principle of retribution: "He who says to the wicked, 'You are innocent,' will be cursed by peoples, abhorred by nations; but those who rebuke the wicked will have delight, and a good blessing will be upon them" (24:24–25). This reflects the common Hebrew belief that invocation of cursing or blessing brings bad or good fortune to those concerned.

The other appearance of the recompense theme in the appendix is in the context of revenge: "Do not say, 'I will do to him as he has done to me; I will pay the man back for what he has done'" (24:29; cf. Matt 5:38–39). This advice does not necessarily contradict the old law of retaliation (cf. Exod 21:23–25; Lev 24:19–20; Deut 19:21),[31] but rather reflects the sage's experience of the effects of revenge in personal relationships. Obviously it is also based on observation of the self-destroying effects of wickedness and on the certainty that God will ultimately repay evil (cf. 20:22), for the sage is a sage just because he can hold realities and truths in balance. So it is not surprising that similar thinking is found in the Babylonian *Precepts and Admonitions:* "Do not return evil to the man who disputes with you; requite with kindness your evil-doer, maintain justice to your enemy, smile on your adversary."[32]

2. *Wisdom Sentences*

In contrast to the instruction passages, the wisdom sentences form complete and independent entities, rarely combining to create larger compositions. Nor do they provide clear criteria for determining coherence of theme in particular collections.[33] It is noteworthy that the collections of chapters 10–

Yahweh's anger may not relent and his ruin may be final."

[31] It is important to bear in mind that the old law of retaliation was not suggested as a right of private revenge, but as a legal regulation.

[32] See W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), pp. 100–101, lines 41–44.

[33] U. Skladny, *Die ältesten Spruchsammlungen in Israel* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), identifies with limited persuasiveness marks of thematic coherence: the righteousness // wickedness antithesis (chaps. 10–15), God and the king (section 16:1–22:16), nature in general and agriculture (chaps. 25–27), the king and the instruction of young men (chaps. 28–29). See also the principles of classification of the sentences outlined by W. McKane, *Proverbs,* 11, 415: Class A: old wisdom concerned with the education of the individual; class B: predominantly negative statements concerning the community; class C: God-language expressive of a moralism reflecting Yahwistic piety.

15 and 28–29 are predominantly in antithetic parallelism—a phenomenon that, on such a scale at least, is unique in the Hebrew Bible. This explains why in these chapters more is said about reward for the righteous and punishment for the wicked than in passage 16:1–22:16 and chapters 25–27, where synonymous parallelism prevails. Antithetic parallelism is the most convenient form for expressing the different effects of positive and negative ways of life. In studying individual antithetic couplets, therefore, the principle of antithesis is an important key to resolving problems of textual criticism and to establishing the proper meaning of their constituent parts.

2.1 *Chapters 10:1–22:16*

In chapter 10 the theme of recompense appears in vv. 6, 7, 8, 9, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, and 30. Most couplets contain general statements of reward and punishment that do not involve the characters, attitudes, or deeds of those concerned. Verse 6 (v. 6b reappears in v. 11b) reads: "Blessings are on the head of the righteous, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence." In contrast to this unnatural antithesis, the Septuagint version implies a slightly different Hebrew text: "The blessings of the Lord are on the head of the righteous man, but untimely grief shall cover the face of the wicked." The antithesis of 10:7 is complete: "The memory of the righteous is a blessing, but the name of the wicked will rot *(yirqāb)*." Some exegetes propose the emendation of *yirqāb* to *yûqāb,* "will be cursed" in order to introduce the natural antithesis to "blessing." But the contrast between the durability of the righteous and the impermanence of the wicked in the received text needs no emendation, and the thesis is generally accepted as valid. Job, however, expresses the opposite point of view in 21:7–34.[34] In vv. 8 and 9 punishment is not explicitly mentioned but is implied: "The wise of heart will heed commandments, but a prating fool will come to ruin. He who walks in integrity walks securely, but he who perverts his ways will be found out *(yiwwādēa')*." The expression "will be found out," literally "will be known," implies that the guilt of him who walks in tortuous ways will be unmasked and punished accordingly. The contrast between the fate of the righteous and the wicked in vv. 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, and 30 is exact and the meaning always obvious.

In chapter 11 most sentences enunciate the doctrine of recompense: vv. 3–8, 17–21, 23–31. The text is usually clear and its purport obvious, but some couplets deserve individual mention. Verse 7 is not antithetical in

[34] See also W. Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* 3.2:

> The evil that men do lives after them;
> The good is oft interred with their bones.

form and is concerned only with the fate of the wicked: "When a wicked man dies, expectation perishes, and hope set in riches is cut off."[35] The Septuagint, however, translates antithetically: "When a righteous man dies his hope does not perish, but the boast of the wicked perishes." This rendering clearly implies a belief in immortality. Verse 8 foretells a reversing of positions in the long term: the righteous man who suffers will ultimately be rescued, and the evil-doer who seemingly prospers will sooner or later take his place in affliction. Verse 17 reads literally: "A man who is kind does good to his soul, but a cruel man brings into trouble his flesh." The anthropological terms "soul" // "flesh" are the usual means in Hebrew of expressing the idea of "self." The sentence points, therefore, to the recoil upon the self of one's attitude to others. Verse 21 emphasizes the certainty of retribution: the popular asseverative phrase *yād lĕyād,* "hand to hand," means "be assured, assuredly": "Be assured, an evil man will not go unpunished, but those who are righteous will be delivered." The Targum of Proverbs offers a different rendering of 11:21a: "*He who stretches out the hand against his neighbour* will not be acquitted of evil."[36]

The chapter ends (11:31) with a progressive parallelism that reads literally: "Behold, the righteous in the land will be repaid, how much more the wicked and the sinner!" Septuagint renders it as follows: "If the righteous man is scarcely saved, where will the impious and sinner appear?" (quoted in 1 Pet 4:18). The obvious underlying idea is that even the righteous, who are capable of falling into sin, will not escape punishment for evil-doing: all the more must this be true of the wicked.

In chapter 12 the following sentences suggest some kind of recompense: vv. 2, 3, 7, 13, 14, 19, 21, 28. Verses 13–14 (for v. 13 cf. 11:9; 18:7; 29:6, and for v. 14 see 13:2a; 14:14; 18:20) in particular deserve attention: "An evil man is ensnared by the transgression of his lips,[37] but the righteous escapes from trouble. From the fruit of his words a man is satisfied with good, and the work of a man's hand *(ûgĕmûl yĕdê-'ādām)* comes back *(yāšûb)*[38] to him." The Septuagint has a more elaborate rendering of v. 13: "By the sin of his lips the sinner falls into snares, but the righteous escapes out of them. He whose looks are gentle will be pitied, but he who encounters (men) in the gates will afflict souls."

In chapter 13 recompense plays its part in vv. 2, 6, 9, 13, 21, 22. The interpretation of v. 13 is controversial. In view of its antithetical form the RSV translation is to be preferred: "He who despises the word brings destruction

[35] The translation by W. McKane, *Proverbs,* 227.

[36] For a translation of this and other passages, see J. F. Healey, *The Targum of Proverbs Bible* (AramB 15; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991). Rashi thinks that "hand to hand" signifies the retribution coming from the hand of God to the hand of the wicked.

[37] Literally: "In the transgression of the lips is a snare to the evil man."

[38] So Ketib, but Qere has *yāšīwb."*

on himself *(yēḥābel lô),* but he who respects the commandment will be rewarded *(yĕšullām).*" This use of the verb *ḥābal* is consonant with its Akkadian and Old-South-Arabic meaning.[39] The Targum has a slightly different rendering: "He who shows contempt for the word will be damaged by it, but he who fears the command will be repaid with good." The Septuagint adds the triplet: "A crafty son will have no good thing, but the affairs of a wise servant will be prosperous, and his path will be directed aright."

In chapter 14 the recompense theme sounds unmistakably in vv. 1, 3, 11, 12 (= 16:25), 14, 22, 26, 27, 32, 34. Of these, vv. 14 and 32 present substantial textual and interpretative difficulties. As the text stands, v. 14 must be rendered: "From his ways the backsliding in his heart *(sûg lēb)* is sated, and from himself *(mē'ālâw)* the good man." The commentaries' usual suggestion is that *mē'ālâw* must be emended to *mimma'lālâw,* "from his deeds." Such an emendation is, however, unnecessary, for poetry has its own prerogatives. The underlying idea is explicit in Gal 6:7: "... for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." Isa 3:10 applies this only to the righteous: "Tell the righteous that it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their deeds." The Targum of Proverbs renders 14:14: "He who is haughty of heart gets satisfaction from his own ways, but a good man gets satisfaction from *his good.*" The Septuagint differs considerably: "From his ways is sated the bold of heart, but from his thoughts the good man."

Verse 32 reads: "The wicked is overthrown by his calamity *(bĕrā'ātô),* but the righteous finds refuge [even] in his death."[40] The Targum has: "Through his wickedness the wicked man is ruined, but he who has trust who dies is righteous." It is surprising that most translations and interpreters prefer the Septuagint rendering which reads: "The wicked is overthrown because of his evil-doing, but the righteous may trust to his integrity." It is true that the word *rā'āh* itself can equally well be rendered "calamity" and "evil-doing, wickedness." But *māwet,* "death," in v. 32b suggests "calamity" rather than "evil-doing" in the parallel v. 32a. The emendation of "death" to "integrity" in order to avoid the implication of a doctrine of immortality allegedly missing in the book of Proverbs is questionable: there are similar statements elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Gen 5:24; 2 Kgs 2:1–14; Pss 49; 73).

Chapter 15 mentions recompense in vv. 6, 10, 24, 25, 27; the first two require comment. Verse 6 reads literally: "The house of the righteous is a great store, but in the revenue of the wicked is a thing troubled *(ne'kāret).*"[41] The

[39] L. Koehler and L. Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958), suggest, however, the meaning under II: 'seize a thing as a pledge.'

[40] C. H. Toy, *Proverbs,* 300, expresses very well the essence of the sentence in Hebrew: "... the contrast is between the absoluteness of the fall of a wicked man, and the confidence or trust which the good man has even in the greatest of calamities."

[41] For the meaning of the verb *'ākar* in the same sense, cf. 11:29; Judg 11:35; 1 Sam 14:29; 1 Kgs 18:17. J. Fuerst, *A Hebrew & Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament,* 1047, states,

Targum has: "In the house of the righteous man is great wealth, but the harvest of the wicked will be spoiled." Septuagint offers two renderings: "In amassing righteousness is much strength, but the impious will be destroyed with the entire root from the land. In the house of righteous men there is much strength, but the fruits of impious men will be destroyed." Verse 10 introduces the concepts of mercy and forgiveness by threatening: "There is severe discipline *(mûsār)* for him who forsakes the way; he who hates reproof *(tôkaḥat)* will die." The instruction contains a similar threat in its larger context (cf. 1:20–33). The principle behind this sentence refers to those who are not amenable to correction of various kinds, including corrective punishments. The incorrigible are denied mercy since they travel the road of self-will that must ultimately lead to a death that is the child of their own decisions and deeds. The sentence is reminiscent of the advice in 3:7 :"Be not wise in your own eyes ..." and of the statement in 14:12 and 16:25: "There is a way that seems right to a man *(yāšār lipnê-'îš),* but its end *(wĕ'aḥărîtāh)* are the ways of death" (cf. 5:4–6, 22–23; 7:26–27; 9:17–18; Matt 7:13–14). The Targum renders the plural "ways" in v. 10b with the singular: "The correction of a wicked man makes his way wander and whoever hates chastisement will die." The Septuagint deals with v. 10b as follows: "... the end of it goes into the depths of Hades." The basis of the sentence's most general theme is obviously the illusive character of human plans and affairs, but there is no need to argue that the root of human illusions is man's "lack of discipline" (cf. 5:23) or his "craving" (cf. 10:3), stepping-stones leading to blind self-will. The opposite way is the way of wisdom: "The wise man's path leads upward to life, that he may avoid Sheol beneath" (15:24). The idea of final judgment implicit in the words "end," "death," and "Sheol" does not necessarily refer to punishment in the other world; it probably designates the inevitable final outcome of man's aberrations.

In chapter 16 vv. 4, 5, 6, 7, 17, 18, 20, 22, 25 (= 14:12) reflect the doctrine of recompense; the content of vv. 4 and 6 is of special interest. Verse 4 reads: "The Lord has made everything in relation to its counterpart *(lamma'ănēhû),*[42] even the wicked for the day of trouble *(lĕyôm rā'āh).*" This statement is sometimes interpreted as implying predestination to evil.[43] It is, however, more likely that the emphasis is intended to lie on the correspondence between the wickedness of the wicked and their punishment; "the day of trouble" is the day of judgment or punishment.[44] The word *ma'ăneh*

however: "*ne'keret* Prov. 15,6 is probably a noun meaning *trouble, disturbance.*"

[42] Normally the phrase is to be read *lĕma'ănēhû.* The translation of v. 4a follows W. McKane, *Proverbs,* 235; commentary, 497.

[43] See C. H. Toy, *Proverbs,* 321: "... since the wicked are punished, it is Yahweh who has created them to that end ..."

[44] W. McKane, *Proverbs,* 497, explains the meaning thus: "The sentence 'Yahweh has made everything in relation to its counterpart' suggests a self-contained, self-regulating order

means etymologically 'answer' which does not support the translation "purpose" or "design." 16:6 reads: "By loyalty and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for *(yĕkuppar),* and by the fear of the Lord a man avoids evil *(sûr mērā').*" Since the word *kpr* in various forms appears most frequently in priestly texts designating atonement by offerings, the statement points to the two fundamental ways of atonement that result in the averting of punishment: disposition of mind and ethical integrity. The word "evil" in 16:6b obviously designates misfortune in the sense of punishment.

In chapters 17–22 the theme of recompense rarely surfaces, nor, when it does, are there any great difficulties of text or sense. These passages are: 17:5, 13, 15, 20; 18:7, 10, 12, 20, 21; 19:5, 9, 16, 17, 23, 29; 20:7, 20, 22, 28; 21:5, 12, 16, 21, 28; 22:3, 4, 8, 9, 14.

2.2 *Chapters 25–29*

In chapter 25 there is only one clear mention of recompense: 25:21–22; it counsels kindness and magnanimity to an enemy, followed by a double motivation: "If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for you will heap coals of fire on his head, and the Lord will reward you *(yešallem-lāk)*" (cf. 20:22; 24:17–18, 29; Matt 5:44–45; Rom 12:20–21). The first motivation, "for you will heap coals of fire on his head," obviously signifies the pain of contrition, which is a self-inflicted punishment resulting in penitence. The advice and the motivation point to the fact that undeserved kindness awakens feelings of remorse in a guilty man and is therefore the most constructive way of taking vengeance on him—a paradoxical vengeance that can convert an enemy into a friend.[45]

Chapter 26 contains two remarkable statements: vv. 2 and 27. Verse 2 reads literally: "Like a sparrow in wandering, like a swallow in flight, so is a groundless *(ḥinnām)* curse, it does not come *(lō' tābō').*" The Targum renders the passage: "Like a sparrow flying quickly and like a bird flying away, so a curse which has no cause will have no effect." The Septuagint has: "Like birds fly and sparrows, so an empty curse will not come to anybody." The Hebrew margin suggests "comes to him *(lô)*" in the second line. If *lô,* "to him," refers to the cursed this indicates, echoing the old belief, certainty that a curse uttered will alight upon him against whom it is directed. The word *ḥinnām,* 'groundless,' however, and various statements about the recoil that follows evil intent may indicate that *lô* refers to the curser rather

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rather than theodicy in the strict sense, i.e., a government which is enforced by repeated forensic interventions made by Yahweh either to 'justify' or 'condemn.'"

[45] This general experience explains why similar advice is found in the Babylonian *Precepts and Admonitions* (see W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature,* pp. 100–101, lines 41–44): "Do not return evil to the man who disputes with you; requite with kindness your evildoer, maintain justice to your enemy, smile on your adversary."

than the cursed. According to Gen 12:3 God promises Abraham: "I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse ..."

The most striking example of malice rebounding on its perpetrator is found in Prov 26:27: "He who digs a pit will fall into it, and a stone will come back upon him who starts it rolling" (cf. 1:17–18; 5:22; 14:32; 22:8; 28:10; 29:5; see also Isa 33:1; Hos 8:7; 10:13; Pss 7:15–17; 9:16; 37:14–15; 57:7; Job 4:8; 15:35; Qoh 10:8–9; Esth 7:10; 9:1; Dan 6:24; Wis 11:16; 12:23; Sir 27:25–27; Tob 14:10).[46] This idea is most clearly expressed in Sir 27:25–27: "Whoever throws a stone straight up throws it on his own head; and a treacherous blow opens up wounds. He who digs a pit will fall into it, and he who sets a snare will be caught in it. If a man does evil, it will roll back upon him, and he will not know where it came from." But why should the negative particle *lō'* be changed into the pronoun *lô?* The imagery of the bird's motion in the first line indicates that the bird never reaches any definite place and, since the first line is an illustration of the second, it obviously expresses the belief, supported by common sense, that a groundless curse fails to reach its target (cf. the broader perspective in Num 22–24). Only such an interpretation is truly in line with the principle of strict justice observed throughout the book of Proverbs.

Chapter 27 is not relevant to the theme of this study, but chapter 28 contains a number of pertinent and noteworthy statements: vv. 1, 10, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 20, 22, 25, 26, 27. Verse 1 reads: "The wicked flee when no one pur-

[46] See also *Ahiqar* 9:126: "[Do not draw] your bow and shoot your arrow at the righteous man, lest the gods come to his aid and turn it back against you"; *Jubilees* 4:31–32: "At the end of that jubilee Cain was killed one year after him. And his house fell upon him, and he died in the midst of his house. And he was killed by its stones because he killed Abel with a stone, and with a stone he was killed by righteous judgment. Therefore it is ordained in the heavenly tablets: 'With the weapons with which a man kills his fellow he shall be killed just as he wounded him, thus shall they do to him'"; *The Testament of Gad* 5:10–11: "For by whatever human capacity anyone transgresses, by that he is also chastised. Since my anger was merciless in opposition to Joseph, through this anger of mine I suffered mercilessly, and was brought under judgment for eleven months, as long as I had it in for Joseph, until he was sold"—for a translation of all three passages, see J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha,* 2 vols. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983 and 1985); the thanksgiving hymn 2:29 from Qumran: "But as for them, the net they have spread for me, shall catch their own feet; and (in) the snares which they have hid for my life, they themselves fell therein. But my foot standeth in uprightness." For the translation, see M. Mansoor, *The Thanksgiving Hymns* (STDJ 3; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1961); in Egyptian *The Instructions of Onchsheshonqy* 22:5: "He who shakes a stone—it will fall on his foot"; W. Shakespeare, *Hamlet,* Scene 17 (4.7) 2826–2829 (the King speaks): "... conuert his Guilts to graces, so that my arrowes too slightly tymbered for so loude a wind, would haue reuerted to my bowe againe, and not where I had aym'd them"; idem, *Hamlet,* Scene 19 (5.2) 3528–3529 (Laertes speaks): "Why as a woodcock to mine owne springe *Ostrick,* I am iustly kild with mine owne treachery"; idem, *Iulius Caesar,* Scene 15 (5.3) 2322–2324 (Brutus speaks): "O *Iulius Caesar,* thou art mighty yet, thy Spirit walkes abroad, and turnes our Swords in our owne proper Entrailes"—see *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works: Original-Spelling Edition* (ed. S. Wells and G. Taylor; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

sues, but the righteous are bold as a lion."[47] The writer was possibly thinking of bad and good consciences in opposing types of men, which gave rise to feelings of insecurity or security. These contrary feelings are not, however, confined to the emotions; they correspond to inward and outward actualities. Since acts of wickedness contradict the very nature of human beings and of the universe, they are in essence self-destructive, while acts of righteousness are edifying. Consequently, at least the end results of such contrasting deeds inevitably show that man's inmost feelings reflect the inward as well as the outward processes of recompense. The wicked are pursued by their own shadows, which hound them to destruction, whereas the righteous are secure in their positions. The meaning of 28:17 on the one hand and 28:13–14 on the other can be properly evaluated in the light of the intrinsic effects of vice and virtue. 28:17 reads: "If a man is burdened with the blood of another, let him be a fugitive until death; let no one help him."[48] Murder is so extreme an example of transgression that there is no way in which a murderer can escape the death sentence.[49] This extreme case must all the more persuade us that the self-destructive results of wickedness cannot be concealed; to try to do so would merely worsen the situation. If the wicked man persists in his wickedness he denies the truth about himself and, by hardening his heart (cf. 28:14b and 29:1), accelerates the process of self-destruction. The only way out is the recognition of transgressions and submission to the discipline of penitence. The antithesis in 28:13 declares: "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses *(môdeh)* and forsakes them will obtain mercy *(yĕruḥām)*" (cf. Isa 1:16–18; Hos 14:2–4; Ps 32:3–5; Job 31:33–34).

In chapter 29 the theme of recompense recurs in vv. 1, 5, 6, 14, 16, 18, 23, 24, 25. Only v. 1 needs comment: "He who is often reproved, yet stiffens his neck *(makšeh-'ōrep)* will suddenly be broken beyond healing." This means primarily that the aim of reproof is salutary correction, and its repetition indicates perseverance in good intent on the part of the reprover. There is, however, a limit to patience; stubborn incorrigibility blocks all the roads of reform and leads inevitably to destruction.

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[47] The Hebrew text has a plural verb with singular noun in 1a, a plural noun with singular verb in 1b, but the Septuagint regularizes the grammar. The Targum of Proverb gives: "The wicked flee when there is nobody pursuing them, but the righteous are like a lion *which looks out* for its food, hoping for wisdom."

[48] The Septuagint differs considerably from the Hebrew: "He who goes surety for a man on a charge of murder will be obliged to flee and will not find security." The Targum has: "A man who is guilty of the blood of a person, even to the pit he may flee, but they will not capture him."

[49] See W. McKane, *Proverbs,* 626: "The murderer will be a fugitive until he dies, but however hard he may endeavour to run away from death, he is being borne irresistibly towards the place where life will be swallowed up in death."

3. *Conclusion*

Throughout the book of Proverbs human beings are judged by their attitude to the law of right, which covers all aspects of ethical life. The sages insist repeatedly that happiness follows obedience and misfortune disobedience to that law, which is not viewed in relation to divine inspiration or formal authority, but to man's conscience, reason, and experience. By their attitude to the law of right men are sharply divided into good and bad.

Many of the book's statements seem ethically defective in at least two points: first, they do not suggest that virtue should be pursued and vice avoided for their own sake; secondly, rewards and punishments are not delineated from the inward but from the outward perspective (material prosperity, long life, peace, honour, etc., or their opposites). None the less, it is impossible to deny the basic thesis of the book of Proverbs: good thoughts and actions produce healthy fruits, while intrigues and evil deeds lead to (self-) destruction. The most paradoxical instances given are examples of poetic justice in which the wrongdoer is hoist with his own petard. We must not, of course, overlook the fact that the sages specify neither the time nor the manner of recompense, and sometimes explicitly assert that such consequences appear only in the long term. In some circumstances this final outcome is needed to confirm the consciousness of the natural necessity of punishment.

In general, it is not possible to determine whether recompense is a function of natural law or a result of divine intervention.[50] Explicitly theological statements are rarely encountered in Proverbs. It is evident, however, that monotheism and the associated principle of divine providence are assumed throughout. The sages believe that nothing happens unless by the explicit or implicit will, i.e., order or permission of God. The boundary between the natural processes of recompense and God's *ad hoc* intervention, and the manner in which inner life affects outward happenings (and *vice versa*) always remain a mystery. The book of Proverbs is a special genre of literature, and concerns itself mainly with the facts of outward experience: it attempts no analysis of human inner life in relation to oneself, to God, and to other people.

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[50] See K. Koch, "Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament?," *ZThK* 52 (1955), 1–42 = *Um das Prinzip der Vergeltung in Religion und Recht des Alten Testaments* (WdF 125; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972), 130–181; English translation, "Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?," *Theodicy in the Old Testament* (ed. J. L. Crenshaw; IRTh 4; Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press; London: SPCK, 1983), 57–87, who finds in the book of Proverbs welcome support for his claim that the Old Testament does not point to "retribution" but to a built-in and inherent connection between an action and its consequences. See G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1 (London: SCM Press, 1975), 265; W. McKane, *Proverbs*, 271.

CHAPTER XXVI

QOHELET'S VIEW OF DIVINE RETRIBUTION

The original sage called Qohelet (Ecclesiastes, or the Preacher) bases his teaching on personal experience—what he himself has seen and understood. And the thinking is renowned for what is regarded as its severe and sustained skepticism about a wide spectrum of biblical belief. Since retributive divine justice is one of the basic tenets of that belief, and indeed one of the central themes of the entire Bible, his cynicism when he comes to examine it is to be expected. He does not hesitate, in fact, to speak in certain places of the righteous and the wicked meeting an identical fate, while in other passages he even turns the principle of appropriate retribution upside down.

Any dealing with the issue of retribution in the book of Qohelet has to take into account interdependence of contrasting arguments of individual units in the light of their unifying thematic and stylistic features. Qohelet contains some implicit modes of expression, which extend beyond the book and can only be interpreted by taking the whole religious background into account. Given the state of the passages with which we are concerned and the diversity of opinions concerning them, we shall divide our analysis into two parts: 1. passages dealing with divine justice; and 2. a critical assessment of these passages and their interpretation.[1]

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[1] For the book of Ecclesiastes as a whole, see especially following commentaries and studies: G. A. Barton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908, 1947); E. Podechard, *L'Ecclesiaste* (EB; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1912); K. Galling, *Die Fünf Megilloth: Prediger Salomo* (HAT 18; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1940), 47–90; O. S. Rankin and G. G. Atkins, *The Book of Ecclesiastes* (IntB 5; New York / Nashville: Abingdon, 1956), 1–88; W. Zimmerli, *Das Buch des Predigers Salomo* (ATD 16; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), 123–253; H. W. Hertzberg, *Der Prediger* (KAT XVII/4–5; Gütersloh: G. Mohn, 1963); O. Loretz, *Qohelet und der alte Orient: Untersuchungen zu Stil und theologischer Thematik des Buches Qohelet* (Freiburg / Basel / Vienna: Herder, 1964); P. L. Di Fonzo, *Ecclesiaste* (SB; Rome / Turin: Marietti, 1967); A. Lauha, *Kohelet* (BK.AT XIX; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978); N. Lohfink, *Kohelet* (NEB; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1980); J. L. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1988); J.-J. Lavoi, *La Pensée du Qohélet: Étude exétique et intertextuelle* (EtB 49; Quebec: Fides, 1992); T. A. Perry, *Dialogues with Kohelet: The Book of Ecclesiastes; Translation and Commentary* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993); A. A. Fischer, *Skepsis oder Furcht Gottes?: Studien zur Komposition und Theologie des Buches Kohelet* (BZAW 247; Berlin / New York: W. de Gruyter, 1997); J. G. Butler, *Joshua, the Conqueror of Canaan* (2nd print; Clinton, Iowa: LBC Pub., 1997); L. Schwienhorst-Schönberger (ed.), *Das Buch Kohelet: Studien zur Struktur, Geschichte, Rezeption und Theologie* (BZAW 254; Berlin / New York: W. de Gruyter, 1997); W. H. U. Anderson, *Qoheleth and Its Pessimistic Theology: Hermeneutical Struggles in Wisdom Literature* (MBPS 54; Lewiston / Lampeter: Mellen Biblical Press, 1997); C. L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 18C; New York, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1997).

1. *Passages Dealing with Divine Justice*

Retributive divine justice figures in various ways in certain conspicuous passages: 1:12–2:26; 3:16–22; 7:15–22; 8:2–9; 8:10–9:10; 11:9; 12:14.

1.1 *All Human Beings Are Faced by the Same Fate: Death (1:12–2:26)*

In this passage Qohelet presents himself as a king in Jerusalem, and as one who is eager "to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven" (cf. 1:12–13). He states his views on the meaning and purpose of human life in the first person singular. In summarizing (in 1:14) his teaching that there is no lasting happiness or reward for human beings, he uses his most characteristic word: *hebel,* 'breath, vapour, vanity.'[2] He says: "I have seen everything that is done under the sun; and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind." From 2:12 onwards he touches directly upon the question of justice within the world order, and considers the relative worth of wisdom and folly (2:13–17). Qohelet recognizes "that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness" (2:13), but painfully acknowledges "that one fate comes to all of them" (2:14); "...How the wise man dies just like the fool!" he exclaims (2:16). He finds another painful instance of injustice in the fact that "sometimes a man who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave all to be enjoyed by a man who did not toil for it" (2:21).

In the concluding verse (2:26), however, Qohelet declares that God deals differently with the righteous and the wicked: "For to the man who pleases him God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy; but to the sinner he gives the work of gathering and heaping, only to give to one who pleases God." Because this statement is reminiscent of the traditional retributive principle, some scholars conclude that it is a later gloss,[3] but others affirm that it is not concerned with the principle of retribution but simply with divine activity uninfluenced by humans. Thus they see no reason not to attribute the passage to Qohelet.[4]

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[2] A simple statistic demonstrates the centrality of this word for Qohelet. It occurs 73 times throughout the whole of the Hebrew Bible, and 38 of them are in the book of Ecclesiastes.

[3] See G. A. Barton, *The Book of Ecclesiastes,* 84; O. Eissfeldt, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (3rd ed.; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1964), 677; A. Lauha, *Kohelet,* 58. O. Eissfeldt suggests that 3:17; 7:18b, 26b; 8:5, 12b, 13a; 11:9b; and 12:7b are also later additions. A. Lauha, *Kohelet,* 7 ("Einleitung"), attributes to a later hand the following passages: 3:17a; 5:18; 7:26b; 8:12b, 13; and 11:9b. See also E. Podechard, *L'Ecclesiaste,* 160–162 ("Introduction") and his commentary on the verses mentioned. On p. 162 he says: "... Si les versets qui affirment l'existence de la rétribution sont de Qohéleth, son oeuvre échappe difficilement au reproche de contradiction et l'incohérence."

[4] See K. Galling, "Kohelet-Studien," *ZAW.*NF 9 (1932), 289; idem, *Prediger Salomo,* 57; H. W. Hertzberg, *Der Prediger,* 94.

1.2 *There Is an Appropriate Time for Judgment (3:16–22)*

Qohelet laments repeatedly that the same fate awaits all men, evil-doers and the good alike, and in 3:18–19 he asserts that animals and human beings share a common destiny: death. One would expect, therefore, that he would reach a like conclusion on the fate of the righteous and the wicked—that is, that death obliterates the differences between them. The affirmation in the preceding verse (17) is all the more striking: "I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for he has appointed a time for every matter, and for every work." Should we conclude that this verse may be a later gloss?[5]

If careful attention is paid to Qohelet's starting point and fundamental emphases, other interpretative possibilities emerge that make the hypothesis of a later addition unnecessary. The statement "for he has appointed a time for every matter, and for every work" (3:17b) is clearly indicative of Qohelet's understanding of the expression "a time." The preceding passage (3:1–15) plainly takes the view that every event on earth has its appropriate moment. We may conclude, therefore, that v. 17a is referring to the belief that there is a definite time for judgment of the righteous and the wicked. This belief, in the light of God's eternity, is much more important than any complaint of the similarity between human beings and animals, for it is based on a certainty that God's activity in the world is beyond human understanding.

Qohelet does not allow himself to speculate on the question of whether divine judgment, with appropriate retribution, takes place after death. But there is no doubt that he values, in principle, virtue, righteousness and wisdom higher than their opposites. Although he saw "under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness" (3:16), he can find some consolation in the fact that at least this, too, will end with death.[6] A modest consolation, but one that may suffice at the appropriate moment. The basic belief in God's eternity remains decisive, as does the certainty that success without wisdom and righteousness is but a chimera, and the end of the wicked must therefore in every case be different from the end of the righteous.

1.3 *Moderation in All Things (7:15–22)*

Two statements in this passage are of key significance: "... he who fears God shall come forth from them all" (7:18b); and "Surely there is not a righteous

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[5] See G. A. Barton, *The Book of Ecclesiastes,* 108: "The idea that the righteous are vindicated is entirely out of harmony with the context. This is a strong reason for regarding it as the work of a glossator." See also J. L. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes,* 102.

[6] See K. Galling, *Prediger Salomo,* 63–64; H. W. Hertzberg, *Der Prediger,* 110: "... Dabei scheint der Tod *selbst* der Zeitpunkt des Gerichtes zu sein."

man on earth who does good and never sins" (7:20). The two assertions are causally linked, and in view of them Qohelet's warning against excesses of all kinds seems highly apposite. Verses 7:15–18 read as follows: "In my vain life I have seen everything; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evildoing. Be not righteous overmuch, and do not make yourself overwise; why should you destroy yourself? Be not wicked overmuch, neither be a fool; why should you die before your time? It is good that you should take hold of this, and from that withhold not your hand; for he who fears God shall come forth from them all." This passage makes clear that there are several reasons for observing moderation in all things: the relative validity of the cherished principle of retribution,[7] the fact that righteousness and wisdom are unattainable ideals, and the destructive nature of wickedness.

The parallelism: "Be not righteous overmuch ..." // "Be not wicked overmuch ..." is an example of merism in its most usual form: using opposing extremes to signify the whole.[8] The writer uses the antithetical terms figuratively to emphasize in a general sense that all human excessive striving to achieve a particular goal is senseless. 7:18c supplies the theological background to the warning—the conviction that only "fear of God" can safeguard human beings from extremes, or rather from the vain toil that ruins him. This conclusion makes it evident that Qohelet's true theological perspective is fully compatible with the characteristic Hebrew view of the relationship between God and humankind. Qohelet is aware that the real reason for human vain strivings in many and various spheres is his lack of awareness of human limits and his failure to trust in divine righteousness and wisdom. Ignoring divine sovereignty, humans attempt to achieve righteousness and wisdom unaided and would take everything into their own hands. Qohelet's warning may be considered, therefore, as an original expression of the classical biblical criticism of the chief human sin: presumptuous arrogance.[9]

In this context, 7:15 serves as a preparation for the warning against exaggerated trust in human righteousness. God determines the course of events in accordance with his own wisdom and righteousness, so these events are usually beyond human understanding. On account of human limited comprehension, much that happens may appear to contradict the principle of retribution. Even though a competent observer will admit that such a contradic-

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[7] J. L. Crenshaw claims in *Ecclesiastes,* 140: "In any event, Qohelet does not believe the universe operates according to a principle of reward for virtue and punishment for wickedness. For this reason, he urges a moderate course that does not call God's attention to one." Such a statement is at least misleading: Qohelet certainly does not reject the principle of retribution as such, but merely accepts that it can not be applied over the whole gamut of human experience.

[8] See J. Krašovec, *Der Merismus im Biblisch-Hebräischen und Nordwestsemitischen* (BibOr 33; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1977).

[9] See especially the statements by H. W. Hertzberg, *Der Prediger,* 153–155.

tion is not an invariable occurrence, there is good reason for moderating human expectations. He should not demand watertight evidence that human striving for righteousness and wisdom is rewarded in every case, and that human wickedness is always punished.

1.4 *A Time and a Judgment for All Things (8:2–9)*

In this passage Qohelet examines the position of rulers and the attitude of subjects towards them. He emphasizes the absolute power of a monarch and recommends caution in his presence. The reason for such advice is not, however, pragmatic but theological in nature. Obedience to the king ultimately has its basis in the oath to God. Qohelet adjures: "Keep the king's command,[10] and because of your sacred oath be not dismayed; go from his presence, do not delay when the matter is unpleasant, for he does whatever he pleases. For the word of the king is supreme, and who may say to him, 'What are you doing?'" (8:2–4). In 8:5–6 he asserts: "He who obeys a command will meet no harm, and the mind of a wise man will know the time and way. For every matter has its time and way, although man's trouble lies heavy upon him."

There can be no certainty as to whether the command under consideration here is divine or royal, but the rule holds for both: the wise man will continue to obey his king. Qohelet's advice is based on the characteristic Hebrew belief that God is absolute lord of history: it is he who decides upon "the time and the way" for every event and for every ruler. Here humans can find consolation when sensing their helplessness before the disorder of the world. The inevitability of divine judgment is demonstrated in two directions: first, in the principle that everything has its own definite time, and consequently its own end; secondly, in guilt. Qohelet knows that guilt must be punished; judgment is a postulate of divine justice.[11]

In 8:7–8 Qohelet clarifies his viewpoint by pointing to utter human powerlessness over the future, over natural forces, over war and death. This may serve as a substantiation of why it is pointless for the subject to resist the despot, or as a corroboration of the awareness of judgment in 8:6. Verse 8 reads: "No man has power to retain the spirit, or authority over the day of death; there is no discharge from war, nor will wickedness deliver those who are given to it." By emphasizing that there is no deliverance for the sinner in this context, Qohelet makes it clear that divine judgment inevitably awaits a wicked ruler.

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[10] The Hebrew text begins with the problematic pronoun *'ănî*, which is usually omitted in translation.

[11] See H. W. Hertzberg, *Der Prediger*, 165–166.

1.5 *Divine Justice Cannot Be Judged on the Basis of Human Experience (8:10–9:10)*

In this passage Qohelet sets forth in extreme form the contradiction between the traditional belief in divine justice and terrestrial events. He begins: "Then I saw the wicked buried; they used to go in and out of the holy place, and were praised in the city where they had done such things. This also is vanity" (8:10). The wickedness of the world is a direct encouragement to the evil-doer—unless there are appropriate sanctions: "Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men is fully set to do evil" (8:11). This sounds like a reproach to God: why does he leave human wickedness unpunished, even allowing it to increase?

The answer is found by Qohelet himself in an insight that transcends human experience: "Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him; but it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God" (8:12–13). Most commentators think that 8:12b–13 cannot be attributed to Qohelet but were inserted later as an affirmation of traditional thinking. This only heightens the importance of more profound exegeses that take into account Qohelet's fundamental antithesis between, on the one hand, the belief in absolute divine righteousness and the human sinfulness that creates disorder in the world, and, on the other, the limitations of man's wisdom.[12]

The reflections of Qohelet bring him back to the recognized order of things on earth: "There is a vanity which takes place on earth, that there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity" (8:14). Humans cannot change this state of affairs, yet Qohelet here does not turn to God in appeal, or even in reproach. His standpoint is realistic: humans must accept the fact of their own limitations in the face of ultimate truth and be glad of what they are given (cf. 8:15).[13] The key to Qohelet's perception of God's dispensation of

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[12] See especially H. W. Hertzberg, *Der Prediger.* The observation of J. L. Crenshaw in *Ecclesiastes,* 156, is notably relevant to this issue: "Whether one views this optimism as Qohelet's inability to abandon dogma altogether or as the religious community's inability to do so, the presence of 8:12b–13 demonstrates the force of the belief that good people fare well and bad people suffer. The impact of the Joban attack on this belief is difficult to assess."

[13] See H. W. Hertzberg, *Der Prediger,* 175: "Übrigens sagt Qoh nicht einmal, daß die Lose überall ungerecht verteilt sind, sondern die Ausdrucksweise ist so, daß es doch immer nur gewisse Fälle seien, auf die das zutreffe. Freilich sind diese ernst genug, um ihm wieder einmal für die Richtigkeit seines Satzes von der Eitelkeit den Beweis zu liefern ... Er kritisiert nur die Welt, nicht Gott, dessen Gerechtigkeit feststehend bleibt, und zieht aus Gottes Undurchsichtigkeit auf der einen, den Unstimmigkeiten des Weltlaufs auf der anderen Seite lediglich seinen bekannten Schluß. Gerade diese Erkenntnis zeigt wieder, daß 12b. 13 in Qoh's Bewußtsein schon möglich sind."

reward and punishment is found in the following words: "Then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out; even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out" (8:17).

In 9:1–10 Qohelet continues the same line. First he asserts that the righteous and the wicked are in the hands of God, with all their work (9:1), but then emphasizes that all men suffer the same fate: "... one fate comes to all, to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As is the good man, so is the sinner; and he who swears is as he who shuns an oath" (9:2). The writer probably does not see the opposed words as having a predominantly moral significance, but as playing a role in the stylistic-rhetorical form of merism. The emphasis is upon mankind as a whole, and Qohelet uses the figure to emphasize that all, without exception and regardless of their religion or its absence, meet the same fate. By taking this line, he rejects all justification for humans relying upon their own merits.[14]

In 9:3 Qohelet once again declares that everything is the same in the end regardless of human conduct: "This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that one fate comes to all; also the hearts of men are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead." Nevertheless, Qohelet emphatically asserts that a live dog is preferable to a dead lion. The dog was an object of contempt in the Near East,[15] whereas the lion was a symbol of a prince or person of great worth[16]; nevertheless, a live dog remains preferable to a dead lion. In 9:5–6 is given the reason for this assertion: "For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward *(śākār);* but the memory of them is lost. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and they have no more for ever any share in all that is done under the sun."

1.6 *A Warning of Judgment to Come (11:9; 12:14)*

The last larger unit, 11:9–12:8, begins with an exhortation: "Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment *(bammišpāṭ).*" Commentators are divided on the origin of the warning given in the second half of 11:9. There are, however, no substantial reasons for attributing such

[14] See H. W. Hertzberg, *Der Prediger,* 177: "Ihm kommt nur darauf an zu zeigen, daß die *sittlichen und religiösen Qualitäten eines Menschen nichts an dem ihm bestimmten Schicksal ändern* — 'auf dass sich kein Fleisch rühme.'"

[15] Cf. 1 Sam 24:14; 2 Sam 3:8; 16:9; Matt 15:26; Rev 22:15.

[16] Cf. Gen 49:9; Isa 38:13; Hos 13:7; Job 10:16; Lam 3:10.

elements in the book to a glossator. Qohelet is not advocating irresponsible pleasure-seeking, and his warning is therefore very appropriate.[17]

Warning of judgment to come appears finally in the concluding words of the book of Ecclesiastes, and these are generally considered to be a later addition. In 12:13–14 we read: "The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment *(bĕmišpāṭ),* with every secret thing, whether good or evil."

2. *A Critical Assessment of the Passages Treated Above and Their Interpretation*

An assessment of the passages considered above and their interpretation cannot hope to reach valid conclusions unless it takes into full account the mutual and complementary relationship between them and with the book of Ecclesiastes as a whole. For Qohelet submits the impressions gathered from human experience to profound reflection and travels by widely differing routes to reach an identical and fundamental understanding of humankind and God.

2.1 *Divine Justice in the Light of the Book As a Whole*

Qohelet talks most frequently of humans in relation to what they are and what they do. He dismisses events related to humans and all human actions with the word *hebel,* 'breath, vanity,' and some synonyms. He sees in the fact of death incontestable proof for the conclusion that all is vanity, for death eradicates all the distinctions that exist in the human consciousness: between the beasts and humans, wise and foolish, rich and poor, the righteous and the wicked. Death demonstrates to him that ultimately none of them has any advantage over another. The insistency of Qohelet's harping on vanity necessarily gives the powerful impression that he is a classical exemplar of skepticism and pessimism, and commentators not infrequently describe the book in these terms.

Because of this, it is all the more appropriate that his entire ideological perspective and all its overtones should be taken into account. Some passages clearly show that Qohelet perceives everything in the world and all human activities in the light of divine eternity and transcendence. Because God is to him the sole incontestable fact, everything else pales almost to nothingness. Passages that directly express God's eternity and incomprehensibility are in fact points of departure from which Qohelet begins his assessment of human

[17] See H. W. Hertzberg, *Der Prediger,* 208–209.

affairs: 3:11, 14–15; 6:10; 7:23–24; 8:16–17; 11:5. In 3:11 he states: "He has made everything beautiful in its time; also he has put eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end." In 3:14–15 Qohelet emphasizes that divine eternity determines everything, and goes on: "God has made it so, in order that men should fear before him" (3:14). In 8:16–17 he says: "When I applied my mind to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on earth, how neither day nor night one's eyes see sleep; then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out; even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out." In 11:5 he offers an analogy: "As you do not know how the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything."

From God's eternity and the incomprehensibility of his acts the conclusion logically follows that all that happens in the world is determined by God and cannot be influenced by men. The most remarkable aspect of this determinism is "time." Qohelet declares that everything has its own moment, which humans cannot know (3:1–15). Man feels infinitesimal before an infinite God and helpless before the scale of events, so that in the light of the death that seals his earthly fate his state appears tragic. A sense of his personal tragedy can easily lead him into resistance to the infinite being who decides his fate. He can easily come to see God as an inexorable despot.[18]

It is precisely this danger that is a decisive test of human relationship to God, since all resistance to God signifies, at the least, doubt about divine righteousness. He who resists presents himself as a victim labouring under the oppression of a greater force than his own—which is, of course, the philosophy and practice of self-confident contemporary nihilism. Qohelet is not of this persuasion. He never accuses God, but merely states the realities that humans must take into account when defining their place and the role of their activities in the world. To Qohelet, God is the only indisputable and inviolable fact.[19] The end-product of Qohelet's emphasis upon the infinite abyss that separates God and humankind is determinism with a tincture of predestination, although his determinism is not absolute: free will and responsibility for one's actions are not denied. Qohelet recognizes the difference between good and evil, wisdom and foolishness, righteousness and wickedness. The clearest proof of this is his incontestable consciousness that there is a time of judgment for every deed that humans do.[20]

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[18] A. Lauha, *Kohelet,* describes Qohelet's experience of God in this sense.

[19] This is emphasized in places by H. W. Hertzberg, *Der Prediger;* see esp. pp. 222–238: "Zur Theologie des Buches Qohelet."

[20] See H. W. Hertzberg, *Der Prediger,* 226: "Es gibt nur einen Punkt, an dem dieser Gott aus seiner deistisch-prädestinatianischen Reserve heraustritt. Das ist der Gerichtsgedanke. Qoh hat den alten Gedanken, daß Gott richtet, als etwas Undiskutierbares übernommen."

In view of all this, the assertions by certain commentators that the book of Qohelet must be understood as a protest against traditional belief in divine righteousness are unfounded. The truth is the opposite: Qohelet emphasizes in his own way and to an absolute degree that only God is righteous. When he notes the vanity that is in all things, he does not blame God for it. On the one hand he sees in this a basis for his thesis that all divine activity in the world is incomprehensible, and on the other he recognizes that the disorder of the world is the result of human guilt. The word *hebel* designates human ethical nothingness even more than it denotes the limitations of his nature. His efforts to attain wisdom are vain inasmuch as they are merely human. Because of its theological bases, the conclusion, repeated several times (2:24; 3:12–13, 22; 5:17–19; 8:15; 9:7–9), that the *summum bonum* for humans is to find enjoyment in labour, does not carry negative, hedonistic overtones.

Plainly, commentators exaggerate when they find in Qohelet an extreme pessimist. It would be more accurate to depict him as a realist. In what other culture and religion do theological presuppositions permit—and demand—so much realism as in the Hebrew tradition?

2.2 *Qohelet in the Light of the Hebrew Bible*

A critical comparison of the book of Ecclesiastes with other books of the Hebrew Bible supports the view that Qohelet is indeed a realist rather than a pessimist. Before pursuing this comparison, we must call to mind the principle of partiality, or one-sidedness, of individual biblical passages. Particular conclusions and promises are stated from particular viewpoints, and all therefore must be complemented, while the language used is literary, often poetical. Hence it is even more true to say that no text is an unambiguous expression of complete and absolute truth. This fact is due to the limited human capacity for comprehension and expression, and also to historical circumstances. Indeed, all individual passages are open to supplementation, on account of their inadequacy of expression, partiality and bias. All of them complement each other inasmuch as they start from the same fundamental theological postulates. As is the case everywhere else, if we are to understand the book of Ecclesiastes, we must proceed according to the principle of complementariness. Taking into account Qohelet's theological starting point and the viewpoint from which he assesses events in the world, we find that his individual conclusions with regard to both humankind and God are true and valid.

Basic theological presuppositions imply that an infinite distance exists between God and humankind. Thus Qohelet is completely correct when, in the light of divine eternity, he recognizes the futility and vanity of all human private strivings after wisdom and righteousness. The other books of the Hebrew Bible ultimately express the same thing in different literary catego-

ries. The locus classicus is the book of Job. Chapter 28, for example, asserts in the language of lyric poetry that wisdom is unattainable by any created being. In 28:23 it states: "God understands the way to it, and he knows its place," and the chapter ends: "... Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding" (28:28). Qohelet, too, knows that the highest rule for humankind is that of "fear of the Lord" (cf. 3:14; 7:18; 8:12–13). In 3:14 we read: "I know that whatever God does endures for ever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has made it so, in order that men should fear before him." Indeed, Qohelet, too, knows that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (cf. Prov 1:7).

Some commentators emphasize the essential difference between Job and Qohelet, but this is acceptable only to those who miss the whole point of the book of Job. Do not all the dialogues between Job and his friends show the limitations of the human quest for wisdom, and that to seek the solution to the problem of suffering in the world is vain? Only then does the divine wisdom speak out, demonstrating that humans can comprehend nothing–not even the primal phenomena of the earth and the heavens (cf. chaps. 38:1–42:6). Consequently, humans ought not to attempt to litigate with God but should fall silent before him. Job acknowledges this and confesses his "fear of the Lord": "Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer thee? I lay my hand on my mouth" (40:4); "'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore have I uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. 'Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me.' I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees thee; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (42:3–6). If the main theme of the book of Ecclesiastes is "resignation," as many think, where is such resignation before the presumably incomprehensible, eternal divine righteousness expressed more vividly than here? After all, Job is repenting "in dust and ashes," at the brink of death. And yet commentators admit that the sole incontestable truth is infinite, divine wisdom and righteousness, so that humans must fall silent before it in the fear of the Lord. Only here lies the basis for a trusting relationship with God in faith, hope, and love. In the face of divine righteousness, humans possesses no merits that they might use as a basis for complaint against God. They have no right to tell God how to execute judgment over the righteous and the wicked. They must abandon their own worthless wisdom, to accept everything from God as a gift, and to honour him.

CHAPTER XXVII

CONFESSION OF GUILT THE SOURCE OF HOPE IN LAMENTATIONS

Complaint, continuous and unrelieved, is the salient characteristic of the book of Lamentations. Its author portrays, in the darkest possible terms, the ruin of Jerusalem and the agony of her people at home and in exile. The anguish becomes unbearable as he recalls the city's former power and glory, and the subsequent triumph of the enemies who have destroyed her, trampling her inhabitants into the dust of despair.[1]

The poet shows deep compassion for a suffering people, but his feelings do not provoke him either to sentimental optimism or to despair. He is clearly both a theologian, at home with intellectual synthesis, and a prophet of exceptional courage, and he identifies the cause of the disaster clearly and unflinchingly: everything that has happened is the consequence of Israel's guilt, both past and present; Israel has abandoned her God. The language of Lamentations bears this out: God's wrath is mentioned as frequently and as forcefully as the misery of the people.[2]

The author insists, even when dealing with extreme suffering, that the source of Israel's present misfortune is, simply and solely, personal guilt; and he is therefore an apologist for God's righteousness and justice. Inevitably, in their desolation the people have begun to ask what has happened to their God, to doubt his almightiness, faithfulness, and mercy, to question even the traditional belief in their election. But the poet does not share their despair and speaks of the urgent need for reform. This alone, he declares, offers abatement of distress, for God is in essence benevolent and merciful, and his punishments endure for only a limited time.[3]

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[1] Cf. 1:5a, 9c; 2:16, 17; 3:46, 58–63; 4:21.

[2] See words and expressions denoting anger in various forms: *bā(bĕ)'ap* (3:43, 66); *bĕ'appô* (2:1a); *bĕza'am-'appô* (2:6c); *bĕyôm 'ap-yhwh* (2:22b); *bĕyôm 'appĕkā* (2:21c); *bĕyôm 'appô* (2:1c); *(bĕyôm) ḥărôn 'appô* (1:12c; 4:11a); *bāḥorî-'ap* (2:3a); *(kā'ĕš) ḥămātô* (2:4c; 4:11a); *bĕ'ebrātô* (2:2b); *bĕšebeṭ 'ebrātô* (3:1a).

[3] Amongst commentators and other studies on Lamentations, see especially J. Meek and W. P. Merrill, *The Book of Lamentations* (IB 6; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1956), 1–38; A. Weiser, *Klagelieder* (ATD 16; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962); W. Rudolph, *Klagelieder* (KAT XVII/1–3; Gütersloh: G. Mohn, 1962), 187–263; H.-J. Kraus, *Klagelieder (Threni)* (BK.AT XX; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1968); O. Plöger, *Die Fünf Megilloth: Die Klagelieder* (HAT 18; 2nd ed.; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1969), 127–164; D. R. Hillers, *Lamentations* (AB 7A; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972); I. G. P. Gous, "A Survey of Research on the Book of Lamentations," *OTE*.NS 5 (1992), 184–205; J.-M. Droin, *Le livre des lamentations: "comment"?: Une traduction et un commentaire* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1995); L. Moraldi and G. Ravasi, *Il Libro di Geremia: Le lamentazioni* (Milan:

1. *Guilt and Punishment*

After introductory descriptions of Jerusalem's destruction and the misery of exile (1:1–4), the poet touches upon the rawest nerve of the nation's pain, the malicious triumph of her adversaries. Here he reveals profound prophetic vision when he sees, beyond the present horrors, the fate of guilty Israel. In 1:5 he says:

> Her foes have become the head,
> her enemies prosper,
> because the Lord has made her suffer
> for the multitude of her transgressions *('al rōb-pĕšā'êhā);*
> her children have gone away,
> captives before the foe.

He uses the word *peša'*, in essence meaning rebellion, to describe Israel's sin. Thus her guilt is extremely heavy,[4] and the Lord responds with punishment, thereby asserting his authority and sovereignty.

The poet goes on to speak of a causal link between guilt and misfortune in vv. 8a, 14a and 18a. Verse 8a runs:

> Jerusalem sinned grievously *(ḥēṭ' ḥāṭĕ'āh),*[5]
> therefore she became filthy ...

and v. 14a:

> My transgressions were bound into a yoke *(niśqad 'ōl pĕšā'ay);*[6]
> by his hand they were fastened together ...

In v. 18a there is a unique declaration of God's righteousness:

> The Lord is in the right *(ṣaddîq hû' yhwh)*
> for I have rebelled against his word *(kî pîhû mārîtî)* ...

What does a declaration of God's righteousness signify in this context? It is found elsewhere, in various contexts and forms: Exod 9:27; Deut 32:4; Jer 12:1; Pss 11:7; 116:5; 119:137; 129:4; 145:17; Dan 9:14; Ezra 9:15; Neh

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Biblioteca universale Rizzoli, 1996); J. Hunter, *Faces of a Lamenting City: The Development and Coherence of the Book of Lamentations* (BEATAJ 39; Frankfort on the Main et al.: Lang, 1996); I. G. P. Gous, "Mind over Matter: Lamentations 4 in the Light of the Cognitive Sciences," *SJOT* 10 (1996), 69–87.

[4] See L. Köhler, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (NTG; 3rd ed.; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1953), 159–160; English translation, *Old Testament Theology* (London: Lutterworth, 1957), 170: "... Sin is revolt of the human will against the divine will."

[5] *Ḥēṭ'* may be classed as the *internal* or *absolute object,* also named *schema etymologicum* or *figura etymologica;* consequently, the vocalisation need not be altered to *ḥāṭō'* in the sense of *infinitivus absolutus.* See W. Gesenius, E. Kautzsch, and G. Bergsträsser, *Hebräische Grammatik* (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1962), § 117p; English edition, E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), § 117p.

[6] The translation is uncertain, because the verb *śāqad* is a hapax legomenon; the Greek and Latin translations suppose the verb *šāqad,* seeing in *'ōl* the preposition *'al.*

9:8, 33; 2 Chr 12:6. Three of these instances are very similar to Lam 1:18a. In Exod 9:27, Pharaoh states, in the presence of Moses and Aaron, and after the plague of hail: "I have sinned this time; the Lord is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong *(yhwh haṣṣaddîq wa'ănî wĕ'ammî hārĕšā'îm).*" In Ezra 9:15, Ezra declares: "O Lord the God of Israel, thou art just *(ṣaddîq 'attāh),* for we are left a remnant that has escaped, as at this day. Behold, we are before thee in our guilt *(bĕ'ašmātênû),* for none can stand before thee because of this." And in Neh 9:33, the people state: "Yet thou hast been just *(wĕ'attāh ṣaddîq)* in all that has come upon us, for thou hast dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly *(wa'ănahnû hiršā'nû).*"

These examples demonstrate how decisive is the emphasis on the contrast between the righteousness of God and the guilt of the people for an understanding of such affirmations of God's uprightness. When God is, as it were, on trial as a result of some earthly disaster, the vindication of his holiness depends on recognizing the guilt of man. It is a cardinal point of the theological compass that the Ruler of the world always does right, so that even the tragedy of Jerusalem cannot seriously bring into question the correctness of his actions. But such questioning leads to a new awareness of personal indebtedness to God, and the suffering people gradually come to terms with the fact that they are being punished if rightly, terribly. Accepting God's justice by recognizing their own guilt is seen by the poet as essential to the change of heart needed for deliverance.

The poet emphasizes not only the people's guilt; in 2:14 and 4:13 he lays heavy stress on that of the prophets and priests. In 2:14 he says:

> Your prophets have seen for you
> false and deceptive visions;
> they have not exposed your iniquity *(lō' gillû 'al-'ăwônēk)*
> to restore your fortunes *(lĕhāšîb šĕbûtēk),*[7]
> but have seen for you oracles
> false and misleading.

While the guilt of the people is a persistent phenomenon, the primary task of the prophets is to publish it abroad and call for reform. It is natural, however, for the people to reject such prophets, preferring others who will accede to their wishes.[8] Thus a true prophet had to be a man of exceptional

[7] The Masoretic form *šbytk* is usually read as *šĕbûtēk.* With regard to the meaning of the syntagma *lēhāšîb šĕbûtēk* opinions are divided; even more so because ancient translations adopted various solutions. It seems most probable that the syntagma means "to alter fate (for the better)." See especially E. L. Dietrich, *šwb šbwt: Die endzeitliche Wiederherstellung bei den Propheten* (BZAW 40; Gießen: A. Töpelmann, 1925).

[8] False prophets are mentioned in many places in the Hebrew Bible: Jer 14:13–16; 23:9–40; 27–28; 29:8–9; Ezek 13; 21:34; 22:28; Mic 3:5–7. The terminology is largely the same as in Lam 2:14. See G. von Rad, "Die falschen Propheten," *ZAW* 10 (1933), 109–120; G. Quell, *Wahre und falsche Propheten* (BFChTh 46/1; Gütersloh: C. Gertelsmann, 1952).

understanding and power, someone who could state with Mic 3:8:

> But as for me *(wĕ'ûlām 'ānōkî)*, I am filled with power,
> with the Spirit of the Lord,
> and with justice and might,
> to declare to Jacob his transgression *(pišĕ'ô)*
> and to Israel his sin *(ḥaṭṭā'tô)*.

In 4:13 the author of Lamentations attributes Israel's current misfortunes directly to the guilt of the prophets and priests:

> This was[9] for the sins of her prophets
> and the iniquities of her priests,
> who shed in the midst of her
> the blood of the righteous.

It is impossible, on the evidence of this single verse, to reach a firm conclusion about the circumstances in which the prophets and priests shed innocent blood, or the methods they used. We may perhaps assume that the phrase refers in general terms to the perversion of justice. However that may be, only sins of exceptional gravity could explain why so unexampled a fate overtook Jerusalem.[10]

Accusing the prophets and priests could be construed as an excuse for the people as a whole, but the poet does not permit this. In the unit 3:42–47 the community admits its own apostasy. And it is at this point that he invokes the terminology of forgiveness:

> We have transgressed and rebelled,
> and thou hast not forgiven *('attāh lō' sālāḥtā)*.
> Thou hast wrapped thyself with anger and pursued us,
> slaying without pity *(hāragtā lō' ḥāmāltā)*;[11]
> thou hast wrapped thyself with a cloud
> so that no prayer can pass through.
> Thou hast made us offscouring and refuse
> among the peoples.
> All our enemies
> rail against us;
> panic and pitfall have come upon us,
> devastation and destruction.

So the community concludes that God has not yet forgiven Israel,[12] but the

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[9] Verse 13 is not linguistically linked with the preceding v. 12. It forms an independent unit. But everything indicates that "This was" must be presumed for thematic reasons of context.

[10] See declarations about criminal prophets and priests in Jer 6:13; 8:10; 23:11–14; Ezek 22:25–31; Hos 5:1–2; 6:7–11.

[11] Cf. 2:21c: *ṭābaḥtā lō' ḥāmaltā*.

[12] It seems that the verb *sālaḥ* means not only the forgiveness of sin, but also the removal of the trouble that is the sign of punishment for sin. See J. J. Stamm, *Erlösen und Vergeben im Alten Testament: Eine begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Bern: A. Francke, 1940), 53–58.

very admission of personal guilt becomes a turning-point: there is hope in the future.[13]

In 4:6 a comparison between the fates of Jerusalem and Sodom allows the poet to demonstrate anew the strict causal link between misfortune and guilt. It seems to him that Sodom's pains were less grievous than Jerusalem's; the former perished abruptly, while the latter's agony has proved long-drawn-out. He concludes that Jerusalem's guilt must be the greater:

> For the chastisement *('āwôn)* of the daughter of my people has been greater
> than the punishment of Sodom *(mēḥaṭṭa't sĕdōm),*
> which was overthrown in a moment,
> no hand being laid on it.

The same comparison is drawn in Isa 1:7–10; Jer 23:14; Ezek 16:48, the last of them (like the author of Lamentations) stating that Jerusalem's guilt was the greater: "As I live, says the Lord God, your sister Sodom and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done."[14]

Although the concluding fifth chapter is not constructed on the acrostic principle observed in the previous four, it also has 22 verses. The tragedy of Jerusalem looms large, but the introduction (5:1) and conclusion (5:19–22) make it clear that the voice is that of the community. In v. 2 the people, using the first person plural, turn directly to the Lord. When they complain of the gravity of their present misfortunes (5:2–17), guilt from the past troubles their conscience. Verse 7 reads:

> Our fathers sinned *(ḥāṭĕ'û),* and are no more;
> and we bear their iniquities *('ăwônōtêhem).*

The preceding verse shows clearly that the misdeeds of the fathers are relevant here: pact-making with Egypt and Assyria for commercial reasons.

This complaint of the sins of the fathers echoes Exod 20:5; Jer 31:29; Ezek 18:2. But the principle of collective retribution is not understood in an absolute sense. In 5:16 the people lament their own guilt:

> The crown has fallen from our head;[15]
> woe to us, for we have sinned *(ḥāṭā'nû)!*

Verses 7 and 16 taken together are the equivalent of Jer 3:25: "Let us lie down in our shame, and let our dishonour cover us; for we have sinned *(ḥāṭā'nû)* against the Lord our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even to this day; and we have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God."

Israel's admission of personal iniquity implies the absolute exoneration of God; even her enemies are seen as tools in his hands. If misfortune is the

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[13] See section 2.
[14] Cf. Jer 2:10–11.
[15] Cf. 2:1–2; 4:1–2; Jer 13:18.

result of guilt, it is logical to conclude that God himself called down the nation's adversaries upon his own people (1:17b; cf. Isa 36:10).

It is characteristic of the victor not to consider God's law, however, but rather to seek to enforce his own will (cf. Isa 10:5–15). He is quickly joined by others eager to profit from the misfortunes of the vanquished (cf. 1:5a, 7c, 9c, 21b; 2:15a, 16, 17c; 3:60–61; 4:21). Their malicious gloating is a source of the greatest pain to the author of Lamentations, and it is therefore understandable that this gloating should provoke what may be retributive desires in him. He feels it imperative that Israel's sufferings should eventually overtake her—and his—enemies.

The poet expresses these feelings in three passages. In 1:21b–22 we read:

> All my enemies have heard of my trouble;
> they are glad that thou hast done it.
> Bring thou the day thou hast announced,
> and let them be as I am.
> Let all their evil doing come before thee;
> and deal with them *(wĕ'ôlēl lāmô)*
> as thou hast dealt with me *(ka'ăšer 'ôlaltā lî)*
> because of all my transgressions;
> for my groans are many
> and my heart is faint.

Again, at the end of the third song the poet speaks of the vengefulness and derision of Israel's enemies, concluding in 3:64–66:

> Thou wilt requite them *(tāšîb lāhem gĕmûl)*, O Lord,
> according to the work of their hands *(kĕma'ăśeh yĕdêhem)*.
> Thou wilt give them dullness of heart *(mĕginnat-lēb)*;
> thy curse *(ta'ălātĕkā)* will be on them.
> Thou wilt pursue them in anger and destroy them
> from under thy heavens, O Lord.

Finally, at the end of the fourth song, he turns in 4:21–22 to Israel's traditional enemy Edom:[16]

> Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom,
> dweller in the land of Uz;
> but to you also the cup shall pass;
> you shall become drunk and strip yourself bare.
> The punishment of your iniquity, O daughter of Zion,
> is accomplished *(tam-'ăwônēk bat-ṣiyyôn)*,
> he will keep you in exile no longer;
> but your iniquity, O daughter of Edom, he will punish
> *(pāqad 'ăwônēk bat-'ĕdôm)*,
> he will uncover your sins *(gillāh 'al-ḥaṭṭō'tāyik)*.

This last passage is certainly the most powerful of the three, and the antithe-

[16] Cf. Ezek 25:12–14; Obad 1–15; Ps 137:7.

sis in 4:22 is impressive. The depth of the poet's anguish certainly suggests that, in Israel's case, the price of guilt will sooner or later be paid, and that the people will once again taste the fruits of God's benevolence. Their enemies' arrogance, however, cries out for judgment. Everything indicates that the antithesis 4:22a//22b has a profound theological basis. It is, indeed, nothing less than an expression of faith in God's guidance of the world. The Lord of the Universe cannot permit human arrogance to prevail; this follows from the same law of his own holiness and absoluteness under which God has judged the sins of Israel. The announcement of just punishment for her adversaries is not only an affirmation of the principle of retribution, but probably more importantly, reaffirms traditional belief in the election of Zion, in the light of which it is urgent that the Lord should set a seal upon his plan of deliverance by humiliating the enemy.

2. *The Supremacy of God's Mercy*

The unrelieved portrayal of suffering, and the revelation of Israel's guilt, are interrupted in the middle of Lamentations by an acknowledgment of God's benevolence and mercifulness. Here it becomes evident that the author of the book is deeply rooted in a Yahwistic tradition. He is aware that, ultimately, the Lord is not a God of wrath but of mercy. In 3:22–33 we read:

> The steadfast love of the Lord *(ḥasdê yhwh)* never ceases,
> his mercies *(raḥămâw)* never come to an end;
> they are new every morning;
> great is thy faithfulness *('ĕmûnātekā),*
> "The Lord is my portion *(ḥelqî yhwh),*" says my soul,
> "therefore I will hope in him *('al-kēn 'ôḥîl lô).*"
> The Lord is good *(ṭôb)* to those who wait for him,
> to the soul that seeks him.
> It is good that one should wait quietly
> for the salvation of the Lord.
> It is good for a man that he bear
> the yoke in his youth.
> Let him sit alone in silence
> when he has laid it on him;
> let him put his mouth in the dust—
> there may yet be hope *('ûlay yēš tiqwāh);*
> let him give his cheek to the smiter,
> and be filled with insults.
> For the Lord will not
> cast off for ever,
> but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion
> according to the abundance of his steadfast love;
> for he does not willingly afflict
> or grieve the sons of men.

The poet's vision is not confined to his own immediate situation. He lifts his gaze to the infinite horizons of God's rule. He is aware not only that he must probe the suffering that presses him to the ground and drives many to despair, but that he must look beyond his own circle into the infinite vistas of God's perspectives. Even as the darkness is at its most extreme, as the situation eclipses all hope, the brightness of God's light bursts upon him (3:18–21), inspiring a magnificent vision of the divine benevolence and mercy. Where he had concluded that consolation and hope were dead (3:18), there is now a realization that God's benevolence, mercy and faithfulness endure for ever (3:22–23).[17]

This reflects the fundamental theological presupposition of Hebrew belief: the Lord is the absolute ruler of the universe and yet wills that he be the God of Israel. The poet's declaration is decisive: "The Lord is my portion" (3:24).[18] As the Lord becomes his God, and enters into a truly personal relationship with him, the crisis is overcome. His profoundly pessimistic cry *'ābad nišḥî wĕtôḥaltî mēyhwh,* "Gone is my glory, and my expectation from the Lord" (3:18) gives way to tranquillity: ... *'al-kēn 'ôḥîl lô,* "... therefore I will hope in him" (3:24). The poet recommends patient waiting for salvation and silent acceptance of suffering (3:25–30). He has rejected all the pessimism that increasingly threatened his sorely tried people and himself.

The call to bear suffering patiently has of course nothing to do with resignation, but rests upon the unshakable theological assumption of God's benevolence and mercy, from which it follows that a person of true faith must retain his strength and hope even when God allows an enemy to strike him down. Despite this, the poet does not speak of hope untrammelled by qualification. In 3:29b he says *'ûlay yēš tiqwāh,* "there may yet be hope." The particle *'ûlay* is not an expression of deficient faith, as if there were some doubt whether hope is legitimate, but a recognition of God's absolute freedom and human guilt. In principle, God's activity on mankind's behalf is always good, although in practice it sometimes clashes with human ideas and wishes. But the author of Lamentations cannot ignore Israel's guilt as he reflects on her present suffering and the possibility of the advent of salvation. Salvation is an unalloyed gift that he and he alone can dispense, and human beings must wait quietly and patiently before the holy God. This quiet waiting is a sign of readiness to atone for personal misdeeds, which are, in turn, the obstacle that prevents the coming of salvation.[19]

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[17] See the meaning of the word *ḥesed* especially in Gen 32:11; Isa 63:7; Pss 17:7; 89:2, 15, 34; 107:43, *raḥămîm* in Isa 63:7; Zech 1:16; Ps 79:8, *'ĕmûnāh* in Isa 25:1; Hos 2:22; Pss 89:34; 142:6. As a whole the excerpt is strongly reminiscent of Mic 7:18–20.

[18] Cf. Num 18:20; Pss 16:5; 73:26; 119:57; 142:6.

[19] Other places in the Hebrew Bible where the particle *'ûlay* or a similar expression appears demonstrate that human guilt is the background to these particles. In Exod 32:30 we read: "On the morrow Moses said to the people, 'You have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up

In keeping with the spirit of the entire book of Lamentations, the passages we examined here demonstrate that their author sees the current tragedy of Israel as strictly causally linked with her guilt. Yet the theological assumption of the supremacy of God's benevolence and mercy implies that strictly speaking human guilt is not fatal and final; God's wrath does not last for ever but is subject to the laws of his benevolence and mercy (3:31–33).[20]

None of this, of course, is unconditional; God's punishment is a call to reform. The complaint of the people, prominent in 3:34–36, leads the poet to emphasize this very point strongly (3:37–41). They complain that the veritable crushing of God's chosen people has occurred before the face of the Most High. "Does the Lord not see this?" (3:36b). The writer defends the righteousness of God by emphasizing that he is almighty, and that the people are guilty. Yes, God sees everything, and everything happens according to his will: "Who has commanded and it came to pass, unless the Lord has ordained it?" (3:37);[21] "Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and evil come?" (3:38). "Good" // "evil" is an example of merism, a polarized expression denoting "everything."[22] Everything comes from God, and the present situation cannot be an exception. Yet the covenanted people have no right to complain against the Almighty; rather should misfortune warn them to look inwards and to return to their God. The poet places himself in the ranks of his sinful people and, in the first person plural, invites them (3:40–41) to turn and be reformed:

> Let us test and examine our ways,
> and return to the Lord *(wĕnāšûbāh 'ad-yhwh)!*
> Let us lift up our hearts and hands
> to God in heaven.

Communal penitence signifies a true recognition of God and an extreme realism with regard to relationship of humankind with him. God is merciful, but is never prepared to compromise. In response to his own faithfulness, he expects undivided loyalty from people, subjugating them until they turn to

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to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.'" Amos 5:15 says: "Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph." Similarly Zeph 2:3: "Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do his commands; seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the wrath of the Lord." See also Joel 2:14: "... Who knows whether he will not turn and repent *(mî yôdēa' yāšûb wĕnīḥām),* and leave a blessing behind him ..."; Jonah 3:9: "... Who knows, God may yet repent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we perish not?"

[20] With v. 32 cf. Isa 54:7–8 and Hos 6:1.

[21] Cf. Ps 33:9.

[22] A similar example of merism occurs in Isa 45:7 with the pair *'ôr // ḥōšek* and *šālôm // rā':*

> I form light and create darkness,
> I make weal and create woe,
> I am the Lord, who do all these things.

him, discarding all reservations.[23]

The theme of reform makes its final appearance in the concluding section of the prayer in the fifth song (5:19–22):

> But thou, O Lord, dost reign for ever;
> thy throne endures to all generations.
> Why dost thou forget us for ever,
> why dost thou so long forsake us?
> Restore us to thyself, O Lord, that we may
> be restored *(hăšîbēnû yhwh 'ēlêkā wĕnāšûbā)!*
> Renew our days as of old!
> Or hast thou utterly rejected us?
> Art thou exceedingly angry with us?

This prayer articulates the desolation of the moment and a consciousness that deliverance lies only with God, the universal Lord of history. His penitent people are aware that the weightiness of God's wrath has rightly afflicted them, yet a consciousness of their election and of the supremacy of God's benevolence and mercy provides a basis for hope that he has not rejected them for ever. This hope is, of course, inseparably linked to a desire for reform. In fact, the people have matured to a point where they see not only deliverance, but also conversion, the prerequisite for salvation, as lying beyond their personal capabilities. They are aware that even reform is essentially God's work and that it must be pleaded for.[24] They are at last prepared to accept the fruits of this work, and impatiently ask their God why his anger does not cease (5:20–22), so bringing that mitigation for which their hearts and minds cry out.

[23] Similarly Jer 3:19–4:4 contains the Lord's urgent call to conversion so that the people may avoid misfortune. Cf. also Amos 6:1 and Joel 2:13.

[24] This recognition is a great step ahead from the attitude of the people reflected in the expectation of Malachi in 3:7: "From the days of your fathers you have turned aside *(sartem)* from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you *(šûbû 'ēlay wĕ'āšûbāh 'ălêkem),* says the Lord of hosts. But you say, 'How shall we return *(bammeh nāšûb)?'"*

PART FIVE

THE CONCEPT OF PUNISHMENT IN ANCIENT GREECE

An analysis of individual books and passages from the Hebrew Bible illuminates many important aspects of the relationship between obedience and rewards; disobedience and punishment; and repentance/atonement and forgiveness. These themes are central to all cultures and religions, since they concern the whole of humanity. The insights derived from the Hebrew Bible, therefore, have to be assessed within a larger inter-cultural context. Two main questions arise: how far does the Hebrew world-view correspond to the underlying principles and beliefs in other ancient cultures? And what are the origins of the characteristics of Hebrew beliefs and practices?

Any attempt to make a comparative study within such a vast panorama must recognize limitations. Firstly, any selection of material from such great and ancient cultures as Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Greek, Indian, and Chinese must be fragmentary. For these and other reasons, it seems advisable to limit our investigation to Greek poetry, drama, history, oratory, science, and philosophy. But any inquiry in this field, also involves references to other ancient cultures. Secondly, some restrictions must be accepted in the scope of the study. It is obvious that we can deal only with "ontological" and moral aspects of punishment and forgiveness; the issue of reward in such a framework requires no explicit treatment. Two questions are central: Who or what constitutes the source of the law and the authority for punishment and forgiveness in individual cultures and religions? And how can punishment and forgiveness be justified?

CHAPTER XXVIII

PUNISHMENT IN THE LIGHT OF THE COSMIC AND SOCIAL ORDERS

An overview of beliefs and practices related to guilt and punishment in the Hebrew Bible discloses much variety of thought and feeling among the Hebrews. Some passages reflect a cosmological background, while many others bespeak personalist beliefs. How far do these extremes and the intermediate positions that lie between them harmonize with the views of other ancient religions and cultures? And how far can they be reconciled with one's natural feelings, and with the reasoning of the human intellect?

In order to answer these questions we must first examine the basic ideological presuppositions of various ancient religions and cultures—notably those of the Greeks. The most important point to determine in each case is the source of justice and authority for punishment in each case. Against this background the question of the justification of punishment on the one hand, and that of forgiveness on the other, can be seen in better focus. In the existing literature punishment is very often treated as a mere aspect of the notion of "justice." It is important, therefore, to recognize that justice is in fact a much broader concept than are those of punishment, retribution, and poetic justice.

1. *The Concepts of a Just Cosmic Order and a Well-ordered Society in the Ancient Near and Far East*

The religions and cultures of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece, India, and China are based on conceptions of the order of the universe, and of the order of society that mirrors it. Such assumptions are conceptually expressed by words that are usually translated as "justice" or its related terms: truth, order, regularity, right, right-dealing, rightfulness, righteousness, law, duty. In Egyptian we have *ma'at,*[1] in Akkadian *kittu(m),*[2] in Greek *díke* and

[1] See especially J. A. Wilson, *The Burden of Egypt: An Interpretation of Ancient Egyptian Culture* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1951), esp. pp. 48–49, 93, 119–123, 143–144; R. Anthes, *Maat des Echnaton von Amarna* (JAOS.S 14; Baltimore, Md.: American Oriental Society, 1952); J. A. Wilson, "Authority and Law in Ancient Egypt," *Authority and Law in the Ancient Orient* (JAOS.S 17; Baltimore, Md.: American Oriental Society, 1954), 1–7; J. Assmann, *Ma'at: Gerechtigkeit und Unsterblichkeit im Alten Ägypten* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1990); K. Koch, "Ṣädeq und Ma'at: Konnektive Gerechtigkeit in Israel und Ägypten?," *Gerechtigkeit: Richten und Retten in der abendländischen Tradition und ihren altorientalischen Ursprüngen* (ed. J. Assmann, B. Janowski, and M. Welker; Munich: W. Fink, 1998), 37–64.

nómos,[3] in Sanscrit *dharma,* and in Chinese *li.*[4] It is obvious that there can be no complete overlapping or exact correspondence among these concepts; indeed, such agreement as exists tends to be vague. But they have certain common features: all are based on some concept of order, all refer to supernatural spheres, and none recognize any separation between cosmic and social norms.[5]

There are, however, disparities in their views of the role of divine agencies in an all-embracing order, and of the relation of this order to human society. The idea of an all-embracing cosmic order seems to be most clearly evident in the rather similar concepts of *ma'at* and *dharma,* which signify the sum of cosmic and immutable truths, the cosmic force of harmony or the regularity of the universe; they denote an impersonal principle, an objective

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[2] See especially E. A. Speiser, "Authority and Law in Mesopotamia," *Authority and Law in the Ancient Orient* (JAOS.S 17; Baltimore, Md.: American Oriental Society, 1954), 8–15; idem, "Cuneiform Law and the History of Civilization," *PAPhS* 107 (1963), 537; S. M. Paul, *Studies in the Book of the Covenant in the Light of Cuneiform and Biblical Law* (VT.S 18; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), 6–8. H. H. Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung: Hintergrund und Geschichte des alttestamentlichen Gerechtigkeitsbegriffes* (BHTh 40; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1968), 61–65, presents a survey of the corresponding concepts in the ancient Near East.

[3] See especially P. Guérin, *L'Idée de Justice dans la Conception de l'Univers chez les Premiers Philosophes Grecs: De Thalès à Héraclite* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1934); G. Vlastos, "Solonian Justice," *CP* 41 (1946), 65–83; idem, "Equity and Justice in Early Greek Cosmologies," *CP* 42 (1947), 156–178; L. R. Palmer, "The Indo-European Origins of Greek Justice," *TPS* (1950), 149–168; M. P. Nilsson, "Die Griechengötter und die Gerechtigkeit," *HThR* 50 (1957), 193–210; F. M. Cornford, *From Religion to Philosophy: A Study in the Origins of Western Speculation* (New York, N.Y.: Harper & Brothers, 1957; 2nd ed.; Sussex: Harvester Press, 1980); T. Beïkos, *Cosmology and Cosmic Justice in Ancient Greek Thought* (in Greek with an English summary; Thesalonike, 1969); M. Ostwald, *Nomos and the Beginnings of the Athenian Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969); H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus* (SCL 41; Berkeley / Los Angeles / London: University of California Press, 1971, 1983); J. de Romilly, *La loi dans la pensée grecque des origines à Aristote* (Paris: Société d'édition "Les belles lettres," 1971); M. W. Dickie, "*Dike* As a Moral Term in Homer and Hesiod," *CP* 73 (1978), 91–101; E. A. Havelock, *The Greek Concept of Justice* (Cambridge / London: Harvard University Press, 1978); R. May, *Law and Society East and West: Dharma, Li, and Nomos, Their Contribution to Thought and to Life* (BSAF.SAIUH 105; Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1985), 168–219.

[4] See especially T. Stcherbatsky, *The Central Conception of Buddhism and the Meaning of the Word "Dharma"* (PPF 7; London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1923); G. H. Mees, *Dharma and Society: A Comparative Study of the Theory and the Ideal of Varna ('Natural Class') and the Phenomena of Caste and Class* ('S-Gravenhage: N. V. Servire, 1935), 3–49; R. Lingat, *The Classical Law of India* (Berkeley / Los Angeles / London: University of California Press, 1973); R. May, *Law & Society East and West,* 12–117, 199–219; S. Arokiasamy, *Dharma, Hindu and Christian, According to Roberto de Nobili: Analysis of Its Meaning and Its Use in Hinduism and Christianity* (DM 19; Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1986).

[5] See especially H. Cazelles, *Autour de l'Exode (Études)* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1987), 371–387: "Aspirations à la justice dans le monde préblique: La réponse divine selon la révélation biblique"; L. K. Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven: The Syro-Palestinian Pantheon As Bureaucracy* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1994); S. M. Maul, "Der assyrische König—Hüter der Weltordnung," *Gerechtigkeit* (ed. J. Assmann, B. Janowski, and M. Welker; Munich: W. Fink), 65–77; A. Dihle, "Die Krise der Legitimation 'gerechter' Ordnung im Griechenland des fünften Jahrhunderts v. Chr.," *Gerechtigkeit* (ed. J. Assmann, B. Janowski, and M. Welker; Munich: W. Fink), 141–147.

order inherent in the very nature of things, the order of physical and spiritual created entities, the intrinsic justice and rightness that underlie all things, established at the beginning and valid for all time, the eternal laws that maintain the world, the moral law and the values of the moral order. The human ruler is responsible to the supernatural agencies for the implementation of the cosmic design. So the concept of "justice" involves a right relationship between rulers and members of society, sometimes seen as sacred in its nature.

The basic terms that describe the order of the universe and of society naturally include the idea of punishment: whoever violates that order is liable to punishment, and there may be no chance of expiation and purification until such guilt is atoned for. In a system of this kind it seems logical to expect that guilt should affect not only the sinful but also the innocent, for punishment descends biologically upon posterity. But to comprehend the whole range of meaning of the concept of "justice" and the manifold aspects of punishment and atonement would require the study of all the documents of a particular religion and culture. And it would not be enough to examine only the passages dealing with moral concepts; practice as well as theory would have to be taken into consideration.[6]

An investigation of the whole range of relations between guilt, punishment, atonement, and forgiveness in non-Hebraic religions and cultures is far beyond the scope of the present study, and we shall limit ourselves to Greek mythology, drama, historiography, and philosophy—subjects in which comparison with the findings of the Hebrew Bible is especially practicable.

It is widely accepted that "justice" is the main underlying concept in Greek religion and philosophy. Greek historical, literary, and philosophical writings contain many statements that explicitly express the views of ancient scientists, poets, writers, and philosophers upon it. Their ideas, however, are set forth in a closely cohering network of terms and symbols signifying a cosmic order or a well-ordered society, plus sanctions against those who violate it: *thémis, díke, nómos, moîra, némesis,* and *Erinús.* We must have some understanding of these terms in order to evaluate adequately Greek declarations and statements about human responsibility and liability to punishment.

The concept of justice in general and of punishment in particular reflects the whole ideological background of a culture and a religion. It is useful,

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[6] See methodological comments by H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus,* 2–3, 157–158. On pp. 2–3 he says: "One of the most damaging sources of error about early Greek morality has been the assumption that in order to study the moral notions found in a work of art or in a society it is enough to list and analyze the words indicating moral concepts which occur in it. The scrutiny of such words is certainly an important part of such an investigation; but the investigation will not be complete until the study of moral terminology has been supplemented by a study of the actions performed in the book or the society in question and the attitudes shown towards them by those who have performed and those who have described them."

therefore, to note the following summary of the *differentiae* of early Greek religion: "Three important differences mark off the early religion of the Greeks from those of the surrounding peoples, and also from those that are familiar to us in modern times. First, it is neither monotheism nor, in the strict sense, polytheism, but something between the two; it has many gods, but from the earliest times of which we have knowledge one of these is preponderant over the rest. Secondly, it is not anthropocentric; men are the creation only of a minor god, and have only a minor status in the universe and a minor place in the attention of the gods. Thirdly, these gods are not transcendent but immanent; they do not interfere from outside with the course of nature, but govern the inanimate world through natural processes and the animate through human passions."[7]

The attributes of Zeus are represented on the analogy of those possessed by human kings, even though their powers depend on his authority. In the *Iliad,* Nestor addresses Agamemnon in the following words: "... thou art king over many hosts, and to thee Zeus hath vouchsafed the sceptre and judgments *(skêptron t' edè thémistas),* that thou mayest take counsel for thy people" (9.98–99; cf. 1.238–239). The main function of a king was in fact that of protecting the *thémistes:* customs, usages, and the principle of justice. According to Homer, Zeus was concerned particularly with protecting oaths, strangers, and suppliants. Breaking an oath or injuring a stranger involved the especially grave offence of *timé* of Zeus, and was followed by inevitable punishment. But the "ultimate concern" of Zeus himself and the other gods was their own honour and prerogatives. They did not govern the universe in the interests of humankind and cared nothing for human welfare, but were markedly jealous of their own superiority. This belief of the ancient Greeks was closely linked with the assumption of divine envy.

2. *Cosmological Foundations of Justice in Ancient Greece*

The oldest and most controversial text in pre-Socratic philosophy, Anaximander's fragment 1, may serve as a key to the "natural" moral foundations of Greek thinking. The passage reads:

> Beginning and source of existing things is *ápeiron.* And into those things from which existing things take their rise, they pass away once more, according to that which is ordained; for they render justice *(díken)* and reparation to one another for their injustices *(adikías)* according to the ordering of time *(katà tèn toû chrónou táxin).*[8]

[7] See H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus,* 160.

[8] See H. Diels and W. Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker,* vol. 1 (18th ed.; Zurich / Hildesheim: Weidmannn, 1989), 89, with the following German translation: "Anfang und Ur-

The passage can be adequately understood in the light of ancient cosmological presuppositions. The main interest of all three philosophers from Miletus (Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes) was *Physis,* 'Nature.' During the 6th and 5th centuries B.C.E., philosophical writings were usually entitled *Perì phúseos,* 'On Nature.' They envisaged Nature as the substance from which things terrestrial had arisen and to which they must return. Nevertheless, Nature to them is not solely material; it is closer to life than to matter, since the universe is alive, has a soul within itself. Thales believes water to be the ultimate substance, Anaximander talks of "Boundless (substance)" *(tò ápeiron),* Anaximenes of "air" or mist. Anaximander first proposed a systematic theory of the Nature of the world and of its development from the "Boundless" into the many. Nature has various components—gods, human beings, and natural objects,—and each of them has its allotted sphere with clearly defined boundaries. Nature is a self-regulative equilibrium underpinned by the fixed proportions of its main constituents.[9] Perhaps the clearest expression of this view of the universe is fragment 94 of Heraclitus:

> Sun will not overstep his measures; if he does, the Erinyes, the minions of Justice *(Díkes)* will find him out.[10]

In view of this cosmology the use of the terms justice // injustices in Anaximander's fragment becomes understandable. Injustice, it seems, starts with the coming into being of individual living things. The world with its mass of creatures could come into existence only if there were unjustness; nothing can come into being and grow without transgressing boundaries. Next to his use of justice // injustices, the most important element of Anaximander's statement is the phrase *katà tò chreón,* "according to that which is ordained." It is not by chance that he uses the definite article *to,* which unites the ideas of Necessity and Right. The concluding phrase *katà tèn toû chrónou táxin,* "according to the ordering of time," emphasizes the importance of *Chrónos,* 'Time,' in the processes of the universe. Pindar, too, sees in Time "the father of all."[11] In Time encroachment and reparation occur: to impair Nature means "violation" or "injustice." If violation is repaired and things are reinstated within their proper limits, harmony is re-established. In

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sprung der seienden Dinge ist das Apeiron (das grenzenlos-Unbestimmbare). Woraus aber das Werden ist den seienden Dingen, in das hinein geschieht auch ihr Vergehen nach der Schuldigkeit; denn sie zahlen einander gerechte Strafe und Buße für ihre Ungerechtigkeit nach der Zeit Anordnung." For an English translation, see F. M. Cornford, *From Religion to Philosophy,* 8, and G. Vlastos, *CP* 42 (1947), 168.

[9] See especially F. M. Cornford, *From Religion to Philosophy,* and G. Vlastos, *CP* 42 (1947), 156–178. Both authors present the whole range of Greek theories of a "just" cosmic order, but we have to limit ourselves here to their basic findings.

[10] See H. Diels and W. Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker,* vol. 1, 172; G. S. Kirk, *Heraclitus: The Cosmic Fragments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954, 1986), 284.

[11] See the *Olympian Odes* 2.16–17.

terms of Anaximander's statement this means that full reparation among the opposites is ensured by reabsorption into the Boundless. "The damages are paid not to the Boundless but to *one another.*"[12] Absolute justice can be achieved provided the equation of reparation to encroachment is achieved.

This cosmological background is applicable to relationships in society and individual human lives. The eternal cycle of life and death in Nature needs a human contribution. Nature is just because everything she encompasses adjusts itself. This is particularly evident in the succession of the seasons. In the *Phoenician Maidens* 538–548 Euripides sounds a unique call for equality in harmony with the adjustments seen in Nature:

> Nature gave men the law of equal rights,
> And the less, ever marshalled foe against
> The greater, ushers in the dawn of hate.
> Measures for men Equality ordained,
> Meting of weights and number she assigned.
> The sightless force of night, and the sun's beam
> Equally pace along their yearly round,
> Nor either envieth that it must give place.
> Sun, then, and night are servants unto men:
> Shalt then not brook to halve your heritage
> And share with him? ... Ah, where is justice *(díke)* then?

Heraclitus uses the word "measures" in connection with the "cosmos": "This (world-)order *(kósmon [tónde])* did none of gods or men make, but it always was and is and shall be: an everliving fire, kindling in measures *(métra)* and going out in measures."[13] Solon, on the other hand, observes caution in dealing with order in the universe and uses the analogy of the sea: "The sea is stirred by the winds; if someone does not move it, it is the justest of all things *(pánton estìn dikaiotáte).*"[14] Solon suggests that unrest is not the sea's natural state but is due to a disturbing cause.[15] Applied to human life,

[12] See G. Vlastos, *CP* 42 (1947), 172.

[13] See fragment 30 (20B): G. S. Kirk, *Heraclitus,* 307.

[14] See fragment 12 in *Greek Elegy and Iambus,* vol. 1 (LCL 258; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: W. Heinemann, 1931, 1982), 125; G. Vlastos, *CP* 41 (1946), 66, who comments that the editor (J. M. Edmonds) for *dikaiotáte* in the manuscripts substitutes *akaiotáte,* 'without good reason.'

[15] Solon's understanding of the relationship between cause and effect is an adequate answer to the poetic picture given by Semonides of Amorgus: "Another of the Sea, whose thoughts are in two minds; one day she laughs and is gay—a stranger seeing her within will praise her, saying 'There's no better wife in all the world, nay, nor comelier'; the next she is intolerable to behold or draw nigh to, for then she rageth unapproachably, like a bitch with young; implacable and nasty is she to all, alike foe and friend. Even as the sea in summertime often will stand calm and harmless, to the great joy of the mariners, yet often will rage and toss with roaring waves, most like unto it is such a woman in disposition, nor hath the ocean a nature of other sort than hers." See fragment 7 in *Greek Elegy and Iambus,* vol. 2 (LCL 259; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: W. Heinemann, 1931, 1979), 219–221. See also Homer, *Iliad* 4.423; Hesiod, *Works and Days* 670–678; Herodotus, 7.16.

this means that reciprocity between Nature and human dealings is the ultimate basis of justice. The basic ideal is not to "stir the sea" but to live in harmony with Nature. All the more surprising is Heraclitus's parallel to the tension of opposites in Nature, which he finds in the social category of war:

> One must know that war is common and right *(díken)* is strife and that all things are happening by strife and necessity.[16]

But he says in another place:

> To god all things are beautiful and good and just, but men have supposed some things to be unjust, others just.[17]

Antiphon the sophist points to the cosmological foundations of justice by drawing a sharp distinction between *phúsis,* 'nature,' and *nómos,* 'law.' In his *On Truth* (fragment 44) he gives reasons for the general preference for obeying nature rather than law.[18] He attacks "the laws" because most of them are not sufficiently in accordance with "the nature." This view has important implications for Antiphon's attitude to punishment in general and to the justification of legal punishments in particular. When humans violate nature pains, i.e, "punishments," are inflicted automatically and inevitably. On the other hand, violation of "the laws" results in adventitious punishments which are not automatic and inevitable, being imposed by "the laws." Let us cite the first three columns of fragment 44a:

Column I

> ... Justice, therefore, is not to transgress the observances *(tà nómima)* of the state in which one lives as a citizen *(politeúetai).* [12] Therefore a man would handle justice especially advantageously to himself if with witness he were to deem the laws *(toùs nómous)* as great, but when isolated from witnesses, the matters of nature *(phúseos).* [23] For the matters of the laws are adventitious *(epítheta),* whereas those of nature are given *(anankaîa).* [27] And those of the laws have been agreed on *(homologethénta),* they have not grown naturally *(phúnta);* whereas those of nature have grown naturally and have not been

Column II

> agreed on. [3] Therefore when transgressing the observance, if he escapes the

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[16] See fragment 80 (62B) in H. Diels and W. Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker,* vol. 1, 169; G. S. Kirk, *Heraclitus,* 238.

[17] See fragment 102 (61B) in H. Diels and W. Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker,* vol. 1, 173; G. S. Kirk, *Heraclitus,* 180–183.

[18] For the text, see H. Diels and W. Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker,* vol. 2, 346–355; for the translation and interpretation, see T. J. Saunders, "Antiphon the Sophist on Natural Laws (B44DK)," *PAS.*NS 78 (1977–1978), 215–236; See also T. J. Saunders, "Protagoras and Plato on Punishment," *The Sophists and Their Legacy* (ed. G. B. Kerferd; Hermes 44; Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1981), 135–136.

notice of those who made the agreement, he gets off shame and punishment; but not if he fails to escape notice. [10] And if he forces against the possible *(tò dunatón biádzetai)* one of the things that have naturally grown along with us, and if he escapes the notice of all men, the evil *(tò kakón)* is no less; and if all see, it is no greater. [21] For he is harmed *(bláptetai)* not because of opinion *(dià dóxan)* but because of truth *(di' alétheian)*. [23] The enquiry is for the sake of all these things, because the majority of things that are just *(katà nómon dikaíon)* according to law are laid down hostilely *(polemíos)* to nature. [30] For it has been legislated *(nenomothétetai)* in the case of the eyes, what they must

Column III

see and what they must not; and in the case of the ears, what they must hear and what they must not; and in the case of the tongue, what it must say and what it must not; and in the case of the hands, what they must do and what they must not; and in the case of the feet, what they should approach and what they must not; and in the case of the mind *(noûs)*, what it must desire and what it must not. [18] Therefore the things from which the laws turn men away are no more friendly *(philiótera)* nor more akin *(oikeiótera)* to nature than the things they turn them to. [25] For to live and to die are of nature, and to live comes to them from the advantageous things *(tôn xumpherónton)*, to die from the non-advantageous things.

Plato was certainly the leading authority on the question of punishment in ancient Greece. He offers a profound justification of the role of judgment in the administration of justice in the state,[19] but, being well aware of the imperfections of social institutions, often reminds his readers of that ultimate judgment where everyone gets his deserts. In this connection he combines the familiar myths of Greek literature with a scientific approach expressed in terms of physical processes.[20] In his earlier eschatological writings the world to come is sharply differentiated from the present one,[21] but in the *Timaeus* and the *Laws* the situation is different: the next world is described in the physical and spatial terms used of the material universe. Judgment is not pronounced by any personal agency but is conceived as an automatic or semi-automatic process. It follows, then, that ethics is grounded in physics. "*All* that is in question is the state of the soul; and the state of the soul automatically, mechanically, by itself, determines where the soul is to go, so that post-mortem psychoscopy becomes unnecessary ... No one has to examine the soul to decide where it should go: the system pigeon-holes it automatically, in the interests of the cosmos, with an efficiency far exceeding that of

[19] See especially *Laws* 862c6–863a2; 933e6–934b3; See also *Protagoras* 324a3–c5; 325a5–b2.

[20] See R. J. Saunders, "Penology and Eschatology in Plato's Timaeus and Laws," *CQ*.NS 23 (1973), 232–244; J. Annas, "Plato's Myths of Judgement," *Phronesis* 27 (1982), 119–143.

[21] See especially the *Gorgias* 523a1–524a8; the *Republic* 614a1–616a7.

the crude attempts of earthly legislators and judges to inflict appropriate penalties in the interest of the state as a whole."[22]

The famous myth of Er in the *Republic* (613e6–621d3) implies the cosmological foundations of justice in its presentation of the cosmic cycle of reincarnations. In Er's account of judgment after death human life is for the soul only one segment of the wheel of reincarnations. "The cycle of reincarnations represents a belief in a kind of determinism. The cosmos in this myth whirls round the spindle of Necessity; the process is regulated by the Fates. The language of the passage is full of references to fate and necessity. But the more my life is shown to me as being part of an unending cycle of events over which I have no control, the less I can feel that rewards for being just, or punishments for being unjust, really answer to what I have done and chosen."[23]

3. *The Intellectual Foundations of Social Order in Ancient Greece*

The term *díke* is a general-purpose expression covering various aspects of social order in ancient Greece. An examination of its etymology within the Indo-European group of languages seems to confirm that its basic meaning is "boundary mark" or "limit." *Díke* is almost certainly connected with the root *deik-, dik-,* 'to point out, to mark,' and its primary significance is therefore "mark" or "indication." The statement "this is the *díke* of the gods" can be understood as "this is the mark or sign, the characteristic of the gods." The word is applied to different subjects: gods, old men, slaves, etc. This view of the basic significance of *díke* harmonizes with the general worldview found in ancient Greek and other Indo-European cultures. It is based on the idea of equilibrium and harmony, which is possible only if every being observes its own boundaries or limits.[24]

These boundaries circumscribe one's proper portion or allotment, a concept often expressed by the words *moîra, móros,* or *aîsa. Moîra* signifies the orderly division of things in space, "men's lands and just portions, the rôles and prerogatives of humankind and gods. It is almost equivalent to *phúsis.*"[25] Some later poets and philosophers thought that *Moîra*—Fate—is superior to the gods, since it is the cause of events that cannot be altered; but in general the gods were seen as sustaining and expressing the power of *moîra.* In archaic times *moîra* denoted a single order, but in the post-Homeric period we find the plural *moîrai*—the Fates. In Homer the plural form occurs only

[22] See T. J. Saunders, *CQ*.NS 23 (1973), 237. This statement relates to books 9 and 10 of the *Laws.*

[23] See J. Annas, *Phronesis* 27 (1982), 133.

[24] See L. R. Palmer, *TPS* (1950), 149–168.

[25] See W. C. Greene, *Moira: Fate, Good, and Evil in Greek Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1944), 14.

once,[26] whereas Hesiod speaks of three *moîrai* with their familiar names: *Clotho*—the Spinner, *Lachesis*—the Disposer of Lots, and *Atropos*—She who cannot be turned: "Also she (Night) bare the Destinies and ruthless avenging Fates, Clotho and Lachesis and Atropos, who give men at their birth both evil and good to have, and they pursue the transgressions of men and of gods: and these goddesses never cease from their dread anger until they punish the sinner with a sore penalty. Also deadly Night bare Nemesis (Indignation) to afflict mortal men ..."[27]

Némesis, which also means 'distribution' or 'apportionment,' is the principal term for the indignant reaction of gods and humans to an act that goes beyond the due portion. *Nemesis* is a spirit that oversees the universal system of proper portions and she punishes any transgression of limits, excess or disproportion, and all temerity or presumption. She reflects the just anger of the gods and their disapproval. Plato, for instance, says in the *Laws* of human conduct that, if it is to be dear to God: "... throughout all his life he must diligently observe reverence of speech towards his parents above all things, seeing that for light and winged words there is a most heavy penalty,—for over all such matters Nemesis, messenger of Justice *(Díkes Némesis ángelos),* is appointed to keep watch ..." (717c7–d3). Sometimes it may appear, however, that a human lot bears no relation to one's deserts.

Another well-known type of divine agency is the *Erinyes*—Furies. The *Erinyes* were originally the angry soul of a murdered man, appearing in Homer as a pitiless spirit of punishment that avenges wrongs done to kindred.[28] The *Erinyes* were supposed to be more ancient than the Olympian gods and not under the rule of Zeus, although they recognize his authority. Sometimes it seems that even gods are subject to their power.[29] "They have become the avengers of all offences against the moral law, or, in more positive terms, the champions of the moral order in every sphere. Finally, as in the moral sphere they have punished what may be called 'unnatural' conduct, they assume a guardianship over even natural law."[30] There can be no question of their surrendering their role in the government of the universe.

How is *díke* related to the gods and to the *moîra?* The first thing to note is that *díke* is closely akin to *thémis,* for both are concerned with order in the universe and in society.[31] *Thémis* etymologically means something that is laid down or established. We can envisage three possible spheres appropriate to

[26] See *Iliad* 24.49.
[27] See *Theogony* 217–223.
[28] See *Odyssey* 11.280.
[29] See Homer, *Iliad* 21.410–414; cf. 15.204.
[30] See W. C. Greene, *Moira,* 17.
[31] See especially R. Hirzel, *Themis, Dike und Verwandtes* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1907); J. H. Harrison, *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912, 1927).

their presence or activity: cosmic, social, and personal. The inner world of divine or human personalities was not the primary concern of the Greeks and the link between the cosmic and social worlds emerges all the more clearly:[32] the order discernible in the universe was the foundation and the mirror of a well-ordered society. For most poets, writers and philosophers the concept of justice was of major relevance to the maintenance of social order.[33] Consequently, *thémis* and *díke* are in most cases the mark of a well-ordered society.[34] Basically, they signify 'custom' or 'rule (of law)' or 'lawful behaviour.' In Homer both terms are concrete, and they are often used in the plural: *thémistes, díkai.* Of the *thémistes* Homer says that they came from Zeus "the counsellor most high."[35] Gradually emphasis shifted from *thémis* to *díke.*

It follows, then, that all who do not respect established customs or rules are savages. In certain circumstances they may provoke the anger and punishment of the gods. The Cyclopes, for instance, are characterized as "an overweening and lawless *(athémiston)* folk ... Neither assemblies for council have they, nor appointed laws *(thémistes),* but they dwell on the peaks of lofty mountains in hollow caves, and each one is lawgiver *(themisteúei)* to his children and his wives and they reck nothing one of other."[36] In this context mention is made of "a savage man that knew naught of justice or law."[37] Zeus is provoked by those "who by violence in an assembly judge crooked themistes and drive out dike, caring nothing for the wrath of the gods."[38]

From the principle of order flow counsels, appeals, promises, and threats. Hesiod, for instance, offers Perses the following argument against violence: "But you, Perses, lay up these things within your heart and listen now to right *(kaí nu díkes epákoue),* ceasing altogether to think of violence. For the son of Cronos has ordained this law *(nómon)* for men, that fishes and beasts and winged fowls should devour one another, for right is not in them *(epeì ou díke estì met'autoîs);* but to mankind he gave right *(díken)* which proves

[32] See the statement about *díke* by A. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (London: G. Duckworth, 1988), 14: "For the use of the word '*dike*,' both by Homer and by those whom he portrayed, presupposed that the universe had a single fundamental order, an order structuring both nature and society, so that the distinction which *we* mark by contrasting the natural and the social cannot as yet be expressed. To be *dikaios* is to conduct one's actions and affairs in accordance with this order."

[33] See J. H. Harrison, *Themis,* esp. pp. XI–XXV: "Introduction."

[34] See the statement by L. Pearson, *Popular Ethics in Ancient Greece* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1962, 1966): "The language of the Homeric poems ... definitely forbids the conclusion that the words mean anything like 'natural law' or 'self-evident justice.' In due time, as later literature shows, these concrete words become abstract and acquire ethical implications; but we cannot trace the stages of this development. We do not even know how early or in what historical setting Themis and Dike emerged as goddesses who personified the ideal of justice."

[35] See *Iliad* 8.22.

[36] See Homer, *Odyssey* 9.105–115.

[37] See Homer, *Odyssey* 9.215.

[38] See Homer, *Iliad* 16.386–388.

far the best. For whoever knows the right *(tà díkaia)* and is ready to speak it, far-seeing Zeus gives him prosperity; but whoever deliberately lies in his witness and forswears himself, and so hurts Justice *(díken)* and sins beyond repair, that man's generation is left obscure thereafter. But the generation of the man who swears truly is better thenceforward."[39] In another place Hesiod warns Perses of *húbris,* which is his most characteristic word for man's transgression of prescribed limits and of the rules of social justice.[40] Then he proclaims judgment, making use of antithetic juxtaposition of rewards for those "who give straight judgments to strangers and to the men of the land, and go not aside from what is just," and punishment "for those who practice violence *(húbris)* and cruel deeds."[41]

In view of the judicial connotation of *díke* and *thémis* in society, it is important to note that both became at some point personified as goddesses with the closest possible relationship to Zeus, of whom Hesiod reports: "Next he married bright Themis who bare the Horae (Hours), and Eunomia (Order), Dike (Justice), and blooming Eirene (Peace), who mind the works of mortal men, and the Moerae (Fates) to whom wise Zeus gave the greatest honour, Clotho, and Lachesis, and Atropos who give mortal men evil and good to have."[42] Being the daughter of Zeus and Themis, Dike's role is exceptionally important, and Hesiod addresses the following warning to earthly rulers: "You princes, mark well this punishment *(ténde díken)* you also; for the deathless gods are near among men and mark all those who oppress their fellows with crooked judments *(skoliêsi díkesin),* and reck not the anger of the gods. For upon the bounteous earth Zeus has thrice ten thousand spirits, watchers of mortal men, and these keep watch on judgments and deeds of wrong as they roam, clothed in mist, all over the earth. And there is virgin Justice *(he dé te parthénos estì Díke),* the daughter of Zeus, who is honoured and reverenced among the gods who dwell on Olympus, and whenever anyone hurts her with lying slander, she sits beside her father, Zeus, the son of Cronos, and tells him of men's wicked heart, until the people pay for the mad folly of their princes who, evilly minded, pervert judgment and give

[39] See *Works and Days* 274–285.

[40] For this term, see especially C. del Grande, *Hybris: Colpa e castigo nell'espressione poetica e letteraria degli scrittori della Grecia antica (da Omero a Cleante)* (Naples: R. Ricciardi, 1947).

[41] See *Works and Days* 213–247.

[42] See *Theogony* 901–906. Cf. the fragment of a lost play of Aeschylus where *Dike* herself explains the origin of her connection with Zeus: "And he has his seat upon his father's very throne, having overcome Kronos by means of Justice; for Zeus can now boast, since his father began the quarrel, that he paid him back with Justice on his side. That is why Zeus has done me great honour, because after being attacked he paid him back, not unjustly. I sit in glory by the throne of Zeus, and he of his own will sends me to those he favours; I mean Zeus, who has sent me to this land with kind intent. And you shall see for yourselves whether my words are empty." See supplement to the Loeb edition of Aeschylus, vol. 2, 579–580.

sentence crookedly. Keep watch against this, you princes, and make straight your judgments, you who devour bribes; put crooked judgements altogether from your thoughts."[43]

How are *thémis* and *díke* related to *nómos? Nómos* emerged gradually by replacing to some extent *thémis,* and one of the above-cited passages of Hesiod[44] provides clear evidence of this fact. *Nómos* is regarded as a directive or guiding principle, an independently established practice or habit.[45] Heraclitus indicates its origin: "Those who speak with sense must rely on what is common to all, as a city must rely on its law *(hókosper nómo pólis),* and with much greater reliance: for all the laws of men *(anthrópeioi nómoi)* are nourished by one law, the divine law *(hupò henòs toû theíou);* for it has as much power as it wishes and is sufficient for all and is still left over."[46] Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides speak of "unwritten laws" *(nómoi ágraphoi),* thereby championing the traditional order, which should not be transgressed. When Creon asks the question: "And yet wert bold enough to break the law *(nómous)?*" Antigone replies:

> Yea, for these laws were not ordained of Zeus,
> And she who sits enthroned with gods below,
> Justice *(Díke),* enacted not these human laws.
> Nor did I deem that thou, a mortal man,
> Could'st by a breath annul and override
> The immutable unwritten laws of Heaven.
> They die not; and none knoweth whence they sprang.
> I was not like, who feared no mortal's frown,
> To disobey these laws and so provoke
> The wrath of Heaven ...[47]

When Plato speaks of divine law he invokes the authority of both God and *Díke;* in the *Laws* the Athenian Stranger exclaims: "O men, that God who, as old tradition tells, holdeth the beginning, the end, and the centre of all things that exist, completeth his circuit by nature's ordinance in straight, unswerving course. With him followeth Justice *(Dikē)* always, as avenger *(timorós)* of them that fall short of the divine law *(theíou nómou)* ..." (715e7–716a3).

4. *From a Collective Conscience to a Personal Righteousness*

Today it seems axiomatic that justice cannot be limited to the external rhythms

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[43] See *Works and Days* 248–264.

[44] See *Works and Days* 274–285.

[45] See Hesiod, *Theogony* 416–418; idem, fragment 20.

[46] See fragment B 114 (91b) in H. Diels and W. Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker,* vol. 1, 176; for translation, see G. S. Kirk, *Heraclitus,* 48.

[47] See Sophocles, *Antigone* 450–470.

of the cosmos and society: it is also a quality of the heart and involves personal attitudes. Before Plato, however, the concept of justice was in fact, as in other primitive cultures and religions, based on collective feeling and thinking.[48] Greek religion failed to satisfy the human personal instinct and reflected communal actions and emotions. Its heroes do not represent ordinary people; they are extraordinary figures—very often kings—and functionaries rather than persons. Its forms, too, express and represent the social structure of the people.[49] The Greek collective conscience led a modern philosopher to conclude: "Even the possession of some concept of a unified inner self is not culturally necessary, and one culture that functioned very well without it was that portrayed in the Homeric poems."[50] We may, however, observe in Homer's epics the appearance of what has been called a "quiet morality."[51]

The situation changed only with Plato who recognized three types of law: a law of the soul, society, and of the universe. But the moral quality of the "heart" was not expressed by the traditional term *díke* or its equivalents; the discovery of this new quality found expression in a new derivative *dikaiosúne.*[52] If *díke* was "based on the maintenance of reciprocal rights and requiring also the right of redress and hence of punishment as the mechanism of enforcement," *dikaiosúne* became a "moral" concept of virtue; the appropriate translation is therefore "righteousness."[53] In view of this, Theognis's statement seems most apposite: "Righteousness *(dikaiosúne)* containeth the sum of all virtue; and every righteous man, Cyrnus, is good."[54] Aristotle similarly praises it after giving some examples of human personal qualities:

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[48] J. H. Harrison, *Themis,* finds in this fact a decisive impulse for her book; see especially "Introduction." See also F. M. Cornford, *From Religion to Philosophy,* 43–50, who uses the expression "collective representation."

[49] In view of the social structure J. H. Harrison says in *Themis,* XXII: "The all-important point is not *which* particular structure is represented, but the general principle that social structure and the collective conscience which utters itself in social structure, underlie all religion. Themis conditions not only our social relations, but also our whole relation with the outside world ... Ancient faith held, and in part modern religion still holds, that moral excellence and material prosperity must go together, that man by obeying Themis, the Right, can control the Way of Nature."

[50] See A. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?,* 21.

[51] See H. Lloyd-Jones, *Justice of Zeus,* 15: "Even in a heroic society in which feelings of shame and not feelings of guilt do the main work of morality, the so-called quieter virtues are essential, above all loyalty, without which not even a gang of thieves, let alone an army, can hope to operate successfully." See also p. 170: "Even in Homeric times there were collectivities and communities as well as individuals, and certain 'quiet virtues,' such as loyalty, had considerable importance, even if there was no name for them."

[52] See E. A. Havelock, "*Dikaiosune:* An Essay in Greek Intellectual History," *Phoenix* 23 (1969), 49–70. For the question of meaning of *díke,* see V. A. Rogers, "Some Thoughts on Δικη," *CQ* 21 (1971), 289–301; M. Gagarin, "*Dikē* in the *Works and Days,*" *CP* 68 (1973), 81–91; idem, "*Dikē* in Archaic Greek Thought," *CP* 69 (1974), 186–197; M. W. Dickie, "*Dike* As a Moral Term in Homer and Hesiod," *CP* 73 (1978), 91–101.

[53] See E. A. Havelock, *Phoenix* 23 (1969), 68.

[54] See fragment 145–148.

"Justice *(dikaiosúne)* then in this sense is perfect Virtue, though with a qualification, namely that it is displayed towards others. This is why Justice is often thought to be the chief of the virtues, and more sublime 'or than the evening or the morning star'; and we have the proverb—*In Justice is all Virtue found in sum.* And Justice is perfect virtue because it is the practice of perfect virtue; and perfect in a special degree, because its possessor can practice his virtue towards others and not merely by himself; for there are many who can practice virtue in their own private affairs but cannot do so in their relations with another."[55]

The shift from a merely cosmological and social understanding of "justice" and "right" to the concept of an inward-looking master-virtue of "righteousness" was of much greater importance for the history of European civilization than it may seem.[56] It was exactly here that Greek thinking about morality and the characteristic Hebrew concept of divine and human "righteousness" found their first important common ground. The Greek intellectualized perception of reality did not, it is true, even with Plato's teaching and terminology penetrate to the real instinct and need of the soul. All the more is it understandable why the established Greek and Roman empires were not able to halt the spread of Jewish-Christian beliefs. On the other hand, it is also clear why Christianity did not need to reject the mature fruits of former cultures. What was crucial was the awareness that the existing culture had to be complemented by the profound Hebrew personalist insights and feelings.

The synthesis between the Greek and the Hebrew worlds remained always precarious for biblical religions, however. In the Hebrew Bible the terms *ṣedeq/ṣĕdāqāh* mean basically the same as *dikaiosúne* in the Greek Bibles (Septuagint, New Testament): righteousness, faithfulness, goodness, love, mercy, salvation. The difference between divine and human righteousness is determined by the differing natures of God and mankind. God's righteousness results from divine inner perfection and harmony, whereas the righteousness of humans springs from their painful search for a right relationship to God, to their inner self, to their fellow-men, and to the world. The idea of retribution or punishment is not part of this term, but has its own terminology and literary modes of expression. But in European thinking in general and about the Bible in particular many have not recognized this fact.

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[55] See *Nicomachean Ethics* 1129b.28–36 (5.1.15). The cited proverb is also reported by Phocylides, *Sententiae* 10.(17), ed. E. Diehl, *Anthologia lyrica Graeca,* vol. 1 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1936), 60; *Elegy and Iambus,* vol. 1, 181 (Nr. 16).

[56] See the finding of E. A. Havelock, *Phoenix* 23 (1969), 51, concerning the new term *dikaiosúne:* "... it might be guessed that its appearance marks the beginning of the internalization of a moral conception hitherto viewed from a purely external and social point of view. *Dike* and *dikaios* refer to the maintenance of reciprocal relations of right: they connote 'rights' rather than 'righteousness'; they were indexes of purely external behaviour whether of gods or of men. With the appearance of *dikaiosune* it had occurred to some that this kind of reciprocal propriety corresponded to a personal virtue, the property of an individual."

So in most European languages the concept of "justice" includes the various presuppositions and demands of distributive justice as well as the personal virtue of righteousness.[57]

The striking difference between the classical Greek collectivism of feeling and thought, and the individualistic and personalist nature of Hebrew prophetic experience raises a question of principle: how far is the inner world of emotions, desires and purposes conditioned by the external world of society? In a recent philosophical work we read: "The role and function of desires in the self-understanding of human beings vary from culture to culture with the way in which their projects and aspirations, expressions of need and claims upon others, are organized and articulated in the public social world."[58] But this statement is far from being unanimously supported by the cultural and spiritual testimonies of mankind. It is true that societies usually give priority to their collective norms and customs over personal suffering, need and hope. The so-called "quiet virtues" may go unheard by the official ear—although they may speak with an ever more mighty voice in the long term. Individuals with strong personal convictions are sometimes bold enough to give free rein to the spontaneous reactions of their souls and to oppose the "customs" that inhibit the genuine expression of personal character. A culture or a religion may survive in this fashion until it is sustained by the "quiet virtues."

The phenomenon of ancient Israel is an especially cogent proof of this fact. Most Israelites observed the collective customs of other nations—and all the more vigorously did the prophets oppose them, even at the risk of their lives. Their testimonies survived much persecution and many people have found in them an expression of their own inner lives. This fact and the accounts of many other individual experiences are sufficient proof that the human inner world is not only legitimate, but is in fact the crown of the cosmic order and the cornerstone of a well-ordered society. The cosmic and social orders must be animated by the righteousness of the individual soul. It is the privilege of the human personality to live in a condition of tension or polarity between the demands and customs of society and the soul's deepest personal instincts. The cosmic and social orders alone can never satisfy the real needs of the human soul.

5. *Responsibility and Punishment in Pre-Socratic Writings*

It does not logically follow from the ideological presuppositions of early

[57] See J. Krašovec, *La justice (ṣdq) de Dieu dans la Bible hébraïque et l'interprétation juive et chrétienne* (OBO 76; Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988).

[58] See A. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 21.

Greek religion and culture that human beings are always free to decide and are therefore always responsible for their decisions. Moreover, it may appear that the gods' dealings with humankind are not always just. Such a conclusion is reflected in the harsh accusation of Zeus by King Agamemnon: "Father Zeus, than thou is no other god more baleful. Verily I deemed that I had got me vengeance upon Alexander for his wickedness, but now is my sword broken in my hands, and forth from my grasp has my spear flown in vain, and I smote him not."[59] In the beginning of the *Odyssey,* however, Zeus gives a different fundamental explanation of the human situation: "Look you now, how ready mortals are to blame the gods. It is from us, they say, that evils come, but they even of themselves, through their own blind folly, have sorrows beyond that which is ordained. Even as now Aigisthus, beyond that which was ordained, took to himself the wedded wife of the son of Atreus, and slew him on his return, though well he knew of sheer destruction, seeing that we spake to him before, sending Hermes, the keen-sighted Arged'phontes, that he should neither slay the man nor woo his wife; for from Orestes shall come vengeance for the son of Atreus when once he has come to manhood and longs for his own land. So Hermes spake, but for all his good intent he prevailed not upon the heart of Aegisthus; and now he has paid the full price of all" (1.32–43).[60]

In ancient Greece the general view was that the gods do not deal with humankind capriciously. Human agents are responsible for their deeds and are punished in due season for their misdeeds.[61] It follows that humans must adapt themselves to the laws of the universe in which they find themselves, practise the principle of loyalty, accept the realities of the actual situation, and not presume to emulate the gods. The demand for loyalty was of special importance, as the speech of Agamemnon to Menelaus in the *Iliad* shows:

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[59] See Homer, *Iliad* 3.365–368.

[60] E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley / Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), 32–33, makes the following comment on this passage: "Placed where it is, at the very beginning of the poem, the remark sounds, as the Germans say, 'programmatic.' And the programme is carried out. The suitors by their own wicked acts incur destruction, while Odysseus, heedful of divine monitions, triumphs against the odds: divine justice is vindicated." See also note 22: "We must, of course, remember that the Odyssey, unlike the Iliad, has a large fairy-tale element, and that the hero of a fairy-tale is bound to win in the end. But the poet who gave the story its final shape, seems to have taken the opportunity to emphasize the lesson of divine justice."

[61] See H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus,* 161: "In the Iliad and sometimes in later literature, men may blame a god for prompting them to wrong action, but they may never disclaim responsibility for their decisions. Wrong action is due to the actor's perverse preference for self-interest over justice, even if the passions that caused it came from a higher power, that can never be effectively pleaded as an excuse." See also p. 162: "Wrong moral decisions might be prompted by a god, but even in the Iliad the divine motivation of an act might be abstracted and the human motivation—and the human responsibility—remained unaltered; since these gods worked through human passions, the notion of divine causation might be abandoned and the human emotion responsible for wrong decision be the same."

"Dear brother, it was for thy death, meseems, that I swore this oath with sacrifice, setting thee forth alone before the face of the Achaeans to do battle with the Trojans, seeing the Trojans have thus smitten thee, and trodden under foot the oaths of faith. Yet in no wise is an oath of none effect and the blood of lambs and drink-offerings of unmixed wine and the hand-clasps, wherein we put our trust. For even if for the moment the Olympian vouchsafeth not fulfillment, yet late and at length doth he fulfil them, and with a heavy price do men make atonement, even with their own heads and their wives and their children" (4.155–162).

This passage highlights three important aspects of punishment: its inevitability, its inscrutability in terms of manner and time,[62] and the possibility that it may take the form of collective retribution or hereditary punishment (curse). In Plato's *Gorgias* Socrates echoes Homer in pointing to the inevitability of divine judgment in the next world: "By Homer's account, Zeus, Poseidon, and Pluto divided the sovereignty amongst them when they took it over from their father. Now in the time of Cronos there was a law concerning mankind, and it holds to this very day amongst the gods, that every man who has passed a just and holy life departs after his decease to the Isles of the Blest, and dwells in all happiness apart from ill; but whoever has lived unjustly and impiously goes to the dungeon of requital and penance which, you know, they call Tartarus" (523a4–b4). This and other aspects of judgment are represented in the writings of Hesiod, Solon, Theognis, and Pindar. They emphasize that in the end justice shall prevail. When Hesiod warns against wealth taken violently, and "unnatural sin," he adds: "... truly Zeus himself is angry, and at the last *(es dè teleutèn)* lays on him a heavy requital for his evildoing."[63]

Solon believes firmly in divine justice and complains all the more loudly about the conduct and fate of the citizens of Athens: "But Athens, albeit she will never perish by the destiny of Zeus or the will of the happy Gods immortal ... Her own people, for lucre's sake, are fain to make ruin of this great city by their folly. Unrighteous is the mind of the leaders of the commons, and their pride *(húbrios)* goeth before a fall; for they know not how to hold them from excess nor to direct in peace the jollity of their present feasting ... but grow rich through the suasion of unrighteous deeds ... and steal right and left with no respect for possessions sacred or profane, nor have heed of the awful foundations of Justice *(Díkes),* who is so well aware in her silence of what is and what hath been, and soon or late cometh alway to avenge. This is a wound that cometh inevitable and forthwith to every city ..."[64]

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[62] See the statement by H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus,* 162, about inscrutability in general: "What happened in the world depended ultimately upon the gods, and their purpose was usually inscrutable to human minds; that did not mean that it was irrational, but that the reasons that governed it usually remained mysterious."

[63] See *Works and Days* 319–334.

[64] See fragment 4 in *Greek Elegy and Iambus,* vol. 1, 117–121.

In another place Solon proffers a remarkable statement about retribution: "... Wealth I desire to possess, but would not have it unrighteously *(adíkos);* retribution cometh alway afterward *(pántos hústeron êlthe Díke)* ... even such is the vengeance of Zeus; He is not quick to wrath, like us, over each and every thing, yet of him that hath a wicked heart is He aware alway unceasing, and such an one surely cometh out plain at the last *(es télos).* Aye, one payeth to-day, another to-morrow; and those who themselves flee and escape the pursuing destiny of Heaven, to them vengeance cometh alway again, for the price of their deeds is paid by their innocent children or else by their seed after them."[65] Solon's belief in divine justice actuates his advice: "If ye suffer bitterly through your own fault, blame ye not the Gods for it."[66]

Theognis speaks of divine justice from various aspects, one of which is the certainty of ultimate retribution. In fragment 197–208 he says: "A possession that cometh from Zeus, and of right *(díke)* and in seemly wise, abideth evermore; but if one shall win it unrighteously *(adíkos)* and unduly with a covetous heart, or by unrighteous seizure upon an oath, at the first him seemeth to get him gain, but in the end *(es dè teleutèn)* it becometh bad likewise, and the mind of the Gods overcometh him. But these things deceive man's understanding, seeing that the Blessed Ones requite not wrongdoing at the moment; nay, albeit this man may pay his evil debt himself and not make ruin to overhang his dear children after him, that other man Retribution overtaketh not, because too soon did unconscionable Death settle upon his eyelids fraught with his Doom."[67] In fragment 337–340 he yearns for the validation of retribution: "Zeus grant me to repay the friends that love me, and mine enemies that have proved stronger than I; then shall I seem a God among men, if the destiny of death overtake me with all paid."[68]

Another aspect is the belief in divine sovereignty and justice. Theognis knows "that not even Cronus' Son, the Ruler of both Gods and men, can please all mankind."[69] But humans must not argue with the gods. In fragment 687–688 he proclaims: "'Tis not for mortals to fight Immortals, nor yet to give them judgment *(díken);* this is not right *(thémis)* for any man."[70] In fragment 833–836 he says: "All things here are among the crows and perdition, and none of the Blest Immortals, Cyrnus, is to blame; nay, the violence of men and their base gains and their pride *(húbris)* have cast us from much good into evil."[71]

After such a statement it is surprising to find that Theognis is the only

[65] See fragment 13 in *Greek Elegy and Iambus,* vol. 1, 127–128.
[66] See fragment 10 in *Greek Elegy and Iambus,* vol. 1, 122–125.
[67] See *Greek Elegy and Iambus,* vol. 1, 252–253.
[68] See *Greek Elegy and Iambus,* vol. 1, 268–269.
[69] See fragment 801–804 in *Greek Elegy and Iambus,* vol. 1, 324–325.
[70] See *Greek Elegy and Iambus,* vol. 1, 312–313.
[71] See *Greek Elegy and Iambus,* vol. 1, 328–329.

Greek writer who complains about the indiscriminate judgments of Zeus: "Dear Zeus! I marvel at Thee. Thou the heart and mind of every man alive; and Thy might, O King, is above all things. How then is it, Son of Cronus, that Thy mind can bear to hold the wicked and the righteous in the same esteem, whether a man's mind be turned to temperateness, or, unrighteous works persuading, to wanton outrage? Nor is aught fixed for us men by Fortune, nor the way a man must go to please the Immortals. Yet the wicked enjoy untroubled prosperity, whereas such as keep their hearts from base deeds, nevertheless, for all they may love what is righteous, receive Penury the mother of perplexity, Penury that misleadeth a man's heart to evil-doing, corrupting his wits by strong necessity, till perforce he endureth much shame and yieldeth to Want who teacheth all evil, both lies and deceits and baleful contentions, even to him that will not and to whom no ill is fitting; for hard is the perplexity that cometh of her."[72]

In a similar vein Theognis appeals against collective retribution: "Father Zeus, I would it were the Gods' pleasure that wanton outrage should delight the wicked if so they choose, but that whosoever did acts abominable and of intent, disdainfully, with no regard for the Gods, should thereafter pay penalty himself, and the ill-doing of the father become no misfortune unto the children after him; and that such children of an unrighteous sire as act with righteous intent, standing in awe of thy wrath, O Son of Cronus, and from the beginning have loved the right among their fellow-townsmen, these should not pay requital for the transgression of a parent. I say, would that this were the Gods' pleasure; but alas, the doer escapeth and another beareth the misfortune afterward. Yet how can it be rightful, O King of the Immortals, that a man that hath no part in unrighteous deeds, committing no transgression nor any perjury, but is a righteous man, should not fare aright? What other man living, or in what spirit, seeing this man, would thereafter stand in awe of the Immortals, when one unrighteous and wicked that avoideth not the wrath of God or man, indulgeth wanton outrage in the fullness of his wealth, whereas the righteous be worn and wasted with grievous Penury?"[73]

Pindar speaks of inevitable punishment for the wicked and reward for the good: "But if, in very deed, when he hath that wealth, he knoweth of the future, that immediately after death, on earth, it is the lawless spirits that suffer punishment,—and the sins committed in this realm of Zeus are judged by One who passeth sentence stern and inevitable: while the good, having the sun shining for evermore, for equal nights and equal days, receive the boon of a life of lightened toil, not vexing the soil with the strength of their hands ..."[74]

In view of such firm belief in and demand for divine retribution, it is un-

[72] See fragment 373–392 in *Greek Elegy and Iambus,* vol. 1, 274–275.
[73] See fragment 731–752 in *Greek Elegy and Iambus,* vol. 1, 316–319.
[74] See *Olympian Odes* 2.56–64.

derstandable that Democritus should have acknowledged only two gods: Punishment and Reward.[75] One of the basic characteristics of the Greek cosmological approach is the belief that the gods worked not by means of extraneous intervention but through nature and human passions. The cosmological foundations of morality make it clear that all guilt automatically involves punishment because it contains the seeds of retribution. On the other hand every good deed must generate some reward. But the human being is a social animal, and the inevitability of individual retribution therefore implies the inevitability of collective retribution. The more inevitable the punishment, the more logical it is that it should affect the innocent. And again, the closer the link between the offender and his fellow-men, for instance within a family, the more likely it is that the consequences of the offence will harm them. In view of the characteristic Greek cosmological background, the hereditary curse becomes an important issue. In the religion of ancient Greece there was much more reason to conclude that the gods visit the crimes of the fathers upon the children than was the case in the predominantly personalist Hebrew religion. Sophocles describes succinctly the working of the curse in his *Antigone:*

> If once the curse of Heaven attaint a race,
> The infection lingers on and speeds apace,
> Age after age, and each the cup must drain (584–586).

Since the principles of both individual and collective retribution are very largely endorsed by experience, the conclusion suggests itself that the cause of any particular misfortune must lie in guilt. This natural tendency to search for causes is reflected in the semantic development of the word *aitía;* the usual meaning is 'cause,' but originally it meant simply 'guilt.'[76] Aristotle says, referring to some thinkers, "that nothing happens casually, but that everything we speak of in that way has really a definite cause *(ti aítion).*"[77] The general principle of causality does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that a given misfortune must have been caused by someone's guilt. In the Bible, with its constitutive monism and predominantly personalist attitudes, there are other ways of explaining present distress: the testing of faith, the

[75] See Pliny, *Natural History* 2.14: "Innumeros quidem credere atque etiam ex vitiis hominum, non virtutibus tantum, ut Pudicitiam, Concordiam, Mentem, Spem, Honorem, Clementiam, Fidem, aut (ut Democrito placuit) duos omnino, Poenam et Beneficium, maiorem ad socordiam accedit." — "To believe in gods without number, and gods corresponding to men's vices as well as to their virtues, like the Goddesses of Modesty, Concord, Intelligence, Hope, Honour, Mercy and Faith—or else, as Democritus held, only two, Punishment and Reward, reaches an even greater height of folly." See also H. Diels and W. Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker,* vol. 2, 103.

[76] Cf. Pindar, *Olympian Odes* 1.35; see also the adjective *aitios* in the sense of 'culpable' in Homer, *Iliad* 1.153.

[77] Cf. *Physica* II.4.196a.2–3; see H. Diels and W. Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker,* vol. 2, 101, A68.

inscrutability of God's dealings with humankind, education through suffering, the flawed nature of the present world in the light of future perfection. But in view of the predominantly cosmological background of Greek thinking in this sphere the possibilities of explaining cause or reason are more limited. One may perhaps conclude that the gods are powerless or capricious, and Fate or destiny may have the last word—a word unconnected with the guilt of a suffering person. The paradoxical conclusion seems justified: "In fact, Greek religion is such that it is possible for men to reproach the gods with injustice and also for the gods to retort by making the same reproach against men."[78]

Once this fact is recognized, one must be very cautious in interpreting the burden of the tragedy *Oedipus the King* and similar works. There are at least three possible explanations of "punishment" for abominable deeds done in ignorance: a hereditary curse, purification after pollution, or the might of Fate.[79] It seems untenable to argue that the ways of gods to humans are "just" merely because the gods do not chastise them unless they themselves or their forbears have committed some crime. To visit the sins of the fathers upon the children *intentionally* cannot be just; only indirect collective punishment, effected by the course of events in a complex world, is defensible.[80] Theognis's appeal against collective retribution is fully justified, insofar as he has the principle of justice in mind.

The "message" of *Oedipus the King* is certainly many-sided, but three points seem to be cardinal: first, the dramatist claims that human happiness is based on illusion; secondly, he answers to question of how to deal with offences against the objective world-order; thirdly, he warns his audience against criminal activity of all kinds. The first of these points is derived from the fact that Oedipus could not escape his fate though he did everything possible to avert it, and his essential moral innocence is obvious.[81] The

[78] See H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus,* 173.

[79] For the discussion about this problem, see H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus,* 104–128.

[80] See the statement by H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus,* 111: "... the man on whom a curse lies will be especially prone to fits of passion that will cause him to commit actions that will have disastrous consequences. Oedipus is portrayed as being liable to such fits of passion; his acts have been of the kind we might expect from a man under a curse. May not a family curse inherited from the past have more importance for the plot of the Oedipus Rex than most scholars have allowed?" But the assumption of a family curse resulting in such a tragedy cannot "justify" the gods more than the assumption of a fate of coincidence which is far more likely than a predetermined fate. E. R. Dodds, "On Misunderstanding the Oedipus Rex," *GR* 13 (1966), 36–49, presents an explanation which is much more convincing, even though he does not point clearly enough to the characteristic cosmological background as the reason for the way Greek drama is presented.

[81] In *Oedipus At Colonus* 964–968 Oedipus claims his own innocence by pointing to the hereditary curse:

> No willing sinner; so it pleased the gods
> Wrath haply with my sinful race of old,

second emerges when it becomes evident that neither any god nor any human society can pardon or disregard parricide or incest, even when committed in ignorance; to the Greek mind purification was impossible since these two crimes fill the human heart with horror unqualified. Accepting this, Oedipus chooses the "punishment" of self-mutilation and self-banishment, crying:

> O, I adjure you, hide me anywhere
> Far from this land, or slay me straight, or cast me
> Down to the depths of ocean out of sight.
> Come hither, deign to touch an abject wretch;
> Draw near and fear not; I myself must bear
> The load of guilt that none but I can share (1410–1415).[82]

And so the third point becomes clear: even things done in ignorance can have disastrous effects—all the more so, of course, if they are done knowingly.

It follows that for neither class of wrongdoing can there be mercy or forgiveness if the crime outrages the objective world-order,[83] for this order does not recognize intentions, and the gods are not transcendent and personal so that they can save one who is unfortunate. When compared with the biblical personalist background, it becomes evident how limited is the "message" proclaimed by the Greek dramatists. Like them, the Bible speaks of offences that require punishment without mercy—but only when God's sanctity is directly infringed. In general, the Hebrew religion reserves punishment for *intended* sins and crimes. And even then repentance and reform offer the wings of the morning to the darkness of the sinner's night.

In view of the narrow and pessimistic perspectives of Greek tragedy it

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> Since then could'st find no sin in me myself
> For which in retribution I was doomed
> To trespass thus against myself and mine.

[82] See the speech of Creon in *Oedipus the King* 1427–1431:

> Leave not thus nakedly for all to gaze at
> A horror neither earth nor rain from heaven
> Nor light will suffer. Lead him straight within,
> For it is seemly that a kinsman's woes
> Be heard by kin and seen by kin alone.

[83] See the tale Herodotus (1.45) tells about Adrastus, son of Gordies. This story is the nearest parallel to the situation of Oedipus. Adrastus unwillingly slew his own brother and Atys, the son of his benefactor Croesus. Croesus took pity on Adrastus, saying: "Friend, I have from you all that justice asks *(pâsan tèn díken),* since you deem yourself worthy of death. But it is not you that I hold the cause of this evil *(toûde toû kakoû aítios),* save in so far as you were the unwilling doer of it: rather it is the work of a god, the same who told me long ago what was to be." After Croesus has buried his son, Adrastus despaired: "But Adrastus ..., the slayer of his own brother and of the man who purified him, when the tomb was undisturbed by the presence of men, slew himself there by the sepulchre, seeing now clearly that he was the most ill-fated wretch of all men whom he knew."

may be better to define the aim of a dramatist as an "awakening of sensitivity" rather than an "enlargement of sensitivity."[84] But when the play leads the reader or listener to experience or sense the profoundest and largest dimensions of the world, the term "enlargement of sensitivity" is fully justified. The drama of Job is certainly one example of this: human sensitivity is expanded from a sustained pessimism and fatalism to recognize the unlimited resources of the positive structure of the universe. Since many are and always have been responsive to its wisdom, there must surely be a basis for such sensitivity in the human heart and mind.[85]

[84] E. R. Dodds concludes his article "On Misunderstanding the Oedipus Rex," *GR* 13 (1966), 49, with the remark that "enlargement of sensitivity" is all he asks of any dramatist.

[85] See, for instance, the unique work on divine justice by G. W. Leibniz, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil* (ed. with an Introduction by A. Farrer; RMPhS; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951). The basis of Leibnitz's theodicy is the conviction that God is one, intelligent, free, absolutely perfect, good. The world is created and is thus relative, but man has a free will. The principle of sufficient reason tells him that the world could not have originated and cannot exist without a higher intellect. From this it follows that only one God can exist, as absolute master both on the natural and supernatural planes. According to Leibnitz, God is not some kind of blind force; he has free will, and he chose the best world from among many. God's all-embracing intellect suggests to man a calm recognition of the limits of his own mind. But in an immense universe of many marvels he has ample support for his optimism.

CHAPTER XXIX

PLATO'S AND PLUTARCH'S THEORIES OF PUNISHMENT

In Plato Greek thinking about punishment reaches its zenith. He not only expounds his own views, but also relates them to contemporary popular and philosophical trends, and the ideas of Protagoras and Socrates in particular have a prominent place in his writings. The *Protagoras,* the *Gorgias,* and the *Laws* employ his formal theory of punishment, their main concern being its justification, and the *Laws* came to be regarded as a model penal code for practical everyday use. Also characteristic of Plato are his views about eschatological punishments and rewards, which are set forth in the eschatological passages of the *Gorgias, Phaedo, Phaedrus,* the *Republic,* and the *Laws.*[1]

In spite of his extraordinary interest in various aspects of punishment, in this respect he had surprisingly little effect on his disciples. In Aristotle we find only a few obiter dicta,[2] and it was not until the first century C.E. that the Platonist Plutarch wrote a major work on punishment that was clearly influenced by Plato's writings.[3] Since he and his master present their reflections on certain fundamental penological problems in a more or less systematic way, it seems appropriate to pay them due attention in order to show, in what follows later, how far their theories can be applied to the views and tenets of the Hebrew Bible.

1. *Plato's Formal Theory of Punishment*

Plato's penology is an integral part of his general moral theory which "rests

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[1] In any discussion of Plato's views on punishment the following studies are relevant: T. J. Saunders, "Penology and Eschatology in Plato's *Timaeus* and *Laws*," *CQ*.NS 23 (1973), 232–244; idem, "Protagoras and Plato on Punishment," *The Sophists and Their Legacy* (ed. G. B. Kerferd; Hermes 44; Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1981), 129–141; M. M. Mackenzie, *Plato on Punishment* (Berkeley / Los Angeles / London: University of California Press, 1981); J. Annas, "Plato's Myths of Judgement," *Phronesis* 27 (1982), 119–143.

[2] See R. Nilstun, *Aristotle on Freedom and Punishment* (LMPPh 3; Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1981).

[3] See *De Sera Numinis Vindicta,* ed. by W. R. Paton, M. Pohlenz, and W. Sieveking, *Plutarchi Moralia,* vol. 3 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1929), 394–444; English edition by P. H. de Lacy and B. Einarson, *On the Delays of the Divine Vengeance (De Sera Numinis Vindicta),* Plutarch's Moralia, vol. 7 (LCL 405; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: W. Heinemann, 1959, 1968), 169–299. For an interpretation of this work, see T. J. Saunders, "Plutarch's *De Sera Numinis Vindicta* in the Tradition of Greek Penology," *Studi economico-giuridici: Il problema della pena criminale tra filosofia greca e diritto romano* (ed. O. Diliberto; Napoli: Casa editrice dott. E. Jovene, 1993), 65–94.

upon arguments designed to show that without *aretē* you cannot be either theoretically or practically rational and that without rationality you cannot have *aretē* ... And a key part of Plato's view is that not to understand what virtue is precludes one from being virtuous."[4] Plato thinks that reason itself has the power to generate action. In the *Protagoras* Socrates holds that "whoever learns what is good and what is bad will never be swayed by anything to act otherwise than as knowledge *(epistéme)* bids, and that intelligence *(phrónesis)* is a sufficient succour for mankind" (352c4–8). It follows, then, that failures of human beings are always a matter of ignorance. Socrates argues, addressing Protagoras: "... you have admitted that it is from defect of knowledge *(epistémes endeía)* that men err, when they do err, in their choice of pleasures and pains—that is, in the choice of good and evil; and from defect not merely of knowledge but of the knowledge which you have now admitted also to be that of measurement. And surely you know well enough for yourselves that the erring committed without knowledge is done through ignorance" (357d5–e2).

The second corner-stone in Plato's moral foundations is the metaphor of disease, or weakness, beyond control of the human race. On the analogy of healthy and diseased conditions of the body, justice means a healthy condition and injustice a diseased condition of the soul. In the *Republic* he says: "... Virtue, then, as it seems, would be a kind of health and beauty and good condition of the soul, and vice would be disease, ugliness, and weakness" (444d10–e2).[5] In the *Timaeus* Socrates argues that diseases of the soul can originate in disorders of the body: "Such is the manner in which diseases *(nosémata)* of the body come about; and those of the soul which are due to the condition of the body arise in the following way. We must agree that folly is a disease of the soul *(nóson mèn dè psuchês ánoian);* and of folly there are two kinds, the one of which is madness, the other ignorance. Whatever affection human beings suffer from, if it involves either of these conditions it must be termed 'disease'; and we must maintain that pleasures and pains in excess are the greatest of the soul's diseases" (86b1–8). In the same dialogue Socrates claims that "no one is voluntarily wicked, but the wicked man becomes wicked by reason of some evil condition of body and unskilled nurture, and these are experiences which are hateful to everyone and involuntary" (86d10–e3). In the *Protagoras* he elucidates a poem of Simonides by arguing: "I am fairly sure of this—that none of the wise men considers that anybody ever willingly errs or willingly does base and evil deeds; they are well aware that all who do base and evil things do them unwillingly" (345d11–e3). And in the *Laws* he says: "... when men commit wrongs which are remediable, one should, in the first place, recognize that

[4] See A. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (London: G. Duckworth, 1988), 69.
[5] See the analogy of the condition of body and soul in 409 and in the *Gorgias* 464a.

every wrongdoer is a wrongdoer involuntarily; for no one anywhere would ever voluntarily acquire any of the greatest evils, least of all in his own most precious possessions. And most precious in very truth to every man is, as we have said, the soul" (731c1–7).

One's attitude to wrongdoing derives from one's evaluation of virtue. According to Socratism and Plato virtue is an intrinsic good, while wrongdoing results in intrinsic disadvantage and suffering. This means that Plato's approach is basically individualist. In the *Republic* Glaucon proposes a classification of goods. Addressing Socrates he says: "Is it your desire to seem to have persuaded us or really to persuade us that it is without exception better to be just than unjust? ... do you agree that there is a kind of good which we would choose to possess, not from desire for its after effects, but welcoming it for its own sake?" (357a5–b7). Socrates agrees that there are things that are good in themselves, things that are good in themselves and in their consequences, and things which are good only in their consequences. Being asked in which of these classes he places justice Socrates answers: "In my opinion, it belongs in the fairest class, that which a man who is to be happy must love both for its own sake and for the results" (358a1–3). In the *Gorgias* Socrates argues that the just people act in accordance with the skill they possess; he thinks that the just people will never wish to act unjustly (460c), that wrongdoing is worse than being wronged (473a5–6; cf. 472d6–475e8; 482e–483b), and "that to strike or cut me or mine wrongfully is yet more of a disgrace and an evil, and likewise stealing and kidnapping and housebreaking, and in short any wrong whatsoever done to me or mine, are both worse and more shameful to the wrongdoer than to me the wronged" (508e6–8). Since justice belongs in the fairest class, injustice, which is considered as the vice of the soul, is conversely the foulest evil "because it produces the greatest pain or harm or both" (477c). In the light of this argument, what Socrates says in the *Republic* is particularly appropriate: "And now at last, it seems, it remains for us to consider whether it is profitable to do justice and practice honourable pursuits and be just, whether one is known to be such or not, or whether injustice profits, and to be unjust, if only a man escape punishment and is not bettered by chastisement" (444e5–445a4).

The criterion of culpability is the disposition of the soul rather than conduct. Of special importance is Plato's principle of the "proper order" of the soul. In the *Gorgias* Socrates describes a just person by drawing an analogy with the skill of a craftsman: "... each of them arranges everything according to a certain order, and forces one part to suit and fit with another, until he has combined the whole into a regular and well-ordered production *(tetagménon te kaì kekosmeménon prâgma)*" (503e8–504a2). The point is best illustrated in the following conversation between Socrates and Callicles in the *Gorgias:* "... But surely the virtue of each thing, whether of an implement or of a body, or again of a soul or any live creature, does not arrive

most properly by accident, but by an order or rightness or art that is apportioned to each. Is that so? I certainly agree. Then the virtue of each thing is a matter of regular and orderly arrangement *(táxei ára tetagménon kaì kekosmeménon estìn he aretè hekástou)?* I at least should say so. Hence it is a certain order *(kósmos tis ára)* proper to each existent thing that by its advent in each makes it good? That is my view. So then a soul which has its own proper order is better than one which is unordered *(kaì psuchè ára kósmon échousa tòn heautês ameínon tês akosmétou)?* necessarily. But further, one that has order is orderly *(allà mèn he ge kósmon échousa kosmía)?* Of course it will be. And the orderly one *(kosmía)* is temperate? Most necessarily. So the temperate soul is good ..." (506d6–507a2). In the *Republic* the proper order of the soul is likened to the internal organization of a just state; a person is just in the same way in which a city is just (441d; 443de).[6]

The order of an internal organization presumes human rationality and a sense of responsibility. "The original Socratic position, that vice is ignorance, supposed that the agent had misguided impulses towards what he thought to be in his interests, for his failure we can but pity his intellectual deficiency. It is possible, however, to imagine a situation where his ignorance is wilful and therefore, even if his actions prove to be against his interests, he is culpable. The new doctrine, that virtue is psychic order, raises this question of culpability with even greater urgency, since we may readily conceive of a person deliberately promoting disorder (although his clumsy counterpart does not)."[7] How is the question of responsibility and culpability reflected in the theory of punishment?[8]

1.1 *The* Gorgias

In this work Socrates enunciates two interrelated paradoxes: first, it is better to suffer than to do wrong; secondly, for an unjust person it is better to be punished than to escape punishment, for punishment is a release from evil (473–479).[9] These themes are repeated several times in various forms in the dialogue between Socrates and Polus in order to illustrate the issue. Socrates says at one point: "I think, indeed, that you and I and the rest of the world believe that doing wrong is worse than suffering it, and escaping punish-

[6] See the statement about psychic harmony in the *Laws* 689d5–8; the Stranger argues: "... For without harmony *(áneu xumphonías)*, my friends, how could even the smallest fraction of wisdom exist? It is impossible. But the greatest and best of harmonies would most properly be accounted the greatest wisdom ..."

[7] See M. M. Mackenzie, *Plato on Punishment*, 148–149.

[8] Since the *Protagoras* and the *Laws* deal very similarly with the question of punishment, we shall discuss the *Gorgias* before the *Protagoras* even though the latter was written before the former.

[9] For 477e7–479e9, see commentary of E. R. Dodds, *Plato: Gorgias* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959, 1990), 254–255.

ment worse than incurring it" (474b2–5).[10] The argument concerning punishment makes the following points: paying the penalty for wrongdoing means suffering something; he who punishes rightly punishes justly; he who pays the penalty by being punished suffers what is just; to suffer what is just means something good; the benefit for the justly punished is that the person becomes better in soul; he is relieved from badness of the soul, which is the greatest evil; injustice is the foulest vice of the soul and is consequently the most painful; the justice of the law courts reforms the wrongdoer and acts as a medicine for wickedness; medical treatment is not pleasant but it is beneficial;[11] happiest is he who has no vice in his soul and next after him he who is relieved of it; not paying a penalty is a retention of the evil in us, and the worst life is led by him who is not relieved of evil by punishment; to do wrong and not pay the penalty is the greatest of evils; it is always the wrongdoer who is more wretched than the wronged, and the unpunished than the punished (475e9–479e11).

After having developed this complex argument Socrates offers the following logical advice concerning the wrongdoer: "If he is guilty of wrongdoing, either himself or anyone else he may care for, he must go of his own freewill where he may soonest pay the penalty, to the judge as if to his doctor, with the earnest intent that the disease of his injustice shall not become chronic and cause a deep incurable ulcer in his soul ... Then for pleading in defence of injustice, whether it is oneself or one's parents or friends or children or country that has done the wrong, rhetoric is of no use to us at all, Polus; except one were to suppose, perchance, to the contrary, that a person ought to accuse himself first of all, and in the second place his relations or anyone else of his friends who may from time to time be guilty, to bring it to light in order that he may pay the penalty and be made healthy; and, moreover, to compel both himself and his neighbours not to cower away but to submit with closed eyes and good courage, as it were, to the cutting and burning of the surgeon, in pursuit of what is good and fair, and without reckoning in the smart: if his crimes have deserved a flogging, he must submit to the rod; if fetters, to their grip; if a fine, to its payment; if banishment, to be banished; or if death, to die; himself to be the first accuser either of himself or of his relations, and to employ his rhetoric for the purpose of so exposing their iniquities that they may be relieved of that greatest evil, injustice" (480a7–d8).[12]

[10] See the conclusion of the section in 475e3–7: "Then I spoke the truth when I said that neither you nor anyone else in the world would choose to do wrong rather than suffer it, since it really is more evil."

[11] See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1104b.17–19 (2.3.4): "Another indication is the fact that pain is the medium of punishment; for punishment is a sort of medicine, and it is the nature of medicine to work by means of opposites."

[12] See Socrates' suggestion in the *Republic* 409e4–410a4: "Then will you not establish by

From these premises follows, conversely, paradoxical advice on how to injure an enemy: "... we must make every exertion of act and word to prevent him from being punished or coming to trial, or if he does, we must contrive that our enemy shall escape and not be punished; nay, if he has carried off a great lot of gold, that he shall not refund it but keep and spend it on himself and his, unjustly and godlessly, or if he has committed crimes that deserve death, that he shall not die; if possible, never die, but be deathless in his villainy, or failing that, live as long a time as may be in that condition" (481a1–b1).

1.2 *The* Protagoras

Protagoras introduces his views on punishment within the framework of his doctrine that virtue can be acquired by teaching. He maintains that the people do not regard virtue "as natural or spontaneous, but as something taught and acquired after careful preparation by those who acquire it" (323c6–8). Protagoras sees support for his doctrine in the reaction of the people to those who have evil in them by accident, and in the function of punishment of actual wrongdoers. The former are not punished: "one merely pities them" (323d4–5). As for the real wrongdoers, Protagoras argues: "If you will consider punishment, Socrates, and what control it has over wrong-doers, the facts will inform you that men agree in regarding virtue as procured. No one punishes a wrong-doer from the mere contemplation or on account of his wrong-doing, unless one takes unreasoning vengeance like a wild beast. But he who undertakes to punish with reason does not avenge himself for the past offence, since he cannot make what was done as though it had not come to pass; he looks rather to the future, and aims at preventing that particular person and others who see him punished from doing wrong again. And being so minded he must have in mind that virtue comes by training: for you observe that he punishes to deter. This then is the accepted view of all who seek requital in either private or public life; and while men in general exact requital and punishment from those whom they suppose to have wronged them, this is especially the case with the Athenians, your fellow-citizens, so that by our argument the Athenians also share the view that virtue is procured and taught" (324a3–c7).

The crux of this argument concerns the justification of punishment. Protagoras claims that no rational being inflicts punishment on the ground of the bare fact that wrongdoing has been committed, "since he cannot make

law in your city such an art of medicine as we have described in conjunction with this kind of justice? And these arts will care for the bodies and souls of such of your citizens as are truly well born, but of those who are not, such as are defective in body they will suffer to die and those who are evil-natured and incurable in soul they will themselves put to death."

what was done as though it had not come to pass." This saying is especially noteworthy because the idea appears also elsewhere. In the *Laws* 934a7–8 it occurs in a similar statement on punishment: "... for what is done can never be undone ..." Aristotle also uses the expression in his treatment of the question of choice: "Choice is not concerned with anything that has happened already: for example, no one chooses to have sacked Troy; for neither does one deliberate about what has happened in the past, but about what still lies in the future and may happen or not; what has happened cannot be made not to have happened. Hence Agathon is right in saying *This only is denied even to God, The power to make what has been done undone.*"[13] In the context of Plato's penology the expression means that all ideas of backward-looking reference or retributive punishment, which were very strong in Greek thought, are ruled out. Instead of taking vengeance (like a wild beast) on a crime of the past, the punisher looks to the future. His aim is the teaching of virtue by deterrence from doing wrong through punishment. According to Protagoras such an attitude to punishment is "the accepted view of all who seek requital in either private or public life." This rejection of retributive punishment is surprising, for punishing for the sake of the future does not mean that punishing *also* for the sake of the past is not justified and must therefore be excluded. Conversely, punishing for the sake of the past does not preclude punishing for the sake of the future *as well.*[14]

Since Protagoras uses the problem of punishment to support his thesis that virtue is teachable and that all should partake of it, the question arises of how to deal with wrongdoers who resist education and appear to be incurable. His answer is that those who fail to respond to instruction should be exiled or put to death: "... we should instruct and punish such as do not partake of it (virtue), whether child or husband or wife, until the punishment of such persons has made them better, and should cast forth from our cities or put to death as incurable whoever fails to respond to such punishment and instruction" (325a5–b2).

1.3 *The* Laws

In his late work, the *Laws,* Plato presents a detailed penal code, which is concerned with the public good rather than the interests of the individual. The question of punishment is a side issue. Plato retains the theoretical basis of the *Gorgias* and especially of the *Protagoras,* but realizes that he must clarify some of the details from the points of view of both criminal and victim in order to justify his penal code. Therefore his emphasis is in some respects differently placed. The first noteworthy point is his curable // incur-

[13] See *Nicomachean Ethics* 1139b.8–11 (6.2.6).
[14] See T. J. Saunders, *The Sophists and Their Legacy,* 132.

able antithesis, which forms part of his thesis that no one does wrong willingly—something he sees as a reason for restraint in punishing criminals: "Every man ought to be at once passionate and gentle in the highest degree. For, on the one hand, it is impossible to escape from other men's wrongdoings, when they are cruel and hard to remedy, or even wholly irremediable, otherwise than by victorious fighting and self-defence, and by punishing most rigorously, and this no soul can achieve without noble passion. But, on the other hand, when men commit wrongs which are remediable, one should, in the first place, recognize that every wrongdoer is a wrongdoer involuntarily ..." (731b3–c3).

On the other hand, Plato was so much concerned with the community or the state as a whole that he called for extrusion of all criminals who endanger the rest of the body politic. The Stranger depicts the community as a flock from which the unsound animals must be separated out from the sound ones: "The best purge is painful, like all medicines of a drastic nature,—the purge which hales to punishments by means of justice linked with vengeance *(ho tê díke metà timorías eis tò koládzein ágon),* crowning the vengeance *(timoría)* with exile or death: it, as a rule, clears out the greatest criminals when they are incurable and cause serious damage to the State" (735d8–e5).[15] In book 9 the Stranger explicitly points to the purpose of punishment and advocates at the same time the principle of individual retribution: "... no penalty that is legally imposed aims at evil, but it effects, as a rule, one or other of two results—it makes the person who suffers it either better or less bad. But if any citizen is ever convicted of such an act—that is, of committing some great and infamous wrong against gods, parents, or State—the judge shall regard him as already incurable, reckoning that, in spite of all the training and nurture he has had from infancy, he has not refrained from the worst iniquity. For him the penalty is death, the least of evil; and, moreover, by serving as an example, he will benefit others, when himself disgraced and removed from sight beyond the borders of the country; but his children and family, if they shun their father's ways, shall be honoured, and honourable mention shall be made of them, seeing that they

[15] See 728b2–c5: "Hardly anyone takes account of the greatest 'judgment' (as men call it) upon evil-doing; that greatest judgment is this,—to grow like unto men that are wicked, and, in so growing, to shun good men and good counsels and cut oneself off from them, but to cleave to the company of the wicked and follow after them; and he that is joined to such men inevitably acts and is acted upon in the way that such men bid one another to act. Now such a resultant condition is not a 'judgment' (for justice and judgment are things honourable), but a punishment, an infliction that follows on injustice; both he that undergoes this and he that undergoes it not are alike wretched,—the one in that he remains uncured, the other in that he is destroyed in order to secure the salvation of many others." See also 854c1–6: "... every man is bound to honour what is noble and just; but the company of evil men shun wholly, and turn not back. And if it be so that by thus acting your disease grows less, well; but if not, then deem death the more noble way, and quit yourself of life."

have done well and bravely in leaving the ways of vice for those of virtue" (854d7–855a5).

In book 9 the Stranger clarifies the voluntary // involuntary antithesis by invoking the notion of deliberation: only deliberately done good deeds may be called just, and only deliberate injuries may be termed unjust (860d–863a).[16]

To this antithesis Plato attaches an outline of his theory of punishment: "As regards unjust injuries and gains, in case man causes another to gain by acting unjustly towards him, all such cases as are curable we must cure, regarding them as diseases of the soul. And we should affirm that our cure for injustice lies in this direction ... whenever any man commits any unjust act, great or small, the law shall instruct him and absolutely compel him for the future either never willingly to dare to do such a deed, or else to do it ever so much less often, in addition to paying for the injury. To effect this, whether by action or speech, by means of pleasures and pains, honours and dishonours, money-fines and money-gifts, and in general by whatsoever means one can employ to make men hate injustice and love (or at any rate not hate) justice,—this is precisely the task of laws most noble. But for all those whom he perceives to be incurable in respect of these matters, what penalty shall the lawgiver enact, and what law? The lawgiver will realise that in all such cases not only is it better for the sinners themselves to live no longer, but also that they will prove of a double benefit to others by quitting life—since they will both serve as a warning to the rest not to act unjustly, and also rid the State of wicked men,—and thus he will of necessity inflict death as the chastisement for their sins, in cases of this kind, and of this kind only" (862c6–863a4).

In this passage Plato speaks more explicitly of some aspects of punishment than in the *Protagoras,* and deals with some entirely new issues. He

[16] M. M. Mackenzie, *Plato on Punishment,* 202, argues: "Thus we may expect just acts from the just man and unjust acts from the unjust man, when each is acting with intent. In terms of the new definition, the just man under these circumstances will be acting both deliberately and voluntarily, in that he is pursuing his true interests. The unjust man will, however, be acting deliberately but not, in terms of the paradox, voluntarily, since he is in fact failing to follow his own true interests." See the conclusion of the article by T. J. Saunders, "The Socratic Paradoxes in Plato's Laws: A Commentary on 859c–864b," *Hermes* 96 (1968), 434: "If my interpretation is right, what are the consequences for the penal code? We are punishing a man for what he admittedly 'wanted' to do; but this was not what he 'really' wanted to do. His will has been taken over by emotions or misdirected by ignorance, and in the Socratic sense his action was involuntary. 'Guilt' or 'blameworthiness' has no place in Plato's penology, except in an attenuated and purely legal sense, for 'guilt' implies knowing the good but opting for the bad without being compelled. The punishments in his penal code therefore aim simply at producing a 'conditioned response' to tug against the 'bad strings' mentioned in the puppet metaphor (644dff.) and to pull with the good (cf. 862d). From one point of view, Plato's doctrine is distasteful to us; it seems to deny individual responsibility and to treat a man as the mere plaything of opposing forces; from another point of view it seems to be a resounding vote of confidence in the fundamental soundness of the human will."

emphasizes a medical analogy in discussing re-education and the question of recompense. Perhaps the most striking point is his suggestion that those who are supposed to punish wrongdoers may even employ various kinds of gifts in order to "make men hate injustice and love justice," but the focal point is his forward-looking justification of punishment and its deterrent effect. Both Protagoras and Plato agree that punishment should not be mere vengeance. This crucial insight is, apart from the issue of recompense, reinforced in book 11 of the *Laws:* "In all cases where one man causes damage to another by acts of robbery or violence, if the damage be great, he shall pay a large sum as compensation to the damaged party, and a small sum if the damage be small ... And he shall pay the penalty, not because of the wrong-doing,—for what is done can never be undone *(ou gàr tò gegonòs agéneton éstai poté),*—but in order that for the future both he himself and those who behold his punishment may either utterly loathe his sin or at least renounce to a great extent such lamentable conduct" (933e7–934b2).

2. *Plato's Eschatological Myths of Judgment*

In addition to his discussion of traditional views about punishment and formal theories of punishment, Plato had an intuition or vision that "at the end" an eschatological judgment will take place. The idea recurs in the *Gorgias, Phaedo, Phaedrus,* the *Republic,* and the *Laws.* It is obvious that accounts of a *last* judgment must have several characteristics in common that far transcend the compass of a formal theory of punishment: the aim of punishment ceases to be reform and becomes the fulfilment of the requirements of justice "at the end"—hence eschatological punishment is retributive. Since punishment is considered as the consequence of vice, the determination of punishment is linked with reward as the consequence of virtue; the judgment takes place at a crossroads, and from there the righteous and the wicked have to go to their separate destinations. The emphasis is laid on personal responsibility, so there is no room for exculpation of the wrongdoer or pity towards him.

2.1 *The* Gorgias *(523a–527e)*

In the beginning of the account given in the *Gorgias* Socrates offers Callicles a short and simple vision of a *last* judgment: "... Now in the time of Cronos there was a law concerning mankind, and it holds to this very day amongst the gods, that every man who has passed a just and holy life departs after his decease to the Isles of the Blest, and dwells in all happiness apart from ill; but whoever has lived unjustly and impiously goes to the dungeon of requital and penance which, you know, they call Tartarus" (523a6–b4).

Socrates here outlines a received popular view,[17] which he uses in order to emphasize some basic ideas concerning virtue in general and punishment in particular.[18] He cites the good man who is not treated properly by his judges, and suggests that a later trial–after death–will turn the tables. Earthly trials are flawed because the judges are misled by false appearances, "because they who are on trial are tried in their clothing, for they are tried alive ... Next they must be stripped bare of all those things before they are tried; for they must stand their trial dead. Their judge also must be naked, dead, beholding with very soul the very soul of each immediately upon his death, bereft of all his kin and having left behind on earth all that fine array, to the end that the judgment may be just" (523c3–e8).

Eschatological judgment is intended to serve a deterrent purpose, but its principal aim is to reinforce the intrinsic value of virtue and the importance of correction, and Socrates concludes: "... among the many statements we have made, while all the rest are refuted this one alone is unshaken—that doing wrong is to be more carefully shunned than suffering it; that above all things a man should study not to seem but to be good both in private and in public; that if one becomes bad in any respect one must be corrected; that this is good in the second place,—next to being just, to become so and to be corrected by paying the penalty ..." (527b3–c2).

2.2 *The* Phaedo *(78b3–84b8; 106b11–115a10)*

In this work the issue of final judgment is combined with that of reincarnation. Plato's way of presenting these issues is dictated by his view that soul and body are distinct and opposed. A soul is pure if it never willingly associates with the body, and its excellence lies in separation from its turbulent partner. The philosopher presumably possesses the highest kind of virtue because he does not identify with the body's concerns. Therefore he alone escapes the doom of permanent embodiment. A pure soul "goes away into that which is like itself, into the invisible, divine, immortal, and wise, and when it arrives there it is happy, freed from error and folly and fear and fierce loves and all the other human ills, and as the initiated say, lives in truth through all after time with the gods" (81a3–9). On the other hand, a soul that is defiled and impure "because it was always with the body and cared for it and loved it and was fascinated by it and its desires and pleasures ... because the body has been its constant companion and the object of its care ... such a soul is weighed down by this and is dragged back into the

[17] See the *Republic* 330d7–e2: "The tales that are told of the world below and how the men who have done wrong here must pay the penalty there, though he may have laughed them down hitherto, then begin to torture his soul with the doubt that there may be some truth in them."

[18] For a commentary on the whole passage, see E. R. Dodds, *Plato: Gorgias*, 372–386.

visible world, through fear of the invisible and of the other world, and so, as they say, it flits about the monuments and the tombs, where shadowy shapes of souls have been seen, figures of those souls which were not set free in purity but retain something of the visible; and this is why they are seen ... And it is likely that those are not the souls of the good, but those of the base, which are compelled to flit about such places as a punishment for their former evil mode of life. And they flit about until through the desire of the corporeal which clings to them they are again imprisoned in a body. And they are likely to be imprisoned in natures which correspond to the practices of their former life" (81b1–e5).

It is striking that at this point Plato introduces the possibility of reincarnation as a punishment for an evil life—implying, of course, that pure souls are not liable to undergo it. The proposal may sound droll but is obviously seriously intended: "Those who have chosen injustice and tyranny and robbery pass into the bodies of wolves and hawks and kites. Where else can we imagine that they go?" (82a2–5).[19]

In the second section of the dialogue the emphasis is on the soul's immortality and imperishability—hence the following advice from Socrates: "We ought to bear in mind, that, if the soul is immortal, we must care for it, not only in respect to this time, which we call life, but in respect to all time, and if we neglect it, the danger now appears to be terrible. For if death were an escape from everything, it would be a boon to the wicked, for when they die they would be freed from the body and from their wickedness together with their souls. But now, since the soul is seen to be immortal, it cannot escape from evil or be saved in any other way than by becoming as good and wise as possible" (107b11–d2). Socrates goes on to speak of the travelling of the soul before it comes to judgment. Then he says: "And when it arrives at the place where the other souls are, the soul which is impure and has done wrong, by committing wicked murders or other deeds akin to those and the works of kindred souls, is avoided and shunned by all, and no one is willing to be its companion or its guide, but it wanders about alone in utter bewilderment, during certain fixed times, after which it is carried by necessity to its fitting habitation. But the soul that has passed through life in purity and righteousness, finds gods for companions and guides, and goes to dwell in its proper dwelling. Now there are many wonderful regions of the earth, and the earth itself is neither in size nor in other respects such as it is supposed to be by those who habitually discourse about it, as I believe on someone's authority" (108b4–c10).

Socrates offers his own interpretation of the legend of Tartarus and the

[19] Concerning all the others Socrates asks the question in 82b4–9: "Is it not likely that they pass again into some such social and gentle species as that of bees or of wasps or ants, or into the human race again, and that worthy men spring from them?"

Isles of the Blessed, which are no longer placed outside our world but are integral with it. The dead are destined to come to their appropriate place, each in accordance with his ways: "Now when the dead have come to the place where each is led by his genius, first they are judged and sentenced, as they have lived well and piously, or not. And those who are found to have lived neither well nor ill, go to the Acheron and, embarking upon vessels provided for them, arrive in them at the lake; there they dwell and are purified, and if they have done any wrong they are absolved by paying the penalty for their wrong-doings, and for their good deeds they receive rewards, each according to his merits. But those who appear to be incurable, on account of the greatness of their wrong-doings, because they have committed many great deeds of sacrilege, or wicked and abominable murders, or any other such crimes, are cast by their fitting destiny into Tartarus, whence they never emerge. Those, however, who are curable, but are found to have committed great sins—who have, for example, in a moment of passion done some act of violence against father or mother and have lived in repentance the rest of their lives, or who have slain some other person under similar conditions—these must needs be thrown into Tartarus, and when they have been there a year the wave casts them out, the homicides by way of Cocytus, those who have outraged their parents by way of Pyriphlegethon. And when they have been brought by the current to the Achrusian lake, they shout and cry out, calling to those whom they have slain or outraged, begging and beseeching them to be gracious and to let them come out into the lake; and if they prevail they come out and cease from their ills, but if not, they are borne away again to Tartarus and thence back into the rivers, and this goes on until they prevail upon those whom they have wronged; for this is the penalty imposed upon them by the judges. But those who are found to have excelled in holy living are freed from these regions within the earth and are released as from prisons; they mount upward into their pure abode and dwell upon the earth. And of these, all who have duly purified themselves by philosophy live henceforth altogether without bodies, and pass to still more beautiful abodes which it is not easy to describe, nor have we now time enough" (113d1–114c7).

2.3 *The* Phaedrus *(246a4–249d4)*

The idea of judgment after death is related to the argument that the soul is immortal. In the *Phaedrus* Socrates describes the soul figuratively as consisting of a charioteer and two horses. He works out fully the myth of reincarnation in the context of a final judgment, thereby emphasizing the advantage of the philosophers more strongly than in the *Phaedo*. He says of those who grasp the truth: "And this is a law of Destiny, that the soul which follows after God and obtains a view of any of the truths is free from harm

until the next period, and if it can always attain this, is always unharmed; but when, through inability to follow, it fails to see, and through some mischance is filled with forgetfulness and evil and grows heavy, and when it has grown heavy, loses its wings and falls to the earth, then it is the law that this soul shall never pass into any beast at its first birth, but the soul that has seen the most shall enter into the birth of a man who is to be a philosopher or a lover of beauty ..." (248c2–e4).

All souls are condemned to the cycle of rebirth, but not all have to remain in its toils for ever; the just will be rewarded by ultimate release: "Now in all these states, whoever lives justly obtains a better lot *(ameínonos moíras metalambánei),* and whoever lives unjustly, a worse. For each soul returns to the place whence it came in ten thousand years; for it does not regain its wings before that time has elapsed, except the soul of him who has been a guileless philosopher or a philosophical lover; these, when for three successive periods of a thousand years they have chosen such a life, after the third period of a thousand years become winged in the three thousandth year and go their way; but the rest, when they have finished their first life, receive judgment, and after the judgment some go to the places of correction under the earth and pay their penalty, while the others, made light and raised up into a heavenly place by justice, live in a manner worthy of the life they led in human form. But in the thousandth year both come to draw lots and choose their second life, each choosing whatever it wishes. Then a human soul may pass into the life of a beast, and a soul which was once human, may pass again from a beast into a man. For the soul which has never seen the truth can never pass into human form. For a human being must understand a general conception formed by collecting into a unity by means of reason the many perceptions of the senses; and this is a recollection of those things which our soul once beheld, when it journeyed with God and, lifting its vision above the things which we now say exist, rose up into real being. And therefore it is just that the mind of the philosopher only has wings, for he is always, so far as he is able, in communion through memory with those things the communion with which causes God to be divine. Now a man who employs such memories rightly is always being initiated into perfect mysteries and he alone becomes truly perfect; but since he separates himself from human interests and turns his attention toward the divine, he is rebuked by the vulgar, who consider him mad and do not know that he is inspired" (248e5–249d4).

2.4 *The* Republic *(613e16–621d3)*

The passage cited above from the *Republic* contains the famous myth of Er, which is based on the idea of a cycle of reincarnations. The returning of soul to body is part of an endless process regulated by the Fates *(Moîrai).* This

view is all the more striking as the main moral theme of the *Republic* is that virtue in general and justice in particular are good in themselves and in their intrinsic consequences. Socrates emphasizes that justice "belongs in the fairest class, that which a man who is to be happy must love both for its own sake and for the results" (358a1–3). Before the account of the myth of Er starts, Socrates insists that towards the end of his activity and life a just person enjoys all its good consequences, whereas the unjust fail in their last days (613c–d). However, the advantages and disadvantages experienced during their lives "are nothing in number and magnitude compared with those that await both after death" (614a5–6).

Judgment after death is not based on the principle of strict retribution: "For all the wrongs they had ever done to any one and all whom they had severally wronged they had paid the penalty in turn tenfold for each, and the measure of this was by periods of a hundred years each, so that on the assumption that this was the length of human life the punishment might be ten times the crime; as for example that if anyone had been the cause of many deaths or had betrayed cities and armies and reduced them to slavery, or had been participant in any other iniquity, they might receive in requital pains tenfold for each of these wrongs, and again if any had done deeds of kindness and been just and holy men they might receive their due reward in the same measure" (615a7–b7).

Nevertheless, in the myth of Er the sentence pronounced after death cannot be considered as a final judgment but rather as part of a cosmic cycle of reincarnations. A prophet, for instance, proclaims the word of Lachesis, the daughter of Necessity: "Souls that live for a day, now is the beginning of another cycle of mortal generation where birth is the beacon of death. No divinity *(daímon)* shall cast lots for you, but you shall choose your own deity. Let him to whom falls the first lot first select a life to which he shall cleave of necessity. But virtue has no master over her, and each shall have more or less of her as he honours her or does her despite. The blame *(aitía)* is his who chooses: God is blameless *(Theòs anaítios)*" (617d9–e6). It is a notable feature of the myth that "the choice was determined for the most part by the habits of their former lives" (620a2–3): Orpheus selected the life of a swan, the soul of Thamyras chose the life of a nightingale, Ajax the life of a lion, Agamemnon the life of an eagle, Epeius the life of a craftswoman, and so on. When "all the souls had chosen their lives in the order of their lots, they were marshalled and went before Lachesis. And she sent with each, as the guardian of his life and the fulfiller of his choice, the genius that he had chosen, and this divinity led the soul first to Clotho, under her hand and her turning of the spindle to ratify the destiny of his lot and choice; and after contact with her the genius again led the soul to the spinning of Atropos to make the web of its destiny irreversible, and then without a backward look it passed beneath the throne of Necessity ..." (620d6–621a1).

It is obvious that such imaginative conjurings are incompatible with belief in personal responsibility and the moral significance of human conduct since, if Er is to be credited, the present life is determined by past lives and their subsequent requitals. Sentencing after death can be cruel and the allocation of rewards arbitrary;[20] the vice // punishments and virtue // rewards relationships are wholly impersonal; and the cosmic cycle of reincarnations cannot offer any reason to be just while in this world.

But precisely that seems to be the point of the myth of ER. Remembering the *Republic*'s emphasis on the intrinsically good consequences of behaving justly, we may conclude that the myth confirms that argument directly or indirectly. Since rewards after death have little or no significance for the life of the individual, we should choose justice for its own sake rather than for any deferred dividend it may pay. Justice is worth having for what it is—even against the background of a world that is indifferent to the concerns of the individual.[21]

2.5 *The* Laws

In books nine and ten of the *Laws* there are some traces of impersonal eschatology, while the issue of reincarnation is not developed, but is implicit in certain passages. The dialogue treats eschatology as part of the fabric of penal prescriptions for crimes committed during the life of a human being, and its purpose in this context is to help convince the reader. A striking feature is the introduction of the *lex talionis.* After having pointed to certain types of murder, the Stranger claims "that vengeance for such acts is exacted in Hades, and that those who return again to this earth are bound to pay the natural penalty *(kaì pálin aphikoménois deûro anankaîon eînai tèn katà phúsin díken ektîsai),*—each culprit the same, that is, which he inflicted on his victim,—and that their life on earth must end in their meeting a like fate

[20] See the statement by J. Annas, "Plato's Myths of Judgement," *Phronesis* 27 (1982), 133: "How can it be right for me to be punished for having been unjust, if my unjust state resulted from factors over which I had little or no control? As personal requital for what I have done, punishment has become grossly unfair. It makes sense only if it is itself regarded as part of the cosmic pattern; my treatment after death is then merely inevitable requital for what I have done in life, and its results go on to produce another stage of the cycle. But if the rewards or punishments only make sense when viewed as part of the total pattern, and not from my viewpoint, they cease to have real moral significance for me. They will still be either good or horrible, and therefore to be awaited with anxiety; but there is nothing that I can do that will bring it about that I receive the one rather than the other. Which it will be, has already been decided in and by lives that are already past."

[21] See J. Annas, *Phronesis* 27 (1982), 138: "A realistic moral philosophy must start by accepting that individuals' lives do not have point in the world as a whole, and that even if justice does turn out to bring rewards in the end, that cannot be an inducement that has any cogency to an honest and realistic person. If we choose to be just, we must choose justice for itself, in a universe that we recognize to be indifferent rather than benevolent to us as individuals."

(toiaúte moíra teleutêsai) at the hands of another" (870d10–e3).

Elsewhere the Stranger speaks of avenging the murder of relatives. There is no possibility of purification from a crime of this kind other than suffering a similar fate in a future incarnation: "The myth of story (or whatever one should call it) has been clearly stated, as derived from ancient priests, to the effect that Justice, the avenger *(timoròs díke)* of kindred blood, acting as overseer, employs the law just mentioned, and has ordained that the doer of such a deed must of necessity suffer the same as he has done *(kaì étaxen ára drásantí ti toioûton patheîn tautà anankaíos háper édrasen):* if ever a man has slain his father, he must endure to suffer the same violent fate at his own children's hands in days to come; or if he has slain his mother, he must of necessity *(anankaîon)* come to birth sharing in the female nature, and when thus born be removed from life by the hands of his offspring in afterdays; for of the pollution of common blood there is no other purification, nor does the stain of pollution admit of being washed off before the soul which committed the act pays back murder for murder, like for like *(phónon phóno homoío hómoion),* and thus by propitiation lays to rest the wrath of all the kindred. Wherefore, in dread of such vengeances *(timorías)* from Heaven a man should refrain himself; if, however, any should be overtaken by a disaster so lamentable that they have the audacity deliberately and of free will to reave soul from body for father, mother, brethren or children, in such cases the ordinance of the law of the mortal lawgiver stands thus:—The warnings of exclusion from customary places, and the sureties, are the same as those prescribed for former cases; and if any man be convicted of such a murder, and of having slain any of the persons named, the officers of the judges and magistrates shall kill him and cast him out naked at an appointed cross-roads outside the city, and all the magistrates, acting on behalf of the whole State, shall take each a stone and cast it on the head of the corpse, and thus make atonement for the whole State; and after this they shall carry the corpse to the borders of the land and cast it out unburied, according to law" (872d9–873c1).

In addition to these passages there is a hint of reincarnation in the context of afterlife judgment (903e–905b). The blueprint of the next world is unusual: instead of precisely defined locations for individual souls, Plato envisages the arranging of every "part" of the universe as a "Whole," "for every physician and every trained craftsman works always for the sake of a Whole, and strives after what is best in general, and he produces a part for the sake of a whole, and not a whole for the sake of a part *(méros mèn héneka hólou kaì ouch hólon mérous héneka apergádzetai)* ... And inasmuch as soul, being conjoined now with one body, now with another, is always undergoing all kinds of changes either of itself or owing to another soul, there is left for the draughts-player no further task,—save only to shift the character that grows better to a superior place, and the worse to a worse, ac-

cording to what best suits each of them, so that to each may be allotted its appropriate destiny *(moíras lagcháne)*" (903c7–d11).

The Stranger claims that supervision of all things is child's play to the gods, and points to the role of "our King": "He designed a location for each of the parts, wherein it might secure the victory of goodness in the Whole and the defeat of evil most completely, easily, and well. For this purpose He has designed the rule which prescribes what kind of character should be set to dwell in what kind of position and in what regions; but the causes of the generation of any special kind he left to the will of each one of us men. For according to the trend of our desires and the nature of our souls, each one of us generally becomes of a corresponding character" (904b3–c4). The position of human beings in the next world is described in spatial terms. The soul moves over the surface in space towards the lower regions, named Hades, if it is unjust, or up to an eminent region if it is in union with divine virtue.[22] This process serves the interests of the cosmos as a whole.

3. *Plutarch's Theory of Punishment*

As a Platonist, Plutarch adopts the main Platonic theories and models of punishment. Perhaps the two writers' most remarkable common ground is the medical analogy: the purpose of punishment is the cure of the soul. Plutarch does not, however, adapt Plato's patterns for practical purposes; his intent is to justify the ways of God (the gods) to human beings in the light of his providence *(prónoia)*, omnipotence, omniscience, and magnanimity. As the title suggests, his main concern is to explain the reasons for delays in divine punishment. *On the Delays of the Divine Vengeance* is conceived as a dialogue between himself and Olympichus, Patrocleas and Timon. The discussion opens with the fictitious attack of an Epicurean on divine providence, which cites in particular the delays that attend punishment of the wicked. The dialogue has a dialectical structure containing three main stages and concludes with a picturesque and fantastic eschatological myth (563b8–568).

The myth is for our purposes not of major interest even though certain sections are devoted to punishment after death. All the more important are the three main theses of the *logos* in which Plutarch discusses the justifications and purposes of divine punishments inflicted in this world on humans:

[22] See T. J. Saunders, *CQ*.NS 23 (1973), 234: "The process is not, apparently, subject to more than minimal guidance from any personal agency: it seems to be automatic or semi-automatic, with perhaps some remote control from a supervisor who may have done no more than construct the system in the first place, which thereafter operates by virtue of its own built-in mechanisms." On pp. 237–238 Saunders points out that the eschatology of the *Laws* in book 10 is based on that of the *Timaeus* 40–44; 91. There reincarnation is mentioned in the framework of the four-element theory.

a) four reasons for the delays in God's punishment (549e2–553f7); b) punishment is in fact not deferred, for it is contemporary with the offence, resulting immediately and inevitably in remorse, regret and terror (553f8–556e2); c) the punishment of descendants for their ancestors' sins is a special case of delay that calls for justification (556e3–560a12; 561c1–563b7). The section 560a13–561b14 is a discussion of the survival of the soul after death.

Plutarch's theodicy displays a wider spectrum of ideas than the Platonic works on punishment which are concerned, for the most part, with the punishment of humans by humans, and thus serve practical ends. Plutarch does not, however, explore the full range of rational argumentation against the background of divine omnipotence, omniscience and magnanimity. The main reason for this restraint seems to be his view that God is our model, requiring imitation. Humans as individuals and human institutions are often compelled to act without delay even though they do not by so doing exclude the possibility that God may have reasons for delay in punishing the wicked. The main problem for humans is that of reconciling principle with the challenge of the particular situation. Since mortals with their limited knowledge cannot properly imitate God's ways to humans, one is all the more attracted by the Yahwistic maxim that recurs frequently in the Bible in different literary forms and is made explicit in Isa 55:8: "... my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord."

3.1 *Reasons for and Advantages of God's Delays*

We noted above that section 549e2–553f7 offers four reasons for God's delays in punishing humans. It starts by suggesting that it is presumptuous for mortals to inquire into the concerns of gods and demons when they determine the time, the manner, and the measure of a wrongdoer's punishment. Since the cure of the soul is the greatest of all skills, it can hardly be an easy matter to determine on what principle the gods punish some wrongdoers later and others earlier (549e2–550c15). Then comes the first reason for and advantage of delay (550d1–551c6): God is our model, and for human beings the chief blessing is therefore to become established in virtue through copying his beauty and goodness. He is slow to punish the wicked because he teaches us not to inflict punishment in a spirit of brutishness, violence, anger and hate but to imitate his mildness, with Time as our counsellor. "We should become cautious in such matters, and hold the gentleness and magnanimity *(tèn praóteta kaì tèn megalopsuchían)* displayed by God a part of virtue that is divine, which by punishment amends a few, while it profits and admonishes many by the delay" (551c2–6).

The second argument (551c7–552d7) concludes that God "distinguishes whether the passions of the sick soul to which he administers his justice will in any way yield and make room for repentance *(metánoian),* and for those

in whose nature vice is not unrelieved or intractable, he fixes a period of grace" (551d1–3); " ... he does not expedite punishment *(tèn timorían)* for all alike, but at once removes from life and amputates what is incurable, as constant association with wickedness is certainly harmful to others, and most harmful of all to the sufferer himself; whereas to those whose sinfulness is likely to have sprung from ignorance of good rather than from preference of evil, he grants time for reform *(dídosi metabállesthai chrónon),* but if they persist, these too he visits with condign punishment; for he need hardly fear they will escape" (551e1–9).

The third argument (552d8–553d4) distinguishes even among the incorrigible on the ground that some of them, experience shows, may eventually be the source of great benefits. For instance, some humans of acknowledged virtue are the scions of a wicked, hated, or even cursed line, and the Deity has on occasion made use of the wicked to chastise their fellow evildoers. The argument closes with the question: "Where then is the absurdity, if, as a farmer does not cut away the prickly plant until he has culled its edible shoots, and the Libyans do not set fire to their shrub until they have gathered from it the gum ladanum, so God too does not destroy the rank and thorny root of a glorious and royal race until it has borne its proper fruit?" (553c3–9).

The fourth argument (553d5–f7) relies on the general principle "that punishments should take place at a fitting time and in a fitting manner rather than speedily and at once" (553d5–7).

3.2 *Punishment Is in Fact Contemporary with the Offence*

At this point Plutarch introduces probably his most important argument. The assumption that the punishment of the wicked is deferred recalls Plato's statement that punishment follows on injustice,[23] but Plutarch finds Hesiod more convincing: punishment is contemporary with injustice, "springing up with it from the selfsame soil and root" (554a1–2). Hesiod's own statement is: "He does mischief to himself who does mischief to another, and evil planned harms the plotter most."[24] Plutarch develops this argument: "Whereas the blister beetle is reported to contain, mixed within itself, its own remedy, which operates by a sort of counteraction, wickedness engenders with itself its pain and punishment, and thus pays the penalty of its wrongdoing not later, but at the very moment of commission; and whereas every criminal who goes to execution must carry his own cross on his back, vice frames out of itself each instrument of its own punishment, cunning artisan that it is of a life of wretchedness containing with infamy a host of terrors, regrets, cruel passions, and never-ending anxieties" (554a5–b6). It follows, then, that punishment

[23] See the *Laws* 728c2–3.
[24] See *Works and Days* 265–266.

does not begin with its execution which may rather be considered its end and consummation. For the same reason no criminal can escape punishment: "... those of the wicked who appear to have escaped the immediate blow, pay not after, but during a longer period a penalty more lasting, not more delayed, and have not been punished on growing old, but have grown old in punishment" (554c10–d2).

In the light of this argument the Divinity would, indeed, appear lax and negligent in punishing the offender early rather than in delaying punishment (555d). At the same time, the natural reaction of a soul burdened by guilt is to wonder: "how it might escape from the memory of its iniquities, drive out of itself the consciousness of guilt, regain its purity, and begin its life anew" (556a10–b3). The wicked condemn their own way of life and are in terror even of those who applaud them. This fact dictates to Plutarch the following conclusion: "For my part, if it is not impious to say so, I hold that the perpetrators of unholy deeds need neither god nor man to punish them: their life suffices for that office, as their wickedness has wholly ruined it and plunged it into turmoil" (556d10–e2).

3.3 *The Punishment of Descendants*

At 556e5 Timon sends "the last problem *(tèn teleutaían aporían)* into the field": the injustice of the gods in punishing later generations for the sins of their forbears. It is striking that Plutarch feels compelled to defend the principle of collective retribution as a special case of delayed punishment. When Timon summons up some impressive instances of such punishments (556f7–557e10), Plutarch dismisses them as fabulous and invokes cases in which descendants are rewarded for the good deeds of their ancestors. This is allowed to pass, and he goes on to argue that the punishment of descendants for their ancestors' misdeeds is equally reasonable (557f5–558d3). Another analogical point adduced by Plutarch is the fact of contagion. Just as a disease which has its origin in one country can devastate another, so justice *(díke)* should find her way from parents to their children (558d4–f10). Plutarch concludes: "For forces *(hai dunámeis)* have a way of reverting from their farthest points to their origins and effecting a connexion; and although the cause of this may be unknown to us, it silently achieves its proper effect" (558f7–10).

The next point is again analogical, and it follows from the premises that an individual remains the same throughout his life and that a city counts as an individual (558f11–559c12). "A city, like a living thing, is a united and continuous whole. This does not cease to be itself as it changes in growing older, nor does it become one thing after another with the lapse of time, but is always at one with its former self in feeling and identity, and must take all blame or credit for what it does or has done in its public character, so long as

the association that creates it and binds it together with interwoven strands preserves it as a unity" (559a1–8). It seems reasonable to Plutarch that a city should suffer for its past offences as an old man may pay for the crimes of his youth: "A man is called one and the same from birth to death; and we deem it only proper that a city, in like manner retaining its identity, should be involved in the disgraces of its forbears by the same title as it inherits their glory and power" (559c4–9). This analogy is applied to family links (559c13–e9). A child has been created partly by its father, "and thus not only contains within itself a portion of what is his, but receives a portion of his due when rightly punished or honoured" (559d5–7). This analogical sequence continues by introducing the characteristically Platonic medical parallel (559e10–560a12). In medicine it is customary to cauterize a diseased part of the body in order to cure other organs. What is helpful is also "just" *(díkaion)*. Plutarch claims that, accordingly, it is just to punish some persons in order to admonish others. In this way certain dispositions, afflictions, and corrections are transmitted both from soul to soul and through the body to the body.

The aim of the dialogue on the survival of the soul (560a13–561b14) is to make it clear that rewards and penalties are awarded or imposed after death rather than before it, and are therefore invisible to the eyes of the living, "whereas the rewards and penalties that reach such souls through children and descendants are rendered visible to the inhabitants of this world and thus deter and discourage many of the wicked" (561a6–9). A more subtle reason for chastening a man's offspring is that it punishes him by letting him see them suffer calamities on his account.

At this point Bion says that God, in punishing the children of the wicked, is more ridiculous than a physician who treats a grandson or son for a progenitor's disease (561c1–4). In his reply Plutarch points to the dissimilarity between medical cure and cure by punishment: the medical treatment of one person cannot cure another, "whereas the reason for making a public spectacle of the punishment of evildoers is that the function of justice, when rightly administered, is to restrain some men by punishing others" (561c8–d2). The comparison holds, however, in the case of preventive treatment. It has been known for a man to fall ill as a result of over-indulgence and for a physician to treat that man's son—who was merely predisposed to the same disease—in order to dispel "the tiny seed of a great disorder by not allowing it to grow to any size" (561e2–3). Likewise God may chasten what only amounts to a vicious disposition on the part of the children of wicked parents. "... Where a good man is born of a bad, as a healthy child may come of a sickly parent, the penalty attached to the family is remitted, and he becomes, as it were, adopted out of vice; whereas if a man's disorder reproduces the traits of a vicious ancestry, it is surely fitting that he should succeed to the punishment of that viciousness as to the debts of an estate" (562f4–9).

3.4 *Plutarch's Arguments in the Light of the Hebrew Bible*

Since Plutarch's work on the delays that attend divine punishment is a theodicy rather than a general penal theory, his arguments contain a number of points reminiscent of the beliefs and views found in the Hebrew Bible. On the other hand, what he says is sometimes not in accord either with the Bible or with common sense.

The point most conspicuously suggestive of biblical theological presuppositions is the emphasis on God's mildness and magnanimity in punishing human beings. Recognition of this is fully compatible with the view that the main purpose of punishment is to heal vice. The Bible also makes some use of the terminology of medical healing. Belief in God's magnanimity and in the curative function of punishment allows us to infer God's patience and his readiness to make room for repentance and to grant time for reform to those of the wicked who are corrigible. The distinction between curables and incurables is based on experience. Plutarch follows the traditional Greek line that the incorrigible infect society and must therefore be eradicated. It is strange, however, that Plutarch should speak of the immediate extermination of such persons by God, for this obviously is not the general practice. Noteworthy is his conviction that it is worth waiting for the eventual good fruits of administering punishment to incurable evildoers. In the Bible, terms such as obstinacy or stubbornness are preferred to incurability, and there are cases of the ruthless punishment of perpetrators of ungodly deeds or of obstinate rebels. Finally, the claim that God's punishment takes place at a fitting time and in a fitting manner is of great interest. This principle is stated or implied especially often in the Hebrew Wisdom literature.

So far there is no real discordance between the Bible's theological presuppositions and those of Plutarch, and it should be noted that he uses the word "God" more often in the singular than in the plural. Until one comes to the paragraphs dealing with four reasons for the delays in God's punishment one might even conclude that Plutarch is a monotheist of sorts.

The section on immediacy of punishment is independent of theological underpinning, for it ends with the statement that evildoers need neither God nor humans to punish them. This section is much more important than it may seem at first sight for a general understanding of life, of the Bible, and of many literary works. It affirms the opposite side of the Platonic principle of the intrinsic value of virtue. Plutarch's marvelously explicit statements are all the more welcome, as their theme is implied in the majority of biblical writings: disobedience to God, disloyal attitudes of all kinds, destroy the very essence of human existence and are therefore punishment in themselves. It is not by chance that the Hebrew word *'āwôn* can signify 'guilt' or (and) 'punishment.'

This clarity makes the section on visiting the sins of the parents on the

children seem all the more puzzling. It is surprising to find Plutarch indulging in rhetorical gymnastics in his attempt to justify what is assumed to be the delayed punishment of third parties, for it is a matter of common sense that someone who has not committed a crime should not be deliberately punished for it. All attempts to justify the direct punishment of later generations are therefore vain and pointless. It is unavoidable, of course, that descendants should sometimes suffer the consequences of their ancestors' misdeeds. This is not due to the direct will of God, however, but to the structure of a universe in which no human being is an island. This is, of course, in line with Plutarch's collective conception of the human being, which emerges most clearly from his analogy between the city and the individual.

According to Greek thinking, the gods work through nature and not against it.[25] Such a concept provides ample room for speaking of the indirect punishment of descendants, but no ground whatever for assuming any direct infliction of retribution. The more it is evident that the gods do not transcend the laws of the cosmos, the more it should be clear that it would be unjustifiable—and indeed impossible—for them to punish directly those who have not committed the crime in question. According to biblical belief God can intervene directly in the world, but it would belie his holiness and justice to punish the children directly for the sins of the parents. It seems appropriate, then, to say that God *permits* later generations to suffer because of their fathers' sins.

[25] This statement is one of the main emphases in H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus* (SCL 41; Berkeley / Los Angeles / London: University of California Press, 1971, 1983).

PART SIX

COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT IN THE LIGHT OF MODERN THEORIES

In Jewish-Christian beliefs and values the emphasis shifts from the one-sided cosmological orientation of the ancient cultures to the historical and personalistic. Many philosophers used material from the biblical tradition to illustrate their arguments, while other poets and thinkers have revealed the depths of the human soul. The Greeks' rational philosophical approach, however, made a stronger impact on early Jewish and Christian thought than their tradition of poetry and drama. Some of the most influential Christian (and sometimes Jewish) philosophers and theologians embraced the ideals of Greek rationalism. The rationalistic method consequently came to dominate the classics of Idealism.

The dialectic tension between the rational and poetic-personalistic ways of grasping reality greatly influenced the perception of justice—and consequently, the understanding of punishment and forgiveness—in the following centuries. Contrasting and contradictory views on these themes seem to resist any one rational solution, and a comparative study of the views of the Hebrew Bible and of the European rationalists therefore seems all the more promising. Any assessment of the possibilities of a rational justification for punishment and forgiveness must consider the following issues: How far are Hebrew beliefs and practices compatible with the European tradition of jurisprudence, philosophy, and theology? Which aspects of the beliefs and values of ancient Israel can be considered as universal? How far do they correspond to humankind's natural feelings and to the natural tendencies of the human mind? What is the relationship between a particular world-view and the expression of cosmic and personal-spiritual realities?

CHAPTER XXX

CONCEPTS OF PUNISHMENT

The Greek concept of punishment is variously expressed. It is mentioned or discussed in the highways and byways of Greek literature, but in Plato and Plutarch we find it treated more or less systematically. The statements made elsewhere largely reflect popular sentiment and traditional belief, whereas these two writers adopt the rational approach characteristic of modern theories of punishment. In contrast, the Hebrew Bible confines itself to the literary presentation of general human sentiments and experiences, and of Israel's belief and values. There is nothing that could be described as a systematic rational treatment of a particular issue, and ideological presuppositions have to be derived from various literary forms, from differing rhetorical and stylistic features, from symbolism and analogy, and from anthropomorphic representations of transcendental realities. And the most striking feature of the biblical account is personalism: the emphasis is on direct relationship between human and divine *persons.* The ideal is not a well-ordered universe, but a true covenant, marked by the absolute fidelity of God to his people and their true faithfulness to him. Hence it is in the Bible that one encounters the best conditions for perceiving and evaluating virtue and vice intrinsically and in the fullest sense.

Philosophers and moral theologians are primarily concerned with the reasons for and aims of punishment—an issue that may be implied but is not explicitly stated in poetry, drama, story-telling and history. It is evident, therefore, that the first difficulty to be faced in a comparative study is the relationship between concrete and abstract, symbol and concept, myth and reflection, the irrational or intuitive and the rational. The reasoned approach can certainly explain much, but not all. In order to do justice to the whole range of relationships between guilt, punishment and forgiveness, philosophical argument must be complemented by intuition and the language of symbol, metaphor, and analogy. It is recognized today that biblical passages should not be interpreted literally, but this principle is too often forgotten in particular instances. The main reason for such lapses may well be an incapacity to grasp the totality of biblical theological presuppositions in the complementarity of their interrelation.

Since exegetes rarely risk assessing in an integrated and rational fashion the evidence on which their analysis of biblical passages is based, we lack even the terminology needed to describe the various levels of interpersonal relationships. The very nature of biblical writing suggests, however, that the terminology used in delineating experiences, expectations and demands in

relation to the universe and to society can be applied to rational assessment of interpersonal relationships, provided that reason is combined with intuition, general human sentiment, and common sense. Finally, we are all personal beings, capable of comprehending the analogies used to express the profoundest feelings and antinomies of our existence. No analogy is adequate to the transcendental and interpersonal reality underlying it, and this could discourage us. All the more enheartening, therefore, is the energy that dwells in the core of our being, driving us to ascend beyond the cosmic and social categories of the phenomenal world, in order to find ourselves and to remain truly ourselves.

1. *Greek and Hebrew Views in the Light of Modern Theories of Punishment*

The theories advanced by modern penologists, philosophers and theologians witness to a rational intent to elucidate the moral justification of punishment, and show what in principle can be said about the subject as a whole.[1] Their purview includes all the fundamental issues of the relationship between guilt, punishment, and forgiveness. It is therefore legitimate to attempt a comparison of their arguments with the beliefs and views expressed in the ancient Greek and Hebrew texts.

Modern philosophical debate on punishment recognizes two types of theories of punishment: utilitarianism and retributivism. The early Greek tradition and Plato's eschatological myths show a predominantly retributive concern which is backward-looking, whereas Plato's and Plutarch's general theories of punishment have a strongly utilitarian flavour which is teleological and forward-looking. Biblical tradition is based on a retributive concept of punishment, but is also teleological because it clearly implies that

[1] See especially J. D. Mabbott, "Punishment," *Mind* 48 (1939), 152–167; A. Flew, "'The Justification of Punishment,'" *Philosophy* 29 (1954), 291–307; T. McPherson, "Punishment: Definition and Justification," *Analysis* 28 (1967), 21–27; H. B. Acton (ed.), *The Philosophy of Punishment: A Collection of Papers* (MSE 255; London: Macmillan, 1969, 1973); M. M. Mackenzie, *Plato on Punishment* (Berkeley / Los Angeles / London: University of California Press, 1981), 3–64: "Theories of Punishment"; S. Jacoby, *Wild Justice: The Evolution of Revenge* (HCB; New York: Harper & Row, 1983); R. A. Duff, *Trials and Punishments* (CSPh; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); C. L. Ten, *Crime, Guilt, and Punishment: A Philosophical Introduction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); E. H. Wolgast, *The Grammar of Justice* (Ithaca, NY / London: Cornell University Press, 1987); I. Primoratz, *Justifying Legal Punishment* (SAPh; Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, 1989); N. Walker, *Why Punish?* (Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); C. Wood, *The End of Punishment: Christian Perspectives on the Crisis in Criminal Justice* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1991); F. P. Earl of Longford, *Punishment and the Punished* (London: Chapmans, 1991); R. A. Duff (ed.), *Punishment* (Andershot: Dartmouth, 1993); idem, *A Reader on Punishment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); R. A. Bauman, *Crime and Punishment in Ancient Rome* (London: Routledge, 1996).

punishment has various positive aims.

1.1 *The Utilitarian Theory of Punishment*

Utilitarians see the justification of punishment solely in terms of the benefits that may flow from chastisement of the offender, and therefore have much to say of its advantageous consequences. There is, however, a wide diversity of opinion about the precise nature of these blessings. Utilitarians usually list the reduction of crime, deterrence, and reform as among them. Empirical evidence, they say, shows that offences are harmful both to the offender and to society, and it follows that crime should be reduced as much as possible. Utilitarians hold that this can be achieved through the individual and general deterrent effects of punishment, which deters both actual and potential offenders. Convicted miscreants refrain from future wrongdoing because of past experience: they recognize that further misdeeds will bring fresh retribution. Moreover, their punishment will deter other potential offenders and so protect potential victims. Finally, punishment may have not only individual or general deterrent but also reformative or rehabilitative effects. The sane who are punished accept that their behaviour was wrong and try to amend their way of life. Here the motivation for reform is provided by a change of values.

There are, however, cogent objections to the utilitarian theory of punishment, and they apply to both the moral acceptability and the attainability of its aims. The main weakness of utilitarian theory is its point of departure. The view that assumed beneficial consequences are the only justification of punishment implies a particular attitude to crime. Utilitarians argue that penalties should not be imposed on offenders on account of their offences, because the wrong done cannot be righted–an argument central to Plato's penology. In the *Protagoras* he says that "he who undertakes to punish with reason does not avenge himself for the past offence, since he cannot make what was done as though it had not come to pass; he looks rather to the future, and aims at preventing that particular person and others who see him punished from doing wrong again" (324b2–7); and in the *Laws* Plato adopts the familiar cliché "what is done can never be undone" (934a8).[2] The weakness of this argument lies in its failure to take account of the origin of the offence: the bad character and evil disposition of the offender. The damage done by a crime may be irreparable; all the more is it necessary to reform the criminal and rebut his false claim to superiority.

The assumed benefits of punishment may accrue to the offender himself or to society in general. Punishment for the sake of others is naturally much

[2] See Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* 1139b.8–11 (6.2.6).

more controversial than punishment for the offender's own sake, yet utilitarians are committed to punishing the innocent if to do so might be beneficial to others. Such an attitude to the fundamental moral issue of responsibility is totally incompatible with the retributive theory of punishment. It is, therefore, not surprising that the pre-Socratic Greek tradition (which is based on a retributive understanding of punishment) rejects collective retribution, whereas the Platonist Plutarch vigorously defends the punishment of the innocent for crimes committed by their ancestors. The earlier Greek tradition accepts collective retribution as unavoidable, but Theognis demands from Zeus that the innocent children should not make requital for the transgression of their parents.[3] In the Hebrew Bible direct collective punishment is firmly prohibited (see Deut 24:16; cf. Ezek 18), and divine collective punishment is a metaphorical threat (Exod 20:5–7 [= Deut 5:9–11]; 34:6–7; Num 14:18; Deut 7:9–10; Jer 32:18).

Since punishment imposes inconvenience and suffering on those who undergo it, it is apparently justifiable only when it ultimately benefits those on whom they fall. Such an end may be achieved if a reformative intent underlies the punishment. And this would harmonize with the view of Plato, who claims that the aim of punishment is to cure the wrongdoer. The idea of healing a guilty people is also central to the Hebrew Bible; it is often stated explicitly (cf. Exod 15:26; Deut 32:39; Isa 6:10; 19:22; 30:26; 57:18–19; Jer 3:22; 17:14; 30:12–17; 33:6; Hos 5:13–15; 7:1; 14:5; Pss 6:3; 41:5; 103:3; 107:20; Job 5:18; 2 Chr 7:14), but even more often implied in various literary forms.

Deterrence is a hard nut for the penologist to crack. It is doubtful whether it is an effective moral educator, and it is unclear whether punitive measures really prevent people from committing the crimes they have in mind. Consequently, the inconvenience and suffering that punishment imposes on individuals may be seen as unnecessary evils, justifiable only when they are in the interests of those who undergo them. Their aim must be the reform of the offender. Moreover, innocent people should never be punished for the sake of others. The utilitarian theory must be modified—especially in view of the dictate of common sense that only those who are responsible for misdeeds can justifiably be punished. It also seems reasonable that punishment should relate not only to future aims but also to the reasons why crime was committed in the past. In the framework of Hebrew theological presuppositions punishment is justifiable only in cases of moral wrongdoing; a link between punishment and offence is therefore essential.

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[3] See fragment 731–752 in *Greek Elegy and Iambus*, vol. 1, 316–319.

1.2 *The Retributive Theory of Punishment*

The retributive theory of punishment is based on the notion of deserts. Retributivism in its strict sense holds that the deserts of human beings are a necessary and a sufficient condition for their being punished. It follows, then, that retribution is a kind of distributive justice and has to be considered as complementary to reward for proper behaviour. Both punishment and reward look backwards to what a person has done, as is made clear by the prefix in the words "re-tribution" and "re-ward." Punishment and reward are just insofar as they match one's deserts; there must be some sort of equivalence. Consequently, they involve a deliberate infliction of suffering or a calculated granting of benefits. The degree of an offender's responsibility is crucial to fair judgment, and punishment of the innocent is in principle unjustifiable—all the more so as we have to consider not only an offender's acts but also his character and disposition.

The most common example of retributive punishment is the *lex talionis.* The central purpose of this law is to achieve a precise equivalence between the gravity of the harm done and the severity of the penalty imposed. It is rarely enforced literally–an example is the death penalty for homicide—for there are many possible alternatives to exactness. In most cases, however, the penalty is proportional to the gravity of the offence. But the *lex talionis,* although it seeks to ensure that the penalty is sufficiently severe, is possibly even more concerned with the limitation of revenge: a penalty, that is, should not exceed the gravity of the harm done. Such constraint is necessary because human beings are notoriously given to passionate excess when they retaliate. The threat of Lamech, uttered to his wives, is characteristically human: "If Cain is avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold" (Gen 4:24). It is understandable, therefore, that the main message of this law in the Bible is that vengeance must be limited. Its use diminished gradually, until Jesus rejected it totally as incompatible with his law of the spirit (cf. Matt 5:38–39). One of the richest fruits of Hebrew monotheism is the recognition that, in the end, only God has the right to punish human beings because only he can punish justly.

Hegel and Kant are probably the outstanding representatives of retributivism among the philosophers of later centuries.[4] There are some differences between them, however. Hegel's view that punishment annuls crime

[4] See G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse;* idem, *Philosophie des Rechts;* idem, *Philosophische Propädeutik;* idem, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts;* I. Kant, *Rechtslehre;* D. E. Cooper, "Hegel's Theory of Punishment," *Hegel's Political Philosophy* (ed. Z. A. Pelczynski; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 151–167; P. G. Stillman, "Hegel's Idea of Punishment," *JHPh* 14 (1976), 169–182; M. H. Mitias, "Another Look at Hegel's Concept of Punishment," *HS* 13 (1978), 175–185; I. Primoratz, *Banquos Geist: Hegels Theorie der Strafe* (HS 29; Bonn: Bouvier Verlag H. Grundmann, 1986); idem, *Justifying Legal Punishment;* C. L. Ten, *Crime, Guilt, and Punishment,* 38–65.

implies that the process has positive goals, whereas Kant finds the infliction of a person's deserts an end sufficient in itself. Hegel's principle is the more teleological of the two. Plato's "what is done can never be undone" is true in a literal sense, but the principle of annulling the crime can be understood metaphorically. The closest approach to a literal interpretation lies through the doctrine of compensation: in terms of ontology and morality we may claim that punishment restores the right of the victim which was denied by the offender. Further, the penalty imposed by the community implies emphatic public denunciation of the wrongdoing. Of the utmost importance is the message transmitted to the offender that his conduct is evil, a message fully in line with the general biblical attitude to wrongdoers.

This central theme allows room for punishment to have additional aims. It implies the idea of an offender's moral transformation, which is claimed by utilitarians as one of the possible beneficial consequences of punishment. This particular aim stands on much firmer ground in a retributive context than in a utilitarian framework that excludes any link between punishment and moral wrongdoing. Moral considerations suggest that punishment can be considered as right or good in itself, as well as in relation to the criminal and the community. Hardened offenders still have to be punished, but the primary aim is not to deter others, as Greek and modern utilitarians hold but to re-establish the moral order and to declare to the evil-doer that his conduct was wrong. Kant holds that to punish an offender is required by the categorical imperative. The stipulations should not, however, be considered absolute; there are at least two reasons for granting a dispensation: the self-punishing effects of an offence that inevitably causes suffering to the offender, and the possibility of repentance. In the light of biblical theological presuppositions the justification of punishment is twofold: the annulment of moral wrong, and the inducement of repentance and reform in the sinner.

1.3 *The Chief Aim of Retributive Punishment: Subjugation of the Offender*

The justification and reason for, and the severity and aim of punishment depend essentially on the punisher's authority and upon his values. When these latter are based on Greek cosmological and societal foundations, they obviously differ from those founded on biblical personalism. If society and material goods are the dominant considerations, infringement of the law is most probably considered an affront to human authorities and interests rather than a moral wrong. If, on the other hand, the fountainhead of all values is the origin and intrinsic value of all beings, and the purpose of human life, the evaluation of offences is necessarily ontological, moral, and theological in nature. The Bible recognizes only an absolute divine authority and human authority is legitimate insofar as it participates therein. It follows first, that only intentional offences are regarded as wrongdoing, and sec-

ondly, that every intentional offence is a moral evil because it is an infringement of divine authority, of the plans and purposes of God's creation. Consequently, it is hardly possible to compensate moral wrong by material goods. On the other hand, there is every possibility of forgiveness and mercy if the offender repents and renounces his violation of divine and human rights.

Most human offences impair or injure, more or less directly, interpersonal relationships: the offender infringes the authority and rights of God or of other people. His basic motive is a desire to diminish the authority, the rights, or the value of others. Evidence for this phenomenon can be found in the nature of relationships within families and between communities, nations, and continents. Paradoxically, denial of God may have its origin in the human desire to be like him and to rule in his stead rather than in rational argument. And analogically, humankind's notoriously destructive and arrogant attitude to his fellow-men seems to have its roots in the same ambition. It is not by chance that the gravest sin in both the Hebrew and Greek traditions is pride and arrogance *(húbris).*

Offences of this kind are wrong in their essence, and cannot be tolerated. The victim reacts spontaneously and looks for the vindication of his rights, while one who has been humiliated demands the subjugation of the offender. If he himself cannot bring this about, he appeals to the courts or to divine justice. Many are ready to sacrifice all they have in order to defeat their adversary and restore their honour. They insist that the offender must recognize his wrongdoing, abandon his false claim to superiority, and reassert the plaintiff's right and value. Those who cannot bring about the punishment of the wrongdoer because he is too strong may use non-violent methods of advancing their cause: the arrogant offender has somehow to be humbled.[5] When in the Bible the persecuted faithful seek their rights but cannot achieve them, they cry to God for his intervention against their oppressors, and great is their joy when he responds. As Milton put it in *Samson Agonistes:*

> O how comely it is and how reviving
> To the spirits of just men long oppress,
> When God into the hands of their deliverer
> Puts invincible might.

According to the Bible, the supreme divine authority holds rebellious na-

[5] As far as I can see, the argument by J. Hampton, "The Retributive Idea," *Forgiveness and Mercy* (by J. G. Murphy and J. Hampton; CSPHL; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 111–161, is the most convincing and illuminating attempt to explain the issue rationally, and it is also the closest to the foundations of the biblical idea of punishment and mercy. That punishment is "the experience of defeat at the hands of the victim" (p. 126) is the central thesis of her essay.

tions in derision (cf. Ps 2), but sometimes intervenes against the unjust who infringe his rights and those of his oppressed people (cf. Ps 82). The classical biblical example of confrontation between divine and human authority is the narrative of the plagues of Egypt (Exod 7:8–11:10). God's demand is uncompromising: Pharaoh must recognize the sole authority of God and release the people of Israel. The question of the real, the supreme divine authority lies at the core of the entire prophetic opposition to all kinds of idolatry. And the main subject of the Apocalyptic literature is the conviction that wrongdoers will in the end be defeated and the rights of the faithful vindicated. False gods and insincere worshippers alike must be overthrown. In the case of the apostate there is no room for mercy until he pays a penalty and genuinely repents (cf. Exod 32–34).

In view of all this the main aim of punishment is obvious: moral truth must be reasserted, the rights of the oppressed must be restored, and everything must be subordinated to the only true divine authority, which is ontological in nature. In view of the cosmological foundations of morality it would suffice to restore the cosmic order.

1.4 *Ontological and Moral Foundations of Forgiveness and Mercy*

The twofold aim of punishment—i.e., the annulment of moral wrong and the inducement of repentance and reform in the offender—implies that a penalty should never be inflicted out of hatred or thirst for vengeance. To annul moral wrong does not mean that the offender should suffer degradation. The judge must respect the fundamental human value of every wrongdoer and recognize the seed of decency within him.[6] This rule is entrenched in the framework of biblical theological presuppositions: man, it is roundly affirmed, was created in God's image (see Gen 1:26; cf. Ps 8). When God inflicts a penalty on a wrongdoer he does not repudiate him; the only logical aim of divine punishment is reform, and this thesis is supported by the teleological perspective of biblical salvation history which begins with creation and knows the promise of eschatological consummation. The inherent decency of all human beings and the essentially positive purpose of every human life and of the universe as a whole form the ontological foundation of forgiveness and mercy. In this sense the promise of forgiveness and mercy

[6] See J. Hampton, "The Retributive Idea," *Forgiveness and Mercy,* 137: "The vengeful hater does not respect but aims to diminish the worth of the offender ... The retributivist, on the other hand, aims to defeat the wrongdoer in order to annul the evidence provided by the crime of his relative superiority. The retributivist is interested in asserting moral truth; hence he is always mindful of, and respectful towards, the value of his wrongdoer. Indeed, the retributivist who accepts an egalitarian theory of worth has no interest in doing anything to *change* the value of either the wrongdoer or the victim."

in the Bible can be considered as an unconditional, unmerited gift.[7]

It is, however, a matter of common sense that forgiveness and mercy are not possible if the wrongdoer persists in his evil ways. It is all the more important, then, that every evil-doer should encounter defeat through the experience of punishment if nothing else will induce him to repent. The victim who recognizes the core of decency within the offender is likely to demand his subjugation but still forgive him. Forgiveness is practicable, however, only after dissociation from wrongdoing by repentance. True repentance rejects past misdeeds and desires future betterment. But the question can still be asked: does a repentant offender require punishment? Is it justifiable to punish him at all? It is obvious that repentance is an important mitigating circumstance, but punishment remains a reasonable means of reparation for harm done and offers an experience that may help to ameliorate the offender's character.

2. *"Natural" Processes of Retribution in the Light of Interpersonal Relationships*

The great number of statements in the book of Proverbs and elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible that provide evidence of an inherent connection between an action and its consequences persuaded K. Koch that it is questionable whether the traditional term "retribution" can properly be used. He argues: "To speak here about a 'retribution belief' is clearly a case of misunderstanding, since an essential part of the concept of *retribution* is that a judicial process must take place. In this process, the personal freedom and economic circumstances of the person, which up to that point have not been affected by his actions, are now indeed affected by some 'alteration' in the person's circumstances relative to possessions, freedom or maybe even life, as that person receives either a 'reward' or 'punishment.' *In such a case, punishment and reward are not part of the person's nature, nor part of the essence of the action.* The response to one's action would be by assessment, meted out by a higher authority, and then imposed upon one from the outside. On the other hand, it seems to us that it is a special accent in these passages from Proverbs that actions and their consequences go hand in hand and are not simply to be brought into a relationship with one another at a later time. In our day, the consideration of retribution has been characterized in such a juridical fashion that it is thought to be reward or punishment *according to a previously established norm.*"[8] Concerning the role of God Koch argues: "*Yahweh* is obviously described as a

[7] See J. Hampton, "The Retributive Idea," *Forgiveness and Mercy,* 161.

[8] See "Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?," *Theodicy in the Old Testament,* 58–59.

higher authority in relationship to humans, but this is not meant in the juridical sense of a higher authority who deals out reward and punishment on the basis of an established norm, but rather somewhat like a 'midwife who assists at a birth' by *facilitating the completion of something which previous human action has already set in motion.*"[9]

There were many reactions to Koch's views. The critics did not question his juridical interpretation of the traditional doctrine of retribution, but his understanding of the manner of God's punishment. The basic question raised was whether biblical statements about punishment can be interpreted only in the indirect manner proposed by Koch, or at least to some extent in a direct sense. Many have defended God's direct intervention on the basis of a personalist understanding of the biblical God,[10] although there have also been favourable assessments of Koch's approach.[11] We recognize, however, that the views of both Klaus Koch and his critics need to be complemented in the light of fundamental biblical theological presuppositions.

2.1 *God's Indirect and Direct Retribution in the Light of His Absoluteness*

It must first be noted that the term "retribution" should not be interpreted only in the juridical sense characteristic of human institutions. Used for God's dealings with humans, it must be understood metaphorically. Gerhard von Rad describes the concept of "retribution" in the ancient Near East as follows: "On this view, the "recompense" which catches up with evil is certainly no subsequent forensic event which the sin evokes in a completely different sphere—that is, with God. It is the radiation of the evil which now continues on: only so does the evil which the sin called out reach equilibrium. This conception has been called a "synthetic view of life," since here the action of human beings on the one hand and what happens to them on the other are not yet understood as two separate and independent things, or at least as things standing only in very loose relationship to one another. Instead, the presupposition of this idea is the closest possible correspondence between action and fate: what is in question is a process which, in virtue of a power proper alike

[9] See "Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?," *Theodicy in the Old Testament,* 61.

[10] See H. Gese, *Lehre und Wirklichkeit in der alten Weisheit: Studien zu den Sprüchen Salomos und zu dem Buche Hiob* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1958), 34–43; F. Horst, "Recht und Religion im Bereiche des Alten Testamentes," *EvTh* 16 (1956), 71–75; J. Scharbert, "Formgeschichte und Exegese von Ex 34,6f und seiner Parallelen," *Biblica* 38 (1957), esp. pp. 140–142; E. Pax, "Studien zum Vergeltungsproblem der Psalmen," *SBFLA* 10 (1960), 56–112; H. Graf Reventlow, "'Sein Blut komme über sein Haupt,'" *VT* 10 (1960), 311–327; W. S. Towner, "Retribution Theology in the Apocalyptic Setting," *USQR* 26 (1971), 204–205.

[11] See G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology,* vol. 1 (London: SCM Press, 1975), 265; J. Barton, "Natural Law and Poetic Justice in the Old Testament," *JThS.*NS 30 (1979), 1–14.

to all that is good and all that is evil, comes to a good or an evil end."[12]

In principle, there is no obstacle to applying the law of retribution both to indirect and to direct divine retribution. A good example of the latter, i.e., of God's subsequent punishment is his appearance after Adam and Eve had committed sin (see Gen 3:8–24). The Bible has, however, good grounds for understanding retribution primarily as a natural process, because its point of departure is the principle of creation and the story of salvation. The world functions according to pre-established laws, which provide evidence for the existence of a hierarchy of realities or truths. The law of causality confirms the general biblical view of the origin of the universe, which sees it as "natural" that God is the highest authority and that he must be respected, obeyed, and praised. It seems obvious that an absolute authority can intervene directly in terrestrial affairs, but it may not be necessary for him to do so. It is very likely that God, who gave human beings liberty, will leave them to the consequences of their own behaviour: the chronicle of time unrolls in accordance with one's own devisings, which means that in most cases humans punish themselves and learn from their blunders.

In the view of the biblical prophets it was entirely natural to act in every respect in accordance with an absolute divine authority, for Hebrew theologians of all kinds firmly believed that it is possible to recognize the activities of the Supreme Wisdom, which transcends the visible world, on the evidence of the positive structure and perfect harmony of the universe. In the Wisdom literature there is much talk of God's incomprehensible plan, of the necessity to search out the divine actions in particular situations, and of an appropriate time for every human action. The psalmists seek to praise God first of all as the Creator, the Ruler of the salvation history, the highest wisdom and righteousness. The prophets claim that it is possible to discern in every historical event his hidden hand.[13] They were able to conceive of a hierarchy of authorities and values between the temporal and the eternal, and to detect the kernel of power in the smallest seeds, in the remnant of the faithful. They understood that, in the end, only good plans can succeed, whereas bad plans must fail. Their trust in providence and in a just God's judgment is confirmed by the historical evidence of the centuries.[14]

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[12] See *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1, 265.

[13] See R. Rendtorff, "Geschichtliches und weisheitliches Denken im Alten Testament," *Beiträge zur alttestamentlichen Theologie: Festschrift für Walther Zimmerli zum 70. Geburtstag* (ed. H. Donner, R. Hanhart, and R. Smend; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 344–353.

[14] See especially J. Barton, *JThS*.NS 30 (1979), 1–14; idem, "Ethics in Isaiah of Jerusalem," *JThS*.NS 32 (1981), 1–18. In the first article we read on pp. 12–13: "God's judgment is never capricious, but wholly consistent, and he acts according to moral principles which are essentially the same as those recognized among men. His justice is not simply a matter of definition, as in a wholly theonomous ethical system in which justice simply means 'what God does or commands,' but is a matter of empirical experience, when judged by the standards which men use in assessing

The prophets perceived the demand to worship the only God and to be humble before him as a dictate of common sense, as "natural." In contrast, it appeared to them most "unnatural" to act according to the commands of temporary earthly powers as represented by pagan potentates and their gods. Hebrew monotheism implies the most consistent, the most universal, and the most perpetual perception of the inherent connection between the universal laws of a theological universe and human actions within it. If worshipping God and doing good lead to prosperity in every respect, sin is a reversal of the orders he has established. The most perverse human attitude toward God is evident when the people of Israel or other nations rebel against him.[15]

Among the Greek philosophers Plato affirms that God can be apprehended by a sort of empirical revelation. God is "the measure of all things" and requires from humankind proper conduct. In the *Laws* the Stranger asks: "What conduct, then, is dear to God and in his steps? One kind of conduct, expressed in one ancient phrase, namely, that 'like is dear to like' when it is moderate, whereas immoderate things are dear neither to one another nor to

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the conduct of other men. And this, I would suggest, means that the prophets who use the notion of poetic justice are implicitly appealing to a human consensus about what sort of acts are just and unjust, which is not logically derived from the revelation of moral norms by God, but rests on ideas about ethics formed by reason—which one might conveniently refer to as natural law. The object, then, of prophetic references to sinners getting their just deserts is essentially to appeal to the reason of the audience: surely they can see that God will not be less just than man, but will react with total consistency to sins that they themselves ought to be able to see the wickedness of. For the moral principles which rational men can recognize are not other than the principles on which God himself works when judging the action of men."

[15] See J. Barton's first cited article, p. 7, concerning Isaiah's condemnation of foreign alliances: "... he sees such alliances as wholly human expedients, which ignore the difference between God and man—the Egyptians are men, and not God—and between created and uncreated power—their horses are flesh, and not spirit. The trouble with alliances is that they exalt human strength above its natural place: those who seek to win victories by allying themselves with Egypt are guilty of hubris in much the same way as the Assyrians, boasting of their own success and ignoring the plan of Yahweh. Indeed, when idolatry *does* appear in Isaiah, it too is assimilated (oddly to our way of thinking) to the model of unnatural human self-assertion: idols are 'the work of (men's) own hands, that which their own fingers have made' (ii.8), so that to worship them is in some sense a kind of self-worship—we are already in the world of II Isaiah here. Rather than being a sign of unfaithfulness to, say, the covenant with Yahweh, idols are a symptom of a human desire to have the divine realm under one's own control. This no doubt is a misunderstanding of the use of images in worship, but its very oddness as a way of interpreting idolatry—which, after all, one might think was a confession of human *weakness*—may serve to show that idolatry like other sins is being pressed into a single mould: it is simply one more example of sin as what I would call a 'cosmic nonsense,' a reversal of the sane way of looking at the world which, according to Isaiah, would lead men to bow in humility before the true God." In the second article by Barton see especially pp. 8–9. On p. 9 we read: "When men ignore the universal moral order, they become foolish, and lose both moral and practical insight. This produces two consequences in their ethical life. On the one hand, they come to overestimate their own importance, failing to keep to their appointed place in the world; and this pride leads to a delight in prestige and the accumulation of riches and status symbols. On the other hand, they fail to see where their trust and confidence should properly be placed, and rely on sources of strength other than God—for example on false foreign gods or on images of God, which they worship with blind idolatry."

things moderate. In our eyes God will be 'the measure of all things' in the highest degree—a degree much higher than is any 'man' they talk of. He, then, that is to become dear to such an one must needs become, so far as he possibly can, of a like character; and according to the present argument, he amongst us that is temperate is dear to God, since he is like him, while he that is not temperate is unlike and at enmity,—as is also he who is unjust, and so likewise with the rest, by parity of reasoning ..." (716c1–d3).[16]

There is, however, a basic difficulty in the relationship between the external and internal levels of the world as a whole and in the relationship between humankind and God. It is easy to accept punishment as a natural process in relation to the physical world. But what of the relationship between persons on a spiritual level? Is there an adequate analogy between the two? It is evident that a correct attitude towards God, man, and the universe involves more than the rational, for the irrational part of the soul, which basically means the will of man, plays an essential role in human actions.[17] God is intimately present in the soul insofar as human beings are ready to accept him. It seems rationally "natural" that God, the absolutely good, should be present and assist in bringing good actions to completion. But he does not force human beings to make particular decisions or engage in specific actions. When humans resist the voice of common sense or direct divine inspiration, God simply departs because it would be "unnatural" for him to communicate with alienated persons. There is, nevertheless, a good reason why God should assist in bringing (indirectly) one's *bad* actions to fruition: it is necessary to demonstrate the futility of evil plans and the triumph of good ones. It is likely, therefore, that such terms as judgment, anger, jealousy, etc., are metaphors for a fundamental law that orders the relationship with the supreme divine authority, which is the only true basis of all existence. Everything must be in harmony with this authority.

2.2 *The Rational and Irrational in a Teleological Universe*

A rational approach is characteristic not only of systematic philosophy but also of literary accounts of beliefs and values. In the Hebrew Bible the use of rationality is much more important than many exegetes admit. There are numerous instances of synthetic thinking, involving the past, the present, and the future: the etiological interpretation of past events; the retrospective prophetic explication of creation and of the origin of evil; the terminology of

[16] The view that God will be "the measure of all things" is an allusion to the saying of the sophist Protagoras, who claimed that "man is the measure of all things"; see H. Diels and W. Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, vol. 2 (17th ed.; Zurich / Hildesheim: Weidmann, 1989), 263.

[17] Aee Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1102a.28–35 (1.13.9–10); 1139.5–15 (6.1.5–6), who recognizes that the soul consists of two parts, one rational and the other irrational.

God's plan, providence, and wisdom; messianic and apocalyptic visions of the future, etc. The law of causality on the one hand and the teleological slant of history on the other are perceived in various ways. The main difference between biblical presentations of ideological presuppositions and more or less systematic philosophical interpretations is the relationship between the abstract and the concrete, the synthetic rational and the individual personalist background of religion. The Bible always combines synthetic ideological visions with experience of life's realities and especially of personal relationships in all levels, whereas systematic philosophers and theologians usually deal in purely rational categories. The Bible is therefore studied with paradox, which most philosophers try to avoid by the exercise of pure rationality; the principle of causality can lead them to a first cause or to a supreme symbol, but not necessarily to a personal God of the covenant.

These basic differences have far-reaching consequences for the relationship between human rationality, will, and moral sense. The rationalists tend to hold that reason determines human will and morality, whereas the biblical prophets sadly realized that the history of Israel was marked by the contrast between evidences of reason and proofs of self-will: irrational rebellion, disobedience, and stubbornness.[18] Irrational powers of hatred, lust for vengeance, and the desire to rule over others are the most striking proofs that the human race's rational and irrational capacities are not in balance. It seems, in fact, that irrational motivations are much stronger than their bedfellows. The phenomenon of stubbornness is the most striking proof of this fact, and a milder instance is the human tendency to argue with God—even though the disputant recognizes his absoluteness and perfect righteousness.

Naturally, the contrast between reason and will does not itself explain human alienation adequately, for there is not only the contrast between human intellectual apprehension and will, but also that between reason and will on the one hand and the "sins of the flesh" on the other. Recognizing this fact, Paul states in Rom 7:14–20: "We know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. So then it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in

[18] It is noteworthy that from the standpoint of a Platonic or Neoplatonic psychology a full intellectual apprehension of the form of justice is sufficient to generate right action, whereas Augustine thinks the opposite. See A. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (London: G. Duckworth, 1988), 156: "For both Plato and Aristotle reason is independently motivating; it has its own ends and it inclines those who possess it toward them, even if it is also necessary that the higher desires be educated into rationality and that the bodily appetites be subordinated to it. For Augustine intellect itself needs to be moved to activity by will. It is will which guides attention in one direction rather than another. It is will which determines in key part what are made of the materials afforded by sense perception for cognition, both within memory and in the act of cognition itself."

my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me." Augustine, who most intensely lived Paul's experience, announced the existence of "original sin" in the sense of misdirection of human will; he believed that only divine grace could rescue alienated mankind.[19]

These conflicts in human existence have, however, negative consequences not only for the life of individuals and for history as a whole. The Bible knows two diametrically opposed ways: the way of righteousness and the way of wickedness. Both evade purely rational analysis, but both are the subject of every human experience. The wicked are in the end always defeated, whereas the righteous are offered promises of every kind. What is the origin of this fundamental difference?

Only the teleological explanation is adequate. Neither reason nor empirical experience offers a satisfactory account of things as they are. The Bible perceives all history as salvation history, held in a tension between first beginnings and final completion. The whole structure of the created cosmos is positive, but its salient feature is its orientation to a particular *telos.* Historical evidence, synthetic rational activity, and personalist religious experience persuaded the biblical writers that the universe is teleological in nature.

A parallel conformation is the structure of human beings as individuals.[20] Biblical faith is unique in transcending unilateral formal rationality: Abraham is willing to sacrifice his son Isaac, born after divine intervention; Hosea remains faithful to his wife in her harlotry; Job envisions a meaningful outcome of his desperate situation; Deutero-Isaiah proclaims a glorious future to a people in inglorious exile; in the Song of Songs the lovers seek each other in spite of all obstacles. There are many situations that justify hoping against hope in accordance with the epigram *credo quia absurdum;* and one can never stress sufficiently that Tertullian's paradox is justified only as an af-

[19] See A. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?,* 157: "The human will is then the ultimate determinant of human action, and the human will is systematically misdirected and misdirected in such a way that it is not within its own power to redirect itself. Originally the will was directed to the love of God, but by the exercise of a freedom to choose between good and evil Adam chose to direct his will to the love of self rather than of God. In so doing Adam impaired his freedom to choose good, and because other human powers need direction from the will, Adam from then on lacked any resources to recover that freedom. Each individual human being reveals in the condition of his or her will, whether he or she recognizes it or not, his or her solidarity with Adam. It is only divine grace which can rescue the will from that condition ... Justice, therefore, cannot inform an individual's character unless that character is also informed by humility, and the rootedness of injustice in pride entails that injustice consists in disobedience. It is not that injustice is not also, as Plato held, a failure in respect of metaphysical, political, and psychological order, and, as Aristotle held, *pleonexia,* but that willful disorder and *pleonexia* are both effects and signs of disobedience."

[20] The usual distinction made by philosophy between a transcendent and an immanent teleology corresponds very well to the biblical conception of God, humankind, and the universe.

firmation of higher—usually indeed the highest—rationality, based on the totality of rational evidence and natural propensities in a human being.

It is evident that reason by itself is an inadequate instrument for grasping characteristic biblical paradoxes, however important it may be. The decisive factor is human natural proclivities—i.e., the inner energies of a person. In spite of the "sins of the flesh" we have a soul-deep need to attain the highest good, unceasing love, and perpetual life. In H. G. Wells's phrase, "man comes into life to seek and find his sufficient beauty,"[21] in search of which we are able to overcome all disappointments. The inborn hunger after truth and the fire of love in our nature enlighten our reason, making it capable of grasping a totality of arguments. The cosmic order in itself is not sufficient to make it possible to comprehend the teleological tendency of the universe. It is the soul that provides the needed orientation and dynamism. The illuminated reason then becomes capable of seeing beyond the narrow defiles of our own situation a higher rationality. Only then is a harmony between rationality and intuition or natural inclination established. In a word, human beings are teleological in nature.

The essence of idolatry and of sin in general is rebellion against the teleological structure of the universe and of human nature. One who identifies himself with temporal powers and values is unfaithful to his true nature, with its inclination to supreme good and supreme love, and to the teleological structure of the cosmos. And this is the mystery of human alienation. There is no future for the rebellious and the stubborn; they are alienated and fail to reach their goal, thus preparing their last judgment on earth.

2.3 *Analogy between Cosmic (Dis)Order and (Dis)Harmony in the Soul*

Cosmological concepts of justice and of morality in general provide ideal terrain for expressions such as "cosmic order." More relevant is, however, the phrase "moral order" because it brings within its compass not only an existing transcendent and/or immanent order but also possible or actual human actions. Crime, wrongdoing, and sin are considered a violation of the moral order, and possibly also of a given social order. David Hume and Immanuel Kant are especially noteworthy defenders of the orderliness of the world. Hume asks the following question: "How could things have been as they are, were there not an original, inherent principle of order somewhere, in thought or in matter?"[22] In another place Hume argues that "... the principle which first arranged, and still maintains, order in this universe, bears not also some remote inconceivable analogy to the other operations of nature,

[21] From *The History of Mr. Polly.*

[22] See *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (ed. N. K. Smith; 2nd ed.; London: T. Nelson, 1947), Part VI, p. 174.

and among the rest to the economy of human mind and thought."[23] Kant considers "that a supreme intelligence has ordered all things in accordance with the wisest ends." He continues: "Consequently, as a condition of what is indeed contingent, but still not unimportant purpose, namely, to have guidance in the investigation of nature, we must postulate a wise Author of the world. Moreover, the outcome of my attempts so frequently confirms the usefulness of this postulate, while nothing decisive can be cited against it, that I am saying much too little if I proceed to declare that I hold it merely as an opinion. Even in this theoretical relation it can be said that I firmly believe in God. This belief is not, therefore, strictly speaking, practical; it must be entitled a doctrinal belief, to which the *theology* of nature (physico-theology) must always necessarily give rise ..."[24]

It is reasonable, therefore, to speak of a certain order or disorder and of harmony or disharmony in humanity itself. Cosmic order can be seen as providing an analogy for the state of the human soul and interpersonal relationships. There are many imprints of the natural order upon human beings: a certain range of urges, drives, or inclinations; the order of human artefacts; the order of attitudes, habits, commitments, and principles of action; the order of the operations of thought as such, of logic, of investigations, critiques, analyses, and explanations.[25] The way in which we perceive order in ourselves is, however, not only a matter of rational understanding or external observation. One needs a combination of introversive vision or reflection and extroversive observation. It is obvious that the analogy of cosmic order or harmony is not really adequate here because the material world lacks the inner dimensions that are essential in human life. Both terms are, however, associative: we experience "cosmic" order or harmony insofar as we feel order, harmony or peace in our souls. If an inner order or harmony exists, we yearn for an external order. On the other hand, those who do not have inner order or harmony are disturbed by external order; they prefer disorder all round.

We have to distinguish order as an abstract or scientific category from order as a moral category. Terrestrial events develop in accordance with natural laws and human intervention, and the same is true of moral order. I may recognize moral principles that determine right attitudes towards God, my fellow-men, and the universe, and yet flout them in my behaviour because I am subject to secret interests and passions. I may confront a harmonious and peaceful person with anger and violence because I lack peace and harmony in my own soul. There is, then, no real proportionality between the order of the universe and that of the soul. The same notion is associative in accordance with the totality of this or any other world; and this holds true

[23] See *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, Part XII, p. 218.
[24] See *Critique of Pure Reason* (ed. N. K. Smith; London: Macmillan, 1950), B854; cf. B65.
[25] See J. Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 380.

for all other ideas characteristic of the Bible: wisdom, knowledge, faithfulness, love, etc.

Plato draws a remarkable analogy between the well-ordered products of painters, builders and other craftsmen, and the proper order of the soul.[26] The Bible does not speak in such terms, even though many of its narratives explore the deepest places of the soul and its poems express human feelings of all kinds that elude rational analysis. Especially suggestive are passages showing how God's voice addressing the human soul contrasts with the "powers" of the physical world—notably in Elijah's experience in 1 Kgs 19:11–13: "... And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave ..." (cf. Ps 29; Isa 42:1–4). Such happenings prove that the Hebrew sages were exceptionally sensitive to human inner aspirations to a transcendent spiritual world, to all kinds of categorical imperatives related to justice, righteousness, faithfulness, and love. They did not, however, try to analyze these phenomena; they were content to live them.

In this respect our age differs from theirs. We tend to investigate the universe's every domain, and many think that there are no limits to the purview of science. Indeed, humanity itself is more and more the object of scientific investigation, all too often under the spur of particular interests rather than with any intent to make humankind better, or things more in accordance with the universal divine plan. As a consequence the gap has grown between science and morality. Science can be used to confer the trappings of power and superiority on nations and cultures, or even in attempts to show that belief in God is superfluous. The most horrible facet of this tendency is the ever deepening pit of human alienation, which parallels the crevasse between the rational order of the external world and the inner moral order of the universe as a whole. There are also the irrational experiences of parapsychology and para-religious experiments, which provide further proof of the alienation of the human being.

All these phenomena offer their warnings that human beings should not be treated as an object like the external world, but respected as mysterious teleological beings who have their being within a teleological universe. The sciences are not limited by religion as such but rather by a one-sided understanding of science, a failure to consider the human inner world and morality. In spite of all scientific progress the demands of the human being remain

[26] See *Gorgias* 503d6–507a4.

the same, and true knowledge is possible within a context of harmonious relationships with his fellow-men, the universe, and God.

3. *The Unwritten (or Natural) Law and the Written Law*

In contradistinction to the practice of other ancient religions, the Hebrew Bible is represented as a book of divine revelation. According to the Sinai tradition the law was dictated by God to Moses amid the thunder (cf. Exod 19:19). Nevertheless, it seems justifiable to claim that the basic commandments of the *tôrāh* were not invented on the mountain top as a special code for Israel; they were already written in the heart of every human being from the beginning. The Bible confirms this impression in many ways. First, in spite of their belief in God's direct revelation and the written law, biblical writers always relied upon a kind of empirical revelation that requires from every one an effort of rational dialectic and contemplation. Secondly, the people of Israel always transgressed their law and yet God did not annul his promise to lead them into the Promised Land and to a messianic glory. The faithfulness of God, despite the unfaithfulness of the people, is understandable only in the light of creation and the history of salvation. God created humankind not for damnation but for glory, and his teleological plan for the universe explains his inner obligation to bring it to completion. Thirdly, when it was evident that Israel could not fulfil God's commandments, the prophets believed that he would enable his people—in the future—to fulfil the law. The most remarkable evidence of this is the statement of Jeremiah in 31:33: "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (cf. Ezek 36:25–27). Fourthly, it is generally recognized that the ten commandments which form the core of the law of Israel correspond to the fundamental impulses of human nature.[27] Fifthly, Paul claims in Rom 2:14–16: "When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or per-

[27] See J. Maritain, *La loi naturelle ou loi non écrite* (ColP 7; ed. G. Brazzola; Fribourg, Switzerland: Éditions universitaires, 1986), 235: "Le Décalogue renferme un paradoxe: il apparaît tout d'abord, par son contenu littéral, comme la proclamation révélée de la loi naturelle, avec quelques préceptes additionnels appartenant à la loi positive divine; mais au fond il recèle une *substance surnaturelle:* ce qui est source de vie en lui est principalement l'amour de *charité.* Les trois vertus théologales, la foi, l'espérance et la charité sont présentes en lui, non comme mentionnées expressément, mais comme son contenu caché et surnaturel. Ce qu'il exprime, c'est d'abord et avant tout la loi naturelle ..."

haps excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus."[28]

It is all the more understandable that Christian philosophers and theologians have in all ages sought to establish a right relationship between the natural and supernatural orders in general and the law in particular.[29] The most remarkable of them in this respect is Thomas Aquinas who "made the doctrine of natural law a cornerstone of his philosophy. Not nature but the Christian God was the fount of all order. Natural law was the divine Eternal Law immanent in the creation, accessible to and binding on human beings. Alone among creatures, they have a capacity for self-determination; but, exercising this capacity, they fulfill the Eternal law no less. Their subjection to the laws of nature also is within God's Providence and a fulfillment of the Eternal Law. The Thomistic doctrine brought natural law to fruition. Nothing approaching the dimension and coherence of Aquinas' statement has appeared since."[30] Jaques Maritain has provided an especially good comparative interpretation of Thomistic doctrine and it will act as a welcome guide during our brief examination of this issue.[31]

3.1 *The Relationship Between Creation, Election, and Covenant*

The biblical idea of creation was definitely established only relatively late in the day. The same may also be true of the ideas of election and covenant. Yet in the classical Old Testament period these concepts are central. In the light of an absolute God, the Creator, it was possible to comprehend his total

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[28] In this connection it is worth noting the famous declaration of natural law in the *Antigone* of Sophocles (449–470):

> Yea, for these laws were not ordained of Zeus,
> And she who sits enthroned with gods below,
> Justice *(Díke)*, enacted not these human laws.
> Nor did I deem that thou, a mortal man,
> Could'st by a breath annul and override
> The immutable unwritten laws of Heaven.
> They die not, and none knoweth whence they sprang.
> I was not like, who feared no mortal's frown,
> To disobey these laws and so provoke
> The wrath of Heaven ...

[29] It is noteworthy what J. Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, 392, states concerning this issue: "It must never be overlooked that, for nearly two millennia, the theories of natural law have been expounded by men who, with few exceptions, believed that the uncaused cause has in fact revealed itself to be all that the foregoing analogue model of creative causality hypothesized, to be indeed supremely personal, and to be a lawgiver whose law for man should be obeyed out of gratitude, hope, fear, and/or love."

[30] See L. L. Weinreb, *Natural Law and Justice* (Cambridge, Mass. / London: Harvard University Press, 1987), 2.

[31] See *La loi naturelle ou loi non écrite*.

freedom to choose a people and to forge a covenant with them. Naturally, the relationship between creation, election, and covenant theology involves paradox of a special kind. Creation theology offers solid ground for thorough-going universalism, and in its light it seems logical that every human being should be created in the image of God and endowed with the same promises and obligations. The teleological structure of the entire universe only confirms this postulate.

Biblical law may be considered the most complete of all laws known to mankind because it is in harmony with the innate tendencies of human beings in a teleological universe. It is the most realistic and therefore the most optimistic of laws. If Israel was chosen in order to transmit this law to the whole of mankind, election theology does not imply discrimination against others but rather a special way of leading all human beings to the full truth. The election of Israel was not motivated by particularism but by the universalism of biblical monotheism, which is not compatible with the shallow religions of paganism. Whether election was solely a matter of choosing a people with special religious sensitivity or also implied direct divine intervention in a particular period of human history is relatively unimportant if we bear in mind that Hebrew belief in God always accepts the possibility of his intervention in the terrestrial story.

The Hebrew personalist concept of God is fundamental. It means that human beings as "persons" communicate not only among themselves but also with the supreme Person. If they discover, in the end, that only this transcendental interpersonal relationship can fulfil their inmost intuitions and aspirations, this suggests that every human being has some degree of communication with a personal God even though the formal structure of his religion does not offer any ideological foundation for such a view. Formal philosophy or religion cannot extrude what is a constituent element of human nature or dictate what does not form part of it. There are many reasons to assume that the history of so-called pagan religions is a chronicle of the conflict between formal non-personalist concepts of divinities and spontaneous popular personalist forms of worship dictated by human natural inclinations. Modern collectivist societies are the monstrous offspring of pagan concepts of the universe and must lead in the end to a rebellion of human souls. To a society of persons only a personalist religious and humanistic attitude is adequate.

This brings us to the question of punishment in a teleological universe that contains human beings characterized by an innate urge to a higher good. Is it reasonable, much less necessary, for a Supreme God to intervene in history in order to punish men? There seem to be at least two important reasons for reaching the conclusion that, in addition to the indirect punishment that rebounds upon humans as a result of their own actions, God does punish them directly by personal intervention: in view, that is, of God as personal

and of the teleological nature of the universe and of every individual person. Since God is a personal being, perfect in righteousness and love, he cannot present a neutral face to the affairs of humans, and it is most "natural" that he should intervene in various ways. Confronted with evil thoughts and deeds he must react somehow and punish their perpetrators. The more humans violate the law inherent in the universe or even provoke God directly, the more it is necessary that he should intervene to punish them and to proclaim what is right and what is wrong.

The teleological structure of the universe—and particularly of every human being—means that human beings have been called to perfection since the creation. This vision makes God's intervention even more natural if human beings are in danger of going morally astray: they must be corrected and moved to repentance. And when they repent God has to save them from the disastrous consequences of causality. One of the most important postulates of the Bible is that God is free to forgive his people and to liberate them from the way of destruction.[32] In a community that comprises a personal God and personal beings, creation, election, and covenant are interrelated and therefore everybody's destiny. Historical election and the covenant with Israel form an example for all times, all nations, and all individuals—when the same conditions obtain.[33]

3.2 *The Inclinations of Human Nature and Their Recognition*

Thomas Aquinas deals with the question of natural law *(lex naturae* or *lex naturalis)* in several passages.[34] He argues that it is to be found in every created being, but that in mankind it takes a moral form, for human beings are free to obey or disobey. Their conduct is of a particular genre that transcends the general immanent cosmic order by tending in general to what is good and to the fulfilment of an ultimate purpose. The foundations of natural law are ontological, for it possesses intrinsic requirements of moral regulations, a totality of things to be done or to be avoided.[35] Accordingly,

[32] See H. Graf Reventlow, *VT* 10 (1960), 326–327: "... Da liegt auch das Geheimnis der menschlichen Freiheit, die sofort in eine Gebundenheit an sich selbst umschlägt. Aber wohl kann Gott den schicksalsmässigen Zusammenhang unterbrechen, er kann die böse Folge nicht eintreten lassen, er kann vergeben. In der Vergebung, die einen neuen Anfang setzt, zeigt sich die letzte Durchbrechung und endgültige Besiegung der schicksalwirkenden Tatsphäre."

[33] See A. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 150: "... what is enjoined by the Torah is not a justice restricted to Israel, but justice as such, not only a law in much of its detail specific to Israel but also a law holding for all peoples."

[34] See especially *Summa Theol.*, I, qu. 60, a. 5; Ia IIae, qu. 91, a. 2; qu. 94; qu. 96.

[35] See *Summa Theol.*, Ia IIae, qu. 94, a. 2, resp.: "Hoc est ergo primum praeceptum legis, quod bonum est faciendum et prosequendum, et malum vitandum. Et super hoc fundantur omnia alia praecepta legis naturae: ut scilicet omnia illa facienda vel vitanda pertineant ad praecepta legis naturae, quae ratio practica naturaliter apprehendit esse bona humana."

Aquinas speaks of "inclinations" of human nature that are perceived as a "form" of inner universe founded in human reason, and claims that human beings have a natural inclination to virtue. Another fundamental characteristic of natural law is its mode of recognition. The inclinations of human nature make it impossible for human reason to discover the rules of a moral order by the normal processes of deduction. Recognition of natural law is a perception through inclination or connaturality *(connaturalitas)* of moral regulations.[36] The precepts of natural law are therefore self-evident *(per se nota).* Aquinas insists, however, that only the most common precepts *(praecepta communissima)* which are known to all—for instance, such primary principles as "to do good and to avoid evil" and "to act as man, in accordance with reason"—belong to natural law.[37] Even though they can be grasped in the world of experience they remain transcendent.[38]

Aquinas recognizes two kinds of human inclinations or instincts: first, those rooted in the animal or biological aspect of human nature; secondly, those rooted in human rational nature but implying instinctive urges—for instance, the biological instinct of procreation. On the other hand, Aquinas distinguishes between the speculative and the practical sides of human reason, which perceives as good—i.e., as worth achieving—all things to which human beings have a natural inclination. The order of natural inclinations determines the order of precepts of natural law. He goes on to affirm that there are three levels of natural law: first, the level of being, common to all things—which also share a tendency to conserve their being according to their nature; secondly, a drive towards sexual union with the purpose of bringing forth offspring and nurturing them; thirdly, an impulse to know the truth concerning God and an inclination to live in community. The desire to know God is the province of speculative reason, and the inclination to live

[36] See *Summa Theol.,* IIa IIae, qu. 45, a. 2. J. Maritain, *La loi naturelle ou loi non écrite,* 28–29, explains this kind of recognition as follows: "La connaissance par inclination ou par connaturalité est une espèce de connaissance qui n'est pas une connaissance claire comme celle qui est obtenue par la voie des concepts et des jugements conceptuels; c'est une connaissance obscure, non systématique, vitale, par mode d'instinct ou de sympathie, et dans laquelle l'intellect, pour former ses jugements, consulte les pentes intérieures du sujet, l'expérience qu'il a de lui-même, prête l'oreille à la mélodie produite par la vibration des tendances profondes rendues conscientes dans la subjectivité, tout cela pour aboutir à un jugement, non pas à un jugement fondé sur des concepts, mais à un jugement qui n'exprime que la conformité de la raison aux tendances auxquelles elle s'accorde."

[37] See *Summa Theol.,* Ia IIae, qu. 94, a. 6, resp.: "... ad legem naturalem pertinent primo quidem quaedam praecepta communissima, quae sunt omnibus nota: quaedam autem secundaria praecepta magis propria, quae sunt quasi conclusiones propinquae principiis. Quantum ergo ad illa principia communia, lex naturalis nullo modo potest a cordibus hominum deleri in universali."

[38] This is the most important characteristic of the Thomist perspective in interpreting natural law, in contradistinction to both the rationalist and the empirical perspectives. See the presentation of the theories of the natural law by J. Maritain, *La loi naturelle ou loi non écrite,* 79–118.

in community is based on practical reason. Aquinas holds that the speculative reason is concerned with science and "necessary things" that are free from deficiencies, whereas practical reason deals with what is contingent, the domain of human actions, which are open to deficiencies.[39]

These distinctions between the two kinds of natural inclinations and between the two categories of reason help to explain the need for education in spite of the connaturality of moral regulations. Aquinas argues that human inclinations have to be founded in reason, which gives them a spiritual stability. Nevertheless, they are fragile because of the animal or biological element in human nature. Here lies the explanation of why it is possible either to strengthen or to pervert the primary inclinations of human nature. Every fundamental education should, then, imitate nature: instead of inculcating in the mind moral concepts and rules, the teacher should uncover and liberate natural inclinations rooted in reason. One needs to concentrate and examine oneself in the light of a particular situation in order to be conscious of the process of attaining knowledge through natural inclinations.[40] And exactly that is the method chosen by the prophets and all the other biblical sages: to confront people with the reality of their own natures in the relationships with God, their fellow-men, and the universe so that they may be able to discern their "proper time" *(kairós)*. Consequently, the central target in the prophetic criticism of people is their "unnatural" behaviour in all aspects of these relationships.

3.3 *Reasons for Revelation of a Personal God and of the Law*

The existence of two classes of human inclinations and of two types of human reason shows that the revelation of the written law was compatible with reason and indeed necessary. The full justification of the biblical revelation can be perceived, however, only within the general framework of biblical theological presuppositions which highlight the gap between the infinite horizons of God and the finite human capacity to perceive the laws in their interrelationships. There are two basic reasons for the revelation: first, the personal nature of God and his otherness; secondly, the limited human capacity to grasp and to follow his natural inclinations in a contingent world.

The personal nature of God is the cornerstone of the Bible. The law of causality points to the conclusion that God is the uncaused cause of every-

[39] See *Summa Theol.*, Ia IIae, qu. 94, a. 4, resp.: "Aliter tamen circa hoc se habet ratio speculativa, et aliter ratio practica. Quia enim ratio speculativa praecipue negotiatur circa necessaria, quae impossibile est aliter se habere, absque aliquo defectu invenitur veritas in conclusionibus propriis, sicut et in principiis communibus. Sed ratio practica negotiatur circa contingentia, in quibus sunt operationes humanae: et ideo, etsi in communibus sit aliqua necessitas, quanto magis ad propria descenditur, tanto magis invenitur defectus."

[40] See J. Maritain, *La loi naturelle ou loi non écrite*, 159.

thing; and the totality of empirical experience can lead to the same result. But purely rational methods and empiricism cannot persuade humankind that God is also a personal being, very near to him and worthy to be loved. Aristotle, whose religion has cosmological ideological and moral foundations, cannot allow that between God and humankind there can be real friendship since their disparity is too great. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* he argues that any extreme difference between two acquaintances makes friendship *(philía)* impossible: "This is most manifest in the case of the gods, whose superiority in every good attribute is pre-eminent; but it is also seen with princes: in their case also men much below them in station do not expect to be their friends, nor do persons of no particular merit expect to be the friends of men of distinguished excellence or wisdom. It is true that we cannot fix a precise limit in such cases, up to which two men can still be friends; the gap may go on widening and the friendship still remain; but when one becomes very remote from the other, as God is remote from man, it can continue no longer" (1158b35–1159a6 [8.7.4–5]). In view of this passage, J. Finnis's judgment seems justified: "Without some revelation more revealing than any that Plato or Aristotle may have experienced, it is impossible to have sufficient assurance that the uncaused cause of all the good things of this world (including our ability to understand them) is itself a good that one could love, personal in a way that one might imitate, a guide that one should follow, or a guarantor of anyone's practical reasonableness."[41]

In accordance with the personal nature of God the revelation or the written law is the most impressive symbol of his solidarity with his people, who live in a contingent world. In spite of the law that is inherent in humanity, it is reasonable to transmit directly the corpus of holy divine laws through a chosen people. When the law is not only inherent (involving some degree of obscurity) but is also explicitly stated, we have clear guidelines for our lives. Humankind is not static and isolated but closely integrated in the community of the absolute God and his people as they move towards their final goal. The more individual members of that community transgress the law within them, the more is it necessary for them to encounter stern reproof if they are to reach that goal without gross aberration.

In this connection it is important to emphasize that only truly basic inclinations and precepts are immutable and invariable indicators of natural law. Human beings, who dwell in a contingent universe and in multifarious types of society, therefore need incentives to perceive the purpose and meaning of their natural inclinations and fairly detailed regulations on how to handle life's main situations.[42] The characteristic antithesis of the Bible, the way of

[41] See *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, 398.

[42] See J. Maritain, *La loi naturelle ou loi non écrite*, 153–154: "Il n'y a pas seulement à considérer les fausses convictions ou les habitudes perverses, mais aussi l'ignorance naturelle

righteousness and the way of wickedness, is an unavoidable result of humankind's living in a contingent world. It is most "natural," however, for the Creator and Supreme Ruler of the universe to be a righteous and just Judge who does not destroy his handiwork but chooses his own ways—sometimes paradoxical though they are—to edify his people and to bring the whole of his creation to completion.

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des hommes dont la connaissance de la loi moral doit grandir et se perfectionner au cours de l'histoire humaine, ainsi que la rudesse naturelle de l'être humain, rudesse propre à sa nature, qui n'a rien de pervers, qui n'est pas habitude déformée, qui n'est pas une conviction erronée, ni une disposition dépravée, mais qui est au contraire l'état dans lequel l'humanité a pris son départ et par lequel elle doit longtemps passer. Nous-mêmes sommes, certes, encore extrêmement rudes, nous avons une nature extrêmement rude et grossière par rapport à ces inclinations enracinées dans la raison et au moyen desquelles la connaissance de la loi naturelle doit se manifester à nous." See also p. 226: "... Il n'y a pas d'incompatibilité à ce que, venant de lui, quelque chose soit *naturel* et en même temps *révélée* par lui, révélée à l'homme pour secourir sa faiblesse, remédier à l'ignorance et à la rudesse de sa nature, et redresser ses inclinations gauchies."

CHAPTER XXXI

CONCEPTS OF FORGIVENESS

Any human society's evaluation of forgiveness depends on its view of punishment. Forgiveness makes little mark within the framework of cosmological doctrine, which presupposes a natural causal relationship between guilt and punishment,[1] and the rationalist approaches to philosophy and law are equally restrictive because they equate punishment with retributive justice.[2] Mercy and forgiveness are accorded the status they deserve only by those doctrines that take into account not only natural law and reason but also the personality traits discernible in humankind and in God. The Bible reaches its peak in the spheres of mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation because it thinks in terms of the covenant—i.e., that which unites the divine being with the humanity he has created.

Obviously, the Hebrew personalist religion presents a considerable challenge to the rationalism of philosophical systems. The conflict between the two approaches suggests the following questions: are the heart's reasons above those of the head or simply opposed to them? Are there any legitimate approaches other than the rational to questions of the admissibility of and reasons for forgiveness? Are God's criteria valid for humankind only metaphorically, or in a genuinely analogous sense? Philosophers are not at one on these issues, and it is surprising that so few of them have explicitly dealt with the concepts of mercy and forgiveness. In philosophy, systematic consideration of such topics has gained ground only fairly recently, and almost entirely in the English-speaking world at that.[3]

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[1] See D. Aubriot, "Quelques réflexions sur le pardon en Grèce ancienne," *Le pardon: Actes du colloque organisé par le Centre Histoire des Idées; Université de Picardie* (ed. M. Perrin; PTh 45; Paris: Beauchesne, 1987), 11–27. See also K. Metzler, *Der griechische Begriff des Verzeihens* (WUNT 2/44; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1991).

[2] See B. Rousset, "La possibilité philosophique du pardon: Spinoza, Kant, Hegel," *Le pardon* (ed. M. Perrin), 183–196. The author concludes (p. 196): "Le philosophe sait qu'il faut, qu'il doit punir; il sait aussi qu'il ne faut pas rester aveugle aux excuses et qu'il faut savoir prendre de nouveaux départs, mais le pardon exige plus que cela. Mais c'est ce qui est impossible à qui veut penser, vivre et agir rationellement, objectivement, avec cohérence et rigueur: le philosophe ne se venge pas, mais ne peut pas pardonner."

[3] For reasons of comparison an overview of literature from all fields seems to be appropriate: J. Köberle, *Sünde und Gnade im religiösen Leben des Volkes Israel bis auf Christum: Eine Geschichte des vorchristlichen Heilsbewusstseins* (Munich: O. Beck, 1905); K. Kohler, *Jewish Theology: Systematically and Historically Considered* (New York: Macmillan, 1928), 112–117: "God's Long-Suffering and Mercy"; E. B. Redlich, *Forgiveness of Sins* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1937); F. H. Wales, *Forgiveness of Sins* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940); V. Taylor, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: A Study in New Testament Theology* (London: Macmillan, 1941); G. F. Pollard, *Christ and Forgiveness* (WPP 7; London: Hutchinson,

1946); E. T. Segert, *Vergebung und Gnade bei Shakespeare* (Stuttgart: K. F. Koehler, 1952); W. Tefler, *Forgiveness of Sins: An Essay in the History of Christian Doctrine and Practice* (London: SCM Press, 1959); W. A. Quanbeck, "Forgiveness," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible,* vol. 2 (ed. G. A. Buttrick; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1962), 314–319; J. G. Emerson, *The Dynamics of Forgiveness* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1964); R. G. Hunter, *Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness* (New York / Lodnon: Columbia University Press, 1965); R. S. Downie, "Forgiveness," *PhQ* 15 (1965), 128–134; K. Koch, "Sühne und Sündenvergebung um die Wende von der exilischen zur nachexilischen Zeit," *EvTh* 26 (1966), 217–239; R. J. O'Shaughnessy, "Forgiveness," *Philosophy* 42 (1967), 336–352; I. Ackermann, *Vergebung und Gnade im klassischen deutschen Drama* (Munich: W. F. Fink, 1968); A. Smart, "Mercy," *Philosophy* 443 (1968), 345–359 = *The Philosophy of Punishment: A Collection of Papers* (ed. H. B. Acton: London: Macmillan, 1969), 212–227; J. Kleinig, "Mercy and Justice," *Philosophy* 44 (1969), 341–342; H. R. T. Roberts, "Mercy," *Philosophy* 46 (1971), 352–353; C. Card, "On Mercy," *PhRev* 81 (1972), 182–207; A. Kolnai, "Forgiveness," *PAS* 74 (1973–1974), 91–108; W. K. Neblett, "Forgiveness and Ideals," *Mind* 83 (1974), 269–275; H. J. N. Horsbrugh, "Forgiveness," *CJPh* 4 (1974), 269–282; R. Niehbuhr, *Justice and Mercy* (New York / Evenston / San Francisco / London: Harper & Row, 1974); M. Hughes, "Forgiveness," *Analysis* 33 (1974–1975), 113–117; A. C. Minas, "God and Forgiveness," *PhQ* 25 (1975), 138–150; H. D. Sakenfeld, "The Problem of Divine Forgiveness in Num 14," *CBQ* 37 (1975), 317–330; P. Twambley, "Mercy and Forgiveness," *Analysis* 36 (1975–1976), 84–90; C. Göbel, "'Denn bei dir ist Vergebung'—*slḥ* im Alten Testament," *ThV* 8 (1977), 21–33; J. Imbach, *Vergib uns unsere Schuld: Sünde, Umkehr und Versöhnung im Leben der Christen* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1978); E. Matthews, *The Forgiveness of Sins* (London: Collins Liturgical, 1978); A. Köberle, *Vergebung und neues Leben: Vorzeichen christlicher Existenz* (Stuttgart: Quell Verlag, 1979); J. Gründel, "Strafen und Vergeben," *Christlicher Glaube in moderner Gesellschaft* (EB 13; Freiburg in Breisgau / Basel / Vienna: Herder, 1981), 121–157; D. Heyd, *Supererogation: Its Status in Ethical Theory* (CSPh; Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1982), esp. pp. 154–164: "Forgiveness, Mercy and Pardon"; C. Williams, *The Forgiveness of Sins* (London: Centenary Press, 1942; reprinted in Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 1984); A.-M. Lhote, *La notion de pardon chez Kierkegaard ou Kierkegaard lecteur de l'Épître aux Romains* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1983); G. G. Jampolsky, *Good-bye to Guilt: Releasing Fear Through Forgiveness* (New York: Banton Books, 1985); C. Cavanaugh, *Love and Forgiveness in Yeat's Poetry* (SML 57; Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1986); V. Jankélévitch, *L'imprescriptible: Pardonner? Dans l'honneur et la dignité* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1986); C. Floristán and C. Duquoc (eds.), *Forgiveness* (Concilium 184; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986); P. Lauritzen, "Forgiveness: Moral Prerogative or Religious Duty?," *JRE* 15 (1987), 141–154; J. G. Murphy and J. Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy* (CSPhL; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); J. A. Wilson, "Why Forgiveness Requires Repentance," *Philosophy* 63 (1988), 534–535; F. P. Earl of Longford, *Forgiveness of Man by Man* (Northampton: Buchebroc, 1989); K. D. Moore, *Pardons: Justice, Mercy, and the Public Interest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); C. Cox, "Vocabulary for Wrongdoing and Forgiveness in the Greek Translations of Job," *Textus: Studies of the Hebrew University Bible Project,* vol. 15 (ed. E. Tov; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1990), 119–130; J. Noble, *The Forgiveness Equation* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1991); R. Parker, *Forgiveness in Healing* (London: Daybreak, 1993); J. Gründel, "Schuld und Vergebung im christichen Verständnis," *Schuld und Schuldbewältigung: Keine Zukunft ohne Auseinandersetzung mit der Vergangenheit* (ed. G. Haeffner; Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1993), 127–147; J. Maier, "Sühne und Vergebung in der jüdischen Liturgie," *JBTh* 9 (1994), 145–174); N. Walker, "The Quiddity of Mercy," *Phlosophy* 70 (1995), 27–37; H. S. Kushner, *How Good Do We Have to Be?: A New Understanding of Guilt and Forgiveness* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1996); G. Müller-Fahrenholz, *Vergebung macht frei: Vorschläge für eine Theologie der Versöhnung* (Frankfort on the Main: O. Lembeck, 1996); English version, *The Art of Forgiveness: Theological Reflections on Healing and Reconciliation* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1997).

1. *Definitions of Forgiveness and Related Terms*

Any evaluation of forgiveness and of terms related to it depends on the view taken of justice in general and of retributive justice in particular. This can be seen from the questions that dominate any discussion of forgiveness and mercy: are they in principle possible and permissible? Are they compatible with the principle of justice or opposed to it? Are they obligatory or merely a matter of free benevolence? The question of whether forgiveness is a duty is the most controversial of these problems. The advocates of "legal" morality believe that forgiveness is obligatory whenever it is justified. The utilitarians agree, holding as they do that the general welfare determines whether wrongdoing ought to be punished or pardoned.

These conclusions can be avoided only by choosing a different and more appropriate starting point, when new possibilities open up thanks to the revision of the idea of justice in the light of the realities of human and divine personality. In all languages the word "justice" has many meanings, referring as it does not only to "legal" (retributive) or social questions but also to the personal aspect of interpersonal relations or the relation between humankind and God. In the latter the determinants are the internal rather than the external criteria of justice.[4] Taking into account the transcendent realities of persons means that both punishment and forgiveness become clearly moral questions, with the result that the relationship between freedom and exigency is radically changed, because it is far from inevitable that the formal criteria of justice should be in agreement with the imperatives of the fact of personality. If, in the light of the formal criteria of justice, punishment or forgiveness or both are regarded as a duty, then perhaps the fact of personality dictates that punishment must be comprehended by us solely as a right; but the reverse can also be true. The reason for this is that the formal criteria are unable to exhaust all aspects of related personality conditions in a person in relation to the same set of conditions in another person and to external circumstances. The essence of the moral criteria for punishment and forgiveness is the premise that reasons for one or the other must exist in the person who committed the wrongdoing. In the light of "personal" justice this means that the wrongdoer must deserve forgiveness.

Any critical assessment of concepts of forgiveness must be based on a definition of the term. Since forgiveness and mercy are often near semantic

[4] J. G. Murphy, *Forgiveness and Mercy*, 174–177, in discussing the concept of mercy distinguishes between the "criminal law paradigm" and the "private law paradigm," adding that in his opinion only the latter admits of mercy. On the other hand, C. Card, *PhRev* 81 (1972), 182–207, makes a distinction between "social justice" and "personal justice" (p. 189), and offers in the light of personal justice a more balanced judgment than Murphy of the relation between justice and mercy.

neighbours, however, it is convenient and advisable to define both words while we are about it.

Mercy is used in a broader sense than forgiveness. It connotes leniency in court, official pardons, and benevolent care for the innocent who suffer, *inter alia,* and presupposes a superiority-inferiority relationship: mercy is granted by the strong to the weak, by those more highly placed to subordinates. In the Bible the concept of mercy is of paramount importance, because it is a universal concomitant of the superiority-inferiority relationship between God and humankind and of the divine benevolence. Both these aspects are especially prominent in the book of Wisdom, whose author praises God in these words (12:15–19):

> Thou art righteous and rulest all things righteously,
> deeming it alien to thy power
> to condemn him who does not deserve to be punished.
> For thy strength is the source of righteousness,
> and thy sovereignty over all causes thee to spare all.
> For thou dost show thy strength when men doubt
> the completeness of thy power,
> and dost rebuke any insolence among those who know it.
> Thou who art sovereign in strength dost judge with mildness,
> and with great forbearance thou dost govern us;
> for thou hast power to act whenever thou dost choose.
> Through such works thou hast taught thy people
> that the righteous man must be kind,
> and thou hast filled thy sons with good hope,
> because thou givest repentance for sins.

In certain respects, the concept of mercy is similar to that of pardon, which, however, can only be granted by individuals who are vested with special capacities and a special role, such as kings and judges. Pardon signifies the remission—i.e., cancellation or mitigation—of the penalty called for by a given law whenever it is transgressed.

Forgiveness can be defined much more clearly and has several salient characteristics. First, in contrast to the concept of mercy forgiveness invariably presupposes wrongdoing by the person who is to be its beneficiary. It is therefore seen as an alternative to the normal human reactions to offence or injustice—resentment, anger, hatred, punishment, retribution, revenge.[5]

[5] J. G. Murphy, *Forgiveness and Mercy,* 34, in discussing this characteristic defines the difference between forgiveness and mercy thus: "Forgiveness involves the *overcoming* of certain passions (resentment, hatred) when they are inappropriate, whereas mercy involves acting in a certain way *because* of certain passions (love, compassion)." In the same volume, J. Hampton (pp. 36–43) is right in pointing out that this definition of forgiveness is not satisfactory, because forgiveness presupposes not only overcoming negative feelings but also an altered relationship to the wrongdoer—i.e., a change of heart in relation to him. She also provides her own definition of both concepts (p. 158): "Whereas forgiveness is a change of heart towards a wrongdoer that arises out of our decision to see him as morally decent rather than bad, *mercy is*

Secondly, the concept of forgiveness implies a relationship on the level of personality. When chosen as an alternative to enduring resentment, hatred and vengefulness, forgiveness makes possible a bridging of the crevasse of alienation between individuals and the restoration of a positive mutual relationship. So, unlike pardon, forgiveness is not bound to certain rules or specific laws. Strictly speaking, only the injured person can forgive. Forgiveness presupposes that both the wrongdoer and his victim are aware of the offence and of the former's responsibility for it. It also assumes not only willingness to forgive but the appropriate consequential action. Since forgiveness takes place on the interpersonal level, it indicates a limited equality between the two partners. In the Bible forgiveness achieves its prominent role because, by entering into a covenant, God opens up a direct personal dialogue with man, coming close to him as an interlocutor despite the infinite distance that separates them.

The Hebrew words translated "forgiveness" or "mercy" are not in themselves very meaningful. They conform to the general semantic rule that a word's shades and depths of meaning can only be discerned when its context is taken into account, which in this case means the whole of Hebrew literature. The concept of forgiveness is expressed by three roots: *kpr, nś'*, and *slḥ*. The first of these is used chiefly in Pi'el and signifies 'to cover'; the meaning of *nś'* is 'to lift'; while the basic meaning of *slḥ* is unclear—it is translated 'to forgive.' The Greek equivalent of these roots is the verb *aphíemi,* 'to send forth, let fall, give up, send away, let go, loose, set free.' The concept of mercy is expressed in Hebrew by the root *rḥm* in Pi'el in its verbal form and in the plural nominal form of *raḥămîm.* It means 'love, compassion, mercy.' Since the noun *reḥem,* 'womb,' is derived from the same root, it follows that the Hebrew concept of mercy connotes motherly affection.

An examination of the terminology of forgiveness in a variety of languages, ancient and modern, shows that most of them provide efficient indicators of the basic characteristics of forgiveness in both its negative and positive senses. In the former, forgiveness means the overcoming of feelings hostile to the evil-doer—something that is possible only if the injured person condones the wrongdoing: only then is he able to see the wrongdoer in a more favourable light. Condoning the offence implies revising one's judgment of the offender, and in the final analysis, this means a change of heart with respect to him, which in turn ultimately makes reconciliation possible.[6]

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the suspension or mitigation of a punishment that would otherwise be deserved as retribution, and which is granted out of pity and compassion for the wrongdoer."

[6] See J. Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy,* 36–43.

2. *Forgiveness and Mercy in the Light of Justice Considered As a Virtue*

In everyday speech, justice is probably not regarded primarily as a socio-legal phenomenon that imposes duties in accordance with certain principles and laws, but is possibly associated more with personality—i.e., transcendent—criteria. "Personal justice" means a comprehensive and all-encompassing virtue—that is, true perfection. A just and righteous person takes into account the interdependency of all the principles and conditions of being. His judgment or verdict on the offence that calls for punishment, and the manner in which he views any reasons that may exist for forgiveness or mercy, are not based solely on the offence itself and its setting, but also on the specific, individual conditions that pertain to the wrongdoer. Whoever takes these conditions into account does not violate the principle of justice. Quite the opposite. He attains a higher, perhaps the highest, level of justice.[7] And such justice leaves room for forgiveness. It is therefore imperative that the term justice be used in its broadest (which as it happens is its popular or literary) sense.

When it is applied to the question of punishment and forgiveness, the principle of personal justice stipulates that reasons must exist for employing one or other of them. Arbitrariness and favouritism are incompatible with the essence of the concept of justice. It follows that in the ultimate analysis both punishment and forgiveness are obligatory—even more than might at first appear to be the case, because obligations do not arise from formal legal standards or societal interests, but from the nature of personal beings. Any obligation signifies the ontological-existential imperative of a righteous person oriented towards what is good. The nearer to perfection the person who passes the judgment, the greater the obligation. Absolute perfection means an absolute determination for good–i.e., loyalty to the judge's own deepest nature. In such a case, it would be quite impossible that under identical conditions persons could receive different sentences. If it seems to an observer that, among the equally righteous, God accepts some but rejects others, his impression must be mistaken. Man, it seems, can never form a foolproof estimate of the degree of human justice, much less comprehend the reasons for certain divine decisions.[8]

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[7] See C. Card, *PhRev* 81 (1972), 191: "When we temper (institutional) justice with mercy in deciding how to treat the offender, we consider not only facts about his offence but also facts about his character and suffering which may not be revealed simply by looking at his offence. Thus, we take a broader view of his situation than we took in establishing our initial justification for punishing him. This does not mean, however, that we act without principle or relax our scruple of searching for relevant facts on which to ground our judgments regarding the case at hand."

[8] See the story of Cain and Abel (Gen 4:1–16). In principle, it is possible that God refuses to accept Cain's offering for quite specific reasons, regardless of simple justice—for example, that God was seeking to test Cain's righteousness. Yet Cain's utterly negative reaction gives sufficient grounds to conclude that it was because of his evil disposition that God withheld his benevolence.

It can hardly be coincidental that in the Bible—in both the Old Testament and the New—the all-encompassing virtue, justice (Hebrew *ṣĕdāqāh/ṣedeq*, Greek *dikaiosúne*), is roughly equivalent to grace or benevolence, words which historically denote God's acts of redemption. It is therefore easy to understand why God's justice in certain texts obviously means God's mercy.[9] Yet grace and benevolence are not to be equated with mercy, because these concepts are the most general labels of the *primary* benevolent orientation of the divine being, while mercy is a *secondary* manifestation of goodwill, because it is related to certain conditions that apply to the wrongdoer and can assert itself only if suitable reasons exist.[10] Grace and benevolence belong unconditionally to God, whereas mercy has only conditional validity.[11]

Insurmountable difficulties arise when consideration of justice is confined to its legal or social aspect. It then becomes a mere logical term and excludes mercy and forgiveness whenever reasons for punishment exist. Such an approach fails to envisage God as a person; he is rather an abstract Supreme Being that acts in accordance with the principles of pure logic. Where there are reasons for punishment, there can be none for forgiveness and mercy; punishment and forgiveness become mutually exclusive terms.[12] Anselm is perhaps the exemplar of this approach. His starting point is a concept of justice in its strict retributive sense. Such thinking forms a perfect fifth with his rationality, but is discordant with the premise of God's mercy that he knows from the Bible.[13] Especially crucial is his aprioristic assump-

[9] See J. Krašovec, *La justice (ṣdq) de Dieu dans la Bible hébraïque et l'interprétation juive et chrétienne* (OBO 76; Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988).

[10] This, among other things, is pointed out by C. Card, *PhRev* 81 (1972), 193–200: "Mercy and Benevolence." On p. 198 she says: "It is morally misleading to regard mercy for offenders as a matter of benevolence and twice as misleading to regard it as a matter of grace ... In any particular case, either mercy *ought* to be shown or it *ought not*. An obligation to show mercy, however, arises only indirectly, if at all (leaving aside other coincidental obligations), by way of the rule that similar cases be given similar treatment. This obligation still would not imply a right to mercy as such, but only a right not to be discriminated against."

[11] At this point it must be stressed that God's mercy and benevolence must be taken as unconditional values in themselves. Since the entire material world and human life, together with its fulfilment, is a gift of God, it is out of the question that man should have earned it. All of this must be regarded as a divine benefaction. But man can squander the gift of his own life, and God's mercy and benevolence in relation to him are therefore conditional. Should he do so, the choice becomes one of punishment or mercy.

[12] See A. C. Minas, *PhQ* 25 (1975), 138–150. At the beginning of her article (p. 138), the author observes: "Only a human being can forgive—a divine being cannot." She concludes it with the following words (p. 150): "So we cannot without logical and/or moral absurdity say of a fully divine being that it forgives in any sense I have been able to give to 'forgive.' Whether this is because divine forgiveness is beyond the scope of human understanding is another question, not the concern of this paper. I have only tried to show that divine forgiveness does appear absurd to the human understanding, or at least to mine."

[13] See *Proslogion*, chap. X: "Sed et iustum est, ut malos punias. Quid namque iustius, quam ut boni bona et mali mala recipiunt? Quomodo ergo et iustum est ut malos punias, et iustum est ut malis parcas? ..." (see also chap. XI). See also Augustine, *Contra Faustum Mani-*

tion that under similar moral conditions God chooses to consign some to damnation but to grant salvation to others.[14] It is remarkable that many commentators fail to notice that Anselm's argument is unfounded, an artificial construct, simply because his starting point is incorrect.[15]

The blind alley to which Anselm's thinking leads lends further support to the majority view that the exercise of forgiveness and mercy presupposes the existence of reasons for it. We must therefore take the next step and ask which reasons are viable and which are not. There is a well-grounded assumption that reasons are pertinent even in connection with the initial judgment on the functions of punishment, which may in fact show that there are wrongdoers who deserve mercy without previously making reparation for their misdeeds.[16] The initial judgment regarding reasons that may exist for mercy should be determined mainly by two principles: first, the wrongdoer must not suffer excessively; secondly, those who have the right to punish him must not, in the process, gain any personal advantage.[17]

These principles relate to the wrongdoer's circumstances, but there are a

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chaeum libri triginta tres, vol. XXI, chap. III = *PL* XLII, 390: "Occultum est, altum est, inaccessibili secreto ab humana cogitatione seclusum est, quemadmodum Deus et damnet impium, et justificet impium."

[14] See *Proslogion,* chap. XI: "... Nam id solum iustum est quod vis, et non iustum quod non vis. Si ergo nascitur de iustitia tua misericordia tua, quia iustum est te sic esse bonum, ut et parcendo sis bonus. Et hos est forsitan, cur malos potes velle salvare: illud certe nulla ratione comprehendi potest, cur de similibus malis hos magis salves quam illos per summam bonitatem, et illos magis damnes quam istos per summam iustitiam ..."

[15] J. G. Murphy, *Forgiveness and Mercy,* 174–181, tries to explain Anselm's riddle by drawing our attention to the one-sidedness of his concept of justice. His explanation falls short of being entirely satisfactory, however, because it relies on Anselm's unfounded assumption that under similar circumstances God chooses to leave some people to damnation while at the same time showing mercy towards others (cf. pp. 180–181). On p. 177 he says: "Anselm sees a paradox in attributing both justice and mercy to God because he seems to see God as analogous to a judge in a criminal case—as someone with an obligation to enforce certain rules. But surely this is not the only model of God. God (at least on one fairly common view) is not bound by independent rules of obligation with respect to His creatures; for the rules of morality are, on this view, simply His commands. He does, however, have many rights with respect to His creatures. Thus His mercy may be viewed as His deciding, out of love or compassion, to waive certain rights that He has—not to violate certain obligations that He has."

[16] See C. Card, *PhRev* 81 (1972), 198: "Mercy ... can be the form of charity specifically deserved, as punishment can be the form of social justice specifically deserved in certain situations. By contrast with punishment and reward, mercy is deserved on the basis of what one has endured and the nature of one's moral character on the whole, rather than on the basis of individual performances or omissions."

[17] See C. Card, *PhRev* 81 (1972), 184: *"Mercy ought to be shown to an offender when it is evident that otherwise (1) he would be made to suffer unusually more on the whole, owing to his peculiar misfortunes, than he deserves in view of his basic character and (2) he would be worse off in this respect than those who stand to benefit from the exercise of their right to punish him (or to have him punished).* When the conditions of this principle are met, the offender deserves mercy. Although desert of mercy does not give rise to an obligation, it can present a case sufficiently strong to outweigh the initial justification for punishing and allow us to discriminate among offenders without violating the rule of justice."

number of other, more general reasons that may be adduced in favour of mercy and forgiveness, some of which are matters of principle while others involve morality. The former category includes man's fundamental dignity, his basic imperfection, and the remedial effects of forgiveness and mercy, while the latter embraces repentance, enough suffering already undergone, humiliation, and earlier loyalty (shown before the offence). All these reasons have gained general acceptance and have been subject to philosophical investigation because they are supported by universal human feelings as well as by historical experience.

3. *Principled Reasons for Forgiveness and Mercy*

Principle-based reasons are universal, because they emanate from the structure of the human being and qualify the relationship between guilt, punishment, and forgiveness or mercy. What they all share is a capacity to relativize both the duty and the right to punish. Such reasons do not, of course, apply to God and man, when they act judicially, in like degree. Human fundamental dignity binds God as Creator, Lord and Father, but constrains humans as equals among equals. Human basic imperfection means that God cannot judge human beings by applying to them the absolute standards of his own perfection, whereas it challenges man's unlimited right to punish his fellows. As every human being is unjust and unrighteous, he is in need of forgiveness and mercy if his survival is to be tolerably decent. Experience of the remedial effects of forgiveness and mercy is relevant to both God and man. In principle both can grant forgiveness and mercy in spite of the unworthiness of the wrongdoer, provided there is hope that such benevolence will assist his conversion.

3.1 *Human Fundamental Dignity*

Classical cosmological and evolutionist theories, which are a priori atheistic, fail to provide satisfactory support for man's fundamental dignity, and the nadir is reached when individuality is subordinated to collectivist interests. This is also the view of humankind that has the most profound consequences for the evaluation of forgiveness and mercy. If humans are not considered unique in their individuality and personal dignity, then a hatred that wills the destruction of the wrongdoer is the natural response to an offence. So-called moral hatred is then unavoidable—a hatred that is directed not only towards the offence of the injustice, but also, perhaps even primarily, towards the evil-doer.

Forgiveness and mercy can be regarded as moral values only by those views that do not disregard the transcendent source, the transcendent core,

and the transcendent aim of the human being. Faith in the creation of humans and of the entire cosmos through the agency of one Supreme Being provides an ontological-existential basis for equality and for the irreplaceable value of every human being. It is precisely here that the advantages of the Jewish-Christian tradition over all other *Weltanschauungen* are most evident. The biblical revelation culminates in the premise that everything made by God is good, and that humankind was created in his image. In the light of creation one can assert that God's love of humans is unconditional.[18] The evil perpetrated by humans cannot distort beyond recognition his fundamental dignity, and it follows from this that we must always distinguish between the wrongdoing and the wrongdoer, while acknowledging the inherent dignity of him who does evil. This principle attains full expression in Augustine's statement that God at the same time loves and hates man: what he hates is that which is man's work–viz., the sin; what he loves is the being he has created in his own image.[19]

Old Testament statements about hatred of one's enemies seem to reject any distinction between the sin and the sinner. And yet such words are not to be taken at their face value. One must not forget that dualism of any kind is alien to Hebrew anthropology, that the biblical mode of expression is in general concrete and anthropomorphic, and that emotional outbursts are frequent. It is nonetheless true, of course, that statements about hatred are in need of the corrective provided by the Sermon on the Mount: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt 5:43–45). This counsel does not, however, rule out retribution. There are at least three background factors to be considered: man's fundamental dignity, humanity's ultimately positive aim, and God's right to exercise judgment.[20]

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[18] See J. Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy,* 161.

[19] See *Sermo* CXLII, chap. IV: "... Oderat eos, quorum facies ignominia impleri cupiebat? Vide quemadmodum amat eos, quos vult quaerere nomen Donini. Amat tantum, an odit tantum? An et odit et amat? Imo et odit et amat. Odit tua, amat te. Quid est, Odit tua, amat te? Odit quod fecisti, amat quod fecit Deus. Quae sunt enim tua nisi peccata? Et quid es tu, nisi quod fecit Deus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem suam? ..." (*PL* XXXVIII, 780). J. Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy,* 143–161, presents a convincing argument for the necessity of distinguishing between wrongdoing and wrongdoer.

[20] See J. Hampton, *Forgiveness and Mercy,* 151–153. On p. 151 the author notes: "Thus Jesus' opposition to the maxim 'Love your friends; hate your enemies' may have been opposition *not* to the *lex talionis* or to the principles of retribution, but to the moral hatred of people ... Aren't we obliged to have faith in a decent core within, even if it is a core which we are completely unable to see?" On p. 153 she adds: "... the idea that some people might be beyond redemption is certainly part of this religion's tradition, even if it is not currently popular. Jesus' injunction to love one's enemies thus may be intended only to encourage generosity of judgement towards many, not to require it in every case."

3.2 *Human Basic Imperfection*

Man is a relative creature in all respects and it is therefore logical that God should not judge him by his own absolute standards. When such judgments relate to man's iniquity or disloyalty, his basic imperfection provides extenuating circumstances of a general kind. What is of decisive importance in that context is the nature and degree of man's knowledge and intention on a specific occasion. Whenever wrongdoing is judged by man, another question is bound to assert itself: how far can he as judge hope to assess correctly all the aggravating and extenuating circumstances? When an aggrieved victim confronts a wrongdoer, his judgment and feelings are willy-nilly influenced by a deep-seated awareness of his own imperfection. The complex of ontological-existential realities together with a miscellany of circumstances can greatly weaken a man's first impression that he is entitled to hatred and to vengeance. In the book of Sirach (27:30–28:7) we find a very persuasive argument in favour of forgiveness:

> Anger and wrath, these also are abominations,
> and the sinful man will possess them.
> He that takes vengeance will suffer vengeance from the Lord,
> and he will firmly establish his sins.
> Forgive your neighbour the wrong he has done,
> and then your sins will be pardoned when you pray.
> Does a man harbour anger against another,
> and yet seek for healing from the Lord?
> Does he have no mercy toward a man like himself,
> and yet pray for his own sins?
> If he himself, being flesh, maintains wrath,
> who will make expiation for his sins?
> Remember the end of your life, and cease from enmity,
> remember destruction and death, and be true to the commandments.
> Remember the commandments, and do not be angry with your neighbour;
> remember the covenant of the Most High, and overlook ignorance.

What in principle seems possible or justified can in practice prove impossible or unjustified.[21] Mutual imperfection is perhaps the most eloquent proof that moral hatred felt by wrongdoers' victims is unjustified. This fact is presented trenchantly by I. Kant in his *Metaphysical Elements of Virtue:*

> It is ... a duty of virtue not only to refrain from repaying another's enmity with hatred out of mere revenge but also never even to call upon the world-judge for vengeance—partly because man has enough guilt of his own to be greatly in need of forgiveness and partly, and indeed especially, because no punish

[21] See J. G. Murphy, *Forgiveness and Mercy,* 96: "... showing that some response is in principle justified does not by itself show that the response is ever *in fact* justified, *all* relevant things considered; for to justify in principle is to justify for a pure and clear case, and it is always possible that the world never contains a pure or clear case—or that we are never in a position to *know* if we are confronted with one."

> ment, no matter from whom it comes, may be inflicted out of hatred. Hence men have a duty to cultivate a *conciliatory spirit (placabilitas).* But this must not be confused with *placid toleration* of injuries *(mitis iniuriarum patientia),* renunciation of the rigorous *(rigorosa)* means for preventing the recurrence of injuries by other men.[22]

Mutual imperfection confronts us with the question of whether we know enough of the wrongdoer's circumstances to have the right to hate him and to punish him mercilessly. No formal law can provide a satisfactory standard for judging the evil done by man: aggravating or extenuating circumstances apply not only to an act itself but also—often even more importantly—to the reasons and intentions of the heart. The judge or the injured person is also faced with another significant question: are humans pure enough to have the right to hate and to judge? If the victim ignores this question, his rejection of forgiveness can indicate that his moral indebtedness may be even greater than that of the person who injured him. Anyone who judges others on the assumption that he himself is just sets up as an unchallenged arbiter and seeks to play the role of God. It is against such behaviour that the silence of the suffering servant speaks (Isa 52:13–53:12) and that Paul warns: "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord'" (Rom 12:19). A very eloquent example of Christ's teaching in the matter is his reply to the scribes and pharisees who challenge him to judge the adulteress: "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7). The awareness that only God can judge righteously, because only he knows the hearts of human beings and can therefore administer punishment in true relation to evil-doing, made such an impression upon Kant that it plays a central role in his famous "moral proof" of God's existence.[23]

The theoretical—as well as actual—inability of humans to judge wrongdoing competently also has far-reaching implications for the effects of retributive punishment. Retributive measures are not enough to provide suitable compensation for wrongdoing, and in relation to the evil-doer, the penalty may be either too mild or too severe. Again, damage cannot always be undone, and retributive measures in themselves can turn out to be too costly to the injured person, who, if he insists on vengeance at all costs, may well encompass his own destruction. It is only when all aspects of the relationship between punishment and forgiveness are considered that the ideal of forgiveness can be properly justified and emerges in its true stature. Willingness to forgive is in exact alignment with humankind's fundamental dignity and is the hallmark of human greatness.[24]

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[22] Gregor translation, p. 130; cited by J. G. Murphy, *Forgiveness and Mercy,* 97.

[23] See *Religion,* 60–61; see also J. G. Murphy, *Forgiveness and Mercy,* 98, note 13.

[24] See J. G. Murphy, *Forgiveness and Mercy,* 104–110.

3.3 *The Remedial Effects of Forgiveness and Mercy*

Experience shows that persistence in hatred and rejection of forgiveness distort the human psyche and may eventually depersonalize humans entirely. Instinct tells us that it is impossible to respect any human being who persists in rejecting forgiveness. On the other hand, experience indicates that ungrudging forgiveness has a remedial effect on both the wrongdoer and his victim. Both reactions confirm the validity of the primeval feeling that the wrongdoer must be forgiven whenever there are clear principle-based or moral reasons for doing so. But a further question suggests itself: is forgiveness also advisable even when there is no reason for it—e.g., when the wrongdoer shows no sign of repentance?[25] In such cases the three acceptable grounds for forgiveness—self-respect, respect for others as moral agents, and conformity with the rules of morality—do not exist.[26] Can general experience of the remedial effects of forgiveness and mercy in particular instances outweigh these theoretical requirements?

The groundwork for an answer to this question is furnished by the principle of the educational function of punishment, according to which punishment cannot be imperative if there is real hope that its purpose can be fulfilled in some other way, for instance by the remedial effect of forgiveness. Everything then depends upon the view taken by the injured person, who has the right either to forgive or not to forgive. That forgiveness will in fact have a remedial effect on the wrongdoer is a matter of hope rather than certainty. When deprived of the appropriate moral backing, it is in essence based on hope—perhaps on "hope against hope." The faith that is invested in a wrongdoer involves a greater or lesser degree of risk: the wrongdoer may reject or even abuse it. Since the taker of such a risk may be endangering himself, it is logical to take that possibility into account automatically when deliberating on the propriety or impropriety of forgiveness. Indeed, each and every act of forgiving or conciliation is hazardous, even if the malefactor shows his awareness of having wronged someone, and even if he confesses overtly. It is perfectly reasonable to regard any person who has done wrong as dangerous in the sense that he might be a recidivist.

The question of whether God can forgive without the appropriate theoretical conditions being met by the wrongdoer is easier to answer. First, no human being is sufficiently righteous ever to deserve forgiveness before God; and secondly, even though offenders may regret particular offences,

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[25] See J. G. Murphy, *Forgiveness and Mercy*, 30: "We should forgive in order to reform the wrongdoer; i.e., we should forgive, not because the wrongdoer has repented, but as a step toward bringing his repentance about, making it at least easier for him."

[26] See J. G. Murphy, *Forgiveness and Mercy*, 19: "Forgiveness is acceptable only in cases where it is consistent with self-respect, respect for others as responsible moral agents, and allegiance to the rules of morality." See also pp. 30–31.

they continue to transgress against each other and against God. Consequently, it is clear that God shows his indulgence to all people and pardons them unceasingly. In principle, his mercy is unavailable only in cases of utter obduracy. Until that point is reached, God is merciful in the face of universal human unworthiness—universal because even he who appears to repent may be insincere.

4. *Moral Reasons for Forgiveness and Mercy*

Principle-based reasons for forgiveness and mercy carry much greater weight if a wrongdoer demonstrates by subsequent good conduct that he deserves leniency. In any assessment of moral reasons for forgiveness, certain factors are recognized by the ordinary person and the scholar alike: repentance, good motives, enough suffering already undergone, humiliation, previous good behaviour.[27] It is difficult to forgive wrongdoing as long as a person continues to identify himself with it: we can reasonably expect him to admit to past misdeeds and to abstain from them in future. Once he has done so, forgiveness accords with the three basic premises: self-respect, respect for the wrongdoer as a person, and the laws of morality. When the transgressor no longer claims superiority but accepts his personal equality of subordination, he in effect joins his victim in condemning what he did. The rules of morality being satisfied, the two parties can finally treat each other with respect. This means that the wrongdoer has submitted himself to the supreme authority, thus recognizing the true nature of that relationship.

Repentance is generally accepted as the proper sequel to wrongdoing, and in the victim's eyes particularly it is a natural requirement or expectation. Genuine repentance implies a complete change of heart: he who repents *ipso facto* repudiates his wrongdoing, taking the side of his victim and seeking to refashion the relationship. True repentance always includes the rejection of a wrongful intention or act, and forgiveness is therefore the "overlooking" of a past wrongful intention because it no longer exists–although the act itself may subsist, along with its inevitable consequences.

An offence in word or deed is frequently committed in circumstances where there was no wrongful intention, or indeed where the offender's aim was to be helpful. If the injured person is satisfied that this paternalistic infringement of his rights was unintentional, forgiveness is morally justified.

The suffering inflicted on a human being as a consequence of his own wrongdoing can affect him in various ways. Some harden their hearts, while others are mellowed and recognize their own limitations, strengthen their

[27] See J. G. Murphy, *Forgiveness and Mercy*, 24–30.

fellowship with others or acknowledge the superiority or supremacy of persons and powers above them. Such suffering is redemptive, because it tends to lead to repentance. When this happens, the victim has a double moral reason to forgive the offender. The Bible assures those who have suffered in this way that they will be forgiven when certain signs of repentance are manifest, and it was obviously in such circumstances that Deutero-Isaiah exclaimed: "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins" (Isa 40:2). On the other hand, however, a hardened sufferer may be pardoned, but he cannot be granted full forgiveness, reconciliation, and the promise of a glorious tomorrow.

Repentance can be identified by its external symptoms. Many religions encourage ritual acts of humiliation, such as confession in public and deeds of penitence, and there are parallels in secular society. A confession of guilt and an act of penitence amount to an apology that usually implies a request to be forgiven. Any balancing of the moral reasons for forgiveness can sometimes be swayed by the earlier record of the wrongdoer, which may be such that it cannot be entirely occluded by later misdeeds. This factor becomes stronger in proportion to the closeness of the relationship between the individuals involved. Forgiveness of course presupposes that the offence in question is not tantamount to irrevocable rejection, so that there is still room for repentance and contrition. In this context it is worth recalling Ezekiel's assurance that in judging human acts the decisive factor is ultimately the present rather than the past. The following passage, taken from 33:13, is relevant: "The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him when he transgresses; and as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall by it when he turns from his wickedness; and the righteous shall not be able to live by his righteousness when he sins" (cf. 18:20–24; 33:18–19).

The foregoing moral conditions or reasons add up to the premise that the wrongdoer (or supposed wrongdoer) deserves forgiveness. From this perspective the offender's true deserts do not include an obligation to forgive on the part of the injured person, for the wrongdoer has forfeited his right to be trusted. This is all the more true if all relationships between persons are regarded as a gift. In terms of the theological structure of the created world and the human being, which is geared to higher aims, to an ultimate fulfilment, it seems logical that forgiveness should nonetheless be obligatory: the inner law of benevolence, man's basic orientation towards the good, imposes on him the duty to forgive. Although this law may be only relatively valid for man, with his limited capacity to perceive and act, it is absolutely valid for God. In the Bible, this inner law postulates the absolute certainty of God's forgiveness provided the wrongdoer is repentant and wishes to reform. The underlying principle is that he who repents sincerely is assured of forgiveness. It cannot be purely coincidental, then, that the basic human in-

stinct calls for forgiveness provided the conditions listed above can be seen to exist. Thus, external rights and freedoms are in no way to be equated with inner, ontological-existential standards of justice.[28]

5. *Conclusion*

The central question in a discussion of this kind is whether it is possible to provide a rational justification of forgiveness and mercy. Opinions differ, as do standards of rational explanation. Those who talk only in terms of reason necessarily judge forgiveness and mercy in terms of retributive justice, and their limited vision forces them to conclude that there is an irreconcilable opposition between the concepts of retributive justice and mercy.

The seemingly firm ground of reason and logic is, however, undermined by a deeper penetration into the reality of the world and of personal beings. In this greater light pure rationality turns out to be absolutism. It is a truism that in seeking to comprehend the world and interpersonal relationships humans draw not only on logic but also on a more profound instinct and intuition. It is the variousness of this approach that enables him to experience the world and the fact of personality in a multi-dimensional perspective. Because of this, the relationship between external or formal and inner or ontological-existential law undergoes a change. The latter emerges as the dominant factor, and only it provides an appropriate scale of values and determines degrees of duty or freedom.

Human reasons for punishment are necessarily the products of limited beings, beings that have been created, which is why the principle of retribution must lack absolute value. Indeed, it is man's relativity that provides the primary reason for forgiveness and mercy. Human beings forgive each other because their own justice is limited, while God forgives us on account of our imperfection seen in the light of his higher perfection–something that he teaches us in various ways. The basic difference between humankind and God lies in the fact that everything that is relative when applied to us is absolute when applied to him. In both cases, punishment as well as forgiveness and mercy must be buttressed by reasons. It follows from this that forgiveness and mercy are in essence wholly moral virtues, and no brand of utilitarianism is comparable with the ontological-existential reasons for or

[28] See J. G. Murphy, *Forgiveness and Mercy*, 29: "... if forgiveness is a virtue, then it must be that sometimes it is not merely permissible that I forgive but that I *ought* to forgive and can be properly criticized if I do not. Perhaps nobody has a *right* to be forgiven (imposing on others a perfect duty to forgive him), but surely forgiveness—if a virtue—must be like charity in at least this way: Just as charity requires that I sometimes ought to assist those having no right to my assistance, so does forgiveness require that I sometimes ought to forgive those having no right to my forgiveness."

against forgiveness and mercy. Only the Supreme Being is able to judge righteously and justly, which means that in the final analysis both God's punishment and his forgiveness and mercy are expressions of absolute justice. When God has reasons for forgiveness and mercy, he acts out of the inner compulsion of being loyal to his own essential nature.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The Hebrew Bible is a record of the relationship between God, humankind and the universe. The fundamental tenet is that God is the Creator of the universe who established a covenant with Israel. This covenant defines the privileges but also the obligations of the covenant people. It is in the light of this eternal law that the actions of human beings are to be judged. The Hebrew Bible clarifies the nature and consequences of humankind's or Israel's sin or guilt, as well as the role and purpose of punishment, and the conditions necessary for forgiveness.

The central message of the Hebrew Bible is that forgiveness and reconciliation have the highest priority in the hierarchy of God's attitude to humankind—much higher than punishment and that the attainment of reconciliation and of unity is revealed to be the true purpose of God's and humankind's activity. Divine forgiveness transcends all the limitations of humankind and persists in spite of the rebellion of human beings including Israel. The primacy of forgiveness can only be understood in the light of the reciprocity of all the basic Hebrew theological presuppositions. It was the ascendancy of monotheism which permitted forgiveness to come to be the hallmark of God's attitude to human beings.

Several distinctive attributes characterize Hebrew monotheism. Firstly, God is seen as the beginning and the end of everything that has so far been created. This creation is the foundation of sacred history, which is messianic and eschatological in nature. Humankind and Israel will prosper only if they preserve the vital link with God. Secondly, God is not only the First Mover and the ultimate cause of everything, he is first and foremost a Person. The divine personality is known to human beings through his actions in history. It is the receptivity of the human mind which enables it to go beyond the finite world of appearances. Thirdly, the perfection of God is absolute. Evil has no independent existence or origin. It results instead from the exercise of free will on the part of human beings. Fourthly, God's relationship with Israel is based on a covenant that possesses the binding force of a legal treaty. This covenant shares many of the formal features of treaties common to the ancient Near East, although in spirit it is closer to the child/parent or husband/wife relationship. The nature of Creation and of the link between God, humankind and the covenant people exclude the possibility of any separation. God is bound to Creation and the chosen people unconditionally. Creation inaugurates the history of salvation that is teleological in orientation. The interlocking of these presuppositions provides the foundation for the distinctive biblical tenets of faith, as well as for the characteristic Hebrew understanding of reward, punishment, and forgiveness.

These themes have continued to play a central role across the whole range of philosophical thought, from Augustine, to Immanuel Kant and Ludwig Wittgenstein, as well as in literature where they recur with striking frequency. The interest in poetic portrayal of human sin, repentance, and forgiveness from the personal perspective is timeless. Because of the wealth of material, this study concentrates on Baruch Spinoza, Søren Kierkegaard and Ludwig Wittgenstein in order to explain the philosophical evaluation of the biblical tenets. The literature section looks briefly at William Shakespeare, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and Leo Tolstoy to try to show how the seeds of the ideas of righteousness, reward, guilt, punishment, repentance, and forgiveness contained in the Hebrew Bible have grown in the medium of literature.

The Hebrew Bible not only traces out the path of human reflection for the centuries to come, anticipating many of the conclusions of philosophers and writers on moral issues, it also offers the most profound personalist perspective on human life. The place to begin, however, is with the conclusions of the biblical documents themselves.

1. *Conclusions Concerning Reward*

The striking imbalance between the frequency of warnings of punishment and demands for repentance and the infrequency of promises or offers of reward, can only be understood against the background of the crisis affecting the relationship between God and the covenant people. While God is infinitely holy and absolutely good, humankind is radically sinful. God's true purpose in warning his recalcitrant people is to solve this crisis and to prepare the people to receive his reward, a mark of God's grace. A threat of punishment is, therefore, a paradoxical way of inducing the people to conform to the pattern of God's law in the future, and so gain divine wealth. Threats of punishment are for this reason usually found combined with promises of reward.

Reward is mentioned in many short statements in the biblical narratives and prophetic literature. Several key texts, however, deal with this question at greater length: the Pentateuch, the Deuteronomistic literature, Proverbs, historical narratives, and Psalms. The issue of reward is systematically examined in two passages in the Pentateuch. The first passage can be found in the summary at the end of the presentation of divine law in Lev 26 and Deut 28. It is true, however, that the amount of space devoted here to assurances of rewards or blessings (Lev 26:2–13; Deut 28:1–14) is far less than the space awarded to warnings of punishment in case of disobedience (Lev 26:14–39; Deut 28:15–68). These texts which share many of the features typical of legal or suzerain treaties of ancient Mesopotamia, and other ancient Near Eastern cultures, play a central role in understanding the Law and its operation in Israel. The

second significant treatment of reward is the promise recurring throughout Deuteronomy, that obedience will be rewarded. This promise is combined with the parallel warning that disobedience will be punished. The presentation of obedience and disobedience, reward and punishment, as opposite pairs is characteristic of Deuteronomistic literature.

The view that reward is primarily an inducement to perform certain actions in the future becomes especially clear in the third person speech in Deuteronomy. The offer of reward is not meant, however, to induce actions that merely conform with externally imposed standards. Reward is an incentive to perform actions that are in inner accordance with the divine law and, therefore, conducive to the greatest well-being of the covenant people. The nature of the reward and the people's states of mind are seen as being directly connected; purity of heart brings its own reward. While biblical writers do not define purity of heart, they present individual cases of it in order to illustrate this quality. Because divine law and human life are intrinsically linked, reward is seen as residing in the action itself.

Narratives dealing with historical sources in the light of the Wisdom tradition reflect the conviction that righteous or wise conduct results in reward. This is especially true of 1 Sam and 2 Sam where the issue is presented in an antithetic way. The antithesis here is, however, created through the actions of characters and not by contrasting present threats with their complementary possible future realization. Those characters who fear God, trust him and act wisely, especially in critical moments, prosper and are saved. The fate of those who refuse to acknowledge God's ultimate authority is one of ruin, as they lock themselves into a self-centred world, with all the attendant dangers of self-delusion and of destruction. The Succession narrative (2 Sam 9–20) describes at length those states considered "necessary" or conducive to success or to destruction.

It is therefore crucial that reward is understood in relation to divine law and not in relation to any institution or to people in general. Although it is perhaps natural that human beings should hope for approval or admiration from others for their actions, this attitude is rooted in a failure to appreciate the true supremacy and magnificence of God's laws, as they are reflected in the universe, in his actions in history, and in our hearts. It is through these laws that God manifests his goodness, grace, and fidelity. And it is God's grace, and not a human being's own integrity, which is the ultimate source of blessing. The pleasure people experience in the consciousness that they have acted well and in accordance with divine law, presupposes that they, too, share the same criteria of goodness. In the mirror of divine law, human beings can discern their own aberrations and their self-deception. By seeing the truth so clearly, they can begin to live righteously in accordance with their truest aim and desire. There is always a danger, however, that this inner motivation might be deflected from its true goal by a desire to impress

other people and obtain recognition in this world.

The prophetic literature deals with these issues in depth. The polarity of the universal divine plan with the Creation, God's election of, and his commitment to the covenant people and the inner life of individuals as persons, stand in paradoxical relationship to each other. Within the framework of the Bible, the Kantian concept of duty means an internal duty that commands us to act for the *summum bonum* and contribute to the overall fulfilment of the universal divine plan. Each individual should do his best which is at the same time no more or less than his duty. The divine law is not merely a pattern against which we must measure our actions but an absolute for whose sake alone we must act. Reward in the Hebrew Bible is linked to the idea that goodness is inherent in the action itself and that this very goodness is the reward. Institutions too align their actions to the concept of internal duty. Peter Winch is justified in concluding: "The reward in itself, *qua* reward and discounting its incidental characteristics and effects, *is* no more than the judgment that the action was good. And the willingness of the recipient to think of it as a reward is no more than his willingness to think of his action as good."[1]

The antithetic method of presentation in the Wisdom tradition reflects the fundament opposition between good and evil. There are striking antithetic statements on reward and punishment in the book of Proverbs. In this book, especially the criterion for reward and punishment is no longer the attitude of human beings to the divine law. Instead the criterion is found in the way divine Providence operates in the natural course of events. Human wisdom is defined as the ability to understand the deeper logic of events. These are themselves usually an indirect reflection of divine actions within the world. Reward is, therefore, seen in terms of success rather than of recompense in the usual sense of the word. While some Wisdom sentences express this truth in an explicit form, others argue from analytical and empirical truths derived from a direct observation of the course of events.

This is especially true of the Wisdom Psalms 1 and 37 contained in the book of Psalms. The statement is explicitly made that while the righteous will prosper, the wicked will perish. In Psalm 37, this traditional belief of ancient Israel and of the ancient Near East as a whole is given its clearest expression. Validation for this belief is not sought in an examination of empirical facts. Instead, proof is derived from a study of countless individual cases which indicate that the righteous receive their reward and the wicked experience adversity. The precise period of time or form of sanction is not explicitly stated.

Because an imminent divine judgment cannot be experienced directly through the senses, some people conclude that there is no justification at all for believing in retribution. The distinction between rewards in an immediate

[1] See P. Winch, "Ethical Reward and Punishment," *Ethics and Action* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 216.

empirical sense and rewards at a profounder level, creates a tension that is reflected in the antithetic structure of Psalm 73. The most extreme expression of these opposite views is found in Job. Job can see no intrinsic or causal connection between his life, as he sees it, and his fate. The lives of the wicked and their prosperity also seems to refute the argument that the just receive their appropriate reward and the wicked their deserved punishment. The principle of divine retribution is contradicted by empirical truth, claims Job.

The response in Ps 73:17–23 throws light on this apparent contradiction. The psalmist is aware of his own innocence and asks why he should suffer hardship and misfortune when the wicked prosper, in spite of their rebellion against God. The answer comes in the form of a revelation. In a sanctuary, the psalmist suddenly obtains a deeper insight into reality that enables him to recognize the world of appearances for what it is. The perspective shifts from the world's point of view to the "voice of eternity." The psalmist understands that the relationship between the individual and the eternal must be judged by very different standards than those "from the world's point of view." He recognizes the inevitability of the fall of the wicked and expresses his own relief to feel: "I am continually with thee ... and afterward thou will receive me to glory" (Ps 73:23–24). Patience is seen as a paramount virtue in an earthly life full of trials and shortcomings.

The source of the psalmist's insight is his own inner, personal experience (cf. Job 42:6). Other people can only have access to this truth if they follow the same inward path. The voice of eternity can be heard only in the silence of the individual's own heart. Only intuition, only a holistic inner vision, enables the individual to distinguish between good and evil—and to appreciate the good.

Summary

A. The relationship between God as Creator and the people of Israel is based on a covenant which implies a promise or offer of well-being or reward, provided that covenant people act in accordance with God's will. This is expressed in the Law or manifested in the natural course of events. Because the people of Israel and indeed humankind as a whole, fail to stand in the right relationship to God, a threat of punishment and a call to repentance often accompany a promise or offer of well-being. The aim is to induce the people to obey God's will in the future and by their positive actions, to achieve true contentment and fulfilment. The promise or offer of reward is more frequent than the paradoxical inducement of the threat of punishment. But this, too, is designed to repair the damage which the original relationship has suffered. In the drama of castigation and expiation, the grace of reward turns into the grace of God's mercy and forgiveness.

B. The relationship between human conduct and reward are presented in two main ways. The first is biblical or personal. This is founded on an immediate and personal relationship to the revealed divine Law. The second, the "cosmological," sees an intrinsic link between individual human conduct and individual fate. The cosmological view is common to all the cultures of the ancient Near East. The principle of recompense has an absolute validity in both these schemes.

C. Empirical facts seem to contradict the absolute law of recompense. While the righteous suffer, the wicked seem to grow in prosperity and power when concrete historical circumstances are examined. To solve this problem, it is necessary to focus on the intrinsic and absolute value of human life; to alter the perspective from appearances to the space of "the voice of eternity."

2. *Conclusions Concerning Punishment*

In those texts that are most striking from a literary point of view, punishment seems to be viewed primarily as a deterrent against certain future actions. But this aspect of punishment is not in fact central. Punishment is only one part of a sequence of experiences that allow the agent to attain a deeper understanding of himself, his actions and the true nature of his life.

Examples of both indirect and direct divine punishment can be found in the Hebrew Bible, although certain literary and rhetorical features in the documents sometimes obscure the distinction between the two. While Wisdom literature generally views retribution as poetic justice, the prophetic section sees it as divine intervention. Inherited punishment is one obvious example of indirect retribution. Those documents based on an etiological interpretation are a special case, because their *differentia specifica* is the assumption that misfortunes result from human guilt. This applies even in cases where it is all but impossible for the people to perceive an intrinsic or causal connection between the true nature of their acts and the extent of the catastrophic events that overcome them. Well-known examples are the "logical space" in the narratives of the Flood, the story of Babel, the book of Job, and the general Deuteronomistic interpretation of past history. But to what extent does perceived disorder or misfortune have causes other than guilt, causes outside the grasp of human comprehension?

Humanity in general and Israel in particular are prone to self-assertiveness. This self-will is often expressed as extreme stubbornness. The aim of direct divine intervention is to induce a rebellious people to show penitence. This overall aim determines the method employed by God. The divine approach is characterized by patience; the heavy artillery is held in reserve. If the rebellious heart, however, hardens, then harsher measures may be used.

If even these prove ineffective, then the final curtain may have to fall (cf. the case of Pharaoh in Exod 7:8–11:10). The patient approach also means threatening punishment rather than inflicting it at once. The threats, however, can be severe and may even envisage complete destruction (cf. Lev 26; Deut 28; Isa 6:1–13; and Jer 1:10). But these threats are first and foremost literary-rhetorical devices used to persuade people to change their hearts. Distinctive of the Bible is the fact that it is in fact the only religious source book of the ancient Near East to give assurances to those who are penitent that they will be rehabilitated (cf. esp. Lev 26:39–45; Deut 30:1–10).

Whenever a direct infringement of divine law occurs (cf. Num 16; Josh 7), collective punishment becomes a divine right. Collective punishment does not, however, have the status of a doctrine or principle: firstly, precisely because it remains a right of God. Of significance, secondly, is the fact that many of the passages that are usually considered to describe collective retribution actually reflect a feeling of inherited ancestral guilt (cf. esp. Exod 20:5–6 [= Deut 5:9–10]; 34:6–7; Num 14:18; Deut 7:9–10; and Jer 32:18). Thirdly, the practice of collective punishment is expressly forbidden in Hebrew law (Deut 24:16). This law recognizes the validity only of the principle of individual retribution.

The conviction that punishment of some kind inevitably follows wickedness is implied in the Hebrew Bible *passim* as well as in many other nonbiblical documents. Because of the profound causal relationship between guilt and punishment, no one can escape the negative consequences of his or her own guilt.[2] Vicarious suffering is, therefore, strictly speaking impossible; fellowship in suffering would be a better description of the willingness of one individual to share in the misfortune of another.

Paradoxically, the "natural" causal link between guilt and punishment is most explicitly expressed in those passages that use divine causality to explain human aberration and its ultimately fatal effects. Ten statements claiming that Pharaoh did not obey the divine commands because God hardened his heart can be found, for example, in the Exodus narrative (4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17). A similar view is expressed in the Conquest narrative in Joshua: "For it was the Lord's doing to harden their hearts that

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[2] The intrinsic operation of human guilt is presented in an impressive way by Mark Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*, Chapter 31:

> So I kneeled down. But the words wouldn't come. Why wouldn't they? ... I was trying to make my mouth *say* I would do the right thing and the clean thing, and go and write to that nigger's owner and tell where he was; but deep down in me I knowed it was a lie—and He knowed it. You can't pray a lie—I found that out.

A similar example is recounted by the greatest Slovenian writer Ivan Cankar in his novelette *Skodelica kave* (The cup of coffee) about the infinitely bitter recriminations of his conscience after having denied his poor mother before his schoolfellows.

they should come against Israel in battle, in order that they should be utterly destroyed, and should receive no mercy but be exterminated, as the Lord commanded Moses" (11:20). The historian claims that God inflicted an evil spirit on Saul to torment him and to incite him to evil (1 Sam 16:14–23; 18:10; 19:9; cf. 1 Kgs 22:22–23; Ezek 14:9). Isaiah is appointed to the paradoxical task of rendering the people blinder, deafer and more insensitive (6:9–10), so effecting a gradual hardening of their hearts.

These statements suggest that Israel saw God as the origin of all things—even of deception and obduracy. But what could be the *reason* for such a divine *modus operandi*? This paradox can only be understood in the light of two equally valid points. Firstly, God wants the people to hear and to understand the divine message in order to be saved. Secondly, God knows in advance that particular individuals, or even the majority of the people, will not respond to the message. The hardening of many rulers' hearts occurs because they prefer to pursue their own self-interest. Ambition and a passion to accumulate wealth become the all-absorbing goals of such rulers. As a consequence they favour advisors who are equally corrupt. Those advisors who warn or admonish the rulers for their misuse of power are ignored or suffer even worse fates. As the heart of the self-willed hardens, the message of salvation becomes a word of judgment. The final outcome—destruction—is compatible with the divine purpose: self-assertion and self-will on the part of human beings has to be destroyed. In cases of human stubbornness, divine causality is therefore seen as doubly ironical with two possible sequences. God's well-intended admonition // human obstinacy, and (or) human stubbornness // divine punishment for that obduracy and the consequent destruction. If God does harden human minds or hearts directly, then such an action is not to be interpreted as an arbitrary divine inducement to innocent people to commit evil, but as a punishment inflicted on determined rebels.

But whoever does wrong and recognizes it and whoever, like David, accepts the penalty, is saved. David's main concern was his own transgression. A willingness to submit to punishment and suffering stems from the recognition that these have beneficial and remedial aims and effects. The view that punishment can have a beneficial effect is found in classical theories of penology (cf. Plato and Plutarch) as well as in many modern ones. To submit to the higher authority of punishment implies a readiness by human beings to relinquish their claim to autonomy and superiority. The recognition of dependency on a higher law is the proper path to atonement. Whoever is bent on wrongdoing may well belittle the idea that punishment has an educative aim. At the opposite extreme, the just may be willing to intercede in the spirit of fellowship on behalf of those who are to be punished. They may even be willing themselves to atone for their neighbour's crimes. The fourth "Servant Song" (Isa 52:13–53:12) describes the suffering of a servant who is assumed to be guilty by the world but whom the prophetic message of the

song then reveals to be suffering for the sins committed by others as a method of expiating their guilt. So, the suffering of ancient Israel is transformed into a sign of fellowship and becomes the means of reconciliation for the entire community, as well as the path to honour in the true sense of the word.

Because human life is social and because every human being sins, it seems reasonable to conclude that we are all obliged to suffer not only for our own guilt but also for that of others. The suffering servant is a magnificent example of how the voluntary acceptance of punishment can make reparation and atonement possible. In the Bible, individual and communal guilt are seen as the main sources of misfortune both in private and in social life; for this reason, the governing ideal and principle rule of every community and society must be to establish the right relationship between the individual and community to God through reconciliation.

Summary

A. The causal relationship between rebellion and punishment is so integral that no one can escape the negative consequences of his or her own wrongdoing. This applies especially to the physical world. The same is true, however, of the causal link between faithfulness and reward. An interpersonal relationship is sensitive to damage in every respect. But if the offender is penitent and willing to reform, then such damage can be repaired.

B. Punishment always has a positive—i.e., educative—aim. It is out of faithfulness to the divine inner nature, to the created world and to the chosen people that God resorts to extreme means of direct and indirect—i.e., through human agency—education to achieve reform, and consigns people to perdition only when their obduracy is extreme.

C. The organic nature of the interrelationship between God, humankind and the world means that the sin committed by an individual or a community affects not only the divine-human relationship but also the relationship between human beings themselves as well as between human beings and the world as a whole; penance is, therefore, theological, societal and cosmic in nature. Since no human being is completely righteous and since we are all connected to others in a community, it is natural to expect a willingness, even a sense of obligation, among people to atone for their own sins and for the sins of others.

3. *Conclusions Concerning Forgiveness*

Although the Hebrew Bible emphasizes that punishment is educative in its

aim and that divine mercy is greater than the exigencies of justice, there is comparatively little mention made of forgiveness and mercy. This is partly due to the persistency of human sinfulness and of Israel's rebellious actions. The apparent infrequency of direct statements on forgiveness and mercy is also related to the specific treatment of these issues in Wisdom reflections and statements. Because the focus is on the direct causal link between righteousness and reward, guilt and punishment, forgiveness recedes into the background. Forgiveness is essentially an aspect of the intimate relationship between God and the chosen people. It is not surprising, therefore, that the most profound statements on forgiveness are found in the context of the covenant relation. For God to show forgiveness usually presupposes a confession of guilt and repentance. Paradoxically it is possible for God's willingness to forgive to exceed Israel's capacity for repentance and atonement for sins. The Bible indicates that even a grievous apostasy does not rule out forgiveness and reconciliation.

The most explicit discussion of the issues of forgiveness or mercy occur in contexts when these concepts themselves are named or used (cf. roots such as *nś', slḥ, kpr, rḥm*). But there are other ways of expressing the idea of forgiveness. In those cases where punishment is less severe than might have been expected from the gravity of the sin, extenuating circumstances and some element of forgiveness can be concluded to have played a role in mitigating the judgment even though no direct reference to forgiveness is made (cf. the role of seduction in Gen 3).

One of the most important narratives dealing with divine mercy and forgiveness is the narrative of the Golden Calf and of covenant renewal in Exod 32–34. The people of Israel commit their most serious apostasy when they create and worship the golden calf. Although this apostasy cannot go unpunished, God is willing to forgive and to renew the covenant with Israel after Moses intercedes on behalf of the repentant people. God himself speaks the revelation formula (34:6–7), proclaiming that he is essentially more a God of mercy than of strict justice. The significance of this formula is underlined by the way it appears in slight variations in several important texts (Exod 20:5–6 [= Deut 5:9–10]; Num 14:18; Deut 7:9–10; Jer 32:18). Renewal and the promise of rehabilitation after disobedience are prominent themes of Lev 26:40–45 and Deut 30:1–10.

While threats of penalties dominate the majority of the prophets' writings, this is not true of some of the major prophets. Isaiah, the great prophet of the eighth century, makes a distinction between the majority and the minority when talking of punishment. The faithful minority, consisting of the prophet himself and a small circle, seem to be the only ones who are offered the possibility of purification and forgiveness and the mercy Isaiah himself is granted (cf. 6:7) seems to be the only evidence for the possibility of forgiveness. Isaiah's experience therefore assumes a great significance for the

future of Israel. Salvation is promised only to the faithful "remnant," however troubled the times.

Hosea's reaction to his unfaithful wife presents a unique depiction of the conflict between anger and disappointment in others—in this case a faithless wife—and a greater love that seeks reconciliation and forgiveness through a new covenant relationship (cf. 2:18–25). The first part of Hosea (chaps. 1–3) is unique in the way allegory and plot, theology and anthropology, are intertwined. For the story of the prophet's life and relationship with his wife is also an allegory of the relationship between God and his faithless people. According to the divine command, the errant wife should not be divorced or be entirely rejected: she should instead be prepared for a renewed covenant. Unavoidable punishment has a strictly educative role and is motivated by deeper love. The final reconciliation, however, occurs only after the estranged wife suffers many disappointments: reconciliation is only possible after purification in the desert (cf. 2:16).

The prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel imply that the people lack the capacity for repentance and so the conditions necessary for forgiveness do not obtain. The promise of forgiveness is consequently projected onto the future. God's own regret at being rejected by the chosen people is stressed in Jeremiah and by the Deuteronomistic editors. Once the people have suffered and partly atoned for their guilt, God shows them mercy and forgiveness. In the oracle of 31:31–34 the forgiveness of Israel's guilt is seen both as the source as well as the evidence of the renewed covenant.

Ezekiel explores how the requirements of punishment and the reasons for mercy are related in passages describing the history of Israel's rebellion (20:1–44) and God's promise that Israel will be created anew (36:16–38). It is difficult to understand, however, how God's leniency can be justified. To solve this problem, we must bear in mind the fundamental antagonism between human evil and divine holiness and benevolence, an antagonism which is the very origin of Israel. Israel clearly deserves punishment, not leniency for her apostasy. It is important, however, to distinguish between different kinds of guilt, a difference that is reflected in various statements. While specific guilt on the part of specific offenders entails inexorable punishment, divine leniency can result in a milder punishment. Only the stubborn are finally faced with death. The distinction again must be made between mercy shown to an individual, to groups and the chosen people as a whole. The ultimate aim of God's promise of mercy "for the sake of his name" (20:9, 14, 22, 44) is to secure Israel's survival as is emphasized in other parts of the Hebrew Bible (cf. 1 Sam 12:22; Isa 48:9; Jer 14:7, 21; Pss 25:11; 79:9; 106:8; 109:21). This aim, which is expressed in the well-known pledge to Noah (Gen 8:21; 9:8–16), is anchored in the principle of Creation and is valid for the whole of mankind.

Divine mercy and forgiveness play an important role in other Exilic and

post-Exilic prophetic literature, such as in Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 40:1–11; 48:1–11; 54:1–10). The fourth "Servant Song" describes how healing occurs through an individual's free acceptance of suffering in order to expiate the sins of the people (Isa 52:13–53:12). In the Apocalypse of Isaiah (Isa 24:1–27:13), the claim is made that the Exile will expiate the guilt of Jacob (27:9). Here, too, the statement is found that God does not confine his mercy to the covenant people but includes all pagan peoples. The surprising conversion of the Egyptians to Israel's God (cf. esp. Isa 19:22) is accompanied by a promise that they will be healed. According to the book of Jonah, the Ninivites were saved because of their penitence and acceptance of punishment.

Prayer is the highest and most profound manifestation of Israel's religion: it is therefore not surprising that the book of Psalms contains some of the most illuminating reflections on the themes of divine mercy and forgiveness. Prayer is significant firstly because it is the most personal expression of the relationship to God. It implies both consciousness of God's absoluteness and holiness as well as an awareness of human limitations. The psalmist in Ps 78:39 describes human frailty as being one of the most important reasons for God's mercy towards Israel: "He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passes and comes not again." Similarly, in Ps 103:14: "For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust." Demonstrating absolute power is not an effective method for God when dealing with the limitations of mortals. The second reason why mercy is more prominent in the Psalms is because prayer by its very nature involves the establishment of a relationship to the eternal. Honesty is a pre-requisite for true prayer. It can be easily understood how an individual faced with the silence of prayer and the voice of eternity may attain a new and intense consciousness of his or her own guilt, both for a particular sin, as well as for the sinfulness that is inherent in humankind.

The nature of divine mercy and forgiveness is most often expressed in short, often formulaic passages—themselves often parts of larger structures—that cover the whole range of literary genres and feelings and beliefs. The recurrence of these statements throughout the Bible underlines the universal quality of mercy and forgiveness. Whenever catastrophes such as illness, persecution by enemies, or exile, occur, then those who suffer are inevitably prompted to consider the extent of their own responsibility for their misfortune or whether an intrinsic causal link between their particular state of mind and their fate exists. True humility, deriving from honest self-examination and a heightened awareness of human limitations, is the surest approach to recognizing God as the source of salvation.

The penitential Psalms 51, 78, and 106 all reflect a belief in God's mercy and forgiveness. In Psalm 51, the suppliant stands before the mirror of divine holiness and sees in it his own inherent sinfulness. The psalmist prays

first (vv. 3–11) for forgiveness and secondly (vv. 12–19) for inner renewal—in the sense of an imminent re-creation—as well as for a new relationship with God. His prayer assumes an eschatological character because of a profound sense of unity with God's holiness and mercy. Psalms 78 and 106 are typical historical recitations of Israel's sin. The opposing character of God and his people is brought into focus by the antithetic structure: God is always gracious and merciful, while Israel is constantly faithless and rebellious. God, however, persists in his covenant promise and forgives the people, thereby creating the conditions necessary for a new election and new hope. The divine promise and election are seen as unconditional in relation to divine Creation as a whole but conditional in relation to particular groups and individuals.

Summary

A. Whenever Israel or the nations are prepared to show penitence, God is willing to forgive. God himself is faithful and therefore under no obligation to exculpate the faithless. He pardons them in the final analysis "for the sake of his name." The guilty have the right to ask for forgiveness. But in view of God's absolute righteousness they do not have the right to demand it either for themselves or for others. Forgiveness is the hallmark of God's generosity.

B. The distance between God as Creator and human beings as his creation is infinite and precludes the possibility that Israel or the nations could ever deserve God's generosity in the proper sense. No fundamental difference, therefore, exists between the gift of reward and the grace of mercy or forgiveness when God's ultimate motivation is considered. A distinction exists, however, between the immediate reasons for God's forgiveness and the human conditions prevailing at the time of God's actions towards Israel and towards the nations; they are all part of his fulfilment of the original plan to create harmony in the world.

C. Mediation through supplication and atonement are required by the very nature of the bonds within a community and especially within the theological covenant. Moses and the suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah exemplify this attitude and therefore play an especially important role among the people of Israel. The suffering of one or several righteous individuals is instrumental in expiating the guilt of the people in several critical situations.

4. *Universality of the Issues: Philosophy*

The centrality of the themes of reward, punishment, and forgiveness in all

religions and all cultures make it understandable that philosophers, theologians and writers in general should also be pre-occupied with these issues. Countless Jewish and Christian commentaries, philosophical and theological writings from the period C.E. could be drawn on for the purpose of a comparative evaluation. Many thinkers and scholars derived the same or similar conclusions from other sources, such as natural theology or religious experience. For these reasons, it is all the more necessary to limit this study to a few more recent authors such as Baruch Spinoza, Søren Kierkegaard, and Ludwig Wittgenstein in the field of philosophy, and to William Shakespeare, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and Leo Tolstoy in the field of literature. The metaphysical background and empirical reasons used to validate many views on Retributivism and Utilitarianism often conform with the beliefs found in the Hebrew Bible.[3] It has been widely recognized that any text can have a multiplicity of meanings. But within the unity of belief in divine authority, a layer of various meanings can form a harmonious coherence which speaks to all times. Other important issues include: the authority of the Scripture; the role of the reason in interpretation of the Bible; the relationship between the immanent and the transcendental experiences of reward, punishment, and forgiveness; the intrinsic operation of reward and punishment; the problem of repentance and expiation; and the ultimate reason for God's mercy and forgiveness.

4.1 *Baruch Spinoza on Reasons for Obedience*

Spinoza's treatise *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* is especially illuminating on the themes of reward, punishment, and forgiveness.[4] Fundamental to Spinoza's system is a distinction between different kinds of knowledge. He differentiates between knowledge acquired by reason and theological truth as revealed to the prophets. The Scriptures, therefore, have a special status. Spinoza believes "that the method of interpreting Scripture is no different from the method of interpreting Nature, and is in fact in complete accord with it."[5]

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[3] See especially D. Z. Phillips, "Does It Pay to Be Good?," *PAS* 65 (1965), 45–60; P. Winch, "Can a Good Man Be Harmed?," *PAS* 66 (1966), 55–70 = idem, *Ethics and Action,* 193–209; idem, "Ethical Reward and Punishment," *The Human World* 1 (November 1970), 34–49 = idem, *Ethics and Action,* 210–228; M. Paton, "Can an Action Be Its Own Punishment?," *Philosophy* 54 (1979), 534–540; T. Hurka, "How Great a Good Is Virtue?," *JPh* 95 (1998), 181–203.

[4] See the edition of the original text in Latin by C. Gebhardt, *Spinoza Opera,* vol. 3 (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1925), 1–247; pp. 251–267: "Adnotationes ad Tractatum Theologico-Politicum." A new English translation was provided and edited by S. Shirley (with an introduction by B. S. Gregory): *Baruch Spinoza: Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991); all citations are taken from this translation.

[5] See *Tractatus,* 141. See also the analogy between the method of interpreting Nature and linguistic devices proposed by G. L. Hallett, *Language and Truth* (New Haven / London: Yale

Knowledge of the Scripture, in Spinoza's view, must be derived from the Scripture itself. To acquire such knowledge involves, firstly, studying the nature and properties of the Hebrew language. Secondly, all the texts dealing with the same subject have to be compared with each other. Thirdly, the historical circumstances surrounding the author/writer of a particular text must be understood, as well as the author's purpose. In theory, Spinoza considered the literal sense of the text to be primary. Because of this, he admits that not only apparent but real contradictions can exist between texts concerning the same subject.[6] Although Spinoza recognizes that much of important linguistic and historical information has been lost, he nonetheless believes that these difficulties "can prevent us from grasping the meaning of the prophets only in matters beyond normal comprehension."[7]

Crucial to understanding Spinoza's approach is his belief that the Scripture's true purpose is not to impart factual knowledge but to persuade people to obey the moral law. Only obedience to this law leads to salvation. The Scripture condemns obstinacy but not ignorance. The special knowledge that the Scriptures imparts is not accessible to reason; its authority rests on the teachings of the prophets, a teaching which receives confirmation through signs. Spinoza concludes that the intention guarantees the moral reliability of the Scripture. He therefore attaches little importance to changes in formulation. A writer's knowledge of God and purity of intention is mirrored so clearly in his message that any error or evil thought can be recognized at once.[8]

Although Spinoza's method of interpreting the Scripture is unsystematic and philosophical, it remains rationalistic. He makes a fundamental distinction between philosophy and theology, and therefore, between knowledge and obedience, truth and faith, intellect and imagination. Spinoza is therefore at variance with Maimonides, who believed that the deepest self of a normal human being is essentially good or sane and proclaimed that reason must be the criteria for interpreting biblical texts and human moral responsibility.[9] Spinoza in fact exaggerates the distinction between philosophy and theology to such a degree that inconsistencies appear in the application of his basic methodological principle. Spinoza's own method is based on rea-

University Press, 1988), esp. p. 4.

[6] See *Tractatus,* 143: "Indeed, even though their literal meaning is opposed to the natural light of reason, this literal meaning must nevertheless be retained unless it is in clear opposition to the basic principles derived from the study of Scripture. On the other hand, if these statements in their literal interpretation were found to be in contradiction with the basic principles derived from Scripture, they would have to be interpreted differently (that is, metaphorically) even if they were in complete agreement with reason."

[7] See *Tractatus,* 153–154.

[8] See *Tractatus,* 211–212.

[9] See M. Sokol, "Maimonides on Freedom of the Will and Moral Responsibility," *HThR* 91 (1998), 25–39.

son in spite of the theoretical distinction between knowledge and obedience. He argues that his "method demands no other light than the natural light of reason. For the nature and virtue of that light consists essentially in this, that by a process of logical deduction that which is hidden is inferred and concluded from what is known, or given as known."[10] Spinoza also asserts: "According to our fundamental principle, faith must be defined as the holding of certain beliefs about God such that, without these beliefs, there cannot be obedience to God, and if this obedience is posited, these beliefs are necessarily posited."[11] Spinoza's list of the dogmas of universal faith to be derived from the Scripture are: (1) God as a Supreme Being exists; (2) God is one alone; (3) God is omnipresent; (4) God possesses a supreme right and dominion over all things and therefore all are required to obey him absolutely; (5) worship of God and obedience to him consist solely in justice and charity; (6) all who obey God are saved, others are lost; and (7) God forgives repentant sinners.[12] Spinoza also emphasizes the importance of understanding the essential interrelation and significance of component parts: "No one can fail to realize that all these beliefs are essential if all human beings, without exception, are to be capable of obeying God as prescribed by the law explained above; for if any one of these beliefs is nullified, obedience is also nullified."[13] These principles seem to have been derived by Spinoza from a general consideration of the Scripture and not from any detailed historical, linguistic or literary analysis of biblical texts.

Although Spinoza's method of arriving at theological principles is rationalistic, he rejects the claim that obedience to the divine law can be based on reason itself. Abraham, Moses and other prophets, he says, obeyed without any prior knowledge of God's fundamental attributes.[14] Spinoza's claim, however, that the obedience of the prophets was based on imagination and not on cognitive reason is arbitrary and does not follow from an examination of the historical, linguistic or literary properties of the Scripture. Arbitrary, too, is his a priori denial that religion—seen as exclusively ethical in nature—has anything to do with the truth. Indeed, the very way Spinoza applies his methodological principles and his highly selective use of Scripture

[10] See *Tractatus*, 154.
[11] See *Tractatus*, 222.
[12] See *Tractatus*, 224–225.
[13] See *Tractatus*, 225.
[14] See the contention about God's manifestation at Sinai in *Tractatus*, 226: "Although the voice which the Israelites heard could not have given those men a philosophical or mathematical certainty of God's existence, it sufficed to strike them with awe of God as they had previously known him, and to induce them to obedience, this being the purpose of that manifestation. For God was not seeking to teach the Israelites the absolute attributes of his essence (he revealed none of these things at the time), but to break down their obstinacy and bring them to obedience. Therefore he assailed them, not with arguments, but with the blare of trumpets, with thunder and with lightnings (see Exodus ch. 20 v. 20)."

argue in favour of a synthetic cognitive effort that recognizes the essential interdependence of faith, truth, and reason in interpreting the Scriptures.[15] Why should anyone obey God absolutely if he does not possess convincing arguments that the divine Creator is the origin and purpose of his life and that this is the absolute authority for all moral demands?[16] A fortiori: how could anyone trust God and love him with all his heart—and that is the ultimate religious ideal of the Bible—if such obedience is motivated only by fear of God and of his overwhelming power and authority rather than by knowledge of the real meaning of this authority?

It is from the interdependence between the basic tenets of faith that the moral demand of absolute obedience to God is derived; an understanding of these tenets favours the psychological disposition to absolute love. The biblical revelation therefore possesses a theological unity. It is no coincidence that the Bible crowns its process of transformative exegesis with absolute monotheism, which implies absolute obedience and undivided love of God as well as charity to our fellow human beings. The explanation of how biblical beliefs and values could be transmitted without falsification is found in this disposition to absolute obedience and love, as Spinoza himself understood. This disposition is anchored in the ontological structure of human beings, which is at once individual, transcendental, and socio-historical.

4.2 *Inherent Absolute Judgment of Value and Human Responsibility*

In modern times, the quest to provide rational and irrational proofs for the existence of God has assumed a dramatic character. No single proof or method seems to supply an explanation that satisfies people, a situation that can lead to widespread resignation and apathy. But in view of the huge repercussions in history, in politics and in every sphere of everyday life resulting from the absence of any belief in God, attempts are made to provide evidence for the belief in the absolute divine authority as the foundation of human morality. It is only within a comprehensive synthetic view of God, human beings, and the world that the individual statements of the Bible as well as of modern philosophers or theologians can be understood. Ludwig Wittgenstein's statement, for example, reflects the synthesis of Jewish-

[15] See *Tractatus*, 42, the "Introduction" by B. S. Gregory: "The TTP is rightly acknowledged as a pioneering work in the establishment of modern biblical exegesis, but it is permeated by a philosophy which, despite its author's claims to the contrary, plays a crucial role in the scriptural interpretation. It is a fine example of the fact that interpretation cannot be done from a privileged, self-evident point of view."

[16] Knowledge alone, however, does not seem to be sufficient to overcome the human tendency to the evil of evils: self-will and obstinacy. The most striking illustration of this fact is found in the stubbornness of Pharaoh, which increases even in the face of God's power as manifested through signs and miracles (Exod 7:8–11:10).

Christian theological presuppositions:

> Schlick says that theological ethics contains two conceptions of the essence of the Good. According to the more superficial interpretation, the Good is good because God will it; according to the deeper interpretation, God will the Good because it is good.
>
> I think that the first conception is the deeper one: Good is what God orders. For this cuts off the path to any and every explanation "why" it is good, while the second conception is precisely the superficial, the rationalistic one, which proceeds as if what is good could still be given some foundation.
>
> The first conception says clearly that the essence of the Good has nothing to do with facts and therefore cannot be explained by any proposition. If any proposition expresses just what I mean, it is: Good is what God orders.[17]

This statement reveals how deeply Ludwig Wittgenstein believed in the existence of an absolute. His emphasis on God's absolute authority is completely in harmony with the monotheistic presuppositions of the Hebrew Bible. Other texts, too, reflect Wittgenstein's belief in an ultimate transcendental divine Being. He states that the obligation for human beings to act decently rests on the possibility of an absolute judgment of value in his lecture on Ethics:

> Supposing that I could play tennis and one of you saw me playing and said "Well, you play pretty badly" and suppose I answered "I know, I'm playing badly but I don't want to play any better," all the other man could say would be "Ah then that's all right." But suppose I had told one of you preposterous lie and he came up to me and said "You're behaving like a beast" and then I were to say "I know I behave badly, but then I don't want to behave any better," could he then say "Ah, then that's all right"? Certainly not; he would say "Well, you *ought* to want to behave better." Here you have an absolute judgment of value, whereas the first instance was one of relative judgment.[18]

The imperative to behave better is derived from something that transcends all immediate circumstances; the logic for acting honourably and justly is so compelling that nothing else can be compared to it in importance. In fact, there is no alternative to it at all, as Ludwig Wittgenstein sees it. His remark "Well, you *ought* to want to behave better" seen in this light is only natural advice and not a distortion or misuse of language. Those who accept the logical necessity of this "prophetic admonition" will attempt to fulfill it in practice or else feel ashamed and guilty.

The limited resources of language to mirror the deeper, metaphysical and supernatural structures of reality make any discussion of the issue of God,

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[17] See F. Waismann, "Wittgenstein's Lecture on Ethics, II: Notes on Talks with Wittgenstein," *PhR* 74 (1965), 15.

[18] L. Wittgenstein, "Wittgenstein's Lecture on Ethics, I: A Lecture on Ethics," *PhR* 74 (1965), 5.

his demands, and his absolute judgments of value in relation to human beings controversial. Any attempt to express these issues automatically involves a "thrust against the limits of language." Søren Kierkegaard described the thrust against the limits of language as the thrust against paradox.[19] Other judgments of value also clearly involve a thrust against the limits of language. In his lecture on Ethics, Ludwig Wittgenstein mentions the feeling of being absolutely safe as a feeling characteristic of the biblical understanding of human faithfulness towards God:

> I will mention another experience straightaway which I also know and which others of you might be acquainted with: it is, what one might call, the experience of feeling *absolutely* safe. I mean the state of mind in which one is inclined to say "I am safe, nothing can injure me whatever happens." Now let me consider these experiences, for, I believe, they exhibit the very characteristics we try to get clear about. And there the first thing I have to say is, that the verbal expression which we give to these experiences is nonsense! ... To be safe essentially means that it is physically impossible that certain things should happen to me and therefore it's nonsense to say that I am safe *whatever* happens. Again this is a misuse of the word "safe" as the other example was of a misuse of the word "existence" or "wondering." Now I want to impress on you that a certain characteristic misuse of our language runs through *all* ethical and religious expressions. All these expression *seem,* prima facie, to be just *similes.* ... And when we say "This man's life was valuable" we don't mean it in the same sense in which we would speak of some valuable jewelry but there seems to be some sort of analogy. Now all religious terms seem in this sense to be used as similes or allegorically. For when we speak of God and that he sees everything and when we kneel and pray to him all our terms and actions seem to be parts of a great and elaborate allegory which represents him as a human being of great power whose grace we try to win, etc., etc. But this allegory also describes the experience which I have just referred to. For the first of them is, I believe, exactly what people were referring to when they said that God had created the world; and the experience of absolute safety has been described by saying that we feel safe in the hands of God. A third experience of the same kind is that of feeling guilty and again this was described by the phrase that God disapproves of our conduct. Thus in ethical and religious language we seem constantly to be using similes. But a simile must be the simile for *something.*[20]

For Ludwig Wittgenstein that *something* that is "supernatural" is the only true subject of Ethics.[21] Ethics itself implies an attempt by human beings *to go beyond* the world; it springs from the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolutely valuable. Ethics

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[19] See L. Wittgenstein, "Wittgenstein's Lecture on Ethics, I: A Lecture on Ethics," *PhR* 74 (1965), 5.

[20] L. Wittgenstein, "Wittgenstein's Lecture on Ethics, I: A Lecture on Ethics," *PhR* 74 (1965), 8–9.

[21] Ibid., 7.

is therefore "a document of a tendency in the human mind."[22] Ludwig Wittgenstein adds: "But the tendency, the thrust, *points to something*."[23] He emphasizes: "I can only say: I don't belittle this human tendency; I take my hat off to it. And here it is essential that this is not a sociological description but that I speak *for myself*."[24]

The expression "experience of feeling *absolutely* safe" in the ordinary or *natural* sense of the word would clearly be an empirically false assertion. To experience an intrinsic or absolute value, people must go beyond the world, beyond the boundaries of language. The certainty that a person who acts decently in all circumstances cannot be harmed in relation to what he considers to be truly important in life reflects a clear belief in supernatural realities. As Ludwig Wittgenstein says in the *Notebooks* (p. 83):

> A good life is the world seen *sub specie aeternitatis*. ... The ordinary way of looking at things sees objects so to speak from within their midst, the view *sub specie aeternitatis* from outside. So that they have the whole world as their background.[25]

4.3 *Intrinsic Operation of Reward and Punishment*

Ludwig Wittgenstein observed in his *Tractatus Locigo-Philosophicus* (6.422):

> When an ethical law of the form, "Thou shalt ..." is laid down, one's first thought is, "And what if I do not do it?" It is clear, however, that ethics has nothing to do with punishment and reward in the usual sense of the terms. So our question about the *consequences* of an action must be unimportant.—At least those consequences should not be events. For there must be something right about the question we posed. There must indeed be some kind of ethical reward and ethical punishment, but they must reside in the action itself.
>
> (And it is also clear that the reward must be something pleasant and the punishment something unpleasant.)[26]

Ludwig Wittgenstein distinguishes between reward and punishment in the usual sense and in the ethical sense. In the first case, reward and punishment are seen as consequences of our actions, whereas in the second case they are seen as residing in the actions themselves. In this second, ethical sense, re-

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[22] Ibid., 11–12.

[23] See F. Waismann, "Wittgenstein's Lecture on Ethics, II: Notes on Talks with Wittgenstein," *PhR* 74 (1965), 13.

[24] Ibid., 16.

[25] A similar judgment of the absolute value of righteousness comes to expression in the concluding part of Plato's *Apology* by Socrates: "But you too, judges, must face death with good hope, and remember this one truth, that a good man cannot suffer any evil either in life or after death, and that the gods do not neglect his fortunes."

[26] For the translation, see P. Winch, "Ethical Reward and Punishment," *Ethics and Action*, 210.

ward and punishment impinge on the consciousness of the individual in a particular way. It is therefore clear how Ludwig Wittgenstein comes to the conclusion that no crime goes unpunished (6.422).

Reward and punishment in the ethical sense has parallels with the Retributivist position. The importance of reward and punishment lies not in their providing inducements or restraints on future actions, but as a way of assessing the degree of goodness inherent in the motivations for previous actions: they are significant factors to be taken into additional account when weighing the moral reasons for or against future actions. It is clear that this view presupposes that individuals are morally responsible with freedom to make decisions. The righteous person is supposed to find his reward in the goodness of his actions, i.e., in the action's own reward, and not in recognition from others. The primacy of the inner life and of consciousness is reflected in Wittgenstein's famous statement in the *Tractatus* that the world of the happy man is a different world from that of the unhappy man (6.43).

Punishment should, however, be seen in the twofold but complementary perspective: both as a consequence of wrong action and, in the ethical sense, as infringement of the moral order. Margaret Paton emphasized that the difficulties inherent in the relationship between the consequential and ethical sense of punishment also apply to the metaphysical and institutional sense of punishment:

> In order to give any substance to the view that no crime goes unpunished it would have to be said that every crime receives punishment because the soul of the wrongdoer is harmed by the wrongdoing. What this comes down to saying is that the criminal inevitably inflicts his punishment on himself, whether he knows it or not. This is to give "punishment" a metaphysical sense which removes it altogether from punishment in an institutional sense.[27]

The same is true for the actions of good people. Søren Kiergegaard observes:

> Now and then someone speaks of "suffering punishment, when one does the Good." How is that possible? From whom shall that punishment come? Certainly not from God! Is it, then, from the world—so that when in its wisdom the world is mistaken, it rewards the bad and punishes the Good? And yet no, it is not as that word "world" implies. The word does not mean what it says. It is improperly expressed. For the word "world" sounds great and terrifying, and yet it must obey the same law as the most insignificant and miserable man. But even if the world gathered all its strength, there is one thing it is not able to do, it can no more punish an innocent one than it can put a dead person to death. ... How wonderful, here is a limit, a limit that is invisible, like a line that is easy to overlook with the senses, but one that has the strength of eternity in resisting any infringement. ...[28]

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[27] See "Can an Action Be Its Own Punishment?," *Philosophy* 54 (1979), 540.

[28] See *Purity of Heart Is To Will One Thing: Spiritual Preparation for the Office of Confession* (translated from the Danish by D. V. Steere; Harper Torchbooks; New York et al.: Harper & Row, 1956), 97.

Søren Kierkegaard illuminates the similarities between the feeling of absolute safety and willing the Good. Both imply a tendency in the human mind to recognize a limit. Only the observance of such a limit can give life a certain kind of unity. To act out of a regard for others and for the sake of one's reputation is a mark of double-mindedness. Unity is found only in the life of an individual who makes it his priority to act with decency and justice in every set of circumstances and throughout every change. The capacity to will the Good is evidence of something eternal in human beings. But the "relation to eternity" can only manifest itself in extended time and in the attitude an individual has to life as a whole. Consequently, the mark of the "relation to eternity" takes on the paradoxical character of patience. Patience accepts suffering voluntarily and so retains its essential purity despite adverse circumstances. As Søren Kierkegaard observed:

> Is patience not precisely that courage which voluntarily accepts unavoidable suffering? ... Thus, patience, if one may put it in this way, performs an even greater miracle than courage. Courage voluntarily chooses suffering that may be avoided; but patience achieves freedom in unavoidable suffering. By his courage, the free one voluntarily lets himself be caught, but by his patience the prisoner effects his freedom—although not in the sense that need make the jailer anxious or fearful. ... One can be forced into the narrow prison, one can be forced into lifelong sufferings, and necessity is the tyrant; but one cannot be forced into patience. ... When the victim of unavoidable suffering bears it patiently, one says of him, "to his shame, he is coerced, and he is making a virtue out of a necessity." Undeniably he is making a virtue out of a necessity, that is just the secret, that is certainly a most accurate designation for that he does. He makes a virtue out of necessity. He brings a determination of freedom out of that which is determined as necessity. And it is just there that the healing power of the decision for the Eternal resides: that the sufferer may voluntarily accept the compulsory suffering.[29]

For an action to be morally good, it is essential that there is a unity between means and ends, that both parts be good. Søren Kierkegaard poses the following question to those who wish to be good:

> What means do you use in order to carry out your occupation? Are the means as important to you as the end, wholly as important? Otherwise it is impossible for you to will only one thing, for in that case the irresponsible, the frivolous, the self-seeking, and the heterogeneous means would flow in between in confusing and corrupting fashion. Eternally speaking, there is only one means and there is only one end: the means and the end are one and the same thing. There is only one end: the genuine Good; and only one means: this, to be willing only to use those means which genuinely are good—but the genuine Good is precisely the end.[30]

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[29] See *Purity of Heart*, 173–174.
[30] See *Purity of Heart*, 201–202.

In a recent article, Thomas Hurka discussed the question of the intrinsic value of goodness. He begins by presenting two different views on the issue:

> Claims about the good, and especially about the human good, are standardly divided into two classes: *subjective* or *welfarist claims,* and *objective* or *perfectionist claims.* Welfarist claims make each person's good depend on certain of her subjective mental states, such as her pleasures or desires. Hedonism, which holds that only pleasure is intrinsically good, is a version of welfarism, as are views that equate a person's good with the fulfilment of her desires. Perfectionist claims, by contrast, hold that certain states of humans are good objectively or independently of their connection to pleasures or desires. Thus, perfectionists have held that knowledge, achievement, and deep personal relations are intrinsically good regardless of how much a person wants or enjoys them, and that their absence impoverishes a life even if it is not a source of regret.[31]

Thomas Hurka argues against the widespread view that virtue is the greatest intrinsic good and vice the greatest evil:

> Far from being the greatest good, virtue is a lesser good in the following sense: the value of a virtuous response to a good or evil object is always less than the value, either positive or negative, of that object. In a similar way, vice is a lesser evil. It is not that every instance of virtue or vice has less value than any other good or evil: on the contrary, it may outweigh many goods and evils. But it always has less value than the specific good or evil that is its object. Although important additions to the list of goods and evils, virtue and vice have in this sense a subordinate comparative status.[32]

This comparative principle makes it possible to explain the intuitive biblical view that God as the *summum bonum* always transcends any intention and any attempt by human beings to attain him. Equally, the evil plans and evil deeds of the rebellious cannot reach the supreme form of evil. As Ps 78:39 and Ps 103:14 state, one of the main reasons for God's forgiveness is that we are "but flesh/dust" and our very limitations do not permit us to distort totally the image of God.

5. *Universality of the Issues: Literature*

The issues of reward, punishment, and forgiveness are central not only to philosophy but also to literature. Because the poetic mode is especially well-suited to expressing the personalist perspective, some of the most explicit examples of the drama of sin, repentance, and forgiveness in the human soul are to be found in the works of the poet-playwriter William Shakespeare, as well as Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Leo Tolstoy, etc. In many literary works emphasis is on the interior life of characters. Modern authors especially portray

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[31] See "How Great a Good Is Virtue?," *JPh* 95 (1998), 181.
[32] See "How Great a Good is Virtue?," *JPh* 95 (1998), 181–182.

the conflict between the sphere of imagined human freedom and of God's law. A few modern literary critics have explored individual aspects of the themes of justice, guilt, punishment, revenge, regret, atonement, forgiveness, and reconciliation in various works.[33] Because these issues are so important, a greater interest in a comparative investigation of these themes in relation to the biblical foundations of European culture can be expected in the future.

5.1 *The Universality of Sin, the Problem of Repentance, and Purity of Heart*

The universality of sin is the most striking proclamation of the Bible. The sensitivity for this phenomenon in Jewish and Christian writers who were profoundly rooted in the biblical message is, therefore, not surprising. So, Shakespeare's *Tragedy of Macbeth* is dominated by the question of sin and the consequences of the failure of repentance. Macbeth is one of the most respected and courageous noblemen serving King Duncan. But restless ambition overcomes his better nature and, prompted by his wife, he decides to assassinate the king while he is sleeping as a guest in his own castle. Mac-

[33] See M. A. Quinlan, *Poetic Justice in the Drama* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1912); A. H. Gilbert, *Dante's Conception of Justice* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1925; reprinted: New York, N.Y.: AMS Press, 1965, 1971); G. Ledig, *Philosophie der Strafe bei Dante und Dostojewski* (Weimar: H. Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1935); M. B. Mroz, *Divine Vengeance: A Study in the Philosophical Backgrounds of the Revenge Motif as It Appears in Shakespeare's Chronicle History Plays* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1941); E. T. Sehrt, *Vergebung und Gnade bei Shakespeare* (Stuttgart: K. F. Koehler, 1952); A. Bachelard, *L'idée de justice dans l'oeuvre di Victor Hugo* (Paris: Imp. administrative, 1953); F. R. Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy* (Gloucester, Mass.: P. Smith, 1959); R. G. Hunter, *Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness* (New York, N.Y. / London: Columbia University Press, 1965); idem, *Shakespeare and the Mystery of God's Judgments* (Athens: University of Geogia Press, 1976); I. Ackermann, *Vergebung und Gnade im klassischen deutschen Drama* (Munich: W. Fink, 1968); T. K. Dunseath, *Spenser's Allegory of Justice in Book Five of The Faerie Queene* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968); J. D. Ebbs, *The Principle of Poetic Justice Illustrated in Restoration Tragedy* (SstEL.PD 4; Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1973); G. A. Hayden, *Crime and Punishment in Medieval Chinese Drama: Three Judge Pao Plays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978); S. H. Garrin, *The Concept of Justice in Jakob Wassermann's Trilogy* (EUS I/267; Bern / Frankfort on the Main / Las Vegas: P. Lang, 1979); D. R. Danielson, *Milton's God: A Study in Literary Theodicy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); J. A. Reynolds, *Repentance and Retribution in Early English Drama* (SStEL.JDSt 96; Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1982); A. K. Cassell, *Dante's Fearful Art of Justice* (Toronto / Buffalo / London: University of Toronto Press, 1984); C. Cavanaugh, *Love and Forgiveness in Yeat's Poetry* (SML 57; Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1986); P. Davies and A. J. Kennedy (eds.), *Rewards and Punishments in the Arthurian Romances and Lyric Poetry of Mediaeval France* (AS XVII; Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1987); L. Anderson, *A Kind of Wild Justice: Revenge in Shakespeare's Comedies* (Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press, 1987); C. Nissen, *Ethics of Retribution in the Decameron and the Late Medieval Italian Novella: Beyond the Circle* (Lewiston / Lampeter: Mellen University Press, 1993); R. A. Bauman, *Crime and Punishment in Ancient Rome* (London: Routledge, 1996).

beth initially succeeds in acquiring the crown, but the country soon descends into the chaos of civil war. And Macbeth, too, is oppressed by unexpected remorse for his murder. His inward, moral, subjective self is no longer in harmony with his outward role. Reality and fantasy collapse. The dagger Macbeth has used to murder Duncan appears to him as a spectre, but pointed towards him as if in accusation (Act II, Scene I):

> Is this a dagger which I see before me,
> The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee:
> I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
> Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
> To feeling as to sight? or art thou but
> A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
> Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?
> I see thee yet, in form as palpable
> As this which now I draw.
> Thou marshal'st me the way that I was going,
> And such an instrument I was to use.
> Mine eyes are made the fools o' th' other senses,
> Or else worth all the rest. I see thee still;
> And on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood,
> Which was not so before. There's no such thing:
> It is the bloody business which informs
> Thus to mine eyes. Now o'er the one half world
> Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
> The curtain'd sleep ...

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* opens with a state of chaos in the Denmark of his time. King Claudius has murdered his brother Hamlet to acquire the throne. An apocalyptic sense of doom is expressed early on in the play by Marcellus and Horatio (Act I, Scene IV):

> *Hor.* ... To what issue will this come?
> *Mar.* Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.
> *Hor.* Heaven will direct it.
> *Mar.* Nay, let's follow him.

In *Hamlet*, too, transcendental realities play a critical role. The supernatural intervention, for example, of the ghost of King Hamlet reveals the true identity of his murderer to his son, Hamlet. The ghost explains that his own soul cannot rest in peace until his guilt has been expiated and Claudius' crime punished (Act I, Scene V), thus revealing the natural link between guilt and repentance, between heaven and earth:

> *Ghost.* Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night,
> And for the day, confin'd to waste in fires,
> Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
> Are burnt and purg'd away.

In *Hamlet* we also find a central character whose role it is to act as interces-

sor and restore the just order by punishing the crime. Hamlet accepts his predestined role to punish Claudius for his father's murder (Act I, Scene V):

> *Ham.* The time is out of joint—O cursed spite,
> That ever I was born to set it right!

Claudius makes a striking soliloquy on repentance. He is "struck to the soul" when he realizes the true nature of his crime, but his struggle to confess ceases when he admits to himself that he cannot hope for forgiveness unless he relinquishes the concrete gains of his murder—crown, ambition and queen. Claudius' concern, therefore, remains how to defend his power and wealth. Claudius' soliloquy in Act III, Scene III in the confessional encompasses many biblical themes and problems concerning reward, guilt, and punishment. Even the imagery is biblical: for example, there is a reference to Cain and Abel, the "primal eldest curse // A brother's murder":

> O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven;
> It hath the primal eldest curse upon't,—
> A brother's murder!—Pray can I not,
> Though inclination be as sharp as will:
> My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent;
> And, like a man to double business bound,
> I stand in pause where I shall first begin,
> And both neglect. What if this cursed hand
> Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,—
> Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens
> To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy
> But to confront the visage of offence?
> And what's in prayer but this twofold force,—
> To be forestalled ere we come to fall,
> Or pardon'd being down? Then I'll look up;
> My fault is past. But, O, what form of prayer
> Can serve my turn? Forgive me my foul murder!—
> That cannot be; since I am still possess'd
> Of those effects for which I did the murder,—
> My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.
> May one be pardon'd and retain the offence?
> In the corrupted currents of this world
> Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice;
> And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself
> Buys out the law: but 'tis not so above;
> There is no shuffling,—there the action lies
> In his true nature; and we ourselves compell'd,
> Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults,
> To give in evidence. What then? what rests?
> Try what repentance can: what can it not?
> Yet what can it when one can not repent?
> O wretched state! O bosom black as death!
> O limed soul, that, struggling to be free,
> Art more engag'd! Help, angels! make assay:

> Bow, stubborn knees; and, heart, with strings of steel,
> Be soft as sinews of the new-born babe!
> All may be well.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky is even more explicit in portraying the issues of guilt, punishment, and repentance. In his novels such as *Crime and Punishment,* the writer is preoccupied with the themes of sin and repentance, with suffering and atonement, both on a personal and on a generational level. The imperative to repent does not derive, however, from external social criteria but from the deepest self of a human being. The narratives of Dostoyevsky are often constructed around the paradoxical situations which can arise from this gap between internal and external duty, between God's law and human demands. In the novel *The Brothers Karamazov,* the Elder Zosima, a holy Starez, recalls the remark of his younger brother:

> In truth each of us is guilty before the others for everyone, only people don't realize it, but if they did, we should all instantly be in paradise! "O Lord, is that not true also?" I wept, and I thought—in truth I am perhaps more guilty than all, and worse than all the other people in the world!

The universality of sin is emphasized throughout the novel to become almost a refrain. The perception of the way out of this despairing situation becomes all the more clear. Dostoyevsky portrays this issue in his account *The Mysterious Visitor.* In this narrative, the Elder Zosima relates an event in his youth: a meeting with a mysterious visitor. This man, a respected official, confesses to Zosima that he had murdered a young woman many years ago. An innocent servant had been convicted in his place. The official was able to begin a new life. He married, had children and became a respected member of society. But the torment of his conscience became so terrible that he tells Zosima he is now resolved to make an open confession of his murder to his fellow men. His conversation with the Elder Zosima moves from foreground appearances to the true state of his soul. It is strongly reminiscent of the crime committed by Cain, as well as of Saul's ambitious hostility towards David, and of biblical statements on the conditions necessary for suffering to be fruitful. The dramatic tension between denial and confession of sin echoes Psalm 32. The prophetic role of the righteous, and of many other aspects of human life are touched upon. The story confirms the widely held conviction that it is less than human to be guilty and yet not to feel anything. It is appropriate after committing an offence to accept punishment. To try and avoid punishment is inconsistent with the recognition that it is both justified and beneficial.

The Elder Zosima begins his account thus:

> The mysterious visitor, who was now my friend, informed me that at first he had not even been tormented by the gnawings of conscience at all. He suffered long torments, but not of that kind, only those of regret at having killed the

woman he loved, at the fact that she was no more, and that, having killed her, he had killed his love, while the fire of passion remained within his blood. To the innocent blood he had spilt, however, and to the fact that he had murdered another human being, he almost never devoted any thought at the time. As for the notion that his victim might have become another man's spouse, it seemed to him impossible, and so for a long time he was persuaded in his conscience that he could not have acted any differently. ... He did this with the especial purpose of stilling his conscience on account of the theft, and it was a remarkable fact that for a time, even quite a long one, he really did experience a sense of calm—he himself told me this. In those days he had embarked upon a period of intense activity in government service, angling for himself a difficult and troublesome assignment which kept him busy for about two years, and, being of strong character, he almost began to forget what had taken place; and whenever he did remember it, he tried not to think about it at all. He also embarked upon philanthropy, establishing many institutions and making many charitable donations in our town, announced himself in the capitals, and was elected in Moscow and St Petersburg as a member of the philanthropic societies there. But nevertheless, in the end he began to reflect, and did so with a torment that was beyond his strength to bear. At this point his fancy was engaged by a certain beautiful and sensible young lady, and he quickly married her, hoping that marriage might dispel his solitary anguish, and that by entering upon a new path and zealously fulfilling his duty in respect of wife and children he would leave his old memories behind once and for all. Instead, what happened was quite contrary to this expectation. Even in the first month of his marriage the ceaseless thought began to trouble him: "My wife there—she loves me, but what if she were to find out?" When she became pregnant with their first child and announced this to him, he was suddenly troubled: "I am giving life, but have taken it away." As his children were born, he thought: "How can I dare to love, instruct and educate them in the ways of man, how can I talk to them of virtue: I have spilt blood." His children grew up and were beautiful, he wanted to caress them, and he thought: "But I cannot look upon their serene and innocent countenances; I am not worthy of it." At last he began to see cruel and menacing visions of the blood of his murdered victim, of her young life that had been destroyed, of her blood that cried out to be avenged. He began to have horrible dreams. Being resolute of heart, however, he endured the torment long: "By my secret torment I shall redeem it all," he thought. But even this hope was in vain: the longer his suffering continued, the more intense did it grow. His philanthropic activity had begun to earn him respect in society, though all were intimidated by his severe and gloomy character; but the more respect he acquired, the more unendurable to him did it become. He confessed to me that he had thought of killing himself. But instead another dream began to visit him—a dream which he at first considered impossible and crazy, but which leeched his heart so greedily that it could not be wrenched away. He dreamed thus: of getting up, going out before the people and declaring to all that he had murdered someone. For some three years did he go around with this dream inside him, and it visited him constantly in different aspects. At last he attained the belief with all his heart that, having declared his crime, he would of a certainty heal his soul and be at rest once and for all. Having attained it, however, he felt a sense of horror in his heart, for how could he bring himself to execute this deed? And suddenly there had occurred that incident in the course of my duel. "As I gazed at you, I took my resolve." I looked at him. ...

The conflict between the official's need to be true to his deepest self and to God and his desire to be admired by his wife, children and fellow men, robs him of his power of decision. Nonetheless, in this state of mind he can clearly see the solution:

> I know that paradise will begin for me, will begin immediately I declare what I have done. For fourteen years I have been in hell. I want to suffer. I shall accept suffering and start to live. One can pass one's life in falsehood, but one cannot go back. Now it is not only my neighbour whom I dare not love, but even my own children. O Lord, but after all my children will perhaps understand what my suffering has cost me, and they will not condemn me! The Lord is not in strength, but in truth. ...

The Elder Zosima encourages the sufferer to make a confession: "All will comprehend the heroic deed you have accomplished," I said to him, "if not now, then later, for you have served truth, a truth that is higher and not of this world ..." On his birthday, the official held a large gathering at his home. He walked into the centre of the room and at once read out the formal report of his crime to all the assembled people. "All were assailed by surprise and horror, and none would believe, though they had all listened to what he had to say with extreme curiosity." Some five days later the official fell ill. But then again something unexpected happened to the Elder Zosima. He reports:

> But when I expressed a wish to visit him, I received lengthy abuse from them all, particularly his spouse: "It is you," she said to me, "who have upset him, he was gloomy enough before, but during this last year we have all noticed that he has been unusually agitated and has been doing strange things, and it is you who are at the bottom of it all, no one else; he has not been out of your lodgings for a whole month." And lo, not only his spouse but everyone in the town hurled themselves upon me and accused me: "It is all your doing," they said. I remained silent, and indeed I felt rejoicing within my soul, for I beheld the unfailing mercy of God towards the one who turns up against himself and takes the punishment upon himself. As for his derangement, I was unable to believe in it. I too was at last allowed to see him, for he himself had insistently demanded to say farewell to me. I entered, and saw immediately that not only his days but also his hours were numbered. He was weak and sallow of feature, his hands trembled, and he gasped for breath, but looked at me with tender piety and joy.

The visit by Zosima was the greatest event for the sufferer: "It is accomplished!" he said to me. "Long have I thirsted to see you, why did you not come?" Then the sufferer, in his last words to Zosima, said:

> God has taken compassion on me and is calling me unto him. I know that I am dying, but for the first time in so many years I feel joy and peace. As soon as I had done what was incumbent on me I at once felt paradise within my soul. Now I dare to love my children and to kiss them. I am not believed, and no one has believed me, neither my wife, nor my judges; never will my children believe me, either. In this I see God's mercy towards my children. I shall die,

> and my name will be unsullied for them. But now I sense the nearness of God, and my heart rejoices as in paradise ... I have performed my duty ...

The Elder Zosima concludes the narrative with an explicit statement on the hypocritical nature of humans and the important prophetic role of those who are mysteriously appointed to teach the ways of God:

> But after he had been buried the whole town rose up against me and even stopped receiving me as a visitor in their homes. To be sure, some of them, at first only a few, but subsequently more and more, started to believe the truth of his testimony, and they began to come and see me in order to ply me with questions, which they did with great curiosity and glee: for men like to see the fall of a righteous man and to witness his disgrace. But I told them nothing and soon got out of town altogether, and five months later the Lord God saw fit to embark me upon a firm and well-apportioned path, and I blessed the invisible finger that had so plainly pointed it to me. As for Mikhail, the long-suffering servant of God, I have remembered him in my prayers each day unto this day.[34]

The importance of purity of heart becomes the central theme of one of Leo Tolstoy's last short stories, *Father Sergius.* The handsome prince Stephan Kasatsky renounces, his ambitions for a brilliant career at court in order to become a monk. But he gradually realizes that even as a monk, he has often been motivated by pride. He understands that these feelings have darkened the inner source of life and light which burns most intensely in him whenever his thoughts are pure and directed to God. After a terrible lapse of sin, he leaves the monastery. By chance he meets Pashenka, an old school friend. She is a downtrodden and universally despised mother and wife, who devotes her life to loving service of others. Sergius sees in her patience and calm acceptance of her fate a great magnanimity. He resolves to become the humblest of pilgrims. He rejoices when he is humiliated for his poverty by a party of wealthy men and women and yet feels no anger. He understands that he now no longer lives according to the double standards of the world and God but only to be pleasing in God's sight. In this state of mind, he recognizes the profound truth that good intentions and deeds are their own reward: "Yes, one good deed, one cup of water given without thought of reward is worth more than all the benefits I ever worked for men."

Kasatsky reflects on all that has happened:

> "So that was the meaning of my dream. Pashenka is all that I should have been and was not. I lived for people, pretending it was for God, while she lives for God and thinks she is living for people. Yes, one good deed, one cup of water given without thought of reward is worth more than all the benefits I ever worked for men. But surely in some part I genuinely wished to serve God?" he thought. And the answer came to him: "Yes, but that was defiled and choked by human glory. And God does not exist for one such as

[34] For the translation, see D. McDuff, *The Brothers Karamazov* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 343–360.

> I, who lived for human glory. I will seek Him now."

Kasatsky leaves to follow the example of Pashenka, "and gradually God began to manifest Himself in him. ... The less he cared for the opinion of men, the more he felt the presence of God."[35]

5.2 *The Ultimate Reason for God's Mercy and Forgiveness*

God in the Bible is motivated by the apparent paradox of the rational principle of justice and of a father's love. The biblical texts, however, emphasize the supremacy of mercy which is found in and justified by the Creation and the Covenant. The Covenant only confirms the principle of Creation—that God is the Father of his people par excellence. Examples of God acting "for his own sake" show that God is inseparably bound to human beings and especially to the chosen people, so that it is impossible for him to be in a state of perpetual anger, however small the hope that the sinful may reform. The impossibility of enduring anger for God is perhaps the most internal, existential and metaphysical mystery in the interpersonal relationship between God and humankind. This mystery is the reason why D. Z. Phillips rejected the principle of Utilitarianism. Phillips is certain that he would never be able to hand over his father to the police even if his father had committed a murder for the simple reason that he is his father. He explains:

> What I should say, in fact, would be, "Because he is my father." ... The impossibility of my being able to give up my father to the police does not depend on profitableness or unprofitableness, but on what it means to give up my father to the police. It is *that* I could never do, whereas the man who does not do it because of profit *could* do it; it is simply a contingent matter that he does not.[36]

The love that exists between parents and children, between husbands and wives, and between friends, is in a certain sense not reasonable and may even lead to conflicts with the rational principle of justice. In the Hebrew Bible God, the Father, cannot condemn his children to destruction. Mercy therefore becomes the highest mark of *imitatio Dei* in human beings. The narrative of David and Absalom offers one of the most paradoxical examples of such mercy. David, a father, makes the "decision of principle" to save his rebellious son. Joab, on the other hand, kills the son on the "principle of justice." Because David acts as a father rather than as a king, he became—especially in the context of his messianic role—a symbol or a paradigm of God's attitude to the covenant people. Duties exist between father and child that are higher than general duties.

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[35] For the translation, see P. Foote, *Master and Man and Other Stories* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), 64–66.

[36] See D. Z. Phillips, "Does It Pay to Be Good?," *PAS* 65 (1965), 56.

The theological tenets in the Bible make a harmonious complementarity possible between power, justice, and love. The texts indicate that the power of the Creator is the foundation of divine justice and love.[37] This paradoxical principle is expressed in the Deuterocanonical/Apocryphal book *Wisdom of Solomon* (11:21–12:2):

> For it is always in thy power to show great strength,
> and who can withstand the might of thy arm?
> Because the whole world before thee is like a speck that tips the scales,
> and like a drop of morning dew that falls upon the ground.
> But thou art merciful to all, for thou canst do all things
> and thou dost overlook men's sins, that they may repent.
> For thou lovest all things that exist,
> and hast loathing for none of the things which thou hast made,
> for thou wouldst not have made anything if thou hadst hated it.
> How would anything have endured if thou hadst not willed it?
> Or how would anything not called forth by thee have been preserved?
> Thou sparest all things, for they are thine, O Lord who lovest the living.
> For thy immortal spirit is in all things.
> Therefore thou dost correct little by little those who trespass,
> and dost remind and warn them of the things wherein they sin,
> that they may be freed from wickedness and put their trust in thee, O Lord.

This biblical foundation of mercy is reflected in the famous passage in William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice,* Act IV, Scene I. When Shylock demands his pound of flesh at Antonio's trial, Portia, the heroine, disguised as a lawyer, appeals for mercy:

> The quality of mercy is not strain'd;
> It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
> Upon the place beneath: it is twice bless'd;
> It blesseth him that gives and him that takes:
> 'Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes
> The throned monarch better than his crown;
> His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
> The attribute to awe and majesty,
> Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
> But mercy is above this scepter'd sway,—
> It is enthroned in the heart of kings,
> It is an attribute to God himself;
> And earthly power doth then show likest God's
> When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew,
> Though justice be thy plea consider this—
> That in the course of justice none of us
> Should see salvation: we do pray for mercy;
> And that same prayer doth teach us all to render

[37] It is no surprise, then, that P. Tillich was able to give a rational explanation of the inner relationship between these three concepts in his work *Love, Power, and Justice* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954).

The deeds of mercy. I have spoke thus much
To mitigate the justice of thy plea;
Which if thou follow, this strict court of Venice
Must needs give sentence 'gainst the merchant there.

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