

## Abstract

This dissertation addresses a lacuna in the study of the literary portrayals of divine retribution in the Old Testament. Focusing on narrative texts, this work posits the presence of the divine messenger opposition type-scene, conventional scenes in which an antagonist opposes a divine messenger on whom God inflicts extreme fates that often seem disproportionate to the offense and occur in the absence of any divine proscription. Opposition to the messenger seems to be the offense grave enough to merit the peculiar fates these characters experience.

The introduction discusses how the historical analysis of divine retribution has been limited to theological treatments. Recent studies have slightly expanded the analysis to sociological and anthropological approaches, but literary approaches to the topic have been scant. Addressing the intersection of convention and historiography provides a foundation for moving the discussion forward. Employing a literary-critical treatment—supplemented by form-, source-, historical-, and redaction-critical approaches where beneficial—to multiple narrative passages reveals the presence of the proposed type-scene. Chapter 2 explores Moses as the prototypical prophet validated through the bizarre fates experienced by his opponents. Korah's destruction, Miriam's leprosy, and the biting serpents all represent divine responses to opposition to Moses. Korah's rebellion represents a paradigmatic template of the type-scene, one in which God validates Moses. Chapter 3 examines the type-scene in narratives involving the classical prophets. The stories of Jeroboam's deformity, Ahab's death, the fiery death of Ahaziah's military squads, the mauling by bears of Bethel youths, Gehazi's leprosy, and the trampling of a court official during the siege of Samaria all utilize the type-scene in a manner that validates the legitimacy of a prophet. The persecution narrative in Jeremiah and the harassment of Amos similarly allude to the scene. Chapter 4 argues that the Chronicler utilizes the type-scene as a part of his literary

treatment of his retribution theology. While the Historian mentions the extreme fates experienced by kings and prophets, the Chronicler presents those fates as merited retribution imposed on those who oppose a divine messenger. The Chronicler connects Josiah's death to Ahab's, links Joash's assassination to Zechariah's murder, associates Asa's diseased feet with his imprisoning Hanani, and roots Uzziah's leprosy in his opposition to Azariah and the temple priests. Chapter 5 transitions to the New Testament, arguing that the enduring nature of the type-scene results in its appearance beyond the Old Testament. The discussion focuses on the presence of the scene in Luke's account of Zechariah's interaction with Gabriel in Luke 2 and in the book of Acts. It is argued that Luke repurposes the type-scene in Acts and merges it with the tyrant-death type-scene in order to portray the impotence of Satan's kingdom.

The number of scenes in which a peculiar fate is linked to the opposition of a divine messenger demonstrates the existence and use of a conventional scene for portraying divine retribution. Ultimately, as a literary component of the Old Testament, the divine messenger opposition type-scene should factor into the discussion of Hebrew historiography.

Extreme Fate as Convention:  
Episodic Reprisals against Divine Messenger Opposition in Scripture

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Prologue

In its interpretive mode, retributive logic...cannot be limited to a pre-scientific outlook or regarded as pertaining to one set of human temperaments and not others, or as a reflection of emotions interfering with reason. Its tokens lie in a thousand different literary moods, nowhere more variously displayed than in the plots of creative writing. Drama feeds on evil, on the idea that some fault in the universe—some arrogance, excess, sacrilege and sin—must be rectified by a resolution of justice, or by Nemesis and “the anger of Zeus”, by the “retribution, swift vengeance, eternal malice” of a *Moby Dick*, or by the rebellion of Nature herself.<sup>1</sup>

### Retribution

“Retribution,” “vengeance,” “comeuppance,” “payback,” “retaliation”—and a plethora of additional synonyms—provide the English speaker with a wealth of vocabulary to frame the experience of righting a perceived inequity. While the standards with which any particular community addresses the imbalance between the equity of two parties varies, the need to address those inequities has long been deeply embedded in every human society.

Revenge is rooted in the desire to preserve self-identity, whether of an individual or of a corporate entity.<sup>2</sup> As such, retribution is central to the human experience. That retribution would

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<sup>1</sup> Garry Winston Trompf, *Early Christian Historiography: Narratives of Retributive Justice* (London; New York: Continuum, 2000), 9.

<sup>2</sup> Paul H. Seton, “On the Importance of Getting Even: A Study in the Origins and Intentions of Revenge,” *Smith College Studies in Social Work* 72 (2001): 77–97. Seton argues that since self-identification is rooted in human neurochemistry, retribution, as a ubiquitous human experience, is similarly rooted in biology. Stephen Beckerman and Paul Valentine (ed., *Revenge in the Cultures of Lowland South America* (Gainesville: University

quickly find its way into the literature accompanying human history, then, is unsurprising. No matter the literary genre—legal corpora, epic poetry, historiography, fiction, apocalypse—retribution permeates ancient literature. Legal codes ensure retribution and recompense as methods for correcting injustice. Epic poetry recounts the wrath of the gods against their enemies. Foundation inscriptions promise divine retaliation toward those who later efface a royal text. Part of the resolution of narrative normally involves the dissemination of merited retribution.<sup>3</sup> Ancient literature—particularly the Old Testament—has been thoroughly analyzed for the presence of the theological and philosophical paradigms regarding retribution. However, few have invested attention of any significance in the literary portrayal of such a vast topic as retribution.

## 1.2 Kinds of Retribution

Whether it intersects with theodicy or ensures a sense of justice, retribution necessarily elicits curiosity regarding its origins and application. And it is the perceived source of retribution that shapes its literary treatment. Does retribution simply reflect a transactional exchange between parties? Does retaliation spring from universal law or the divine realm? Roger Chillingworth’s meticulous revenge against Arthur Dimmesdale in *The Scarlet Letter* unfolds differently as a human encounter than the revenge tales in *The Illiad* in which the gods participate.

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Press of Florida, 2008)) suggest, “From the cultural point of view, it can be argued that vengeance mediates between two spheres. On the one hand there is the destructive, predatory sphere of the ‘other,’ including enemy human communities and vindictive, vengeful spirits; on the other hand, there is the sociable, productive, and reproductive sphere of the local community of ‘ourselves,’” xxi.

<sup>3</sup> For example, narrative resolution of deserved retribution occurs either through revenge (e.g., *The Count of Monte Cristo*), redemption (Ebenezer Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*), or marginalization (Henry Potter in the film *It’s a Wonderful Life*).

Literary stories commonly considered to reflect retribution may be placed into several distinct but overlapping categories: *lex talionis*, in which retribution amounts to revenge and recompense; natural retribution, in which retribution is a function of universal law; and divine retribution, in which a deity is considered to be the source of reprisal.

### 1.2.1 *Lex Talionis*

The most well-known type of retribution is the *lex talionis*, the principle of retaliation *in kind* that functions as a restraint on revenge.<sup>4</sup> *Lex talionis* governs human interactions and appears in its most crystalized form in various modern and ancient legal codes. The principle addresses the human need for justice, retaliation, and recompense for loss while at the same time preventing an escalation of retaliation. In this way, *lex talionis* serves as a societal stabilizing agent.

The *in-kind* nature of the *lex talionis* has evolved over time to allow for substitutions of equivalent value. The recompense for causing a death or physical injury to another, for instance, might be mitigated in legislation through a monetary payment or the transfer of an object with a monetary value.

*Lex talionis* is primarily sociological in nature, not requiring origins other than social compact intended to provide behavioral parameters to maintain a viable society. The sociological nature of *lex talionis* does not preclude divine involvement in outlining the extent of reprisal, as the Old Testament or Code of Hammurabi would suggest. Rather, *lex talionis* functions practically, independent of its origins.

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<sup>4</sup> Beckerman and Valentine, *Revenge in the Cultures of Lowland South America*, xiv: “Revenge is always an integral part of the moral system. It involves a moral compulsion to seek redress of an injury received. It is often framed in terms of a kind of gift in reverse, a form of negative reciprocity that is often expressed as a debt that requires repayment. It has a quasi-judicial nature.” The concept of *lex talionis*, then, harnesses the natural inclination for revenge by placing restrictions on its expression.

### 1.2.2 Natural Retribution

The second category of retribution is that of natural retribution in which recompense exists as a part of the natural order. In an existence in which actions result in consequences, retribution occurs as a normal part of life, built into the universal fabric.<sup>5</sup> The presence of natural retribution seems obvious to even the cavalier observer: “The prominence of the law of retribution can be explained by the fact that its operation has the strongest affinity with the natural law of causality.”<sup>6</sup> Any human activity—eating, work, violence, generosity—is accompanied by the result of that activity. That result may be positive or negative but is connected to the actions that produced it. Natural retribution is also referred to as the “acts-consequence” construct, and, like *lex talionis*, may be understood independently of divine involvement; it simply describes the way the universe works.

Natural retribution may also contain theological elements, however. The divine realm is involved in natural retribution to the extent that it exerts influence over natural law. For instance, “the belief in creation implies that God rules the world 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.”<sup>7</sup> In the theological sense, then, natural law functions as a part of the larger divinely implemented cosmological order.

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<sup>5</sup> See Klaus Koch, *Um das Prinzip der Vergeltung in Religion und Recht des Alten Testaments* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972).

<sup>6</sup> Jože Krašovec, *Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness: The Thinking and Beliefs of Ancient Israel in the Light of Greek and Modern Views* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1999), 18–19.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 154–5.

### 1.2.3 Divine Retribution

The third and most complex category is divine retribution, in which a deity is believed to exert its power in response to particular human activity or circumstances. This divine response may be applied to specific *active* human behavior; a human activity may merit an appropriate divine response. Alternatively, the divine response may be applied to a passive situation; a victim of suffering or a righteous worshipper may receive properly due recompense as a deserved response from the gods. From the perspective of the recipient, divine retribution may be positive or negative in its expression. More powerful than human beings, the gods were considered to dole out both reward and punishment as need or desire arose.

In the paradigm of the ancient world, retribution was often considered to be a mechanism of divine justice. “There exists in the so called ‘primitive world’—a body of consensus explanations or explanatory principles by which significant events (especially trouble, sickness and death, and the blessings which are their opposites) are placed in the spirit-influenced scheme of things.”<sup>8</sup> Because supernatural forces were assumed to control such events, and because human beings desired to control their own circumstances, the concept of divine retribution developed as one aspect of human interaction with the supernatural.

The history of the ancient world is inseparable from the religious milieu that birthed it; because human existence was religious, so was the literature that it produced. And that religious character affected the treatment of retribution in ancient literature; religion infused ancient retribution with a theological flavor as cultures universally explored the laws and mechanisms behind it:

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<sup>8</sup> Trompf, *Early Christian Historiography*, 5.

It is now recognized that a belief in divine rule in history and in divine revelation through historical events was known to other nations. 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. 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.<sup>9</sup>

From epic accounts of divinely engineered floods to nuanced portrayals of humiliation, the literary corpus of the ancient Near East and its neighbors is saturated with stories of divine retribution. The theme of divine retribution permeates Sumerian texts, Babylonian wisdom literature, the works of Diodorus, Dionydius, Josephus, Herodotus Lactantius, Plutarch, Philo, the Old Testament and Maccabees—all depict divine retribution as a reflection on the moral character of the recipient.<sup>10</sup> Moral paradigms, the removal or installation of rulers from their thrones, and theodicy in all cultures reflect an interest in retribution.<sup>11</sup>

Within the biblical text, much of the literary portrayal of divine retribution is simple and straightforward. Codified regulations or specific commands are accompanied by consequences—either promised or realized—for disobedience. Israel’s suffering portrayed in the book of Judges

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<sup>9</sup> Krašovec, *Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness*, 16.

<sup>10</sup> Gary B. Miles and Garry Trompf, “Luke and Antiphon: The Theology of Acts 27–28 in the Light of Pagan Beliefs about Divine Retribution, Pollution, and Shipwreck,” *HTR* 69 (1976), 260; Trompf, *Early Christian Historiography*, 47–63.

<sup>11</sup> Consider the theme of retribution in the book of Job or the Babylonian Exile, for instance; See also Trompf’s *Early Christian Historiography*, 4–33.

occurs because of the nation's implicit violations of Yahweh's expectations of fidelity. Achan's fate and Saul's loss of his kingdom are caused by their disobedience to specific commands.

To the extent that Israel's theology was retrospective, divine retribution frequently overlaps with questions of theodicy. The divinely prescribed legal code in the Torah, for example, leaves the Hebrews with a clear reason for their suffering experienced under the Assyrian and Babylonian empires. The work of the Chronicler is commonly understood to represent, in part, a theological reflection on the divine retribution experienced by the Hebrews.<sup>12</sup> The book of Job's approach to theodicy is effective precisely because it inverts the assumptions about divine retribution by confronting those assumptions with the protagonist's innocence.

Regardless of the manner in which divine retribution manifests itself in the biblical text, divine retribution is an essential component in the literary fabric of ancient Hebrew literature.

Sara Japhet summarizes it well:

A belief in reward and punishment signifies an assurance that God requites the deeds, good and bad, of human beings and stems from a conviction of divine providence.

"Belief in" reward and punishment becomes a principle, or theory of retribution, when divine recompense is perceived as something constant operating in accordance with fixed rules. Any such theory is based on the view that retribution is meted out constantly and consistently and on the axiomatic acceptance of the system's rules. In the Bible, these rules derive from the principle of justice. Thus, in addition to a belief in divine providence, every concept of retribution also entails the belief that God is just and

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Raymond B. Dillard, "Reward and Punishment in Chronicles: The Theology of Immediate Retribution," *WTJ* 46 (1984): 164–72.

requires human deeds justly. These two beliefs—in divine providence and divine justice—are among the most important assumptions in biblical religion.<sup>13</sup>

These three categories—*lex talionis*, natural retribution, and divine retribution—overlap in several ways. First, the impetus for one may be considered to spring from another. A deity may structure natural retribution as part of the natural order or may express divine retribution through *lex talionis*.<sup>14</sup> Second, all three to some extent may be considered to be part of the universal fabric.<sup>15</sup> *Lex talionis*, while certainly malleable in application, is not easily questioned in principle. Third, all at least partially involve the moral character of the offender. At the very least, a lack of wisdom leads to a violation of the normal order and the receipt of natural retribution. At its most egregious, an offender morally affronts a deity and is divinely punished. Finally, all are causal in nature—the expected response to a specific infraction.

Clear distinctions between the categories are present as well. Divine retribution and *lex talionis* involve the violation of relationship, and *lex talionis* does not necessarily invite the understanding of destiny or fate, as do the other two. Further, natural retribution allows a deity to punish passively through natural law, while divine retribution requires a more active involvement.

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<sup>13</sup> Sara Japhet, *I & II Chronicles: A Commentary, 1st American ed.* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 118–9.

<sup>14</sup> *Lex talionis* and divine retribution overlap in the sense that a retribution is designated by God but implemented through human agency. The rationale for the *lex talionis* in Lev 24:17–22 is divine authority: כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם. The intersection in Israel between civil and religious law and the accompanying retribution is rooted in the commands of Yahweh. While the implementation is temporal at its core, the impetus lies with Israel’s deity. Hammurabi’s laws, based on the divine right of kings to rule, represents a similar overlap.

<sup>15</sup> J. Robert Vannoy (“Theology of Retribution,” ed. Willem A. Van Gemeren, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996)) notes that “Some OT texts, in fact, seem to reflect the premise of a divinely ordered moral structure underlying all of human existence, discernable in a sort of poetic justice built into the nature of reality (cf. e.g., Ps 7:14–16; 37:14, 15; Prov 26:27),” 1140.



It is this third category—divine retribution—that will be the focus of this study. Analyses of the nuances of retribution in ancient Near Eastern literature have been abundant. However, the vast majority of studies have been limited to the kind, manifestation, or practice of retribution in the ancient world. What is lacking in the field of retribution studies is an investigation into the literary portrayal of divine retribution. That so little attention has been focused on the manner in which divine retribution is narrated in ancient texts is perplexing, particularly given the prominence of the theme. The heavy emphasis on the theology of retribution has left the literary aspects under-explored. That is to say, the content of retribution has been analyzed, but not the crafting of the literature. A more detailed discussion of the typical treatment of the topic will provide clarification.

### **1.3 Literature Review**

#### **1.3.1 The Ancient Literary Context - Primary Sources**

Reciprocity in human interaction has been examined from sociological, philosophical, and theological perspectives. Divine retribution has seen similar treatment. Modern western ideas of retribution may be traced to Aristotle’s discussions of justice that were later reinforced by Augustine. Commonly defined, “justice, both human and divine, involves the distribution of rewards and punishments in proportion to people’s desserts, and works on the basis of an equality or equivalence between dessert and its reward or punishment.”<sup>16</sup> Such definitions of retribution typically rely on the equitable and proportionate distribution to an action, as well as on the relative moral standards possessed by any particular community.

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<sup>16</sup> Stephen Travis, *Christ and the Judgement of God: The Limits of Divine Retribution in New Testament Thought* (Milton Keynes; Colorado Springs; Peabody: Paternoster; Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), 5. See also Joel S. Kaminsky, “Joshua 7: A Reassessment of Israelite Conceptions of Corporate Punishment,” in *The Pitcher Is Broken: Memorial Essays for Gösta W. Ahlström*, ed. Steven W. Holloway and Lowell K. Handy (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 320.

At the most basic level, a community's beliefs about retribution may be seen in expression of revenge. The form of revenge clearly outlines societal conventions. "Revenge has the triple effect of material results, social obligations, and the transmission of information. For just that reason, revenge, like the exchange of wives or goods, reveals social structure as do few other aspects of culture."<sup>17</sup> In very few societies—ancient or modern—does revenge operate unrestrained. More common is the codification of revenge in which recompense is assigned for specific offenses. Any application of retribution corresponds to a specific set of circumstances. The nature of that correspondence differs, however, depending on the type of offense. Patrick Miller offers three categories in which "some form of talion or correspondence between crime and punishment is present":

- General Correspondence, in which "one begins with the common and natural legal movement from offense to restitution or punishment for *that* offense." It involves restitution appropriate for the offense.
- Talionic Correspondence, in which the punishment is the exact equivalent, to the extent possible, for the injury or crime. Miller notes that while this directly corresponding punishment functions well for bodily injuries, "it does not work as well for other sorts of crimes or illegal acts. It breaks down also when a society has social stratification that affects the severity of punishment and the equation of punishment to crime."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Stephen Beckerman and Paul Valentine, eds., *Revenge in the Cultures of Lowland South America* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), vii.

<sup>18</sup> Patrick D. Miller, *Sin and Judgment in the Prophets: A Stylistic and Theological Analysis* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 105.

- Miller does not offer a name for his third category, but it could be labeled “Instrumental Correspondence,” in which the “*instrument or means* of the crime is the object of punishment.” Deuteronomy 25:11 represents the singular example of this category as a prescribed punishment in the Old Testament, though it sees a wide application in other ancient Near Eastern law codes.<sup>19</sup>

### 1.3.1.1 The Pre-Modern Era

Just as human interactions are governed by the equity established by balanced retribution, religious cultures have assumed that divine-human relationships must also be balanced in a way that reflects the concerns and actions of the parties involved. Humans find stability and sense of meaning when the capriciousness of the divine realm is minimized. Predictability from the divine realm, then, is essential to human perception of a viable human-divine relationship. Divine retribution—whether good or bad—is a necessary component in that relationship. Theodicy is, to a large extent, an effort to correct what is perceived as an imbalance in the divine-human relationship. Religious cultures also consider deities as needing to balance the scales of equity between the divine and human spheres. Deities are considered to respond to the specific circumstances of human beings, whether by rewarding loyal activity and character or by punishing disloyalty.

Divine retribution is commonplace in ancient literature, although its characteristics and motivations differed among cultures. “The conception of divine envy or jealousy plays a great part in Greek literature. In Hebrew literature the more completely moralised character of the national God left less room for it, and it assumes for the most part a form in which it has become

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<sup>19</sup> Miller, *Sin and Judgment in the Prophets*, 105–110.

half-reconciled with the prevailing justice of God. And where the Greeks feared the Deity's envy, the Hebrew feared his wrath."<sup>20</sup> Deities desire revenge too, and have the power and extract it.

The presence of divine retribution cuts across the genres of ancient Near Eastern literature: law codes, theodicies, oracular material, wisdom literature, cultic compositions, and, particularly in the case of Hebrew historiography, narrative. These texts themselves may be considered to reflect an interest that is *theological* in nature, an interest also held by those in the pre-modern era who reflected on and commented on those texts as they pondered the divine role in human experience.

The earliest manifestation of divine retribution appeared in legal texts as an implicit extension of divine authority. The second millennium Code of Hammurabi presupposes a moral standard that the king has been appointed by the gods to uphold. The consequences for transgression of the laws, then, may be understood as extensions of the divine will and to implicitly contain divine retribution. At issue is the way in which the ancients understood the codes. The gods' appointment of Hammurabi to establish law places the consequences received by violation under divine auspices. In another form of divine retribution, Hammurabi invokes curses to be enacted by the gods on any who diminish his law through annulment or damage to the inscription.<sup>21</sup> That the gods are subservient to the cosmic order and curse formulae does not diminish the fact that they were understood to participate in divine retribution.

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<sup>20</sup> C. G. Montefiore, "Hebrew and Greek Ideas of Providence and Divine Retribution," *JQR* 5 (1893): 527.

<sup>21</sup> Law exists as a subcategory of boundaries enforced by curses. Treaties, borders, statues, royal inscriptions (e.g., the *Kulamuwa Inscription* and the *Azatiwada Inscription*), royal monuments (e.g., the *Zakkur Inscription*), disturbing the dead (e.g., *Sarcophagus Inscription of 'Ahirom* and *Nabataean Tomb Inscription of Kamkam*) are all boundaries for which violation resulted in the receipt of curses. Curses represent an explicit statement of retribution applied for those violations; implicit violations are necessarily treated differently in terms of merited retribution (thanks to Dr. Lawson Stone for this insight).

### 1.3.1.2 Theodicy

Ancient literature—particularly theodicies—may in some sense be considered as similar to or even precursors of modern opinion on the topic: theological reflection on divine retribution. Theodicy, “any attempt to render suffering and evil intelligible,”<sup>22</sup> lies on the periphery of divine retribution in the sense that the motivations of a deity are uncertain in the face of that deity’s actions.

The Ancient Near Eastern literary corpus contains multiple examples of attempts to ascertain the theological foundation for suffering. Such literature spans two millennia and multiple genres: Epic poetry, administrative texts and lists, medical texts, and wisdom literature. The most fertile soil for exploring theodicy is certainly wisdom literature, in which the topic is directly approached. Other genres treat theodicy tangentially, as exemplified by divination texts seeking medical cures for unknown disease or incidental statements in epics.

Ancient Akkadian texts offer the most examples of theodicy. Texts commonly considered theodicies include *Dialogue Between a Man and His God* (early second millennium BC), the *Babylonian Theodicy* (first millennium), *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* (late second millennium), the *Dialogue of Pessimism* (first millennium), and the fourteenth century Ugaritic poem *A Sufferer’s Salvation*. Ugarit might be expected to reflect its own theological traditions, but the placement and importance of the city made it a natural point of convergence in the Ancient Near East, a fact reflected in its literature. The Babylonian nature and origin of *A Sufferer’s Salvation* is seen in

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<sup>22</sup> Antti Laato and Johannes C. de Moor, “Introduction,” in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible*, ed. Antti Laato and Johannes C. de Moor (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2003), x.

the poem's focus on the Babylonian deity Marduk, who punishes, delivers, and is the focus of worship.<sup>23</sup>

Theodicy gained maturity in later monotheistic traditions. Wolfram von Soden argues that four essential literary elements—all of which must be present—indicate the presence of theodicy in a given society: a plain sense of right and wrong, significant individual value, minimized conflict within a pantheon, and limited paradigm of judgment occurring in the afterlife. The lack of any one or more of these factors minimizes the need for a theodicy.<sup>24</sup> Because, for example, the developed Egyptian view of the afterlife and its accompanying judgment allowed the gods to complete justice after death, theodicy was not a concern in Egyptian theology.<sup>25</sup>

Von Soden may overreach somewhat regarding the polytheism of the aNE. Ancient Mesopotamians faced the issue of understanding suffering within the context of their worldview. Their worldview revolved around, but was not limited to, the divine realm. The manifestations of suffering needed to make sense in their relationship to expected societal norms as well as to the divine realm. The gods, precisely because they were unknown, represented an ideal focus for theodistic expressions. Underlying the belief that all sin resulted in suffering was the notion that even this perspective was conjecture. While arguably underdeveloped, Babylonian theodicy provided the appropriate context in which the ancients attempted to reach beyond their understanding for answers to life's most perplexing questions.

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<sup>23</sup> Paul-Alain Beaulieu, "The Social and Intellectual Setting of Babylonian Wisdom Literature," in *Wisdom Literature in Mesopotamia and Israel*, ed. Richard J. Clifford (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 8.

<sup>24</sup> Wolfram von Soden, "Das Fragnach der Gerechtigkeit Gottes im Alten Orient," in *Bibel und Alter Orient: Altorientalische Beiträge zum Alten Testament von Wolfram von Soden* (Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 1985), 60.

<sup>25</sup> John H. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 181–82.

Even so, theodicy grew more nuanced as it reflected the struggles of the monotheistic traditions. “Belief in one deity who can be held responsible for both good and evil aggravated the problem of divine justice. In a polytheistic context, a certain equilibrium between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ gods could be assumed to exist. This possibility came to an end in the monotheistic faith which is the major religious heritage of ancient Israel.”<sup>26</sup>

### **1.3.1.3 Sin**

Moral offense against a deity is commonly assumed in ancient literature to be an impetus for divine retribution. Texts such as the Akkadian *The Piteous Sufferer*, while reflecting anguish over suffering, are not readily classifiable as theodicies due to the undeniable commission of sin on the part of the sufferer. In such instances, the suffering is a result of divine retribution against sin, and the appeal is for mercy in the face of clear transgression. Because the sufferer acknowledges his sin, he accepts the divine punishment. The biblical book of Job, on the other hand, wrestles with theodicy precisely because no sin is involved in the face of gratuitous suffering.

The Hebrew Chronicler is also commonly understood to have constructed his work in a way that heavily emphasized divine retribution for sin. That he did so in a heavy-handed and obvious way is a common assertion: “we are irritated by the Chronicler’s method of conceiving the past history of his nation, according to which he is so careful to devise a sin for every calamity and a punishment for every sin.”<sup>27</sup> Brian Kelly notes, however, that sin in Chronicles also encounters a merciful God:

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<sup>26</sup> Laato and Moor, “Introduction,” viii.

<sup>27</sup> Montefiore, “Hebrew and Greek Ideas of Providence and Divine Retribution,” 553.

The traditional understanding of retribution in Chronicles is in many respects a chimera that has distorted a proper understanding of the author's theology and message.

Retribution for *persistent and impenitent evil* is certainly one of the book's themes, but such punishment is never 'immediate', nor is it always inevitable. Far from stressing the outworking of a strict theodicy in the world, the Chronicler is concerned primarily to highlight the offer of God's prevenient and undeserved mercy to a sinful yet penitent people.<sup>28</sup>

The Hebrew prophets frequently combined commentary on sin and theodicy to shape their views regarding divine retribution. Ultimately, the result became the future realization of compensation—reward for the righteous and divine retribution for the wicked. The *יום יְהוָה* served for the prophets as certain future point in which Yahweh would right wrongs.

Subsequent Jewish literature quickly pushed the righting of temporal wrongs into the afterlife. The book of Enoch typifies the idea: "And this has been made for sinners when they die and are buried in the earth and judgment has not been executed upon them in their lifetime. Here their spirits shall be set apart in this great pain till the great Day of Judgment and punishment and torment of those who curse forever and retribution for their spirits" (22:10–11). The trend toward divine retribution occurring after death was continued in the New Testament (1 Thess 4:13–5:11; Heb. 9:27).

Jewish rabbinical literature tends to be theologically inconsistent regarding divine retribution, with little consensus on the topic. Much of the commentary focuses on the

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<sup>28</sup> Brian E. Kelly, "'Retribution' Revisited: Covenant, Grace and Restoration," in *The Chronicler as Theologian: Essays in Honor of Ralph W. Klein*, ed. M. Patrick Graham, Steven L. McKenzie, and Gary N. Knoppers (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 226.



disciplinary aspect of retribution, as well as the guarantee of appropriate punishment and justice to be levied in the afterlife.<sup>29</sup>

The righteous are able to avoid retribution altogether. “Retribution may also be diverted, mitigated, or delayed, depending upon the actions of the righteous: ‘And it came to pass, after seven days, that the waters of the flood were upon the earth. What was the nature of these seven days?’— Rab said: ‘These were the days of mourning for Methuselah, thus teaching that the lamenting for the righteous postpones retribution.’”<sup>30</sup>

Often, functioning as the mechanism of retribution may itself merit retribution. Nations that oppress Israel because of her disobedience may themselves receive retribution specifically because of their functioning as mechanisms of divine retribution. Whereas this kind of retribution usually functions at the corporate level, there are exceptions. One unusual Mishnah passage makes the mechanism of retribution individualized: “[Hillel] also saw a skull floating on the face of the water. He said to it, ‘Because thou didst drown [others] they drowned thee, and the end of those that drowned thee [will be that] they will be drowned.’”<sup>31</sup> This Mishnah also lends itself to the concept of perpetualized cyclical retribution: the agent of retribution becomes the recipient at the hands of another acting agent of divine wrath. The cycle could conceivably continue *ad infinitum* as long as there were deserving perpetrators to be drowned.

Rabbinic literature frequently reflects talionic correspondence between the offender and the divine punishment received:

The Mishnah observes, ‘As Samson went after [the desire of] his eyes, the Philistines gouged them out... as Absalom gloried in his hair, so he was caught by his hair (2 Sam.

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<sup>29</sup> Travis, *Christ and the Judgement of God*, 26–45.

<sup>30</sup> b. Sanh. 108b.

<sup>31</sup> m. ‘Abot 2:6.

18:9).’ Because Joseph buried his father in the Land of Canaan (Gen. 50:7), he merited having his bones also buried there (Sot. 1:8, 9b). The enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt was divine retribution for the sons of Jacob selling their brother Joseph as a slave. When Joseph’s brothers were arrested and accused of stealing his cup, ‘they rent their garments’ (Gen. 44:13). God said to them, ‘Because you caused your father to rend his garments for a lie [i.e., when they showed him the bloody coat of many colors and told him that his beloved son, Joseph, had been devoured by a wild beast], so do you now rend your garments for a lie’ (Tanh. Miketz 99b). Pirke Avot even teaches that certain penalties are invariably imposed for specific sins (5:10–11).<sup>32</sup>

This aspect of divine retribution often extends into the territory of “poetic justice.” Montefiore et al. observe that divine retribution may involve the instrument of offense:

Sometimes this form of retribution goes so far as to define a special punishment to that part of the body which mostly contributed to the committing of the sin. Thus we read, ‘Samson rebelled against God by his eyes, as it is said, ‘Get her (the Philistine woman) for me, for she pleases my eyes’ (Jud. xvi. 21); therefore, his eyes were put out by the Philistines (Ibid. xviii. 9)’; whilst Absalom, whose sinful pride began by his hair (2 Sam. xiv. 25) met his fate by his hair (Ibid. xviii. 9).<sup>33</sup>

It should be noted that this rabbinical observation is theological rather than literary in nature. Justice involving punishing an offender through instrumental correspondence was considered a divinely appropriate punishment and not a literary device. While this could be a literary

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<sup>33</sup> C. G. Montefiore, J. Edwin Odgers, and S. Schechter, “The Doctrine of Divine Retribution in the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Rabbinical Literature,” *JQR* 3 (1890): 36.

observation, the interest seems to be primarily theological, focused on the balance achieved through a theological or psychological equivalency between crime and punishment.

Another aspect of rabbinical interpretation is that retribution is always thorough. Any sign of retribution must have a cause.

If a man sees that painful sufferings afflict him, let him examine his conduct. If he finds nothing objectionable, let him attribute his difficulties to neglect of the study of Torah. If he finds that this is not the cause, it is certain that his sufferings are chastening of love, for it is said: ‘For whom the Lord loves He corrects [Prov. 3:12]’ ... If God loves a man, He crushes him with painful sufferings.<sup>34</sup>

Nor is any act too insignificant—every action will be compensated. “Retribution is meted out above to the wicked for every transgression which they commit, so are the righteous also held to account in this world for every transgression committed; and as the righteous are rewarded in the world to come for every little good act, so are the wicked rewarded in this world for every fulfillment of a religious duty, be it ever so insignificant.”<sup>35</sup>

Ancient Greek thought also held opinions about retribution. First century stoic philosopher Mara Bar Serapion, for example, used the examples of Socrates, Pythagoras, and Jesus to assert that the communities that killed these men experienced divine retribution as recompense for their actions. Athens experienced famine, a tsunami flooded Samos, and the Jews were scattered after the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> b. Ber. 5a.

<sup>35</sup> b. Mo’ed; Ta’anit. Michael Levi Rodkinson, Isaac Mayer Wise, and Godfrey Taubenhaus, eds., *New edition of the Babylonian Talmud. Original Text Edited, Corrected, Formulated, and Translated into English* (Boston: Talmud Society, 1918), 27.

<sup>36</sup> *A Letter of Mara, Son of Serapion (ANF 8:737)*

The early church, while reflecting the perspectives of earlier generations, nuanced those perspectives considerably. Tertullian, for example, argues that divine retribution becomes essential to a deity interested in preserving its identity: “Nothing is so unworthy of the Divine Being as not to execute retribution on what He has disliked and forbidden.” His reasoning is twofold. First, divine retribution validates a deity’s authority by motivating human submission. Second, a deity defines and defends its nature by punishing what it does not like.<sup>37</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem considered the righting of wrongs in the afterlife essential to the nature of God: “Many murderers have died in their beds unpunished; where then is the righteousness of God? Yea, oftentimes a murderer guilty of fifty murders is beheaded once; where then shall he suffer punishment for the forty and nine? Unless there is a judgment and a retribution after this world, thou chargest God with unrighteousness.”<sup>38</sup>

### **1.3.2 The Modern Era**

#### **1.3.2.1 A Theological Approach**

While reciprocity in human interaction has seen a multifaceted study, the *Forschungsgeschichte* of the modern era regarding divine retribution in ancient literature has largely been monolithic in approach. This approach has been limited to a theological treatment, a soil which has been thoroughly tilled.

Initial modern interest in divine retribution as a topic began with works in the late nineteenth century. These early works merely categorized and discussed various kinds retribution, focusing on its theological aspects. Much of the discussion regarding divine retribution revolved

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<sup>37</sup> *The Five Books Against Marcion* (ANF 3:292).

<sup>38</sup> *The Catechetical Lectures of S. Cyril* (NPNF 7:136).

around whether it was eschatological or only temporal in nature.<sup>39</sup> Also during this period, influenced by other areas of research, scholars began to suggest diachronic models for the development of divine retribution as a paradigm.<sup>40</sup> These models suffered from the typical flaws and assumptions regarding the dating of biblical books or the limitations of comparing Greek and Hebrew thought.<sup>41</sup> While perspectives were often undermined by contradictory data, they certainly did not suffer from being limited in scope.<sup>42</sup> Most models of the era were developmental in nature and became progressively more refined.<sup>43</sup> Common to the era, Montefiore et al. assume a diachronic development of divine retribution paralleling both Israelite society and her conception of Yahweh. Early on, Yahweh was considered tribal, punishing iniquity personally focused against him. Only later was he considered to visit retribution for inherently righteous or wicked behavior. Prior to the exile, divine retribution was also collectively applied to the community. Individualized recipients are not seen until a post-exilic context, in which divine retribution also became didactic in nature—as exemplified by Chronicles or the Apocrypha.<sup>44</sup>

Jože Krašovec insightfully notes “that in contrast to neighboring cultures and religions the Hebrews acknowledged only a divine right of collective retribution. When the law in Deut 24:16 explicitly forbids human institutions to implement the principle of collective retribution, it

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<sup>39</sup> Edward Beecher, *History of Opinions on the Scriptural Doctrine of Retribution* (New York: Appleton, 1878).

<sup>40</sup> Montefiore et al., “The Doctrine of Divine Retribution in the Old Testament,” 1–51.

<sup>41</sup> Montefiore, “Hebrew and Greek Ideas of Providence and Divine Retribution,” 517–590. Montefiore here avoids the pitfalls of equating the two cultures by limiting his observations to the contrasts between the two.

<sup>42</sup> Montefiore’s diachronic waters, for instance, are occasionally muddied by the misplaced (to his mind) presence of an individual or corporate recipient of retribution where he expects the other.

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, Richard Adamiak, *Justice and History in the Old Testament: The Evolution of Divine Retribution in the Historiographies of the Wilderness Generation* (Cleveland: J.T. Zubaal, 1982).

<sup>44</sup> Montefiore, et al., “The Doctrine of Divine Retribution in the Old Testament,” 3–6.

affirms that such retribution must, in essence, be wrong.” Krašovec goes on to argue that God’s sovereignty precluded the implementation of collective retribution beyond his purview.<sup>45</sup> The tension created from instances of corporate and individual retribution is frequently resolved through a developmental model of retribution. Early Israel is often assumed to have minimal belief in individualized retribution, leaning instead toward corporate liability for infractions. Later Israel is similarly assumed to have matured to the point where its theology reflected the belief in individual recipients of divine wrath. Corporate liability was still present, but individual culpability for sin was the predominant paradigm.<sup>46</sup> For example, in dealing with the corporate punishment for Achan’s violation of the חָרָם (36 soldiers slain, the execution of Achan’s family, and God’s promise to not be with Israel until the problem was solved), Kaminsky summarizes the various explanations: that Israel was pre-logical and therefore psychologically incapable of separating itself from a corporate mindset (which Kaminsky rejects); the identity of people as property (hence the execution of Achan’s family); the case was extra-legal (which Kaminsky also rejects, arguing that the case falls well within the bounds of Israelite law).<sup>47</sup> This discussion carries implications for the dating of the biblical text, but the arguments easily and quickly become circular, with the presumed date of biblical material informing the nature of the retribution, and the nature of the retribution informing the dating of the text.

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<sup>45</sup> Krašovec, *Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness*, 156-7.

<sup>46</sup> Krašovec (*Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness*) summarizes it well: “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,” 156.

<sup>47</sup> Kaminsky, “Joshua 7”, 321–9.

### 1.3.2.2 Klaus Koch—God’s Absence in Retribution

Klaus Koch’s 1972 work *Um das Prinzip der Vergeltung in Religion und Recht des Alten Testaments* substantially revised the way divine retribution was perceived. In his work, Koch argued, primarily from Old Testament wisdom literature, that divine retribution as a deliberate act of God does not exist beyond his structuring the universe with built-in consequences. Retribution, then, becomes a naturally occurring part of life, experienced as the result of behavior. Koch’s perspective has aptly been dubbed the “acts-consequence” model. Koch’s view contradicted the traditional “judicial” model as advocated by Eichrodt, who argued that God personally intervened in cases of retribution. While Koch’s perspective gained much traction in academia, it is not without problems, not the least of which is the frequent disregard for passages that clearly contradict his model.<sup>48</sup> Texts in which Yahweh specifically claims to be an agent of punishment are carefully avoided. Koch’s arguments, then, are simply reductionistic, failing to accommodate the diversity of perspective about retribution in the Old Testament.<sup>49</sup> A better route was taken by Stephen Chapman in 2004 with his development of a hybrid model that accommodates both natural occurrence and deliberate divine intervention in the experience of retribution.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Koch argues that “an essential part of the concept of *retribution* is that a *judicial process* must take place,” but that such a process is lacking in Proverbs. Klaus Koch, “Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?”, in vol. 4 of *Theodicy in the Old Testament*, ed. James L. Crenshaw, trans. Thomas H. Trapp, *IRT* (London; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 59.

<sup>49</sup> Travis, *Christ and the Judgement of God*, 13–17.

<sup>50</sup> Stephen B. Chapman, “Reading the Bible as Witness: Divine Retribution in the Old Testament,” *PRSt* 31 (2004): 171–190.

Peter Hatton argues that English speaking scholars misappropriated Koch's argument, instead understanding retribution in Proverbs (through deconstruction) as a doctrine developed to secure the position of its elite authors.<sup>51</sup> Instead, Hatton avers:

Koch argued that the Old Testament contains no notion of a God who intervenes to punish sin and reward good actions. The Bible, he argued, never sees God as a judge who punishes wrongdoers according to a predetermined tariff; rather, the Scriptures understand us to be the authors of our own good or bad fortune. Good actions that build up the community lead to prosperity, while bad actions lead—sooner or later—to ruin.<sup>52</sup>

This perspective, though, is problematic because it avoids divine interest, and hence, involvement in retribution:

One of the major reasons for Koch's objection to an idea of retribution is his assumption of the absence of a juridical character or context to statements and notions of judgment. The idea of Yahweh as judge is not involved. There is no pre-established legal or judicial norm or equivalent punishment against which the deed is to be judged and punished (or rewarded). The sinful acts are not separable from the judgment that comes upon the doers. The judgment is not perceived as independent of the sin."<sup>53</sup>

### **1.3.2.3 Garry Trompf—The Beginnings of a Literary Approach**

There are a few exceptions to the theological treatment regarding divine retribution. Karel van der Toorn's 1985 *Sin and Sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia: A Comparative Study* is a fine work that includes a treatment of divine retribution. Toorn's work is notable in that it

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<sup>51</sup> Peter Hatton, "A Cautionary Tale: The Acts-Consequence 'Construct'," *JSOT* 35 (2011): 375–384.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 376.

<sup>53</sup> Patrick D. Miller, *Sin and Judgment in the Prophets: A Stylistic and Theological Analysis* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 135.



expands its survey to cover the broader ancient Near East as well. But Toorn's treatment is still primarily theological in nature, merely exploring beliefs about divine retribution.

The most notable exception to a rote theological explanation of retribution is the work of G.W. Trompf. Trompf has a broad (if not the most encompassing) consideration of retribution, covering anthropological, sociological, and religious perspectives regarding retribution. His overall interest is how a cyclical view of history effects historiography. He carefully outlines multiple "paradigms" that inform historiography. Some focus on the observed recurrence of either stages or individual events through the natural flow of history. Others lean more heavily toward value judgments, juxtaposing the individual patterns of history with a perceived ideal stage or the uniformity of human nature and behavior. All the historical paradigms, he suggests, include an inherent didactic element, instructing readers with the past.<sup>54</sup> Instruction is commonly understood to provide the divine impetus for retribution. Stephen Travis suggests that divine retribution may be disciplinary, purificatory, and revelatory—by which he also means didactic—in nature.<sup>55</sup> G.A. Herion agrees: "Since all humanity is sinful in God's eyes, there is good reason to understand historical adversity in terms of God's punitive retribution. The point of such

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<sup>54</sup> "The cyclical view: the belief that history or sets of historical phenomena pass through a fixed sequence of at least three stages, returning to what is understood to be an original point of departure, and beginning the cycle again; The alternation (or fluctuation) view: the view that there is a movement in history wherein one set of general conditions is regularly succeeded by another, which then in turn gives way to the first; The reciprocal view: the view that common types of events are followed by consequences in such a way as to exemplify a general pattern in history. The doctrines that departures from a mean are continually rectified, and that good and bad actions recurrently evoke their appropriate desert, are two particular and important varieties of this view; The reenactment view: the view that a given action (usually taken to be of great significance) has been repeated later in the actions of others...; Conceptions of restoration, renovation, and renaissance: these entail the belief that a given set of (approved) general conditions constitutes the revival of a former set which had been considered defunct or dying...; The view proceeding from a belief in the uniformity of human nature. It holds that because human nature does not change, the same sort of events can recur at any time" (*The Idea of Historical Recurrence in Western Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 2–3). These definitions are crucial to the distinctions Trompf makes regarding Hebrew historiography (see below).

<sup>55</sup> Travis, *Christ and the Judgement of God*, 19.

adversity is not to torment human beings but to lead them to an awareness of their mortal frailty and their consequent need for God's healing assistance."<sup>56</sup>

Trompf argues that the Deuteronomistic History heavily depicts retribution and that Judges 2 provides the historian's template for recurrence throughout the entire DH.

[...] the Deuteronomist's work was a history of the recurring execution of appropriate recompenses, and Israel's past was viewed as though the same principles operated time and time again. Implicitly, the nature of rewards and punishments was in accordance with the degree of merit or of incurred guilt, but these operations were ultimately dependent on Yahweh and not upon natural or "mechanical" laws. The main point is, however, that the writer bequeathed an account of about six centuries in which history, in a special sense, repeated itself. His picture of the repeated acts of transgression against God's commandments, and the repeated consequences of such disobedience, his characterization of recurrent "event-shapes"—typical transgressions, typical warnings, fitting deaths and recompenses—all reflect a preoccupation with historical recurrence. There is, of course, no exact repetition, and the model of cyclo-alternating change in Judges 2 is only confined to one part of the history.<sup>57</sup>

Trompf argues that *historiography* as such is not present until the final redactions of the Hebrew Bible: "The final or near-final redactions to the Biblical books with historical narration do not begin to take place before the sixth century b.c.e., though, and no systematic view of history along retributive lines can be established from bits and pieces of older source material

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<sup>56</sup> G. A. Herion, "Retribution," ed. Geoffrey William Bromiley, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988). 158.

<sup>57</sup> Garry Trompf, *The Idea of Historical Recurrence in Western Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

used in the later compositions.”<sup>58</sup> That a systemic historiography of recurring retribution may not have been present, however, does not negate the presence of convention regarding retribution in the culture producing the source material.

For Trompf, the Chronicler’s work was unwieldy—”crude and almost mechanical”—compared to that of the Deuteronomistic Historian.<sup>59</sup> While the Chronicler intentionally utilized recurrence, he left nothing to uncertainty, forcing every event into a rudimentary template of negative consequence and positive reward.<sup>60</sup> Trompf also notes that while Hebrew historiography is primarily perceived as linear in nature, a variety of kinds of recurrence may be present.<sup>61</sup>

The teaching that retributive principles were continually operative in human life is writ large in biblical historiography. This view is a variant of the reciprocal rather than the cyclical view of historical recurrence, since appropriate recompenses for good and bad actions are not necessarily meted out within a fixed sequence. It is significant, though, that the Israelite-Jewish writers came closest to stating a cyclical (or alternation) view of history through interpreting the laws of rewards and punishments.<sup>62</sup>

Ultimately, Trompf’s concern is how recurrence paradigms shaped Hebrew historiography—*what* the essential nature of history was for the ancients. While he identifies various recurrences, he stops short of analyzing *how* those patterns are constructed. Trompf’s work offers a plausible model for the presence of retribution in the macro-scale of historiography,

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<sup>58</sup> Trompf, *Narratives of Retributive Justice*, 13.

<sup>59</sup> Trompf, *Idea of Historical Recurrence*, 160.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Garry W. Trompf, “Notions of Historical Recurrence in Classical Hebrew Historiography,” in *Studies in the Historical Books of the Old Testament*, ed. J. A. Emerson (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1979), 213–219.

<sup>62</sup> Trompf, “Notions of Historical Recurrence,” 219.

but the micro-scale—i.e., retribution in the individual narrative—is rendered an implicit subcategory of the model. How to identify conventions within those narratives still remains in question.

### **1.3.3 Nearing a Literary Approach**

Trompf’s work analyzes the historiographical nature of divine retribution and provides much of the initial foundation for the literary exploration of divine retribution. The occasional observations by Montefiore, Miller, and Trompf may be synthesized into the loose beginnings of a framework for identifying the literary presence of retribution in the biblical text. Utilizing Miller, Stephen Travis notes that retribution (primarily in regard to prophetic literature) is often evidenced by the parallel use and repetition of key verbs; a correspondence between the place of the crime and the place of the punishment; and instrumental correspondence—when the instrument of the offense becomes the mechanism of retribution.<sup>63</sup> This list certainly is not exclusive, nor has there been any attempt to apply it, or any other framework, methodologically to a selection of texts to investigate its validity as a model. Further, it might be asked whether any framework at all can be said to exist. Divine retribution undoubtedly occurs outside of any specific model that might be developed. The question, then, is whether or not a model might be developed that is sufficiently nuanced enough to be useful. Are there common elements in the literary portrayal of accounts of divine retribution that a model might be discerned?

#### **1.3.3.1 Conventions**

To move beyond the limitations of the *Forschungsgeschichte* regarding divine retribution, it will be helpful to pursue an altogether different line of inquiry. To create meaning, an author must utilize “conventions” that provide a shared context between text and reader. Conventions—

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<sup>63</sup> Travis, *Christ and the Judgement of God*, 17.

alternatively referred to as stereotypes—are “traditional or standard ways of constructing a literary world and setting it in motion.”<sup>64</sup> The use of convention requires awareness on the part of the recipient; readers must possess familiarity with any convention utilized by an author in order to perceive that convention.<sup>65</sup>

While conventions represent a shared context, it is the innovation of those conventions that provides for engaging literature:

Conventions provide a stylized set of expectations that an audience can anticipate.

A complex of information is presented compactly “at a glance” or “in a word” through the use of formal scenes, images and symbols. However, when the convention becomes highly predictable it ceases to give information that seems important and we cease to look or listen. There is therefore a dialectical tension between conventions, which maintain continuity with the past, and those elaborations and variations that present a new dramatic emphasis or a new insight. It is important, then, to note not only formal patterns but also reworkings of these patterns that contribute to new plays of words, personages, images and symbols without complete departure from ancient forms.<sup>66</sup>

The skeleton, or framework, of a convention, then, is necessary to provide a shared context between text and reader. The individual variations, however, are crucial to creating meaning in a manner that effectively resonates with a reader.

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<sup>64</sup> David A. Robertson, *The Old Testament and the Literary Critic*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977): 8.

<sup>65</sup> David M. Gunn, “Narrative Patterns and Oral Tradition in Judges and Samuel,” *VT* 24 (1974): 313. Gunn argues that the presence of convention/stereotyping in ancient literature is indicative of the oral history behind a particular text.

<sup>66</sup> James G. Williams, “The Beautiful and the Barren: Conventions in Biblical Type-Scenes,” *JSOT* 17 (1980): 107–19.

Also essential to the effective use of conventions is their repetition. “Repetition is not limited to point of view, or even to narrative. It is one of the most extensive devices in the Bible, taking many different forms....it should not be mistaken for ancient redundancy, or even as simply an esthetic device. It is a key to perception, to interpretation; it calls attention to the similarity of two things or utterances, and may also be calling attention to their differences.”<sup>67</sup> Repetition of a convention allows the presentation of elements beyond mere plot. Culture, philosophy, and theology are all communicated in Hebrew literature through the repetition of convention.

One ancient convention is the type-scene. In 1930, Walter Arend published *Die Typischen Szenen bei Homer* in which he classified actions that repeated using similar elements as “type-scenes.” Arend listed a handful of type-scenes linked to journeying, warfare and weaponry, clothing, and food. Arend’s work was useful because he located elements—literary tools, really—that existed outside of the story that were used to create a literary connection between narrated events. The intertextual connection was created by *supra*-textual components.

In Homeric studies, Arend’s work has overlapped with form-critical studies as the interest has moved beyond smaller units of phraseology toward the authorial use of “mental templates” as part of the Homeric formula.<sup>68</sup> The difficulty has been determining what that formula actually is and when it is being utilized: “Our uncertainty as to when we can reasonably decide that a formula has been used rests on a prior uncertainty as to the nature of the formula as

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<sup>67</sup> Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983), 136.

<sup>68</sup> Michael N. Nagler, “Towards a Generative View of the Oral Formula,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 98 (1967): 269.

a mental entity: we cannot be sure how or when the thing behaves, to say nothing of its poetic value, until we have a much better idea what it is.”<sup>69</sup>

Aside from the radical differences between Homeric poetry and Hebrew literature, some of the difficulties are the same: How is it possible to determine with any level of certainty what constitutes a convention, template, or formula? The applicable limits of form-critical study often leave critics stranded without the ability to distinguish a form.

In his groundbreaking work *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, Robert Alter applies Arendt’s insights to the biblical text, demonstrating that the biblical corpus is not without a stable of mechanisms to create literary resonance among passages. Alter’s focus in his chapter on the topic is limited to betrothal scenes, but he alludes to other scenes that scholars have enthusiastically pursued.<sup>70</sup> It should be noted that type-scenes are not modern conceptions retroactively superimposed on ancient texts; rather, they are a convention utilized by ancient authors because they were understood by ancient readers.<sup>71</sup>

Another notable work is O. Wesley Allen’s *The Death of Herod: The Narrative and Theological Function of Retribution in Luke-Acts*.<sup>72</sup> Allen filters the book of Acts through the

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<sup>69</sup> Nagler, “Towards a Generative View of the Oral Formula,” 270.

<sup>70</sup> Alter also recognizes “the birth of the hero to his barren mother; the encounter with the future betrothed at the well; the epiphany in the field; the initiatory trial; danger in the desert and the discovery of a well or other source of sustenance; the testament of the dying hero.” *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 51.

<sup>71</sup> See Koowon Kim, *Incubation as a Type-scene in the Aqhatu, Kirta, and Hannah Stories: A Form-critical and Narratological Study of KTU 1.14 I-1.15 III, 1.17 I-II, and 1 Samuel 1:1-2:11* (Boston: Brill, 2011), 26.

<sup>72</sup> O. Wesley Allen, *The Death of Herod: The Narrative and Theological Function of Retribution in Luke-Acts* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997).

Greek “tyrant death” type-scene.<sup>73</sup> Allen’s work is valuable for the definitions he develops, particularly for his nuanced definition of “type-scene.”

Part of the difficulty in discerning type-scenes lies in identifying the template from which its derivatives originate. For a particular type-scene to exist, it must be accompanied by enough data—i.e., repeated scenes—that the scene serves a literary purpose for the author and readers. Indeed, it is the subtle literary manipulation of such schema that fills out and enriches a narrative.<sup>74</sup> But archetypes are elusive in a limited corpus. Discussing his type-scene of the ill and dying king, Cohn states, “No unadulterated specimen of our type-scene exists in biblical literature; indeed, none may ever have existed in writing. Yet the recurrence of the convention in Kings suggests a pattern firmly fixed in biblical tradition. Against this basic pattern the originality of each episode can readily be seen.”<sup>75</sup> When an individual scene serves as the archetype, derivative scenes are easily perceived. The lack of a recorded archetype, however, makes that archetype speculative for the scholar. Cohn admits as much, later labeling his type-scene “putative.”<sup>76</sup> James Williams goes further, suggesting the lack of historical value in type-scenes places them beyond the purview of the historian and thereby offering “little basis for positing an ‘original’ scene upon which the others are variations.”<sup>77</sup>

Koowon Kim allows for a necessary fluidity in defining the term: “...the fact remains that type-scene is a recurrent sequence of common motifs—each subdivisible into elements and

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<sup>73</sup> I will later argue that Luke actually modifies this type scene and uses it repeatedly throughout Acts to chronicle the defeat of Satan’s dominion.

<sup>74</sup> Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

<sup>75</sup> Robert L. Cohn, “Convention and Creativity in the Book of Kings: The Case of the Dying Monarch,” *CBQ* 47 (1985): 605.

<sup>76</sup> Cohn, “Convention and Creativity in the Book of Kings,” 606.

<sup>77</sup> Williams, “The Beautiful and the Barren,” 111.



capable of functioning independently—which seem to be united under a common theme....Although there may be variations or deviations, one of the definitive characters of type-scene is the narrational movement of multiple motifs.<sup>78</sup>

It is the point of intersection of motifs in a particular narrative that hints to the presence of a type-scene. It is the repetition of that same confluence of linked motifs in multiple narratives that suggest the presence of a type-scene, rooted in convention, that functions as a literary mechanism for structuring narrative.

Type-scenes, like most aspects of literary criticism, are commonly considered to lie skew to historiography. Some suggest that the presence of type-scenes (and other literary devices, for that matter) cannot reasonably be considered historiography. The literary nature of a text and its historical value are considered two distinct entities: “The accuracy of historical assertions made in a work of literature is completely irrelevant to a literary discussion of it.... And what is true for historical assertions is, of course, also true for theological claims.”<sup>79</sup> Literary criticism frequently considers itself above the fray of historical concerns, simply not occupying itself with questions of textual correspondence to external reality. Literary criticism does not try to prove or disprove history—it simply does not deal with it. John Barton argues that at best, “we can say is that there are internal relations among the various texts that make up the Old Testament, that the Bible is marked by a certain ‘intertextuality’. We can observe the parallels, and we can deduce from them some of the conventions with which Israelite literature operated; origins, historical development and dependence, and underlying events are all beside the point.”<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Kim, *Incubation as A Type-Scene*, 13–14.

<sup>79</sup> Robertson, *The Old Testament and the Literary Critic*, 12.

<sup>80</sup> John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1996), 206.

Meir Sternberg, on the other hand, suggests that ideology provides the key to linking literary criticism to historiography:

As a rule of narrative communication, inspiration amounts to omniscience exercised on history: the tale's claim to truth rest on the teller's God-given knowledge. The prophet assumes this stance (or persona) explicitly, the storyteller implicitly but none the less authoritatively. And its assumption enables him to bring to bear on his world (and his audience) what would elsewhere count as the poetic license of invention without paying the price in truth claim. Herein lies one of the Bible's unique roles: under the aegis of ideology, convention transmutes even invention into the stuff of history, or rather obliterates the line dividing fact from fancy in communication. So every word is God's word. The product is neither fiction nor historicized fiction nor fictionalized history, but historiography pure and uncompromising. If its licenses yet open up possibilities for literary art, they are built into the fabric of the narrative by a special dispensation: a logic of writing equally alien to the world-centered anachronisms of historians and the novel-centered anachronisms of literary approaches.<sup>81</sup>

Krašovec similarly notes that the intention of the Hebrews was paramount in determining the final genre of their writing. "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."<sup>82</sup> As intentional historiography, then, type-scenes, while limited in their historical value, still function as interpreted history for the ancient Hebrews.

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<sup>81</sup> Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Indiana University Press, 1985), 34–5.

<sup>82</sup> Krašovec, *Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness*, 12.

Trompf argues that retribution is a theme commonly historicized. Authors crafted specific events in a way that emphasized the appropriate talion for central characters within a narrative.<sup>83</sup> And type-scenes depicting divine retribution would be a natural manner of narrating that history.

### 1.3.3.2 Type-scenes and Divine Retribution

The *Forschungsgeschichte* of divine retribution has been focused primarily on theology, and literary approaches have merely scratched the surface of the topic. For such a prominent topic as divine retribution to receive so little analysis of its literary portrayal in biblical literature is truly puzzling. While the theological issues are admittedly engaging, they tell only part of the story. While various narratives of divine retribution have been individually treated, as have diverse type-scenes, nothing comprehensive examining the data has been attempted. Allen's work represents the only (book-length) treatment of the literary aspect of divine retribution, yet even his material is limited in scope to the type-scene manifested in a single biblical pericope. No one has treated the literary portrayal of divine retribution in a comprehensive way, even though there are noteworthy achievements on specific pericopes.

The Old Testament is no stranger to type-scenes involving retribution.<sup>84</sup> The mutilation of Adoni-Bezek in Judg 1:5–7 or the sacking of Jerusalem and blinding of Zedekiah (2 Kings 25:1–7) reflect common *intratextual* methods of narrating retribution. But the Old Testament also contains schematized scenes of divine retribution known elsewhere. A primary example would be the narrative of 2 Kings 6:1–7 in which Elisha causes a borrowed iron axe head to float so that its user might retrieve it. The narrative is suspiciously similar to the fable by the Greek poet Aesop in which the god Hermes retrieves a golden axhead from a river as a character test for a

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<sup>83</sup> Trompf, *Early Christian Historiography*, 10.

<sup>84</sup> See Stephen B. Chapman, "Reading the Bible as Witness: Divine Retribution in the Old Testament," *PRSt* 31 (2004): 171–190 and Klaus Koch, *Um das Prinzip der Vergeltung in Religion und Recht des Alten Testaments* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972).

woodman who loses his ax. And the Jonah narrative is highly reminiscent of Greek narratives in which divine wrath is experienced through storm and shipwreck. Type-scenes are present in Old Testament narratives of divine retribution, but largely unexplored.

Because scholarship currently lacks a full-length literary treatment of divine retribution in the Old Testament, the purpose of this study is to address that lacuna in research.

### **1.3.4 Methodological Considerations**

#### **1.3.4.1 Summary**

Literary criticism will be the primary method used to investigate the topic. Form, source, historical, and redaction criticisms certainly have a role to play and will inform the study as necessary, although in some instances, the presuppositions associated with a criticism may be antithetical to those of literary criticism. Redaction criticism, for instance, frequently assumes an assembled text with enough lingering imperfection to indicate traces of its constituent parts. Literary criticism, on the other hand, assumes a *crafted* text demonstrating “skill of a high order...[and] signs of developed narrative technique.”<sup>85</sup> The assumption herein prefers the literary critical model in which the text is assumed to reflect deliberate and skillful construction unless it necessitates the exploration of redaction. A literary analysis will necessarily involve semantic analysis, as well as the more broadly focused study of common narrative elements such as plot, character, setting, and theme.

The study will perform literary-critical analysis based on linguistics, sociology, source theory, and comparative literature as needed. Because a wide range of texts will be considered, methodology will necessarily reflect the dynamics of a particular passage. For example, redaction criticism plays a role in the understanding a type-scene in Numbers 16 and Amos 7 but

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<sup>85</sup> Barton, *Reading the Old Testament*, 206–7.

is far less pertinent to the discussion in a text like 2 Kings 1. The study will be functional in nature, focusing on determining the type-scene elements present in the text. This study will concern itself primarily with the narrative portions of the Old Testament text. While both Wisdom Literature and the Prophets are saturated with divine retribution, neither provides a stereotyped portrayal of divine retribution to be found in narrative passages. Both admittedly offer a standardized rhetoric regarding divine retribution, but the intention here is to treat the topic in view of the specific instances of Hebrew historiography rather than through the universal principles of Wisdom Literature or the normalized expectations of the prophets.

Even a study intending to be comprehensive will face practical limitations, and this work is no exception. Not all passages containing divine retribution type-scenes can be thoroughly discussed, but sufficient texts will be selected to effectively establish any issue under discussion. Inclusion of a limited number of pericopes certainly creates the possibility of ignoring narratives and elements that conflict with the line of argument. One measure of a study's value is how well it acknowledges and incorporates contradictory data. Consequently, a concerted effort will be given to discerning data that falls outside the argued thesis. This study must incorporate any instance in which a type-scene fails to appear when one might reasonably be expected, or when data simply does not support a proposed category (see below).

A second difficulty lies in the paucity of scholarship regarding the literary aspects of divine retribution. While any scarcity of data may place a study at risk of over-incorporating conjecture—and the approach here unfortunately is no exception—the breadth of text selection and treatment is intended to mitigate such hazards.

Alluding to the definition of type-scene as offered by Allen, because type-scenes function in a cultural-literary milieu, the broad context in which Israelite authors found themselves is

pertinent to this study. While biblical literature is unique in that it reflects a deity that varies from other deities in the aNE, it was still birthed in the broader culture of the region. Distinctives aside, both Yahweh of the Hebrews and the other aNE pantheons delivered retribution against their opponents. Consequently, the ancient Near Eastern literary corpus must be factored into the discussion throughout the work as needed to illuminate particular type-scene categories.

The larger discussion in Old Testament studies regarding dating also plays into the discourse. While source criticism remains an unsettled field, enough data is available that can act as a control regarding the development and usage of type-scenes in Hebrew literature. The broad conclusions concerning J and the Deuteronomistic Historian, for instance, may be considered as another method for establishing the breadth of use of the type-scene in Hebrew narrative.

Typical literary elements will also be examined as a means to providing a window into the commonality among type-scenes. Beyond a reliance on mere vocabulary, a narrative analysis in which elements such as theme, plot, object, antagonist, etc., is essential to the study. The unexpected action of animals, for instance, is often present in divine retribution type-scenes, as is the uniqueness of the retribution event.

#### **1.3.4.2 Definitions**

Because scholars differ on and lack a consensus terminology, definitions are necessary before proceeding further. Working parameters for what exactly is meant by “type-scene” and related terms must be established to provide a basis for selecting pericopes to explore.

#### **Convention**

Writers are limited in creating meaning by a reader’s scope of understanding. A writer must rely on details common to the shared context of the author and reader. Alter notes that to be recognizable, type-scenes are “dependent on the manipulation of fixed constellation of

predetermined motifs.”<sup>86</sup> The details of this context, and the accepted methods of expressing them, may be referred to as conventions. “Convention” is frequently used in two different ways: 1) “necessary, or at least convenient, devices, accepted by tacit agreement between author and audience, for solving the problems in representing reality that are posed by a particular artistic medium”; and 2) “conspicuous features of subject matter, form, or technique that occur repeatedly in works of literature. Conventions in this sense may be recurrent types of character, turns of plot, forms of versification, or kinds of diction and style.”<sup>87</sup> For this study, both definitions apply, combining to allow the authorial creation of meaning. A convention, then, may be defined as *mechanisms common in a particular context for conveying meaning through a particular medium*. Both the elements in a story and the means through which that story is narrated fall under this definition.

Type-scenes, under discussion here, both utilize convention and function as convention. Conventional elements—hospitality, birth, girding for battle, or meals—structured in a standard way, become conventions understood by readers.

### **Type-Scene**

Arend initially treated type-scenes formulaically and somewhat rigidly in terms of their order and structure. Kim’s description of Arend’s concept of type-scene as “a recurrent sequence of common motifs—each subdivisible into elements and capable of functioning independently—which seem to be united under a common theme” offers a core meaning from which scholarship

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<sup>86</sup> Alter, 51.

<sup>87</sup> M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2009), 58.

has never wandered far.<sup>88</sup> But while the central idea has remained stable, the nomenclature has varied widely. Kim discusses the difficulty and confusion over terminology:

Recurrent narrative blocks in Homeric texts have been referred to in various ways. Beside ‘Typische Szenen’ or ‘type-scenes’ popularized by W. Arend, Homeric scholars, following M. Parry and A. B. Lord, call them ‘themes.’ Other scholars use ‘motif,’ ‘motif-sequence,’ ‘stock-scene,’ ‘story pattern,’ etc. This terminological confusion has been reflected in the indices of Oxford University Press commentary and Cambridge University Press commentary on *Illiad* and *Odyssey*. In the Cambridge *Illiad* commentary, Volume 1, the main pertinent entry is ‘theme motif,’ and there is little under ‘typical scene.’ In Volume 2 there are entries under both ‘typical scenes’ and ‘typical motifs and themes.’ Volume 4 lists ‘type-scene,’ under which there are cross-references to other entries, while Volume 5 lists ‘type-scenes,’ ‘story patterns,’ and ‘motifs, repeated.’<sup>89</sup>

Most contemporary scholars define type-scenes in a way that maximizes the flexibility of the definition. Mark Edwards, for instance, offers this definition: “A type-scene may be regarded as a recurrent block of narrative with an identifiable structure, such as sacrifice, the reception of a guest, the launching and beaching of a ship, the donning of armor.”<sup>90</sup> Kim similarly attempts to move beyond Arend’s and Alter’s more rigid approach, which he considers limited in its reliance on formula. Instead, Kim utilizes Edwards and Nagler for his definition of type-scene. Nagler is useful because he suggests that there is no standard formula for what constitutes a type-scene; i.e., there is no standard scene that another scene imitates or deviates from. Hence, there are no standard elements that must be included. Kim opts for a “family resemblance” in which type

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<sup>88</sup> Kim, *Incubation as a Type-scene*, 13.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 11, n. 47.

<sup>90</sup> Mark W. Edwards, “Homer and Oral Tradition: The Type-Scene,” *Oral Tradition* 7.2 (1992): 285.



scenes are rooted in a poet's "pre-conscious" template.<sup>91</sup> Kim ultimately offers a definition for type-scene that will allow flexibility: A type-scene is "a pre-verbal *Gestalt*."<sup>92</sup>

Donald Fry notes that type-scenes differ from theme in that the former are linked to a specific narrative context, while theme is free to function independently of narrative. Both are highly fluid:

A theme, although it is not linked to any specific type-scene, may nevertheless serve as an underlying structure for a type-scene; the sea monsters' banquet in *Beowulf*, with its submerged theme of the 'Hero on the Beach' as identified by Crowne, is a good example. Indeed, several themes could underlie one type-scene, just as one type-scene may be contained in another, such as the arrival of a messenger during a banquet. Neither themes nor type-scenes are restricted in any way to verbatim repetition, definite metrical patterns, a fixed order of events, details, or ideas, or certain formulas or systems; however, certain systems, because of their usual semantic content, are associated normally, but not exclusively, with certain themes, as, for example, the '(noun)-bedaeled' system often found expressing the theme of exile (Greenfield 202). Furthermore, because the poet may expand or contract a type-scene by the addition or deletion of descriptive material, and because a theme is merely a structural frame of details and ideas, no definite length is required of any theme or type-scene.<sup>93</sup>

Four ideas relevant to this study emerge at this point that offer potential to shape the type-scenes under investigation. First, type-scenes are not formulaic. Theme, while elusive, might

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<sup>91</sup> Kim, *Incubation as a Type-scene*, 14–17.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>93</sup> Donald K. Fry, "Old English Formulaic Themes and Type-scenes," *Neophilologus* 52 (1968): 52-3.

provide a better indicator of the presence of type-scenes.<sup>94</sup> Second, semantic links may be present. Semantic aspects of a theme may indicate a type-scene when included with the conventional details of a scene. Third, a type-scene may be contained within another type-scene. The narrative in Judges 13 is just such a scene in which a birth-annunciation scene contains a scene of providing a meal for an honored guest. Fourth, type-scenes have no definitive length.

Fry defines a type-scene—within the scope of Old English poetry—as “a recurring stereotyped presentation of conventional details used to describe a certain narrative event, requiring neither verbatim repetition nor a specific formula content.”<sup>95</sup> For the purposes of this study, I will utilize Allen’s adaptation of the definition of a type-scene offered by Donald Fry that includes the cultural literary context of the narrative: “Type-scenes are stereotyped scenes which recur within a cultural-literary milieu. The presentations consist of conventional details used to describe a certain narrative event requiring neither verbatim repetition nor a specific formula content.”<sup>96</sup> The cultural-literary milieu, in this case, is the ancient Near East, with particular focus on ancient Hebrew literature. The conventional details will be the standard modern designation narrative elements: plot, character, setting, action, symbol, etc. Kim properly notes, “The type-scene is best regarded as a sub-category of form criticism. Both of them share not only

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<sup>94</sup> Fry defines theme as “a recurring concatenation of details and ideas, not restricted to a specific event, verbatim repetition, or certain formulas, which forms an underlying structure for an action or description” (“Old English Formulaic Themes and Type-scenes,” 53).

<sup>95</sup> Fry, “Old English Formulaic Themes and Type-scenes,” 53.

<sup>96</sup> *The Death of Herod: The Narrative and Theological Function of Retribution in Luke-Acts*, 34–35. Robert Tannehill suggests, “Type-scenes can become an important literary technique in a narrative. The recurrent pattern suggests similarity, and the variations prevent monotony. Discovering the pattern repeatedly, we come to view the situation as common or characteristic and look for it in various guises” (*The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1990), 201).

a synchronic interest in the text at hand, but also a diachronic interest in the ancient conventions shared by the author and reader.”<sup>97</sup>

## **Retribution**

While retribution may be positive (reward) or negative (punishment), this study is concerned with the negative retribution experienced directly as a consequence of offending behavior. In the case of divine retribution, such punishment is actively performed by the deity involved, as opposed to natural retribution, in which the deity administers retribution through a secondary agency such as natural law.

### **1.3.5 Toward a Type-scene**

In attempting to isolate type-scenes for divine retribution, it is important to note the kinds of offense and the kinds of divine response. Many instances of divine retribution are responses to violations of codified expectations; divine retribution was manifest against an offender for engaging in a clearly proscribed behavior. The proscription may be in the form of codified legal requirements (e.g., the Mosaic law) or may be oracular in nature. Achan’s offense at Jericho was the latter.

Searching such narratives describing divine retribution against clearly proscribed behavior is problematic. The convention underlying these narratives is rather simple: disobedience of the divine command merits punishment. Type-scenes are unnecessary to communicate such a basic truth; indeed, they may hinder the reinforcement of the divine command because the command itself is intended to function as convention. Divine retribution reinforces the divine command, making the need for obedience self-evident.

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<sup>97</sup> Kim, *Incubation as a Type-scene*, 23.

An alternative type of divine retribution narrative is a scene in which divine retribution is received but no specific command is violated. Narratives in which divine retribution is portrayed apart from the violation of an explicit command provide fertile soil for exploring the topic. These narratives are many, yet spring from a convention unencumbered by clear exegetical explanation; the text does not always elaborate on the reason for the retribution. Being mauled by bears or dying under the feet of a stampeding mob as examples of retribution become more puzzling because of the lack a clear violation of a divine command. Further, the *kind* of retribution received is often extreme in nature, both in the sense of the uniqueness of the punishment, and in the obvious nature of its poetic justice. In these kinds of narratives, the didactic element, while present, is not as easily in view, nor does the text readily lend itself to connections to codified material.

Although there exists no explicit codified divine expectation regarding these kinds of scenes, there were certainly specific violations made of the divine will as impetus for Yahweh's retribution. While the offenses were not codified, they were no doubt understood conventionally, providing the foundation and milieu for the type-scenes themselves. It is these non-explicit offenses toward the divine that will be the primary consideration in analyzing type-scenes of divine retribution. This will require the answering of several questions:

First, what commonalities exist in the Old Testament literary portrayals of non-explicit divine retribution? Wisdom literature incorporates specific penalties for violating divine injunctions, as does the Law. But what of narratives in which there is no violation of a specific injunction? Is the retribution that the prophets of Baal or Abimelech receive intended to bring to the reader's mind the Law? Universal wisdom? Or the disposition of Yahweh? In other words, what is the rhetorical function of these non-explicit scenes?

Second, while divine retribution portrayals exhibit an inherently unique group of literary elements, the examination also aims to determine how coalesced those elements are. Are the divine retribution type-scenes utilized in the Old Testament thoroughly developed, or merely convention in the sense of a literary context—common cultural beliefs about retribution from which authors drew their material? The possibility for developed type-scenes in the Old Testament lies at the intersection of Hebrew historiography, sociology, intertextuality and the broader ancient Near Eastern literary corpus. In other words, how developed are divine retribution type-scenes in the Old Testament, particularly when compared to those known from other literary milieus?

Third, many of the described type-scenes to be investigated center on a confrontation between competing messengers. Why is divine retribution commonly typified in these proxy confrontations in which messengers or armies symbolize the deities they serve?

In the broadest sense, because portrayals of divine retribution in which Yahweh's motives are explicit are frequent and thus have been commonly treated, this study will prefer occurrences of divine retribution in which the rationale is not explicit. In narratives which Yahweh or his messengers offer no promise of retribution, or where no text threatens divine retaliation, the impetus for such a divine response may be confusing. The study seeks to address the issue of how divine retribution type-scenes in these instances reveals divine motivation intended to be inferred by the reader.

For the sake of convenient arrangement, this study will be structured by corporal eras.

- *Mosaic Scenes — Moses provides the template and serves as an anchor for the convention in later texts*

- *Deuteronomistic History* — *The Historian uses the scene to portray prophets as legitimate successors to Moses*
- *Prophets* — *Jeremiah and Amos trust the convention for their validation*
- *Chronicler* — *The Chronicler retools Deuteronomistic History to validate divine messengers*
- *Acts* — *Luke utilizes the type-scene in carefully crafted polemic against Satan's dominion*

Ultimately, this study argues that Biblical stories in which God implements extreme fates often seeming disproportionate to the offense and occur in the absence of any divine proscription are commonly depicted through conventional scenes in which an antagonist opposes a divine messenger. Opposition to the messenger seems to be the offense grave enough to merit the peculiar fates these characters experience.

This study will progress through Moses narratives, the works commonly assumed to be produced by the Historian, the Chronicler, and the prophetic works of Jeremiah and Amos. The bulk of the type-scene's usage occurs in narratives connected to the classical prophets, where the scene supplements historiography to validate divine messengers. Chapter 5 will move into the New Testament writing of Luke, operating under the assumption that the scene's prevalence in the Old Testament make it an enduring literary device and natural candidate to be employed by the meticulous and thoughtful Gospel writer.

## 2. Moses, The Prototype

### 2.1 The Messenger Matters—Conventional Origins

Prophets occupy a unique position in ancient Israel and the broader ancient Near East. Because they functioned ostensibly as representatives of the gods, some mechanism(s) were necessary to substantiate claims to their status and message. While various sociological factors performed that role within the *Sitz em Leben*, the literary method to establish a prophet's legitimacy required a distillation of those factors.<sup>98</sup> The same components authenticating a prophet in a social context—divine experience, approval of the faith community, prophetic lifestyle, nature of the message, etc.—are all selectively included in a canonized literary context and framed through genre. Deut 13 treats prophetic validation legislatively, while visions or direct messages to the messengers are encapsulated in the prophetic genre in the books attributed to the prophets themselves. But while legal codes and the prophetic poetry speak *for* Yahweh, they are incapable of *observing* Yahweh's activity. Arguably, narrative represents the better genre choice for expressing a convention rooted in the lack of proscriptions.

#### The Difficulty of Proscribing Prophetic Opposition

As explored previously, offenses for which there no clear proscriptions offer the most fertile soil for exploring conventions related to divine retribution. When clear prohibitions against particular behaviors are specified, the convention expressed is reinforced within the narrative. Two examples will suffice here. Lev. 24:10–16 offers insight on retribution received

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<sup>98</sup> Jack Lundbom discusses a “locus of authenticity” in which sociological factors, prophetic experience, and expression intersect to verify a prophet's status as a divine messenger (*The Hebrew Prophets: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 138–152).

for which there was such limited proscription. In the case of the man who blasphemes the “Name,” the proscription is already codified within the Law. Source-critical theory tends to prefer a later date for Leviticus, presupposing the legislative content of the Decalogue.<sup>99</sup> But while the Decalogue forbids the misuse of the divine name, no punishment for the violation of the code is therein prescribed.<sup>100</sup> Consequently, when the offender curses the divine name, there is certainty among the Hebrew community that the violation must be punished, but uncertainty as to what the specific punishment should be. Hence, the offender is detained until Yahweh’s will in this particular instance could be determined.

The identity of the offender must be considered significant since it provides the context for the narrative. His nationality is portrayed only in terms of his parentage. His identity as half-Egyptian and half-Israelite is contrasted with his opponent. The offender is the *בן-אִשָּׁה יִשְׂרָאֵלִית* (son of a female Israelite) while his opponent is “the Israelite man” (*בן הַיִּשְׂרָאֵלִית*). While the Israelite woman belongs to the community, her son does not.

The half-Egyptian/half-Israelite man fights with an Israelite—implying that the offense occurred in the heat of the moment. Irrespective of the intent of the offender, Yahweh informs Moses that the offender’s crime is capital in nature, and the prisoner is promptly executed. Yahweh’s command that the offender be punished is not *ex post facto*. Only the specific punishment—execution—is designated after the offense.

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<sup>99</sup> John E. Hartley et al., *Leviticus* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 2000), 247–260. While the existence of a separate “Holiness Code” is debated, the presumption of supplementation to the Priestly core in service of the cult is far more common. “A clear example [of the hortatorical evolution of the text] is the placing of the case of the half-breed blasphemer in 24:10–23 as the scaffolding for the presentation of laws on personal injury. This reconstruction seeks to account for how the material reached its final shape. While the core material goes back to Sinai, it has been augmented and updated in the context of the cult in order to keep the Word of God vital and contemporary in Israel’s changing social milieu.” (Hartley, 230).

<sup>100</sup> Michael Fishbane suggests this incident represents merely one of several *ad hoc* applications of the legal code during Israel’s wilderness wanderings (*Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 98–104).



This narrative serves to illustrate the flexibility of the Hebrew culture to incorporate *ad hoc* codifications. The law prohibited verbally blaspheming Yahweh's name but provided no penalty for the violation. An outsider living within the community breaks the law, is executed, and the law is updated.

Irrespective of the dating of the passage, the resulting form of the text incorporates a convention that accommodates the updating of codified legislation. The update is provided by Yahweh, but still reflects a change to legislation that is incomplete. The Hebrews would not likely consider the absence of prescribed retribution in the face of the law against blasphemy to be incomplete; they surely would have considered the Law and the penalty for its violation to be self-evident, surprised that anyone would break the command to begin with. This surprise at the violation of the command offers the probable impetus for the careful identification of the offender as born from an Egyptian father. Only an outsider—one who was not truly an Israelite—would be rebellious enough to speak disrespectfully toward Yahweh.

A second narrative describing an infraction committed in the face of an uncertain penalty is found in Num 15:32–36. A man gathering wood on the Sabbath is brought to Moses and Aaron and subsequently detained because of the uncertain nature of his offense. The second clause in vs. 34 (י לא פרש מה־יַעֲשֶׂה לוֹ) follows the congregational presentation of the offender to Moses and Aaron and indicates that they are to be included in the uncertain nature of the offender's fate.

Exodus 31:14-15 makes Sabbath violation a clear capital offense and requires execution for those who disregard the law. It is unlikely the people were consulting Moses merely to establish the *mechanism* of execution. The Hebrews did not utilize methods other than stoning for enforcing penalties for capital offenses. The violator in Num 15 likely represented the first

instance of Sabbath violation which the Israelites encountered.<sup>101</sup> As such, Yahweh himself speaks to Moses, reiterating the capital punishment and the specific mechanism of execution. Moses as Yahweh's representative reinforces the initial legislation by following through with the penalty.

Weingreen asserts that the midrashic flavor of the narrative suggests a "rudimentary form" of a peripheral rabbinic legislation designed to prevent transgression against the core Torah command.<sup>102</sup> Anthony Phillips, on the other hand, suggests that in this passage (as well as the account of the blasphemer in Lev. 24) "the form of the story is due to the priestly legislator who has adopted the practice of putting new legislation into the framework of a particular narrative case."<sup>103</sup> With the late date suggested by the Priestly source, the *ad hoc* nature of the solutions in both narratives are understood to reflect models of the legislation in question. Such a position, though, diminishes the potential theological aspects of the convention. These narratives exist outside of the type-scene (divine messenger opposition) under discussion. Their value, however, comes from the placement of convention within the narrative. For Hebrew writers of theologized historiography, literary convention functions as a mechanism for expressing theology. The theology here seems clear: Yahweh is not merely a detached being who previously delivered the Law and its enforcement to Moses. He is actively engaged in addressing disrespect or disobedience. The legal code alone does not reflect the complete convention. Narrative is utilized to embed the convention of Yahweh's interest in the enforcement of Israel's legal code.

The difficulty with the issue under discussion—the non-codified retribution against those who disrespect Yahweh's divine messenger—is that disrespect for the divine messenger

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<sup>101</sup> J. Weingreen, "The Case of the Woodgatherer (Numbers XV 32-36)," *VT* (1966): 362.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> Anthony Phillips, "The Case of the Woodgatherer Reconsidered," *VT*, 1969 (127).

represents a far more elusive offense toward the divine that is difficult to codify. Legislation regarding speaking respectfully *about* or *to* a prophet might be feasibly be enacted, but such legislation would be unavoidably nebulous. Many of the type-scenes here to be addressed involve that very issue. When a divine messenger is accosted (1 Kings 13), his prediction questioned (2 Kings 7), or criticized (Num 12), retribution is received—deservedly so, but absent any violation of specific legislation.

Three passages relating to the people’s interaction with prophets come closest to offering instruction regarding respect toward a divine messenger: Deut. 13 and Deut. 18. Deut. 13 focuses on oracular threats that arise from within the Israelite community. Any effort by a self-identified prophet or dreamer (נְבִיא אִוִּי חֲלֹמֵי חֲלוֹמִים) to advance apostatical worship was to be considered a capital offense. The emphasis in Deut. 18 is on the Israelites’ avoidance of the oracular methods prevalent in the surrounding nations. God’s promise of a prophet like Moses in Deut. 18:15 is Yahweh’s provision of guidance as his designated alternative to the heterodox pursuit of the clairvoyant.

Neither of these passages, though, concerns itself with the proper treatment of the prophet himself. Instead, the codified instruction of the people’s interaction with prophets is focused on maintaining fidelity to Yahweh rather than demonstrating respect for his messenger. The core thrust of the prophetic legislation in both chapters is on maintaining (at the least a henotheistic) loyalty to Yahweh. Any message from a prophet that encouraged interaction with non-Yahwistic deities was a capital offense.

A third passage that seems to lend itself to functioning as a proscription against disrespecting prophets is Exod 22:27: “Do not blaspheme God or curse the ruler of your people.” The verse’s applicability to the issue of proscription against opposing divine messengers hinges

on whether the typical role of divine messenger is included in “ruler” (רִשָׁאֵי). The term refers primarily to clan-based leaders and is never used in reference to refer to the primary role of messenger.<sup>104</sup> Paul later quotes the passage—discussion of his possible use of sarcasm aside—in Acts 23:1–5 when he is accused of denigrating Ananias. Paul’s understanding appears to allow for the inclusion of the High Priest within the realm of understanding of the LXX equivalent of רִשָׁאֵי, ἄρχων.<sup>105</sup> But similar to רִשָׁאֵי, ἄρχων does not possess a semantic range that includes divine messengers.

The proscription in Exod 22:27 exists because the identity of the רִשָׁאֵי was easy to define. The sociological context made clear who the leaders were. The identity of divine messengers, on the other hand, was often nebulous at best, particularly when the message itself was paramount over the identity of the messenger. Consequently, in the absence of clear delineators for the identity of divine messengers, the type-scene fills that gap, supplementing the muddied waters of prophetic identity.<sup>106</sup>

Because legislation cannot easily codify demonstrating respect for Yahweh through honoring his messengers, the convention required an alternative method for expression. Of the possible forms available, narrative is the best candidate for expressing the convention. Psalms function liturgically in a way that enhances the status of the Law in the heart of the worshipper in the abstract, but do not generally advance specific legislation. Where specific components of the

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<sup>104</sup> NIDOTTE 3:172. See also Philip J. Budd, *Numbers* (Waco, TX: Word, 1984): 330, and Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster Press, 2004), 479.

<sup>105</sup> The parallel structure of blaspheming God and cursing a ruler seems to connect God and the רִשָׁאֵי in a manner similar to the divine messenger’s proxy representation of God. Some ancient Hebrew treatments understood מַלְאָכִים in this context to refer not to God, but rather to judges, making the structure a parallel regarding leaders: “Don’t treat judges lightly, and don’t curse a leader” (Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation/Commentary, The JPS Torah Commentary* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 140). Either way, there is no indication that individuals with a primary role as messenger are included in the proscription in Exod 22:27.

<sup>106</sup> Lundbom, 138-152.

Law are alluded to (e.g., avoiding idolatry (Ps. 24:4)), the emphasis is on the character of worshipper. Similarly, wisdom poetry reflects the general concept of divine retribution (Prov. 11:31; 24:12; Job 34:11) but lacks any specificity toward particular situations. Nor does prophecy lend itself well to addressing opposition to a prophet. In those instances where the prophetic books do deal with the opposition of a divine messenger, the form switches to narrative (Jer. 20:1–6; 28:1–17; Amos 7:10–17). Narrative, because of its capacity to observe a divine response to a prophetic opponent, becomes the best vehicle for demonstrating the various permutations of the convention. While codification is understandably incapable of delineating the nuances of the diversity of possible offenses, narrative allows a detailed and varied exploration of the retribution received for such offenses.

### **Moses Matters**

The initial discussion of the type-scene portraying divine retribution against prophetic opponents properly begins with Moses. Moses functions as the prototypical prophet after which his successors are commonly patterned.<sup>107</sup> And while Isaiah's call and Elijah's penchant for miracles closely mirror those of Moses, other aspects of Israel's preeminent prophet permeate the depiction of subsequent prophets as well. Moses' characteristics—ranging from his miracles to his relationships—have been explored in the lives and ministries of Deborah, Samuel, Ezekiel, Elisha, Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea, Malachi, and Jesus.<sup>108</sup> Consequently, Moses resonates beyond

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<sup>107</sup> Walter Brueggemann suggests Moses serves as the prophetic core at the center of Israel's new alternative consciousness (*The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 1–19). Consequently, the prophetic maintenance of Israelite identity required—or at least reflected—an emulation of the Mosaic prophetic template.

<sup>108</sup> See among many others: Bruce Herzberg, "Deborah and Moses," *JSOT* 38 (2013): 15–33; Victor Harold Matthews, *The Hebrew Prophets and Their Social World: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 43; Henry McKeating, "Ezekiel the 'Prophet Like Moses,'" *JSOT* 19 (1994): 97–109; Gershon Hepner, "The Mockery of Kings and Prophets: The Balaam Narrative Contains an Implied Critique of Moses," *RB* 118 (2011): 180–85; Christopher R. Seitz, "The Prophet Moses and the Canonical Shape of Jeremiah," *ZAW* 101 (1989): 3–27; Meindert Dijkstra, "'I Am Neither a Prophet nor a Prophet's Pupil': Amos 7:9-17 as the Presentation of a Prophet

the texts limited to his life in the form of a convention that underscores the validity of his proper successors. The aspect of “proper” here indicates Yahweh’s selection and approval of his messenger. Opposition undermines Yahweh by questioning his messenger’s status.

Linking particular divine messengers to Moses through the use of the proposed type-scene was one method Hebrew writers used to depict Yahweh’s ongoing presence as Israel’s history progressed. Because Moses’ legitimacy as a prophet is established in part through divine retribution against his opponents, any prophet connected to Moses is also legitimized. It follows, then, that part of the literary linking of a prophet to Moses would occur through utilization of the same conventions that validated Moses.

The repetition of such scenes became touchstones for Hebrew history and theology. Every instance in which a divine messenger was validated cemented the prophet’s identity, and by extension, the literary texts associated with that prophet.

The reuse of the type-scene also becomes self-reinforcing. The more the type-scene is used to compose a text and is read by readers, the more the literary function of the use of the scene itself is reinforced. As readers repeatedly encounter characters who oppose prophets, the expectation grows that the opponent will suffer in a bizarre manner that validates the prophet. The reader knows which character will be validated by Yahweh, and how. An opponent suffers because the conventional expectations created by the type-scene indicate that the opponent must suffer. The convention is self-reinforcing.

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like Moses,” in *The Elusive Prophet: The Prophet as a Historical Person, Literary Character, and Anonymous Artist*, ed. Johannes C. de Moor (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 105–128; Gershon Hepner, “Moses’ Cushite Wife Echoes Hosea’s Woman of Harlotries : Exposure of Unfaithfulness in the Wilderness,” *SJOT* 23 (2009): 233–42; D. Or, “Malachi: Last of the Prophets, and His Link to Moses,” *Beit Mikra* 31 (1985): 316–19; J. Severino (José Severino) Croatto, “Jesus, Prophet like Elijah, and Prophet-Teacher like Moses in Luke-Acts,” *JBL* 124.3 (2005): 451–65.

It should be noted that while the clearest (if not earliest) form of the type-scene lies with Moses, the scene's self-reinforcing nature allows it to detach from Moses as well and function independently of any explicit connection to Yahweh's foremost prophet. Once the scene of a hero arming for battle is conventionally embedded in a culture, that convention is the expected norm long after the scene that birthed it has been forgotten. The divine messenger opposition scene functions in the same way. While Moses is a reasonable choice for the focus and origin of the convention, the scene takes on a life of its own, functioning independently of Moses in order to validate Yahweh's messengers. With the rise of the classical prophet, the scene functions alongside the prophetic tradition to portray prophets as genuine successors to Moses.

### **The Proposed Type-scene**

Before embarking on individual texts in which the type-scene is present themselves, a brief initial sketch of the contents of the proposed scene will prove useful. The proposed divine messenger opposition type-scene may be broadly summarized as follows: An individual or group opposes an individual functioning as the divine messenger of Yahweh. The messenger issues some form of counter-statement that hints at the fate of his opponent. The opponent experiences divine retribution in a manner that is both physical and unique. Yahweh's involvement is seen and assumed, even when not stated explicitly.

The type-scene under discussion functions to validate the messenger of Yahweh. The messenger functions as a divine proxy, and as such represents God himself. Opposing the divine messenger, then, is tantamount to opposing God.

The proposed scene generally contains the following specific elements:

### **A declaration by Yahweh—his chosen messenger**

The concept of a specific verbal statement should be deliberately avoided here. The divine messenger does not, in many scenes, make an explicit verbal statement. Rather, the messenger *is* the declaration by Yahweh, and commonly functions as his proxy. That declaration may be a speech-act by Yahweh through the messenger but may also be the mere presence of the messenger, or even his position as messenger in the abstract. Because the messenger himself functions as a proxy for Yahweh, his presence in the scene should be understood as reflective of Yahweh's interests.

Since this type-scene deals with non-proscribed offenses against Yahweh, the declaration of Yahweh—the presence or speech-act of the messenger—serves to implicitly reveal his interests, namely, the validation of the messenger.

### **A counter-statement by the opposition**

The presence of this element is particularly strong across the scenes. In some capacity, an opponent of a divine messenger will perform a speech-act—a verbal statement directly opposing the first element. If a messenger makes a prediction, the opponent will disagree. When a prophet arrives in divine authority, oppositional speech is targeted at undermining that authority.

The antagonist in this type-scene is almost exclusively a Hebrew, who is expected, even absent a proscription, to know better than to issue a challenge to Yahweh through his messenger. Consequently, the Hebrew who resists a divine messenger is sternly punished. The retribution may be didactic, but more often, the opponent is killed, limiting the pedagogical component to the convention expressed through the text. For non-Israelites, the emphasis falls more firmly on the didactic. Enemy generals and kings experience the power of Yahweh and leave the encounter proclaiming his sovereignty.



### **The response of the divine messenger**

Yahweh's representative typically responds to the opposition's counter-statement. The messenger's response is often verbal, and often includes a statement connecting his position and authority to the fourth element. When the antagonist verbally opposes the messenger, the messenger responds with a curse, a subjunctive, or prediction.

### **The receipt of divine retribution in the form of a unique physical punishment**

This proposed type-scene also includes a punishment against the offender that is unusual or unique. Death by animals, strange unnatural disasters, and the sudden appearance of disease are frequent indicators of God's involvement with the retribution. The retribution also usually avoids the deliberate intervention of a human intermediary. For example, stoning an offender for the violation of the sorcery injunction in Lev. 20:27 required the deliberate human application of the punishment prescribed in the codified legislation. In this type-scene, however, a human agency is not utilized to perform the punishment—Yahweh performs it himself.

## **2.2 Korah's Rebellion and Destruction (Numbers 16)**

In many ways, Numbers 16 represents the paradigmatic example of the convention of divine retribution against opponents of Yahweh's messengers. While not necessarily the earliest of the texts to be examined, the passage embodies in many senses the fullest example of the convention, incorporating the widest array of literary aspects of divine retribution into the narrative. The aspects of the scene play out to their fullest here: A group of Israelites, led by a cadre of disaffected priests, opposes the prototypical divine messenger Moses for his leadership of Israel. They issue a verbal counter-statement that questions his exclusive status as leader. Moses responds, after which Yahweh destroys Moses' rivals through a theretofore unobserved

natural disaster. And at the center of the scene lies the validation of Moses as Yahweh's messenger.

To begin with, the historical-critical information associated with Num 16 should be considered. Of all the texts to be considered in this study, Num 16 presents the most complex background. The chapter is commonly understood to represent the conflation of (at least) two separate rebellion stories.<sup>109</sup> The portrayals of Korah's rebellion and the uprising of Dathan and Abiram seem to merge accounts of different antagonists, punishments, and cultic contexts, suggesting that the text ultimately reflects a redaction of earlier traditions. Milgrom treats the Dathan and Abiram episode as the earlier account, with the final recension grafting Korah into the narrative. While initially ambiguous, Korah's death is linked to that of Dathan and Abiram to associate his impudence with theirs.<sup>110</sup>

Most reconstructions of the text offer differing variations on the traditions behind the narrative. Some align with an approach to the text that sees a clan struggle between the descendants of Aaron and Korah. The narrative in that understanding functions rhetorically to undermine claims of Korah's descendants to the priesthood and support Aaronite power.<sup>111</sup> Noth sees three separate traditions to be clearly present, evidenced by the differing participants in the rebellion, the differing targets of the resistance, and the different nature of the reproaches. The result is a convoluted mixture of Yahwistic and Priestly sources.<sup>112</sup> The presumed Korah material is commonly attributed to the later Priestly writer, while the Dathan and Abiram components are

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<sup>109</sup> Krašovec, *Reward*, 134.

<sup>110</sup> Milgrom, *Numbers = Ba-Midbar: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 416–8.

<sup>111</sup> David L. Stubbs, *Numbers* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009), 146.

<sup>112</sup> Noth, Martin. *Numbers: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1968), 121–2.

considered a product of JE.<sup>113</sup> Milgrom extends the number of rebellions to four: “Dathan and Abiram versus Moses, Korah and the chieftains versus Aaron, Korah and the Levites versus Aaron [...and] Korah and the community versus Moses and Aaron.”<sup>114</sup>

Budd’s reconstruction of the literary history of the section is common fare:

1. A pre-Yahwistic tradition tells of the refusal of Dathan and Abiram, two Reubenites, to engage in the successful settlement from the south (v 12).
2. The Yahwist takes up this story into his tradition of a Transjordanian journey, interpreting the refusal as an unwillingness to wait on Moses, and seeing the whole as an overt challenge to the leadership of Moses. They, and all belonging to them, are swallowed by the ground and go down to Sheol (vv 1b, 21, 12–15, 25, 27b–31, 33a).
3. Some elaboration of the disaster is made (vv 32a, 33b, 34).
4. An early priestly accretion introduces 250 laymen whose claim to the right to offer incense is refuted by a test. The substance of this survives in vv 2b, 4–7, 18, 35.
5. The author of Numbers introduces Korah as a rebel, identifying him as a Levite, and elaborating the existing tradition in the interests of establishing his distinction between priests, the sons of Aaron, and Levites, and confirming the supremacy of the former. His contribution is evident in vv 1a, 3, 8–11, 16–17, 19–24, 26–27a, 32b, 33b.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Budd, 181; Krašovec, 134.

<sup>114</sup> Milgrom, *Numbers*, 415.

<sup>115</sup> Budd, 181; Krašovec, 184.

The obvious question that arises from the midst of such historical-critical arguments is whether a heavily-redacted text can reflect a type-scene. The presence of the subtle nuance of literary devices seems counterintuitive to the presumed multiple layers of a diachronically edited text. The very nature of redaction criticism presupposes that the final result is not seamless, reflecting imperfections that serve as clues to the various threads united by an editor(s). Even redacted texts, though, must represent a unified whole in the mind of the compiler, and the presence of a mental schema used in assembling the final form of the text means that the form given to that text makes sense to the editor. So the question then becomes, “would an editor utilize a type-scene to shape a narrative?” The answer to this question lies in whether or not a type-scene is present in the text. Krašovec notes, “It is generally agreed that this section is a complex of traditions....The final editor, however, worked the various traditions together in the hope of providing a unifying theological perspective.”<sup>116</sup>

Allowing for the presence of redaction in the text, the unifying theological perspective Krašovec suggests must necessarily be presented in the form of unified narrative. The theological perspective resulting from organized arrangement of traditions must also make sense in terms of story. Hebrew historiography frequently advances theology through narrative, and the theology of Numbers 16 is no different. The narrative elements combine to underscore the theologized view of the history, but also to tell the story in a way that that theology would be literarily delivered by the editor and received by the intended audience. The final shape of the narrative, then, reflects a conventional understanding of historiography—an understanding that is both theological in nature and narratively resonates with the readers. The divine messenger retribution type-scene encapsulates both that theology and the historiography through which the theology is

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<sup>116</sup> Krašovec, 134.

delivered. If this perspective is indeed accurate, then the redactor combined traditions in a manner that fit into the conventional expectation for divine retribution. Both stories unite to reveal the convention the redactor uses to structure the narrative: the type-scene.

The broader topic under discussion—the presence of a Hebrew literary convention related to the opposition of a divine messenger—is present in the text irrespective of the level of redaction and episode conflation present in Numbers 16. Even assuming the presence of multiple sources underlying the final composition of Numbers 15–16, the convention is still present. Moses is commanded to make a verbal statement regarding the tassels and their connection to holiness. The text contains a counter-statement, mouthed by Korah. Moses offers a verbal response hinting at the fate of his opponents, after which they suffer a unique fate which indicates divine involvement in the punishment. Allowing for any level of redaction does not negate the presence of a conventional literary framework for presenting an episode of divine retribution. Budd avers: “The author’s main concern in this section [Num 12] is to substantiate his vision of the priestly hierarchy.”<sup>117</sup> Budd’s perspective still allows for the literary portrayal of resistance to a divine messenger expressed through a common literary convention. Assuming Budd’s assertion is correct, the Priestly author of Numbers still utilizes the convention of divine messenger opposition to advance his polemic.

This is a crucial argument applicable throughout this study. The assertion is not for the dating of any particular material, but for the presence of a convention within the final result. What is significant is that the convention exists independently of the dating of the text. This fact further suggests that the convention is deeply embedded in ancient Israelite culture. If the convention is present in presumed early sources (i.e., Yahwist), presumed late sources (i.e.,

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<sup>117</sup> Budd, 190.

Priestly) and everything in between (E, D), as well as in known-dated non-redacted material, then the convention can arguably be considered a significant component of ancient Hebrew historiography.

One potential weakness of this possibility is that unless the convention can be shown to be absent from certain eras, its utility to assist in dating a given text is minimal. While vocabulary and syntax provide firmer ground on which to date texts, conventional elements like type-scenes are revealed in and connected to the final form of the text, irrespective of their earlier presence in constituent sources. In addition, type-scenes are by definition more fluid—the literary edges are fuzzy, limiting their value in affixing an era of composition to the text.

A related issue arising from treating Numbers 16 as a prototypical scene is the broader dating implications. The presence of a type-scene in a text in which the final form is assumed to be late (P) does not indicate that the convention existed in earlier Israelite literary contexts. In other words, how can Numbers 16 reflect a *prototypical* scene if it is a late composition? It is useful to consider the scene typical because Num 16 presents the fullest development of the scene. Even allowing for a redacted text, Num 16 includes the component pieces that fill out the scene. Further, even allowing for a late date of composition for the section places the scene as the culmination of the literary device, the usage of which is predominant through the written history of the text, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

### **The Declaration by Yahweh**

The scene begins in Num 16 with the introduction of Korah and his associates. The question arises, then, as to what constitutes Yahweh's declaration. What exactly is the divine declaration by the divine messenger which the antagonist opposes?

In the case of Numbers 16, the pericope begins with the introduction of Korah and his associates initiating—seemingly independently of any declaration by Moses—a rebellion against Moses’ authority. The nearest declaration Moses makes is as the direct conduit of Yahweh’s message at the end of chapter 15. To determine if the Moses’ verbal material is connected to the suggested type-scene, a brief exploration of the connection between Moses’ statement at the end of chapter 15 and the rebellion of chapter 16 is warranted.

The final section of chapter 15 describes Yahweh’s requirement that the people place tassels on their garment hems as a visual reminder to obey the law, resulting in communal consecration to Yahweh (הֵייתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים לְאֱלֹהֵיכֶם). The command to alter their garments is narrated as Yahweh’s imperative to Moses in 15:38: “דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.” Moses, then, serves as Yahweh’s messenger to the people commanding them to perform a specific task to result in holiness at the communal level. In that context, then, Korah’s specific rebuttal in 16:3 makes sense. Speaking on behalf of Yahweh, Moses’ use of the *qal* of הֵי with the adjective קְדוֹשִׁים in 15:40 offers a mechanism to make holiness a trajectory—something that the Israelite community might *become* through obedience, rooted in the mnemonic memory device of the garment tassel. In 16:3, however, Korah in his response to Moses omits the verb, making קְדוֹשִׁים a qualitative statement about the Israelite community—they were *already* holy, as evidenced by Yahweh’s presence in their midst.

Jacob Milgrom offers this very perspective, albeit rooted in his assumptions about the priestly paradigm associated with source critical theory:

This claim [that the entire community is holy] is anathema to the priestly teaching that only priests are holy [...]. It is a clever application of the command to “be holy” at the end of the previous section (15:40), and it may account for the juxtaposition of the story

of Korah's rebellion to the commandment on fringes. In effect, Korah argues that if all of Israel aspires to holiness by wearing a priestly mixture of their garments [...], why should they not be eligible for the priesthood itself?<sup>118</sup>

Korah's resistance to the idea of the tassels may well spring from Moses' allowing the broader community a status of holiness similar to that of the priests.<sup>119</sup>

The issue of a potential connection between the end of Numbers 15 and Korah's rebellion in chapter 16 becomes nearly Gordian in its complexity when factoring in the potential redaction history of the section. But even beyond the potential declaration of Yahweh in Num 15, the significance of such a relationship of Numbers 15 to chapter 16 lies in the connection of Moses' status as Yahweh's messenger. In this instance, the *position* of the divine messenger is the idea to which the antagonists object. Moses *himself* is the divine statement that will be resisted.

In this sense, this scene is paradigmatic of the convention. The functioning of a human being as Yahweh's emissary implies that any statement that emissary makes necessarily reflects the divine will. God is vested in more than just affirming the verbal statements of the messenger. While God's words are delivered through the messenger, it is the messenger's status as a representative that is crucial for those words to carry authority. Further, Moses is the paramount prophet. Yahweh's capacity to express himself through a human representative finds its zenith in Moses. Consequently, subsequent scenes in which an antagonist opposes a divine messenger will allude in varying degrees to the rebellion engineered by Korah and his followers.

Similar to the incident in which Miriam and Aaron oppose Moses, Moses makes no strong verbal statement to those confronting him. Rather, he himself is the declaration by

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<sup>118</sup> Milgrom, 131.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 413.



Yahweh. The opposition is against his status as Yahweh’s representative over Korah and his followers. The status of Moses and Aaron as Yahweh’s representatives has been clearly established by the destruction of Korah and his associates. Moses attributes the retribution to Yahweh’s activity, but the people ignore his involvement and instead blame Moses and Aaron for the destruction of the “Lord’s people” (עַם יְהוָה).

### **The counter-statement by the opposition**

Numbers 16 opens with a list of four antagonists who will lead a larger group of 250 Israelite leaders in offending Yahweh. All will be the recipients of divine retribution in the narrative. Their offense is simple in 16:2—they stand in opposition to Moses. The phrase לִפְנֵי מִן indicates an antagonistic relationship and appears elsewhere only twice in Joshua 7:12 and 7:13, in which the Israelites stand in opposition to their enemies.

In 16:3 the assembled group offers the verbal opposition to the prophet. Noth sees the verse as clear evidence of Priestly concerns—the clear advocacy for parameters of the priesthood.<sup>120</sup> In this instance, the complaint is twofold. First, the group takes issue with character, suggesting that theirs is sufficient for the request they are making. Korah and his companions are in effect demanding specialized position and status based on their character. At its core, their presumption of a personal holiness that merits cultic status is an affront to the holiness of Yahweh. In reality, there is no comparison, and their affront will prove to be fatal.

The second issue the rebels have is their inferior status to Moses. Their complaint is about the hierarchical structure of which was Moses and Aaron were at the top. Korah’s disagreement with Moses comes from jealousy over his lower-tier priestly status.<sup>121</sup> Yahweh

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<sup>120</sup> Noth, 123–4.

<sup>121</sup> Adriane Leveen, *Memory and Tradition in the Book of Numbers* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 114–20.

was with the entire assembly, making parity (בְּתוֹכָם יְהוּה) with Moses reasonable in their minds. “Korah is not merely siding with the 250 who wish to offer incense. He is one of the ‘sons of Levi’ with rights of his own and pressing for the special rights reserved for the sons of Aaron. He is challenging Moses and Aaron from *within* the priestly hierarchy, and not from outside.”<sup>122</sup> The group consists of Levites, Reubenites, and various leaders of Israel, presumably drawn from each of the tribes. The non-Levites in the group are not demanding cultic responsibilities; rather they are rejecting Moses’s divine authority.

Both issues reflect a severe misunderstanding of the divine-human relationship. That misunderstanding creates the room for arrogance, both of which are distilled down and directed at Yahweh’s divine messenger.

### **The response by the divine messenger**

Moses’ response to the antagonists, incorporated into Num 16:15–30, forms part of the reasoning behind the argument for a heavily redacted text. Moses’ makes several statements in the section. His first statement begins in v. 8 in which he castigates Korah and his contingent of Levites for their audacity. Moses then issues a separate summons to Dathan and Abiram, which the pair refuses. Moses addresses God, imploring him to reject the offering based in Moses’ own integrity. The narrative then shifts back to Moses speaking to Korah in which he repeats the summons to Korah and his followers to present themselves, with the tools to offer incense, before the Lord on the following day.

In Num 16:19, the entire congregation of Israel meets at Korah’s behest. Yahweh takes the opportunity to insist that Moses clear out of the way so that he can destroy the

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<sup>122</sup> Budd, 187.

congregation.<sup>123</sup> Only Moses' intervention, reminding Yahweh in v. 22 of his justice concept of limited individualized retribution, spares the community.<sup>124</sup> Yahweh's retribution at this point becomes targeted specifically against Dathan and Abiram. He commands Moses to command the congregation to remove itself from the vicinity of the antagonists' dwellings, which Moses does. With Num 16:27 the punishment of both groups merges: Korah will receive the same punishment as Dathan and Abiram.

Moses' final and most significant declaration in the narrative occurs in vv. 28–30 and is all but a declaration of the convention regarding divine retribution relating to divine messenger opposition. His verbal statement provides the assembly with two mutually exclusive indicators of his status as divine messenger. The manner of their death will be the cue for that status. Should the antagonists die a natural death, Moses holds no special place as a divine messenger. On the other hand, his divine status will be confirmed not only by his antagonists' immediate deaths, but deaths that are unique.

Another crucial aspect of the convention is that Moses equates God sending him with the treating of the Lord with contempt. In v. 28, the first half of Moses' argument will prove that "the Lord has sent me..." (יְהוָה שְׁלָחַנִי). The statement that Yahweh sent Moses parallels the later statement "then you will know that these men despised the Lord" (וַיִּדְעֻתֶם כִּי נִאֲצוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵלֶּה אֶת־יְהוָה). Vv. 29 and 30 are juxtaposed in an antithetical parallel structure which pivots on the manner of death:

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<sup>123</sup> This scene structure will be repeated beginning in Numbers 16:41, where the cycle of anger against Moses, Yahweh's determination to destroy the offenders, Moses' intervention, and a unique punishment will be rendered. Korah's destruction will serve as the divine declaration, followed by the people's resistance to Moses and his intervention.

<sup>124</sup> "While the people understood natural catastrophes as the result of human (mis)conduct, they also assumed that Yahweh would punish only the guilty. In other words, they assumed that Yahweh was a just deity, meting out punishment to the guilty while sparing the innocent." Warren Robertson, *Drought, Famine, Plague and Pestilence: Ancient Israel's Understandings of and Responses to Natural Catastrophes*, Gorgias Dissertations in Biblical Studies 45 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010), 65.

Manner of death → Yahweh has not sent Moses

Manner of death → The rebels have disrespected Yahweh

The second half of each clause forms the parallel structure. The first half is the negative parallel of the second. Respecting Moses is the equivalent of respecting Yahweh and rejecting Moses is tantamount to rejecting Yahweh. Moses' status will be determined by the unique fate of his opponents.

### **Receipt of divine retribution in the form of a unique physical punishment**

Moses states that his status will be reflected in the retribution Yahweh sends. In Num 16:30, the conditional clause *וְאִם-בְּרִיאָה יִבְרָא* reads, "if he creates a creation." The noun *בְּרִיאָה* (from *ברא*) appears in the Hebrew Bible only here and in its preverbal position signifies a new, innovative creation.<sup>125</sup> Moses does not simply rely on the divine response at this point. Rather, he exercises his authority as the divine messenger and actually specifies the form of retribution. Whether the fate of a sinkhole or quake was a product of Moses' imagination or divine revelation is not mentioned. What is certain, for both the crowd and the reader, is that Moses is wielding divine power in direct response to the group's rebellion against his authority. Yahweh's power belongs to Moses as his representative.

The text describes two different fates for the two different groups of conspirators. Korah's demise at the hands of an earthquake aligns with Moses' test regarding his status as divine emissary. Korah is the recipient of divine retribution in the form of a new creation. Dathan and Abiram, while omitted from the specifics of Moses imprecation, will not see a heretofore unknown punishment. A complaint in Num 11:1 generated the same fiery retribution Dathan and

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<sup>125</sup> See Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka. *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 2013), §126a, 455.

Abiram will later receive.<sup>126</sup> Both fates, however, are unquestionably supernatural in origin, removing any intermediary—cultic or otherwise—between Israel and her deity. The results of such experiences are significant. “Natural disasters are not simply natural occurrences. They are also social phenomena, because they are phenomena interpreted and responded to by those people affected.”<sup>127</sup> As such, the punishment Moses’ opponents receive elevates him in the corporate psyche. By extension, the narrative serves to create the same effect in readers. The conventional use of extreme forms of retribution elevates the divine messenger.

## Review

The background of Num 16 is arguably complex, as is the literary aspect of its portrayal of divine retribution. With regard to the possibility of a textual final form created from constituent sources, it should be noted that the final form itself includes the conventional literary components of divine messenger opposition, suggesting that the redactor constructed a text that conformed to convention. If the text is heavily redacted, the key components of the convention—a divine declaration, counter-statement, divine response, and unique form of divine retribution—may still be seen.

Another issue arising after considering this text is how this paradigmatic scene informs Israelite historiography. As will be demonstrated in subsequent discussion, the connection of other divine messengers with Moses through the retribution delivered against their opponent is a common mechanism in the construction of Hebrew history. Because Moses is the first of a line of prophets, his character will function as an archetype for the literary portrayals of subsequent

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<sup>126</sup> The motif of eating, common in Numbers, is seen in both instances of retribution. “Swallow” (בלע) is used in 16:30 and 32 to describe the ground engulfing Korah, and “eat” (אכל) in v. 35. The presence of the motif in chapter 16 links the judgment of Moses’ opponents to the judgments of Miriam (Num 12), as well as the corporate complaints in Num 11 and 21. See Leveen, 144–5.

<sup>127</sup> Robertson, *Drought, Famine, Plague and Pestilence*, 49.

divine messengers. When an antagonist opposes a divine messenger and Yahweh delivers an extreme punishment on the offender, the reader knows that God is affirming that divine messenger with the same voracity with which he historically affirmed Moses. Yahweh's person and activity are in no way diminished because of Moses' absence. Rather, the convention demonstrates that Yahweh is every bit as present and powerful as he was with Moses. The divine messenger, validated through retribution, functions as an important component in Hebrew historiography—a convention that reflects one way in which Yahweh participates in Hebrew history.

### **2.3 Miriam's Leprosy (Numbers 12)**

Numbers 12 contains another account of direct opposition to Moses' position as Yahweh's divine messenger. In this instance, the opposition comes not from a community of priests, but from Aaron and Miriam.

Similar to the treatment of Num 16, Num 12 is also considered to reflect a redacted text. The source-theory-fueled discussion regarding the construction of the narrative is seen predominantly in the identity of Moses' wife in Num 12:1 and Aaron's role as offender. Many understand Num 12 as an early J/E "base narrative supplemented with 'Aaron' material, though opinions differ as to the precise extent of the supplementation."<sup>128</sup> Budd sees a unified construction by the Yahwist.<sup>129</sup> Others argue for an Elohist core rooted in a more sophisticated stance on prophecy.<sup>130</sup> No matter the compositional origins of the text, the polemical elevation of Moses figures prominently in any prospective reconstruction. Budd, for instance, states that "the Yahwist appears to have built the story around two "facts" of tradition—the marriage of Moses

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<sup>128</sup> Budd, 133.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 133–6.

<sup>130</sup> Alan W. Jenks, *The Elohist and North Israelite Traditions* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977), 54–5.

to a Cushite, and Miriam's leprosy. His real purpose is to highlight the error of opposing Moses."<sup>131</sup> Leveen takes a different approach, suggesting that "within the final form of Numbers, Miriam's opposition may well be part of a "carefully crafted" description of Moses' unique relationship with God depicted early in Numbers that "is being challenged and dismantled piece by piece."<sup>132</sup> Leveen's suggestion, however, is weakened in part by the presence of the conventional scene that reinforces rather than undermines Moses' status as divine messenger.

### **The declaration by Yahweh**

Similar to the Korah-rebellion narrative in Num 16, Num 12 also lacks a clear verbal statement given in divine authority by the messenger of God. Here, too, the focus of the text's composer is on Moses' *status* as divine messenger itself. As the prototype of subsequent messengers, Moses functions in a manner indistinguishable from his spoken words; he himself is both the message of Yahweh and the divinely designated conduit for that message. As such, resisting Moses as divine spokesman is tantamount to resisting God himself.

### **The counter-statement by the opposition**

The initial source of discontent of the pair in 12:1 is limited to the identification of Moses' wife as Cushite. Moses' marriage as the impetus for Aaron's and Miriam's displeasure is seemingly disconnected from the competitive nature of their complaint in 12:2. There, the pair advocates for their equivalent status as Yahweh's mouthpieces, their objection apparently unrelated to the ethnicity of Moses' wife. Budd suggests that while the Yahwist utilized the dual traditions of Moses' marriage to a Cushite and Miriam's leprosy as a springboard to advance Mosaic authority, he held no particular interest in foreign marriage. Rather, Miriam's elevated

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<sup>131</sup> Budd, 138.

<sup>132</sup> Leveen, 86.

and well-known status in Israel made her a good literary foil, useful for demonstrating Moses' superiority over even the elite of Israel.<sup>133</sup>

Miriam and Aaron both sin by speaking against Moses based on the identity of his Cushite wife.<sup>134</sup> Rather than a rejection of the woman as a Cushite, the two siblings reject her because of her *non-Israelite* identity.<sup>135</sup> In some capacity, their complaint reflects the effects of the marriage on Moses' leadership. The primary lawgiver has not consulted with nor submitted to his siblings in regard to his selection of wife—hence their complaint. An alternative possibility was the current influence she held over Moses, potentially impacting his decisions as the leader of Israel and relegating Miriam and Aaron to an inferior status.<sup>136</sup>

As Moses' wife and within the patriarchal milieu of the time, she was a part of Moses' household and arguably an extension of the prophet himself. Ultimately, though, the siblings' displeasure with the Cushite woman culminates with the expansion of their opposition to Moses. Miriam and Aaron extend their opposition by verbalizing their own justification for criticism of Moses' based on their own status as Yahweh's messengers. Leveen suggests that the verbalization is the at the center of their sin, arguing that "complaint" represents a sub-category of speech—a verbal "weapon of subversion."<sup>137</sup> Miriam's and Aaron's problem is not just their attitude toward Moses, but that they verbalize it. Exodus 15:20 identifies Miriam as a prophetess,

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<sup>133</sup> Budd's contention is relevant here precisely because of the literary mechanism through which the author of Num 12 expresses that superiority—the type-scene that validates Yahweh's messenger (138).

<sup>134</sup> The equation of Moses' wife in Num 12 with Zipporah is debated. See Stubbs, 122.

<sup>135</sup> That the siblings' object to Moses' wife's race and skin color is unlikely. Prejudice based on skin color is a modern construction, inapplicable to the ancient Near East (Dennis T. Olson, *Numbers* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1996), 71).

<sup>136</sup> Renita J. Weems, *Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible* (San Diego: LuraMedia, 1988), 72–4.

<sup>137</sup> Leveen, 86–8.



and her prophecy in the form of a song of praise to Yahweh does not make it any less oracular. Aaron, of course, held divinely imparted status as the High Priest, and so felt confident in his own status as divine messenger. Both siblings hold cultic prominence in Israel and so possess the capacity to undermine or even negate Moses' superiority. By speaking their opposition to Moses, they attempt to do just that.

### **The response by the divine messenger**

This component deviates somewhat from the proposed typical scene structure. The type-scene here undergoes a deliberate modification of the divine messenger response in order to emphasize Moses' status. After the complaint issued by Miriam and Aaron, Moses makes no verbal response to Miriam and Aaron. Instead, the response component by the divine messenger is carefully altered in several significant ways.

First, immediately following the siblings' complaint, any potential response Moses' might offer is derailed by the phrase וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה (and Yahweh heard). In light of Moses' leadership of the people to this point, this brief phrase serves as a powerful foreshadowing of Yahweh's upcoming involvement. The reader knows who Moses is, and knows through this phrase that Yahweh is none too happy with the opposition to his divine messenger by Miriam and Aaron.

Second, to further emphasize the fact that Moses' would not be responding is the amusing observation given in 12:3: Moses was too humble to provide a response. Emphatically stated as וַעֲנִיו מְאֹד מִכֹּל הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה, the inclusion of verse 3 at this point is highly significant for the divine retribution to follow. The word choice for humble is עָנָו, reflecting the abject nature of humility and submission.<sup>138</sup> That the statement about Moses is made in the third person is notable. Moses' awareness of his own insignificance must be observed *for* him—his meek nature

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<sup>138</sup> NIDOTTE 3:451; HALOT 2:855.

will not allow him to verbally point out his meekness. The implication of the overall statement is that Moses lacks both the need and the capacity to defend himself against the charges. The comment about Moses' humility is rhetorically designed to "instantly undercut...Miriam and Aaron's complaint and seeks to persuade the reader to stand with Moses in his defense against his siblings."<sup>139</sup> Moses is the most honorable of the three siblings and deserves divine vindication of both his integrity and his status as Yahweh's messenger, which God himself provides in v. 6–8.

Third, the combination of Yahweh hearing in 12:2 and his demand that the three siblings appear at the tent of meeting set the stage for his direct intervention in the situation. So far, the narrative has pointed out that God has heard Miriam and Aaron criticize Moses and noted that Moses is too humble to respond to that criticism. Yahweh's intervention will be necessary to defend Moses when he will not defend himself.

Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, Yahweh's intervention on Moses' behalf inverts the element. Where normally a divine messenger would offer a verbal response to the opponent on Yahweh's behalf, in Num 12, Yahweh himself offers the verbal response on behalf of the divine messenger! By stepping into Moses' role and offering the verbal response himself, Yahweh becomes Moses' representative. This inversion forcefully underscores Moses' connection to God and role as divine messenger.

Though lacking the grammatical superlatives to communicate Moses' superior status, Yahweh nevertheless communicates his preeminence quite clearly. Using statements that contrast the normal mechanisms of prophecy, Yahweh claims intimacy with Moses. 12:6 lists this twofold mechanism of prophecy: visions and dreams. Both, while divinely inspired, are detached from

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<sup>139</sup> Olson, 71.

Yahweh in the sense that no true interpersonal dialogue is required for the prophet to present the oracular material—the prophet merely receives and relays the divine communiqué. Moses, however, differs in that his interaction with Yahweh revolves around personal interaction. God spells out this interaction with four statements indicating Moses holds a special position in his presence.

First is the use of “in all my house he is faithful.” Moses’ reliability (אֱמֻנָה) makes him stand out. Yahweh uses the term “my house” in an uncommon manner to refer to Israel as his possession.<sup>140</sup> Among Israel, whom God claims as a people belonging to him, Moses stands apart.

The second phrase expressing Moses’ prophetic supremacy is “mouth to mouth I will speak with him.” The metaphor expresses the face-to-face in which Yahweh talks with Moses. While Moses is not Yahweh’s equal by any measure, Yahweh approaches the relationship in an almost colloquial manner. Moses has the status before Yahweh to converse informally.

The third statement, “but clearly and not with riddles” may be considered a modification of the second. The synonymous parallel emphasizes intimate communication above typical oracular channels of revelation.

The fourth statement further clarifies Moses’ special status: “The form of the Lord he sees.” Apart from an ecstatic vision, the ability to see and experience Yahweh in an unhindered manner is reserved for only Moses within the confines of Scripture. Moses holds a unique status as divine messenger.

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<sup>140</sup> Cf. Jer 12:7. The term usually refers to the temple (Is 56:7; Ezek 23:39; Zech 1:16; Mal 3:10).

All four statements provide the basis for the question of divine accusation: וַיִּמְדוּעַ לֹא יִרְאוּהֶם. The initial ו serves to introduce the rhetorical question.<sup>141</sup> Moses' unique status is presented by Yahweh himself, who subsequently demands to know why Aaron and Miriam lacked the fear to criticize Moses. The implication is certainly clear. The two siblings *should* be afraid of criticizing Yahweh's messenger, because to do so merits a response from the object of fear. Yet the immediate context treats Moses as meek (עָנָו)—hardly the wellspring of terror that should inspire their caution. Rather, Yahweh himself is to be the object of fear. And that fear should exist when criticizing his preeminent messenger. Yahweh takes the “speaking against” Moses personally, which is appropriate since Moses is his emissary.

Num 12:9 chillingly concludes the divine messenger response which Yahweh makes on Moses' behalf: Seething with anger, Yahweh leaves, foreshadowing the retribution that will appear in v. 10.

### **Receipt of divine retribution in the form of a unique physical punishment**

Miriam's penalty is immediate and severe. She receives a physical form of leprosy that the text compares to snow. Num 12:10 emphasizes Miriam's transformation from having healthy to diseased skin is instantaneous. The verse uses the emphatic particle הִנֵּה twice to draw attention to her newly resulting leprous condition. The first describes her condition as present when the divine cloud leaves the Tent of Meeting. The second points out Aaron's perception of the leprosy as he turns toward his sister. Combined, both reveal Yahweh's immediate answer to his own rhetorical question he posed at the end of v. 8.

While Miriam is punished, Aaron apparently escapes any kind of divine retribution—at least in the physical sense—for his role in the offense. Some suggest Aaron escapes punishment

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<sup>141</sup> Joüon refers here to the “Waw of emotion,” suggesting a strong sentiment behind Yahweh's question (§177m, 614).

because Miriam is the chief antagonist. Stubbs suggests that the use of the third feminine singular in Num 12:1—”And Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses” (וַתְּדַבֵּר מִרְיָם וְאַהֲרֹן בְּמֹשֶׁה)—highlights Miriam’s role in leading Aaron against Moses.<sup>142</sup> Contra Stubbs, however, the feminine singular of דָּבַר does not function to portray Miriam as the primary instigator. The feminine verb here is prepositive, using the singular form appropriate for the first subject to describe the actions of a complex subject.<sup>143</sup> The listing of Miriam first may certainly suggest her role in instigating the opposition to Moses, but the argument is difficult to sustain solely from the syntax of 12:1.

While not innocent, Aaron is still punished for the offense. Yahweh has already appointed Aaron to the high priesthood, which carries with it special rules of sanctification and purity. Leprosy would certainly have disqualified Aaron from functioning as the high priest. But that explanation then begs the further question as to why Yahweh does not inflict a retribution on Aaron that would not violate his sanctified status. It may be argued that very little that Yahweh could do to Aaron would leave the priest’s sanctification intact. Any action God might take would express both his displeasure and his sovereignty. These combine to publicly communicate human inferiority and distance from God. Had Yahweh physically punished Aaron, he would have undermined Aaron’s ability to function as his priestly emissary. Consequently, then, avenues for physical retribution against Aaron are strongly curtailed. Rather, Aaron must receive a non-physical form of retribution, which is exactly what the text suggests he receives, although implicitly.

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<sup>142</sup> Stubbs, 124.

<sup>143</sup> Cf. Judg 5:1 and Gen 31:14.

Aaron's response to Miriam's leprosy is in the plural: אֶל־נָא תִשֶׁת עָלֵינוּ הַטָּאֹת אֲשֶׁר נִזְאַלְנוּ וְאֲשֶׁר קִטְּאַנוּ. He treats her punishment as retribution against both of them for their sin. Whether this response is due to familial affection or guilt over his own culpability is unclear. Clearer is Aaron's immediate awareness of the presence of retribution, his repentance, and his acknowledgement of Moses' as divine intercessor.

Aaron's plea that Miriam does not exist having decayed flesh like a stillborn baby in 12:12 uses אָכַל to inject the narrative into the broader theme in Numbers in which consumption is used as a framework for both sin and punishment:

The repeated use of אָכַל ...imposes its own narrative and theological order. In response to the people's desire to eat of Egypt's delicacies, their death by consumption makes a peculiar, logical sense. "Eating" as a form of death, actual or threatened, represents a fine example of the biblical concept of punishment "measure for measure."<sup>144</sup>

After Aaron's request, Moses intercedes for Miriam with Yahweh in v. 13. Yahweh's curt retort places Miriam in a position subservient to Moses, demanding in v. 14 that she be placed in isolation for a week. Miriam receives the lower limit possible for her isolation. A minimal shaming resulting from her father's hypothetically spitting in her face would require her placement outside the camp for seven days, so Yahweh commands that her isolation must match that of such a small shame.

## **Review**

Lepers experienced physical and its accompanying social isolation, as well as the discomforts of the disease itself. While leprosy is used elsewhere as a form of divine retribution, it is also here used here as a unique and extreme form of physical punishment that validates

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<sup>144</sup> Leveen, 145.

Moses' status as divine messenger. Budd considers the polemical aspect of the story to be obviously simple: "Essentially Miriam represents those who speak against the representatives of Mosaic authority. This and nothing more is the point of the story."<sup>145</sup>

Ultimately, any redaction history in relation to the presence of the type-scene holds true here just as it does in Num 16. The final form of the text includes the scene, indicating its presence as a literary convention which the editor utilized. By extension, it may be at least inferred that the convention is present late in the historiography of the Hebrew Bible without presuming its presence in earlier eras.

#### **2.4 Corporate Rebellion and Serpents (Numbers 21:1–9)**

A third narrative in Numbers involving divine retribution is worth examining. The book of Numbers covers the range of opposition to Moses. In Num 12, Moses is opposed by his siblings and co-leaders. In Num 16, he is challenged by the communal and cultic leaders. In Num 21, Moses will be opposed by the general community, and here, as in the other texts, the employment of a strange punishment gives rise to the possibility of a conventional treatment of divine retribution. Here as previously, no codified injunction against disrespecting the divine messenger exists. Without ever being forbidden from complaining, the people will be punished for doing so. The punishment—and its mitigation—are an oddity in Hebrew history.

#### **The declaration by Yahweh & divine messenger response**

The presence of the type-scene in Num 21 is admittedly questionable, and several arguments are reasonably offered against the presence of the type-scene at the outset. First, the declaration of Yahweh and his messenger's response are absent. The scene lacks any kind of divine declaration. There appears here no divine expression of presence or will against which the

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<sup>145</sup> Budd, 135.

people push. While Moses is the obvious immediate recipient of the complaints, the narrative advances Yahweh and Moses as the targets. The people’s specific sin is to “speak against God and Moses” (וַיְדַבֵּר הָעָם בְּאֵלֹהִים וּבְמֹשֶׁה). The expected structure would use the preposition על,<sup>146</sup> but Num 21:5 utilizes the less common construction of דָּבַר with the preposition כִּי to indicate an oppositional relationship.<sup>147</sup> While דָּבַר is frequently used in legal and official settings, there is no reason to suggest its use here is attached to any postured authoritative component. The people are merely disrespectfully voicing their discontent. The narrative lacks the clear juxtaposition of the divine messenger and opponent. The people are instead motivated by their own impatience with the journey to complain against God and Moses. Any command from the Lord through Moses—e.g., that the Israelites must continue their journey—may only be implicitly inferred, and then only weakly.

The episode also has no indication of any response by the divine messenger. The episode seamlessly moves from the people’s complaining to Yahweh’s sending the snakes. Moses will certainly be validated through the incident, but he has no role to play as divine messenger in legitimizing his own status. So of the four elements in the proposed scene, only two can be said to be clearly present. While there seems to be clear opposition to a divine messenger and the opponents receive an obvious and unique form of retribution, the episode lacks both a clear divine declaration and a prophetic response to the opposition.

### **The counter-statement by the opposition**

A second argument against the presence of the scene is that because of the first argument (i.e., the lack of a divine declaration), that the people’s complaints cannot function as a counter-

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<sup>146</sup> Cf. Deut 13:6, 2 Kings 22:19, 2 Chr 32:16, Is 37:22, Jer 25:13, Hos 7:13, and Amos 3:1.

<sup>147</sup> Cf. Ps 50:20.



statement at all. Their sin in this instance certainly is verbal in its expression. The people's speaking against God and Moses is expressed verbally in three statements. First, they objected to leaving Egypt only to die. The Israelite's second complaint was that there was no food and water available. Yahweh had previously provided manna (Exod 16:31–33), quail (Exod 16:13; Num 11:31–32), and water (Exod 17:1–7). Their grumbling was not only rooted in ingratitude; it was simply false. The third complaint is linked to the second: that they dislike the worthless food that was available (קִצְצָה בְּלֶחֶם הַקֶּלֶקֶל). This final complaint effectively belies the second. God had indeed provided food, but not food in keeping with their preference.

The opposition also lacks a literary focal point in terms of characterization. The portrayal of the people's resistance to Moses does not crystalize in the opposition of a single antagonist. The incident in Num 21 differs from both Miriam's opposition to Moses in Num 12 and Korah's rebellion in Num 16 in that it was apparently a decentralized corporate sin, lacking any prominent agitation of the larger corporate body by a disgruntled leader. The offense is corporate and does not clearly depict the kind of opposition or confrontation suggested by the scene.

The people's deliverance from Egypt was predicated on their misery there. In Exod 3:7–8, Yahweh states his intention to bring the Israelites to a good land. In the same context, Moses is appointed as Yahweh's emissary to make the deliverance and journey possible. Moses, then, is a symbolic representation of Yahweh's intention to bring the people to the land of Canaan. By accusing Moses—and by extension, Yahweh—of attempted genocide, they reject what Yahweh has plainly stated and offered, effectively calling him a liar. But this rejection happens as the culmination of the people's complaints and relies on the wider narrative thread of the people's longing for Egypt which they have made on multiple occasions (Exod 14:11, 16:3, 17:3, 32:4; Num 11:5, 14:2–4, 20:5). The significant point here is that the assembly's complaint reaches

*beyond* the immediate pericope to link with these previous episodes. Further, while their complaint does undermine the nature of God by rejecting his declaration in and through Moses, that declaration is not specifically made within the confines of the immediate narrative, suggesting the absence of the scene in the immediate context of Num 21:4–9. It is the connection to Egypt in the broader Exodus–Numbers arc in which the pericope participates. Consequently, the presence of the type-scene can be considered only if the scene assumes the divine declarations as already having been made by Yahweh in the previous complaining episodes. The type-scene in Num 21, then, would reflect a modified scene that both encapsulates and summarizes previous complaining episodes.<sup>148</sup>

The text seems clear that the offense is verbal in nature, further evidencing the presence of a convention that understood retribution as merited because of *verbal* opposition to a prophet is the people’s reaction to the presence of the snakes. Although no written proscription existed in the law, the people’s reaction makes it clear that they conventionally understood that their offense was sinful and the cause of their suffering. The people exhibit a clear awareness of sin in their response to Moses. They say that they have sinned when they *spoke* against God and Moses in Num 21:7 (קָצַף בַּלֶּהֱם הַקִּלְקֵל). The repentance is not for their attitude, but for *verbalizing* that resentment toward the Yahweh and his messenger. Their verbal opposition itself is a physical expression of rebellion which they understood to be the impetus for Yahweh’s wrath.

### **Receipt of divine retribution in the form of a unique physical punishment**

The unique form of physical retribution in Num 21 comes in the puzzling form of snakes. It is only after the short-tempered people verbalize their complaints that retribution in the form of

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<sup>148</sup> The serpent incident may be viewed as the culmination of a series of complaints throughout the Exodus narrative arc rather than an isolated episode. Amy Birkan (“The Bronze Serpent, a Perplexing Remedy: An Analysis of Num. 21:4-9 in the Light of Near Eastern Serpent Emblems, Archaeology and Inner Biblical Exegesis” (McGill University, 2005), 35–71) makes just this argument, suggesting that Num 21 ends the complaining thread with the people’s first repentance and an awareness of Moses’ role as mediator.

venomous snakes occurs. Snakes as expected forms of divine retribution are not unheard of (Jer 8:17; Amos 9:3), but occur in narrative texts only here.<sup>149</sup> While Yahweh's use of animals are seen in the type-scene occurrences elsewhere, the presence of snakes adds additional layers of complexity to the narrative.<sup>150</sup> Serpents are widely known to have carried both positive and negative connotations in the ancient Near East.<sup>151</sup> While the seeming oddity of the account has led some to suggest a later date for the text that coincides with Canaanite snake symbology, Egypt offers a much better fit for the use of the imagery in Numbers.<sup>152</sup> With the exception of Moses' confrontation with the Egyptian court priests, snakes do not figure prominently in the Exodus arc. Serpents do, on the other hand, figure prominently in the ancient Egyptian theology and culture.<sup>153</sup>

More perplexing than the use of snakes as the source of retribution, however, is their use as the divine provision for healing from that retribution. The bronze serpent heals the bite victim who views it, but also effectively invites understanding it as a talisman, imbued itself with with the self-efficacy of magic power.<sup>154</sup> Bronze serpents were commonly used for healing in Egypt and the broader ancient Near East, and in the case of Egypt, were commonly connected to the

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<sup>149</sup> The New Testament alludes to the convention of divine retribution through serpents when the Apostle Paul was bitten by a snake and observers mistakenly assumed that retribution from the gods had finally caught up with him (Acts 28:3–5).

<sup>150</sup> See discussions of 1 Kgs 13 and 2 Kgs 2 below for attritional instances of the type-scene utilizing animals.

<sup>151</sup> Olson, 136.

<sup>152</sup> Birkan, 9–20.

<sup>153</sup> See Donald M. Bailey, "A Snake-Legged Dionysos from Egypt, and Other Divine Snakes," *JEA* 93 (2007): 263–70.

<sup>154</sup> Hezekiah will later destroy the pole in response to the people's treatment of the object as an idol and their incorporation of it into cultic worship (2 Kgs 18:4). See also Karen Randolph Joines, "Bronze Serpent in the Israelite Cult," *JBL* 87 (1968): 245–56.

use of sympathetic magic.<sup>155</sup> The confusion over the text arises from Yahweh’s command to provide a remedy that is indistinguishable from sympathetic magic. That “the most prominent element in the tradition of Moses and the bronze serpent seems to be that of sympathetic magic — the belief that the fate of an object or person can be governed by the manipulation of its exact image,” as Karen Joines notes, is difficult to avoid.<sup>156</sup>

It should further be noted that the narrative avoids addressing the removal of the threatening serpents. The people’s request for Moses to intercede for them is very specific: they want him to pray that God would “cause the snakes to turn aside” (קִצְּצָה בְּלִקְחָם הַקִּלְקֵל). Moses prays accordingly, but Yahweh does not answer his prayer by removing the snakes. Instead, God does nothing about the *presence* of the serpents but provides a method whereby their threat is mitigated. The snakes—and presumably their ongoing biting—remain. Only their effect is minimized through Yahweh’s provision of the bronze standard. God’s provision leaves the retribution in place while removing its terminal effect. And, the people must still choose trust in Yahweh and look to the bronze serpent in order to find healing.

The presence of the snakes, unresolved in the narrative, literarily suggests a permanence to the retribution. The narrative resolution occurs only after the community moves on to Oboth in v. 10. The mechanism for healing is also made available only after the people’s repentance. The snakes are still present and biting after the people repent, but the availability of healing makes the suffering they create temporary and coincidental. The divine retribution remains as a didactic

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<sup>155</sup> Hector Avalos, *Illness and Health Care in the Ancient Near East: The Role of the Temple in Greece, Mesopotamia, and Israel* (Harvard Semitic monographs; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 20 (further discussion on 337–349). See also Karen Randolph Joines, *Serpent Symbolism in the Old Testament: A Linguistic, Archaeological, and Literary Study* (Haddonfield: Haddonfield House, 1974). Ian Shaw suggests that a cippus amulet containing an image of the god Horus holding snakes was likely used for the healing of venomous snake bites (*The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 473).

<sup>156</sup> Joines, “Bronze Serpent,” 251.

reminder, but no longer appears as direct retaliation. Yahweh's generosity to his people is greater than his offense at their infraction.

The presence of these two elements (the presence of Egyptian ophidian symbology and the use of sympathetic magic) in Num 21 necessitate looking beyond the limited scope of the immediate narrative to the broader role of Egypt played in the Israelite formation and experience. The frequent presence of Egypt throughout the series of complaints suggests Egypt should be placed at the center of the serpent episode. But for what purpose? Moses' authority as divine messenger is not being questioned here. There is no challenge to the legitimacy of either his position or his statements, and there is no juxtaposed opposition to which Moses responds. Rather, the entire incident seems shifted in focus to a memorialization of the wide-ranging role Egypt has played in the Israelite consciousness. Moses, in the tradition of Egyptian magic, utilizes the conventional serpent motif as a reminder of Egypt. The judgment against the congregational complaining mirrors Yahweh's judgment against Egypt and the impotency of Egyptian theology. Similarly, the provision of healing through sympathetic magic imagery mirrors Yahweh's deliverance from Egypt. In this way, the serpent episode functions as a reminder to the Israelite's of Yahweh's judgment and mercy in the face of the people's desire for an Egyptian identity. Both together are a call to remembrance of the Exodus and of their own complaining throughout the journey, as well as Yahweh's willingness to overlook even the shallow ingratitude of his people.

Because the text does not offer specific numbers regarding the deaths from the serpents, opting instead for the vague "many" (רַב), there is no way to know the impact this incident had on the Israelite community. Other offenses resulted in huge and quantified punishments (Num 25:1–9; Num 16:49), but Moses and Joshua nowhere use this incident as a retrospective didactic. The

event nevertheless represents a relevant episode to Numbers' composer. Combined with Miriam's opposition to Moses in Num 12 and Korah's rebellion in ch. 16, an aspect of the retribution theology of the author begins to emerge. Verbally opposing Moses in his capacity as divine messenger—whether in jealousy or weary resentment—invites divine retribution from Yahweh

### **Review**

Certainty about the presence of the type-scene in Num 21 appears elusive. The scene may be loosely structured, with the missing elements jettisoned as part of the composition. Type-scenes by nature are flexible and are easily tailored to an author's purpose in any given context. Alternatively, the type-scene may be abandoned in favor of creating an intertextual connection with previous complaining episodes through retaining the underlying convention that opposition to a divine messenger represents a dangerous choice. Ultimately, the Num 21 incident resists easy classification as a divine messenger opposition type-scene and so the scene's presence there should be considered tentative at best.

### 3. The Prophets: Heirs of Moses

Within the Deuteronomistic History, narratives portraying opposition to divine messengers are minimal prior to the divided monarchy. The book of Joshua assumes fidelity from the people toward Yahweh, and while Achan disobeys Joshua, neither Achan nor anyone else opposes Joshua in his status as Moses' successor. And while Judges tracks communal apostasy, Yahweh still functions as the literary standard by which the people's conduct is evaluated.<sup>157</sup>

Opposition to prophetic messengers during the united monarchy is similarly minimal. While Saul's progressive degradation is seen in his apostasy, he merely disobeys—rather than positions himself against—Samuel. Saul esteems Samuel to such an extent that he considers necromancy a viable option for receiving a divine message from Yahweh.<sup>158</sup>

The literary pivot between conventional respect and disrespect for the man of God occurs in 1 Kings 12. Rehoboam's planned assault against the northern tribes is diverted after a message by Shemaiah. The response of obedience to the message in v. 24 is plural (שָׁמְעוּ), reflecting submission to the prophetic message by the entire military. But it is Jeroboam's construction of alternative cultic sites at Dan and Bethel that initiates direct resistance to the prophets in the Deuteronomistic History.

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<sup>157</sup> Yahweh, by his literary absence, arguably still functions literary as the standard after chapter 16.

<sup>158</sup> Bill T. Arnold, "Necromancy and Cleromancy in 1 and 2 Samuel," *CBQ* 66 (2004): 199–213. Arnold offers the binary of Saul's choice between legitimate prophecy and "illegitimate magical ritual" as the narrative's mechanism for characterizing Saul (211). Saul's characterization is here a bit more nuanced, however. In the necromancy incident, Saul acts consistently with his portrayal in 1 Samuel as a theological pragmatist: his focus is on his preferred end result rather than fidelity to the process. Attempting to utilize necromancy to access Samuel reveals both Saul's respect for Samuel and in the deity the prophet serves. His initial complaint to Samuel laments Yahweh's departure and silence (1 Sam 28:15). Typical legitimate means of access to Yahweh have failed Saul, and so necromancy remains to his mind the only viable vehicle whereby he might obtain guidance from Yahweh.

### 3.1 Jeroboam's Deformity (1 Kings 13)

A highly complex passage regarding retribution is the confrontation of Jeroboam's apostasy and the disobedience of the man of God in 1 Kgs 13. Peppered with retribution incidents, the narrative follows the typical scene format in which Yahweh's representative makes a statement in divine authority and is verbally opposed by the antagonist. The antagonist is then punished in a unique manner, and the identity and proclamation of the divine messenger is validated.

#### The Declaration of Yahweh

Jeroboam's initial offense is his politically shrewd creation of alternative cultic centers in Bethel in Dan and the institution of heretical worship throughout his kingdom. Such activity reflects direct disobedience to Yahweh and is understood to be worthy of his wrath. Consequently, Yahweh responds to Jeroboam's apostasy with a public confrontation. The vehicle for the delivery of the divine oracle is the enigmatic "man of God" (אִישׁ אֶלֹהִים). Such individuals are frequently unnamed, which, in part, functions narratively to emphasize their role as divine messenger rather than on characterization.<sup>159</sup> As a divine representative, a man of God becomes the narrational proxy for Yahweh himself.

While Jeroboam's apostasy will bring ultimate punishment to the Northern Kingdom, his personal offense to Yahweh is two-fold. The divine messenger has already delivered Yahweh's oracle and predicted destruction for the apostasy. The initial reprisal will not be against Jeroboam *per se*, but against the altar at Bethel itself (1 Kings 13:2–3). The oracle is no doubt hyperbolic, referring symbolically to the entire system of apostasy which Jeroboam has initiated.

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<sup>159</sup> Alternatively, the title "man of God" is often perceived in redaction criticism as an indicator of an earlier text or story, often updated with specific characters. E.g., see S. L. McKenzie, "Historiography," *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books*, Bill T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson, eds. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 422.



The broad offense of the cultic centers is not the offense which the scene engages. Rather, that offense elicits the divine declaration from the man of God and sets the stage for the scene. It is Jeroboam's response to the declaration of Yahweh that will merit specific and additional punishment.

### **The Counter-statement by the Opposition**

Jeroboam is standing at the altar making a sacrifice when the man of God first appears. The king is functioning as a priest for the altar—a divine representative of the deity to which the altar is devoted—Yahweh, in this instance. Beyond the apostasy, then, Jeroboam commits a specific offense against Yahweh by acting directly against the man of God. Functioning in his royal capacity, Jeroboam stretches out his hand to order the detention of the man of God and verbally commands his royal assistants to seize the man of God (אִישׁ אֱלֹהִים). The action of stretching out the hand, combined with Jeroboam's location at the cultic altar, goes far beyond a mere royal injunctive. His actions are at the core theological in nature as he endeavors to act as an emissary for Yahweh.

The stretching out of the hand is often used as a divine expression of power.<sup>160</sup> Jeroboam stretches out his hand from his position as self-appointed divine proxy against Yahweh's legitimate proxy. The confrontation between them becomes a contest between legitimate proxies for Yahweh. The confrontation Jeroboam initiates is short-lived, however, resolved immediately and decisively in Yahweh's favor. Jeroboam's authoritative outstretched arm shrivels in a sign of theological impotence.

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<sup>160</sup> The eighth century BCE *Kulamuwa Inscription* uses the term as an expression of military power (trans. K. Lawson Younger, Jr. (COS 2.30:147)).

## Receipt of Divine Retribution in the Form of a Unique Physical Punishment

The man of God makes no specific response to Jeroboam's opposition. Rather, the retribution itself is the response. The retribution Jeroboam receives, consistent with the type-scene under discussion, is unique in its physical application. Divine retribution in the form of physical disfigurement is quite rare. Deformity and disability were considered conventional hallmarks of divine retribution (John 9:2), and were considered to render a victim imperfect, precluding them from some cultic activity (Lev 21:16–23). Both Miriam and Gehazi also suffer physical deformity—in the form of leprosy—for their roles in opposing Yahweh's messengers. In both Gehazi's and Jeroboam's case, while unique and poetically linked to the nature of the offense, the specific disfigurement maximizes the status of the divine messenger. Elisha removes Namaan's leprosy, but then *transfers* it to Gehazi *and* his descendants, elevating the socially perceived power of the prophet. Jeroboam's outstretched arm shrivels, with no input from the divine messenger, when the king attempts to accost the prophet. In a public cultic setting, Jeroboam and the deities which he represents are diminished by the expressed power of Yahweh.

In Jeroboam's case, the physical disfigurement amplifies not only the inefficacy of the deities he serves, but also his personal capacity to function cultically as a priest. While extra-biblical ancient Near Eastern literature provides scant information on the aspects of the participation of the disabled in cultic activity, there are records regarding the divine and social perspective. The Sumerian deity Enki assigned social roles and status to the various forms of disabled humans fashioned by Ninmah. The various roles (a king's patron attendants, artisans, and laborers) reveal that disability was both sourced in the divine realm and allotted a specific place in society by the gods.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> See also "Enki and Ninmah," trans. Jacob Klein (*COS* 1.159:518).

Punishment in the form of a withered hand is also another example of instrumental correspondence in which the object of offense is the specific recipient of punishment. Jeroboam's outstretched hand as a symbol of his authority becomes the specific target of God's punishment. By connecting the instrument of offense to a corresponding punishment, the source of the punishment—Yahweh himself—is made manifest.

The Hebrew perspective regarding precluding the disabled from cultic activity undoubtedly held in the Northern Kingdom. Jeroboam is not merely rendered impotent as a divine messenger, but is also eliminated from priestly service, further minimizing his connection to the gods and socially marginalizing him. Jeroboam's retribution, then, while physically unique, is also theologically significant. Yahweh's retribution against Jeroboam neutralizes the significance of the Northern Kingdom's preeminent apostate.

Beyond a disability precluding from priestly service, the larger issue of instrumental correspondence—punishment applied directly through the instrument of offense—is relevant here.

### **First Scene Epilogue**

After experiencing the withering of his hand, Jeroboam immediately turns to the conduit of the retribution. Whether Jeroboam is a political pragmatist or true pantheist is moot. Either type of individual will shift loyalty to the perceived source of power. Jeroboam is no exception and does so in appealing to the man of God for healing. The king appeals to the prophet for healing, who in turn entreats Yahweh, who reverses the deformity.

The epilogue to the first scene here sets up the second scene. In return for the healing, Jeroboam offers the man of God hospitality. The young prophet refuses, and that refusal functions as Yahweh's declaration for the upcoming narrative. The remainder of 1 Kgs 13 is an

engaging account of a complex manifestation of divine retribution. The narrative pursues the ultimate fate of the divine messenger who confronts Jeroboam but is directly connected to the retribution against the king. The didactic nature of the retribution will play out as the narrative shifts its attention to the departure and death of the man of God.

### **The Declaration by Yahweh**

The second declaration of Yahweh in 1 Kgs occurs after the healing of Jeroboam's withered hand. The king extends to Yahweh's messenger the culturally expected offer of hospitality and a reward, ostensibly in gratitude for his role in the healing. The specific declaration in this case is the one the man of God had previously received in verse 9. The threefold prohibition—to neither eat, drink, nor return by the same route—is a specific declaration regarding the man's personal conduct. The message from Yahweh is a simple command for obedience. The narrative highlights the command by repeating it a second time in 16–17.

This divine declaration is heavily emphasized in the narrative. The man of God twice (initially to Jeroboam and later to the old prophet) declines an invitation and roots his refusal in the command that he verbally repeats. Jeroboam's initial invitation serves no literary purpose other than to stress the importance of the command. The later repetition of the command elevates its centrality to the story—Yahweh has been very clear with the man of God regarding his obedience, and the prophet clearly understands those divine expectations.

### **The Counter-statement by the Opposition**

Initially, the man of God appears as the divine messenger involved in confronting Yahweh. He also serves as the divine messenger in presenting Yahweh's command for his obedience. The wrench in the works is the arrival of the old prophet who makes the same offer of

hospitality—sans reward—that Jeroboam makes. The first prophet’s response to the old prophet is initially the same as his response to Jeroboam—the word from Yahweh clearly prevents him from going.

The old prophet, while ostensibly loyal to Yahweh, lies in an effort to gain the man of God’s company. The old prophet makes an invitation similar to Jeroboam’s offer, likely motivated by the camaraderie among the prophetic community. The invitation lacks any ecstatic background—the old prophet simply desires to be hospitable.

Similar to his rejection of Jeroboam’s hospitality, the man of God also declines the old prophet’s invitation, saying that the word of the Lord (דְּבַר יְהוָה) prohibited him from remaining in Bethel (13:9–10; 16–17). When his invitation is declined, the old prophet lies to the man of God, offering a message in the name of Yahweh that he never provided. The fabrication is elaborate. The old prophet amplifies his credentials and experiences to make the message seem plausible. He identifies himself as a prophet, invokes the presence of an angel, and couches the message as a “word of Yahweh” (דְּבַר יְהוָה). The editorial comment דְּבַר יְהוָה (“he deceived him”) is terse in comparison.<sup>162</sup>

The chapter places an emphasis on the activity of Yahweh through the use of the phrase “by word of the Lord.” Of the thirteen occurrences of the construction בְּדְבַר יְהוָה in the Hebrew Bible, seven appear in 1 Kings 13. The prefixed ב provides the agency for prophetic actions, emphasizing that the man of God’s activities are precisely determined by the interests, will, and power of Yahweh. And it is Yahweh’s concern itself that becomes the vehicle for his will. In a

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<sup>162</sup> The DH seems comfortable with God being connected to dishonesty in some way. God himself authorizes the use of “inspired deceit” among Ahab’s prophets in 1 Kgs 22. Although God’s connection to the old prophet’s dishonesty is further removed, an underlying current may be his sovereignty over the old prophet’s lie in order to test obedience.

likely literary play, the *דָּבַר יְהוָה* in v. 20, voiced by a lying prophet, is revealed even as the man of God makes his choice to disobey.

In this instance, the old prophet gives his counterpart a message contradictory to the message the younger man received previously. The old prophet is clearly functioning as the antagonist to Yahweh. He not only attempts to deceive the younger prophet but does so in the name of Yahweh. Deut 18:20 makes the old prophet's statement a capital offense. He has become a spokesman for a false message and offered a counter-statement to the clear message received by the younger prophet. The younger prophet, then, must choose between the original revelation he initially received and the veracity of the new revelation which he prefers.

It is at this point that the narrator inverts the roles of the man of God and the old prophet. The younger prophet, apparently holding no fealty to Yahweh's command, accepts the lie and travels to the old prophet's house with him. In doing so, he shifts his role to that of the opponent of the divine messenger. He has, through his actions, rejected the clear message of Yahweh.

The man of God is not opposing a specific messenger of God. Rather, he is opposing the word of the Lord which he himself received. He has become his own opponent, opposing the message he both delivered and possesses.

### **The Response by the Divine Messenger**

The old prophet also inverts his role here, shifting from antagonist to divine messenger when the word of Yahweh comes to him at the dinner table. He has received his desire of sharing hospitality with the younger prophet but has accomplished his goal through deceit. In the middle of eating—the expressed point of the younger prophet's disobedience—the old prophet receives a legitimate message from Yahweh and delivers it to the man of God.

The two-part message the older prophet delivers to his fellow prophet is straightforward. Yahweh states that the prophet disobeyed and that, as a consequence, he would not be buried in his ancestral tomb. The prediction is clear foreshadowing of the fate that will soon befall the disobedient messenger. The old prophet personally saddles his donkey for his colleague. The donkey is inserted here because the animal will play an important role in the divine retribution the man of God will soon receive.

### **Receipt of Divine Retribution in the Form of a Unique Physical Punishment**

The punishment for the disobedient prophet is multi-layered and intense. First, the man of God will experience the shame of being disconnected from his ancestral burial. The prophet's predicted punishment for his act of disobedience is not particularly unique; it is merely the contrast to a completed and fulfilled life represented by an honorable burial (1 Sam 31:8–13, 2 Sam 21:14). Not being buried in the ancestral tomb would certainly be shameful and might be considered to be punishment enough for a single act of disobedience. What is unique about the retribution of the man of God is the manner whereby he arrives at the fulfillment: his death itself.

Second, the man of God is killed by a lion. While not unusual in and of itself, combined with the other circumstances surrounding the death, the demise by feline places divine involvement at the center of the scene. Death caused by lion or other animals potentially reveals a deity's involvement. The *Babylonian Theodicy* questions the connection between the gods and animal attacks when the sufferer wonders: "The savage lion that devoured the choicest meat; Did it bring its offerings to appease a goddess' anger?"<sup>163</sup> The Historian elsewhere uses attacks by animals to express God's displeasure (2 Kgs 2:23–25; 9:30–37), and 1 Kgs 13 is no different. Yahweh has orchestrated the death of prophet by lion.

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<sup>163</sup> "Babylonian Theodicy," trans. Benjamin R. Foster (*COS*, 1.154:493).

Third, the man of God's corpse remains untouched by animals. The broader corpus Ancient Near Eastern literature also contains episodes that describe how shame and honor are attached to the bodies of the deceased. An unburied corpse is part of the shame of a victim and considered to be the retribution arising from a curse in the Tablet of Nabû-Apla-Iddina.<sup>164</sup>

On the other hand, a person who is untouched by animals can be a sign of divine protection and approval of an individual. The ancient Akkadian *Poem of the Righteous Sufferer* attributes divine intervention to deliverance from a lion: "It was Marduk who put a muzzle on the mouth of the lion that was devouring me. Marduk took away the sling of my pursuer and deflected his slingstone."<sup>165</sup> Similarly, to the surprise of Darius, Daniel exits the lions' den unharmed the morning after his designated execution. The Persian king ultimately issues an edict in honor of Yahweh, attributing Daniel's survival of the lions to the Hebrew deity<sup>166</sup>. Whether the disinterest of carnivores toward corpses also expresses divine approval is undetermined. More certain, though, is that an animal avoiding a corpse reveals divine *involvement*, particularly in the case of the man of God in 1 Kgs 13. Adjacent to the other aspects of his punishment (dishonorable burial and animal-caused death), the avoidance of the corpse by the lion is a clear indicator of Yahweh's participation in the episode. This perception is reinforced for the reader through the lingering of the donkey in the vicinity while remaining untouched by the lion. The comic picture of donkey-corpse-lion is designed to demonstrate that Yahweh has bypassed the natural law of animal instinct.

The man of God receives a unique form of physical punishment, emphasized by the post-mortem conditions. The punishment the man of God receives cannot be interpreted in manner

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<sup>164</sup> "The 'Sun Disk' Tablet of Nabû-Apla-Iddina," trans. Victor Hurowitz (*COS* 2.135:368).

<sup>165</sup> "The Poem of the Righteous Sufferer," trans. Benjamin R. Foster (*COS* 1.153:491).

<sup>166</sup> Dan 6:26–27.



other than retribution. Death by a lion might be tragic, but the intersection of death by feline, a donkey unafraid of the lion, and the lion loitering in the immediate vicinity while not attempting to feed on the corpse or donkey is a testament to the man's death by divine retribution.

## **Conclusion**

After burying and grieving the man of God, the old prophet steps forward to reiterate the reality of the dead prophet's message. Within the narrative, the old prophet reinforces the broader retribution paradigm at work: Yahweh expects obedience and punishes even small diversions from his commandments.

The young prophet's offense effectively undermines Yahweh's identity. God's logical consistency, expressed through his immutability, is irrelevant to the man of God. He never ponders whether Yahweh can change his mind, opting instead to accept a message with content that he prefers. The theological implication is that Yahweh does not change his mind or alter the way in which he does things.

The punishment for this particular offense is also didactic for Jeroboam. Crucial to the intended theological lesson is the fact that the altars Jeroboam constructed were not designed for foreign deities. Rather, they were artifices deliberately designed to solidify his political power by co-opting the Yahwistic worship of Jerusalem.

Ultimately, though, the narrative of the fate of the man of God illuminates the bracketing narrative of Jeroboam. The retribution received by the man of God is intended to be didactic toward the Israelite king, who unfortunately ignores the instruction (1 Kgs 13:33–34).

In these interacting incidents of divine retribution, the text makes clear that the intention of the miraculous death and post-mortem fate of the man of God were didactic toward a stubborn Jeroboam. 1 Kgs 13:33 uses the term *קִדְּבַר יְהוָה*, “after this matter” to refer to the preceding

incident. The episode served as a warning, one which Jeroboam ignored. With the king's rejection, however, the narrative shifts toward a quick summary of general retribution merited and received because of his apostasy.

Jeroboam's specific offense is not the extreme introduction of foreign deities into Israel. His offense is more subdued and hence more pernicious. His offense involves the subtle perversion of the Yahwistic cult in a manner that will make extricating itself difficult for Israel. The dual miracle of Jeroboam's withered hand and the split altar both signify the illegitimacy of the king's attempt to shape the Yahwism among the northern tribes. Both miracles are didactic, intended to teach the king that he had stepped out of line and abused the authority Yahweh had given him. The disobedience of the man of God to the very clear divine message in favor of an alternative message is designed to make the same point to the king. God has unambiguous requirements and does not deviate from them.

The broader narrative is unique regarding the divine messenger type-scene because it places the scene twice in narrative. In the initial scene, the man of God is the divine messenger, and Jeroboam is the antagonist. The retribution against Jeroboam, delivered in a cultic context, reflects Yahweh's defending his anonymous messenger. The text then replicates the scene but changes the players in order to emphasize Yahweh's interest in Jeroboam's apostasy.

In attempting to seize the man of God, Jeroboam makes a concurrent affront to the divine messenger. His sin of apostasy is a rejection of the broader Yahwistic culture embedded in Hebrew society, and he will receive the appropriate retribution in due time. The expected retribution for such sin was conventional in the sense that it was prescribed in the Law and in the wide swaths of prophetic activity. In this sense, the theology of retribution is reflected throughout the Hebrew scriptures.

The divine messenger opposition convention, in contrast, is a singular temporal incidence—an act of hostility toward a messenger of Yahweh occurring at a single instant in time, often within the broader context of an antagonist’s evil life. The narrower retribution both Jeroboam and the man of God receive is portrayed through the use of the divine messenger type scene in which the antagonist opposes the declaration of Yahweh and suffers for it. Both scenes play into the wider portrayal of the didactic nature of the narrative that interests the Historian. The Historian tells the tale of Yahweh’s rejected appeal to Jeroboam and uses structured type-scenes as a part of the narrative in which he does it.

### **3.2 Ahab’s and Zedekiah’s Demise (1 Kings 22)**

1 Kings 22 contains a complex form of the divine messenger retribution type-scene, interwoven with juxtaposed literary elements that serve to both validate the messenger of Yahweh and complete the historiography of the Ahab narrative arc.

Jehoshaphat and Ahab are linked in their struggle against the common enemy, Aram. The Historian treats Ahab’s contention against Aram as unprovoked, a breaking of the three-year peace between Aram and the Northern Kingdom. Ahab’s point of contention is Ramoth-gilead, a city that had fallen under Aramean control subsequent to Solomon’s control of the area.<sup>167</sup> Ahab attempts to enlist Jehoshaphat’s assistance for recapturing the city. Both kings seek prophetic counsel. Ahab relies on an apparently pluralistic prophetic guild, while Jehoshaphat requests the presence of an exclusively Yahwistic prophet. With the arrival of Micaiah, the narrative follows Ahab’s opposition to Yahweh’s divine messenger.

#### **The Declaration by Yahweh**

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<sup>167</sup> cf 1 Kgs 4:13.

The declaration by Yahweh here requires some discussion of the background to prepare for the narrative twist later in the chapter. Micaiah will be the divine messenger Ahab opposes. Micaiah is summoned at Jehoshaphat's request to provide insight into Yahweh's perspective about an intended joint military strike against the Aramaeans. Ahab queries 400 prophets concerning the outcome of a battle against the enemy forces occupying Ramoth-gilead. The prophets—whose nature is at least partially Yahwistic—promise Ahab victory.<sup>168</sup>

Ahab's interest in divine guidance, however, is soon exposed as illusory when Jehoshaphat requests input from a representative of Yahweh. The only prophet Ahab offers as a Yahwistic prophet is Micaiah, but the king mentions that he hates him because the prophecies are never beneficial to the king. Ahab's objection provides relevant insight into the mind of Ahab—and the implicit theology of the narrator by extension. The source of the prophecy is not important to Ahab; rather, the tenor of the message is. Ahab's thinking mirrors that of the typical ancient Near Eastern theological paradigm: divinity is subject to the larger cosmic order, and blessings, curses, and oracular proclamations possess a power independent of the divine realm. Later Hebrew theology, in contrast, reflects Yahweh at the top of the cosmic order, with all else subservient to his will. Ahab appears not to subscribe to that customary Hebrew paradigm but believes instead that Micaiah possesses an independent power to bless and curse the king.

When the messenger who retrieved Micaiah prompts him to deliver a favorable message to Ahab, Micaiah responds with an oath formula in support of his assertion that he would only repeat the message Yahweh gave him. The oath formula Micaiah uses suggests that he is

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<sup>168</sup> Zedekiah the son of Kenaanah considers himself to be prophet in the service of Yahweh (1 Kgs 22:24). His retort to Micaiah and the broader narrative depicting the divine throne room scene suggest as well that an ecstatic experience was involved in the prophets' messages. Jehoshaphat apparently does not consider Ahab's prophets to be exclusively Yahwistic, as noted by his request for a נְבִיא לַיהוָה. Ahab's prophets most likely incorporated Yahweh as part of a larger pluralistic pantheon.

constrained by the message from God—he is both unwilling and unable to deviate from the divinely sanctioned message.<sup>169</sup>

That Ahab has no such expectations of his own prophets suggests his belief that not only is he free to act independently of the message, but that he can determine the outcome by his own volition. Opposition to a deity is precluded in Ahab's thinking by his belief about the nature of prophecy.

### **The Lie**

The initial declaration Micaiah makes, the text will soon reveal, aligns with the message offered by Ahab's prophetic guild. The guild promises Ahab success, and only Jehoshaphat's demand for a prophet linked solely to Yahweh provides the possibility of a deviating message. The narrative inserts a surprising response by Micaiah. After taking an oath that he can only speak what God says to him, he concurs with Ahab's prophets and encourages the king to attack Ramoth-gilead. Micaiah gives his declaration in his authority as Yahweh's divine messenger, promising that the Lord would provide Ahab with victory.

Micaiah's declaration to Ahab is not surprising at this point in the narrative. The clear oath formula preceding Micaiah's encouragement to Ahab to go into battle implies that the prophet is speaking on behalf of Yahweh. Micaiah serves in the role of divine proxy, which indicates that the prophet's words are those of Yahweh.

Ahab adds a slight twist to the narrative when he refuses to accept Micaiah's message as being the one that Yahweh gave. Instead, he suspects a deceit and pushes Micaiah for an honest response. Ahab's response in v. 16—noting that he needs an oath on Micaiah's part to learn the truth—indicates that he perceives the subtle evasion that Micaiah has offered in his first

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<sup>169</sup> The statement represents similar constraints to those expressed by Balaam in Num 22–23.

declaration. Micaiah has told Ahab that the Lord would give him victory but has not spoken in the name of the Lord. His comment to the king was a sarcastic fib, Micaiah's cynical response to a king not truly interested in any divine council that contradicts his wishes.

The true declaration by Yahweh occurs in verses 17–23. Micaiah's genuine response to Ahab is twofold. First, he hints at Ahab's death, making a cryptic prediction that Israel will be like sheep without a shepherd. Ahab responds with a bitter aside to Jehoshaphat, complaining that his unhappiness with Micaiah's negative predictions about him have been validated.

The second component of Micaiah's response is his depiction of the throne room scene. The scene is introduced with a divine messenger formula: *וְשָׁמַע דְּבַר יְהוָה*, indicating the affairs or events with which Yahweh concerns himself. Micaiah provides a window into the heavenly council in which God discusses Ahab's situation. The ultimate message delivered by Micaiah is the narrative of the throne room in which Yahweh commands Ahab's death. This message is irritating enough to Ahab that he orders Micaiah imprisoned. Ahab may have believed the prophet controlled the outcome as well as the message, and that by imprisoning Micaiah, he could control the prophet.<sup>170</sup>

Ahab also uses a messenger formula to order Micaiah's imprisonment in 1 Kgs 22:27 (*וְאָמְרָת כֹּה אָמַר הַמֶּלֶךְ*). The king's authority and command are communicated through a messenger. The two incidents—the divine throne room scene and Ahab's command of Micaiah's imprisonment—are appropriately juxtaposed and linked by their introductory messenger formulas. Yahweh's will is expressed through his messenger Micaiah that Ahab must die. Ahab's

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<sup>170</sup> There is also a distinction between a divinely inspired prediction of the future and the power of a prophet to utter a curse (Num 22:4–6). Cursing functions as a separate category in which the power of the deity supports the will of the prophet. See discussion on 2 Kgs 2:23–25.

will is to counteract Micaiah's statements by imprisoning him. Through the use of the standard messenger formula, Ahab "sets his word against the word of the prophet of Yahweh."<sup>171</sup>

Yahweh himself as the source of the prediction in the mouths of Ahab's prophets is the second narrative twist inserted by the author. The Historian previously linked Yahweh to deceit in 1 Kgs 13. The connection was loose, however, implicit in the old prophet's activity. The old prophet's lie to the man of God was not the result of any kind of overt divine message. At best, the lie might be considered a divine test of the man of God to determine his obedience and as pedagogical for Jeroboam.

In the case of Micaiah, however, Yahweh is far more complicit in delivering the deceit. As the divine messenger, Micaiah is constrained to speak only the message he receives. The narrative is shaped to give the impression that Yahweh is behind the deceit, any theological or moral difficulty involved being subservient to Yahweh's desire to arrange Ahab's death. God is not only aware of the deceit that Micaiah speaks to Ahab, he authorizes it. Micaiah's statement in 22:23 places the responsibility for the deceit squarely in the hands of Yahweh. "The Lord has set a lying-spirit in the mouths of all your prophets" (יְהוָה רוּחַ שָׁקֵר בָּפִי כָּל-נְבִיאָיִךְ). The explicit nature of this divinely-inspired deception is akin to Ezek 14:9, where Yahweh claims to be the direct source of the false prophet's deceit.

Although Yahweh is more directly involved in the deceit, he still remains one step removed. The idea does not originate with him, but with an enigmatic being, referred to in 22:21 only as "the spirit" (יְהוָה וַיֵּצֵא הָרוּחַ וַיַּעֲמֵד לְפָנַי יְהוָה) "Then the spirit went out and stood before Yahweh". The spirit is personified in v. 21, but still answers to Yahweh. The summary of Yahweh's activity, delivered through his divine messenger, narrowly targets Ahab and sets up the counter-statement.

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<sup>171</sup> Jesse Long, *1 & 2 Kings* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2002), 267.

## The Counter-statement by the Opposition

The narrative offers two counter-statements to Yahweh's declaration, one by Ahab and one by Zedekiah. Both king and prophet will oppose Yahweh's messenger, and both will suffer for it.

Inserted into the narrative in v. 24 is Zedekiah's objection to Micaiah's statement about Yahweh's activity. Zedekiah is treated as a representative of the prophetic guild, and that guild is managed by Ahab. The king initially arranged the gathering of the prophets as a prelude to his intended assault against Ramoth-gilead. In recounting the heavenly council, Micaiah adds a third-person possessive to נְבִיאָה, making the prophets *Ahab's* prophets. This assessment is from Yahweh himself, who in attributing the prophets to Ahab, dissociates himself from the guild.

This divine dissociation from Yahweh is no doubt at the heart of Zedekiah's objection to Micaiah's declaration. Because the prophets are linked to Ahab rather than Yahweh, Zedekiah himself has no source for his message other than Ahab. This disparaging detail has already been alluded to by Ahab's messenger in v. 13 when he pleads with Micaiah to "speak the good" (דְּבַר־טוֹב). Such an exhortation indicates that a message favorable to Ahab is the true impetus for the prophets' unified message. Micaiah claims to speak for Yahweh and proclaims that Zedekiah speaks for no one but Ahab.

Zedekiah's opposition to Micaiah in 1 Kgs 22:24 contains two elements. First, he slaps Micaiah on the face, a physically abusive and disrespectful act that asserts the authority of the one delivering the blow. Zedekiah uses the slap as a mechanism for asserting his own legitimacy.

Second, Zedekiah questions how the spirit of Yahweh left him in order to speak to Micaiah (אֵי-יְזֶה עָבַר רוּחַ-יְהוָה מֵאַחֵי לְדַבֵּר אוֹתָךְ). Zedekiah's response indicates that he considers himself, if not a direct representative of Yahweh, as at least possessing the ability to query



Yahweh about specific matters. His offense at Micaiah's statement is not feigned, but probably rooted in an ecstatic experience, the veracity of which he does not question. That two contradictory messages from Yahweh can coexist is for Zedekiah incomprehensible.

Ahab's opposition toward Micaiah is calculated and less impulsive than Zedekiah's. Ahab orders Micaiah's detention and a sustenance diet until he successfully returns from battle. The move is designed to make Micaiah the loser regardless of the outcome for Ahab. Should the king live through the battle, Micaiah is discredited. Should Ahab die, Micaiah rots in prison. Ahab does not appear to be anticipating his own death. Rather, he imprisons Micaiah to demonstrate that he has no fear of the prophet's message.

The entire confrontation, then, is a proxy contest not between Yahweh and any deity, but between Yahweh and Ahab. The validation of one of the messengers will validate either Yahweh or Ahab. Never one to shy away from his own importance, Ahab attempts to thwart Yahweh's plans and heads off to battle.

### **The Verbal Response by the Divine Messenger**

Micaiah provides a verbal response to the counter-statements of both Zedekiah and Ahab. To Zedekiah, he offers what at first glance appears to be a cryptic statement about hiding in an inner room. The response is in reality a plain promise of retribution.

Responding to Zedekiah's question about how the Spirit of the Lord left Zedekiah, Micaiah may be linking his prediction of Zedekiah's fate to that of the Aramean king Ben-Hadad in 1 Kgs 20:30. There, as in 1 Kgs 22:25, the author uses the rare term (בְּחֶדֶר חֶדֶר) to describe the inner room where the Aramean king flees from an Israelite victory. The context of the Israelite/Aramean conflict in 1 Kgs 20 is the Aramean belief in Yahweh's limited sovereignty. By telling Zedekiah that he will be cowering in a closet, Micaiah is linking the prophet to Aram's

theology. Zedekiah has become a type of Ben-hadad and will suffer the same fate.<sup>172</sup> 1 Kgs 20 does not narrate Ben-hadad's death. Instead, the text describes how Ahab uses his leverage as the victor in the conflict at Aphek to negotiate a treaty in which he gains territory and economic access to Damascus markets. Ben-hadad surrenders his status and hegemony in to order live. Micaiah's sharp retort to Zedekiah encapsulates this context. Zedekiah's prediction is wrong. Ahab will die at Ramoth-gilead. Consequently, Zedekiah will be discredited as a divine messenger, humiliated because of Ahab just as Ben-hadad had been. Further, Zedekiah had completely missed the outcome of the battle and has yet to grasp it. The message is clear: Zedekiah was never speaking for God to begin with. He will finally realize that fact when he is alone, afraid, and cowering.

At this point in the narrative, the scene jettisons Zedekiah from the narrative. While additional conversation or reaction from Zedekiah is easy to imagine, the narrative here abandons Zedekiah to turn attention toward Ahab's opposition to Micaiah.

After Ahab orders Micaiah's detention, the prophet makes a direct statement to Ahab and one to the crowd observing the events. To Ahab, Micaiah put his identity on the line as Yahweh's messenger. Ahab's safe return would be the indicator that God has not spoken through the prophet. Micaiah supplements his statement with the imperative to the crowd to hear his words, marking their significance for his identity.

### **Receipt of Divine Retribution in the Form of a Unique Physical Punishment**

In the instances of both Ahab and Zedekiah, Micaiah has predicted divine retribution for his opponents. Only Ahab will receive that punishment within the confines of the narrative itself.

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<sup>172</sup> Long, 267.

Zedekiah opposes Micaiah, rejecting the latter's message as contradictory to his own. He supplements his opposition with a slap, an attempt at an authoritative show of disdain. Zedekiah certainly merits divine retribution for opposing Micaiah in his role as divine messenger, but the narrative lacks an account of such reprisal beyond Micaiah's promise that Zedekiah will in the future be found cowering in an inner room. Micaiah's insulting retort to Zedekiah recalls Ben-Hadad's effort to hide himself in an inner room (1 Kgs 20:30). Zedekiah may lack enough significance to the broader narrative for the author to follow through with a narrated description of his ultimate demise. Another option may be that Zedekiah's fate *was* known by readers, removing the need for narrated specifics. The end of Zedekiah, while promised, is nowhere related. Omitting the specific act of divine retribution occurs in other occurrences of the divine messenger retribution type-scene, particularly when those scenes involve multiple candidates representing Yahweh who offer contradictory actions and messages.<sup>173</sup> Even without narrated retribution, the type-scene validates the divine messenger, ensuring that retribution will occur beyond the scope of the story itself. In 1 Kgs 22, humiliation will be the thread uniting the punishments of Ahab and Micaiah.

The retribution Ahab receives in 1 Kgs 22 is actually two-fold. Ahab already merits divine retribution for his specific violation of the divine injunctions against murder and theft. Elijah promised Ahab the reception of divine retribution based on the king's evil character. Ahab's character is described as evil with the unique phrase *לַעֲשׂוֹת הָרַע בְּעֵינַי יְהוָה* in 1 Kgs 21:20 and 26. The description is applied elsewhere only in the generic sense to the Northern Kingdom as the reason for the Assyrian Exile (1 Kgs 17:17). The retribution, also to be given to his wife Jezebel, will involve the destruction of Ahab's royal line and a gruesome death for the power

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<sup>173</sup> See discussion on Jer 20:1–6; 28:1–17, and Amos 7:10–17.

couple. The specific punishment described in 1 Kgs 21:17–26 is not connected to Ahab’s general character but is Yahweh’s direct response to Ahab and Jezebel’s murder of Naboth and the theft of his vineyard. Ahab performs a rare act of genuine repentance in 1 Kgs 21:27–29, leading Yahweh to postpone the inevitable retribution.

It would be inaccurate to state that Ahab receives the second incidence of divine retribution—his expedited fate—directly because of his opposition to Micaiah. Micaiah’s description of the throne room scene makes clear that Yahweh intended to have Ahab killed independently of Micaiah’s involvement. Micaiah arrives only because Jehoshaphat requests a Yahwistic prophet. But Ahab’s antagonism toward Micaiah functions as a proxy resistance to Yahweh. By placing himself in opposition to Micaiah, Ahab opposes God himself.

This link between Ahab’s fate and Micaiah’s imprisonment make a connection between the divine messenger and Ahab’s retribution difficult to avoid. Again, it would be improper to say that Ahab’s opposition to Micaiah results in divine retribution. However, the divine retribution Ahab receives served in the immediate context of the narrative to validate Micaiah as Yahweh’s divine messenger. Micaiah’s response offers the true prophetic test to those immediately present: God has spoken through him only if Ahab dies.

The text of 1 Kgs 22, then, narrates the convention of divine messenger opposition. The retribution Ahab deserves for Naboth’s murder as described in 1 Kgs 21 is a literary retrospective. The divine messenger opposition convention, on the other hand, is embedded *within* the narrative itself.

Ahab’s opposition to Micaiah merits retribution in the sense that his offense provides Yahweh with a sense of immediacy about the retribution already promised for Naboth’s murder; Ahab’s opposition to Micaiah expedites the retribution he is already due. The divine throne room

scene illuminates Yahweh's desires for the Israelite king. Yahweh's primary interest in the scene recounted by Micaiah is to bring about Ahab's death. Micaiah's account reveals that Yahweh goes so far as to authorize a spirit to initiate a deceptive ecstatic experience in Ahab's prophets in order to motivate the Israelite leader to make the poor military decision.

### **The Chronicler's Parallel Treatment**

The Chronicler's account of Ahab's death in 2 Chronicles 18 is effectively identical to the Kings account with the exceptions of the initial background details and the rather notably truncated description of Ahab's death. While Ahab is described as evil elsewhere in Chronicles, the fact is downplayed compared to his treatment in Kings.<sup>174</sup> In the Chronicler's account, the divine retribution Ahab receives is unconnected to Naboth's murder and the king's broader evil character. Instead, Ahab dies only in connection with the events narrated in chapter 18. Consequently, the divine messenger opposition convention should be simpler to discern in Chronicles since Ahab's punishment does not involve a context beyond the immediate narrative. The reason Ahab merits divine retribution in the Chronicler's account is contained with the narrative of chapter 18.

The events as laid out by the Chronicler unfold as they do in Kings: Jehoshaphat visits Ahab and the two seek oracular counsel for a military strike against Aram. Ahab and Zedekiah's interaction with Micaiah is the same, as is the divine throne room scene and Micaiah's promise of Ahab's demise.

The contest between Ahab/Zedekiah and Micaiah pivots on the statement in 18:27 that Ahab's death will validate Micaiah's status as divine messenger. In both Kings and Chronicles, Zedekiah is punished for his opposition to Micaiah. The divine retribution against Ahab, though,

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<sup>174</sup> A handful of references use Ahab as a standard of evil and meriting punishment (2 Chr 21:6, 13; 22:3-4, 7-8), but the king's evil nature is assumed rather than narrated as in Kings.

differs between the two books. In Kings, Ahab is punished for his conduct and character throughout his narrative arc. In Chronicles, he is punished solely for his conduct within the Ramoth-gilead battle narrative. The Chronicler, consistent with his approach, relies where he will on the Kings account, and constructs the scene more tightly than the Historian does.<sup>175</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Juxtaposed with the righteous Jehoshaphat, Ahab is the disobedient and evil king from the north. Jehoshaphat's use of the jussive of אָמַר in 1 Kgs 22:8 is a reprimand and warning to the Israelite king. The two kings hold different perspectives regarding the source of Micaiah's prophecies. Jehoshaphat's warning suggests a reverence for the prophet anchored in the king's broader theological respect for Yahweh. Jehoshaphat sees Micaiah as Yahweh's divine messenger.

Ahab, on the other hand, is here portrayed as surrounding himself with prophetic yes-men—prophets who would confirm his pre-existing biases. His distaste for Micaiah is rooted in the prophet's disagreeable oracles. Ahab's opposition to Micaiah removes Yahweh from the equation. Ahab detests the prophet not for reasons of theological loyalty, but because Micaiah never offers a prophecy that favors Ahab. Ahab's aversion to including Micaiah's input reinforces the idea of the king as a theological pragmatist in which prophecy functions as divine approval of his own will. Ahab is the opposite of Jehoshaphat—someone for whom Yahweh's will is peripheral to his own wishes.

While Jehoshaphat is not directly the divine messenger who Ahab opposes, he is placed adjacent to Ahab to provide a literary contrast between righteousness and infidelity. The interaction between Micaiah and Zedekiah is a microcosm of the Ahab-Jehoshaphat relationship.

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<sup>175</sup> See discussion on the Chronicler's use of the type-scene in chapter 4.

The southern righteous king representing fidelity to Yahweh and the wicked northern king representing a skewed and adulterated faith—the rulers are reflected in the character of the prophets.

In 1 Kgs 22, the narrator relies on the literary conventions related to divine retribution to conclude the Ahab narrative arc. The seven chapters of material dedicated to the Israelite king repeatedly point out his wickedness and allude to his ultimate demise at the pleasure of Yahweh. At the center of the conclusion is the scene of divine messenger opposition. The scene amplifies the character of Ahab and his capacity to resist Yahweh. The king's willful resistance to God's continual entreaties toward fidelity through Elijah merit divine retribution. The final sin of Ahab provides a fitting description of the king followed by a fitting end.

### **3.3 Ahaziah's Troops Destroyed by Fire (2 Kings 1)**

In 2 Kgs 1:1–17, divine retribution is exacted against opponents of Elijah. Yahweh is here offended because Ahaziah, sustaining injuries from a fall, seeks out a foreign deity for healing. Incensed, Yahweh sends Elijah to intercept Ahaziah's messengers with a promise of the king's ultimate demise. The messengers, even though ignorant of his identity, apparently accept Elijah's prediction as authoritative and return to the court. Their description of the appearance of Yahweh's spokesman is enough for Ahaziah to determine Elijah's identity. Heretofore, Ahaziah's opposition has been merely a disposition of disbelief. Upon sending soldiers to capture Elijah, however, the king has initiated an overt opposition to the divine messenger.

#### **The Statement by the Messenger of God Given in Divine Authority**

Against the seemingly unconnected backdrop of renewed conflict with Moab, the scene opens by describing Ahaziah as suffering injuries he has sustained in fall. To determine whether he will recover, the king dispatches messengers to the Philistine city of Ekron to consult Baal-

zebub. Ahaziah is not directly seeking healing for his injuries. His query intended for Baal-zebub is phrased as a conditional: אָמֵן־אֶתְהַיָּה מִקְּלִי זֶה.

After Ahaziah dispatches his messengers to Ekron, God intervenes, questioning Ahaziah's seeking out another deity. The divine declaration comes from the prophet Elijah in v. 3. Yahweh's rhetorical jibe to Ahaziah refers to the king's disregard of Yahweh's divine authority in the Northern Kingdom. Ahaziah's quest for oracular information from a Philistine deity disregards Yahweh's historical claim on and presence in the Northern Kingdom. By seeking outside divine advice and guidance, Ahaziah has slandered Yahweh by deriding his efficacy. This understanding is clarified by Elijah in 2 Kgs 1:16. Ahaziah's death will come as a result of his seeking outside divine council. Yahweh punishes Ahaziah for abandoning the theological fidelity that was the responsibility of Hebrew kings.

The announcement of punishment comes in the form of an answer to Ahaziah's original inquiry. Although the king does not solicit input from God, God nevertheless delivers the answer to Ahaziah's question through Elijah: The king will indeed die from his injuries. Yahweh's promise also implies that Yahweh's power is superior to that of Baal-zebub, rendering the Canaanite deity effectively impotent to provide assistance to Ahaziah. Yahweh's response, then, allows for a proxy confrontation between the Hebrew and Canaanite deities. Yahweh's representative, Elijah, stands in direct opposition to a king loyal to Baal-zebub and the military troops which represent him.

The punishment is also passive in nature. Yahweh's irritated tone seems to indicate that although it is within his power to provide a favorable answer to the king (i.e., heal him), he will not do so because of the king's infidelity. Rather than causing death, Yahweh certainly will not heal Ahaziah and thereby prevent his death.



The message Ahaziah's representatives convey back to the king represent the authoritative words of Yahweh delivered through his representative Elijah. The message is straightforward in its retributive nature—Ahaziah will be punished, by death, for his seeking assistance from Baal-zebul. The divine declaration in the scene, then, is Elijah's promise of Ahaziah's punishment for his unfaithfulness.

### **The Counter-statement by the Opposition**

Ahaziah's response to Yahweh's relayed message is to first determine the identity of the man who gave the message. The king is able to identify Elijah from the verbal description and dispatches troops to capture him.

The opposition to the divine messenger occurs independently of Ahaziah's offense of apostasy. Ahaziah has blasphemed Yahweh by seeking out a foreign deity, and his punishment is determined on its own terms. The type-scene under discussion appears as part of the broader narrative arc in a manner that validates Elijah as Yahweh's chosen messenger.

Ahaziah's irritation with Elijah's message presumably mirrors Ahab's discontent with Micaiah's prophesy in 1 Kgs 22: Ahaziah resents the content of the message but exhibits no real fear of the prophet. Ahaziah shows no hesitation in confronting Elijah with a show of military strength to force Elijah's presence before him. Although at the eventual encounter between prophet and king, Elijah will only repeat the prophecy, there is little doubt that the narrative portrays Ahaziah as desiring to harm Elijah. Yahweh's imperative command in 1:15 to accompany the third garrison is supplemented with the encouragement, אֲל־תִּירָא מִפְּנֵי—do not fear him, indicating that Elijah understood the king's intentions toward him to be nefarious.

## The Response by the Divine Messenger

At this point the verbal confrontation ensues through proxy, as will the divine retribution—in part. The captain, and by extension his troops, function as the king's emissaries. That these troops function as the king's envoy is evident in the captain's speech. He functions as a direct spokesman for the king: אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים הַמְּלִךְ דָּבַר רָדָה. So it is Ahaziah, through the company leader and backed up by a squad of fifty, who demands Elijah's surrender. Elijah, also functioning as a proxy—but for Yahweh—responds to the demand by summoning heavenly fire.

Elijah's reply in v. 10 seems comically flippant and whimsical, particularly when juxtaposed against the earnestness of the king. The conditional construction (אם with the jussive of ירד) uttered by a shabbily-clad insignificant prophet mocks the power of the commander and his military support. The reader certainly knows that the comical image is belied by the reality of where the power actually lies. The nature of the retribution itself is a play on the demand made by the officer. The officer's use of the imperative of ירד is met by Elijah's jussive response: Elijah won't come down, but his power will. Travis' framework here applies: there is a repetition of a key verb (ירד), and the instrument of offense (the demand to come down) becomes the instrument of retribution (fire coming down from heaven).<sup>176</sup>

## Receipt of Divine Retribution in the Form of a Unique Physical Punishment

Ahaziah's death at the end of the chapter is the result of his illness—apparently wounds caused by a fall through the trellis-work of a room in his Samaria palace (וַיִּפֹּל אֶחָזִיָּה בְּעַד הַשִּׁבְכָה בְּעֲלִיתוֹ אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁמְרוֹן)—and is Yahweh's response to the king's seeking divine guidance elsewhere. The divine retribution for opposing Elijah is a separate punishment, falling on Ahaziah's emissaries in a unique physical form.

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<sup>176</sup> Travis, *Christ and the Judgement of God*, 17.

The exact nature of the fire of God in 2 Kgs 1:10 and 12 is uncertain. The term אֵשׁ-אֱלֹהִים appears elsewhere only in Job 1:16 in describing the demise of Job's sheep. The origin in the Job narrative is the sky, as is the brimstone and fire (גְּפָרִית וְאֵשׁ) that destroy Sodom and Gomorrah in Gen 19:24. And Elijah's status as representative of the God of fire has already been established in the Mt. Carmel episode in 1 Kgs 18. The cosmological perspective that places deities in a skyward realm applies here: fire from the sky is without a doubt divinely sourced. In both instances of the destruction of Ahaziah's entourage, that divine power is at beck and call of a prophet who casually offers an imprecation.

Divine retribution against Ahaziah's emissaries represents divine disapproval of and retribution against the king himself. In yet another miracle demonstrating an extreme display of divine power, the soldiers are consumed (אכל) by the divine fire. The second captain similarly functions as the king's authoritative representative, and he and his troops are similarly destroyed. It is only when the commander of the third company abandons his role as Ahaziah's representative in deference to Elijah's power and refuses to function oppositional to the prophet that the squad receives no divine retribution.

When Elijah finally accompanies the military delegation and reaches Ahaziah, he repeats the message from Yahweh that Ahaziah will die as a result of his injuries. Yahweh's point of displeasure with Ahaziah is the same with which the narrative begins: the king's seeking oracular counsel from a source other than Yahweh.

The destruction of the military contingents should be not be considered divine retribution for the king's rejection of Yahweh's counsel. Ahaziah actually commits two separate offenses in the narrative. The first is his seeking of the foreign oracular, and the second is his attempt to accost Elijah. The penalty for seeking Baal was enunciated at the beginning; but the penalty for

opposing Elijah is never spoken, merely received. This distinction is crucial to the point at hand. Ahaziah offends Yahweh in two separate ways. The first is a personal offense in which Ahaziah's action makes a statement about Yahweh's efficacy. Yahweh's punishment—Ahaziah's death—is essentially a commentary on the inefficacy of the Baals. Yahweh's verdict renders his competition in the divine realm irrelevant.

Ahaziah's second blunder offends the divine in a different manner and causes the retribution against his emissaries. The rejection of Elijah's message is a rejection of the messenger, and the rejection of the messenger is a rejection of Yahweh, who sends the messenger. Ahaziah's attempt to imprison Elijah is tantamount to an assault on Yahweh. And as the focal point of his word to humanity, Yahweh's messenger is to be off limits. Consequently, the extreme fate met by the first two squads involves a verbal confrontation with a divine messenger, an inferred offense against Yahweh, and an extreme fate received by those who oppose him.

The captain of the third squad is portrayed as differing in demeanor from the first two. The first two captains command Elijah to come down from the top of the mountain. The third captain *goes up* (וַיַּעַל וַיְבֹא) to Elijah and submissively falls on his knees before the prophet. God's command to Elijah to accompany the third commander is clarified with an encouragement not to fear the commander (אַל־תִּירָא מִפְּנֵי). The implication is that Elijah would be safe in the presence of the third commander and his troops, which would not have been the case with the first two. With the surrender and submissiveness of the third contingent, the scene is complete, and the conflict dissipates.

## Conclusion

When Elijah arrives in Ahaziah's presence, he merely repeats the message that has been previously delivered. Because of his rejection of Yahweh, Ahaziah will die from his injuries. The section closes with a terse anti-climactic report of Ahaziah's death, but summarizes the entire narrative as rooted in the king's initial rebellion and disrespect toward Yahweh. The destruction of the military squads is not mentioned in the summary, likely because the divine retribution against Elijah's opponents is self-contained within the confines of the type-scene itself—the punishment has already been meted out on those who dishonor a man of God.

The presence of Elijah's interaction with the three squads in the narrative, then, must serve a purpose beyond the mere criticism of Ahaziah's apostasy. The question becomes what that purpose is. While validating Elijah as Yahweh's messenger might seem like the rhetorical focus of the text, the Historian has already established Elijah's credentials with narratives like the Mt. Carmel confrontation in 1 Kgs 18. The actual purpose is more nuanced than elevating Elijah, involving also the actual opposition to the prophet. The unique fate the first two squads suffer and their role as Ahaziah's messengers reveal the convention with which the author constructs the pericope. Ahaziah and Yahweh are engaged in a contest through a proxy confrontation of the military squads and Elijah.

Ahaziah personally receives no retribution for his messengers' opposition to Elijah, even though they are acting on his behalf and speaking with his authority. Any specific punishment Ahaziah might receive is secondary to the proxy contest between Ahaziah and Yahweh. The destruction of messengers speaking in his name undermines Ahaziah's power. The power of Ahaziah next to that of Yahweh is symbolized by the squads' helplessness in the presence of Elijah. Yahweh minimizes Ahaziah's significance by destroying his emissaries. This divine

confrontation by proxy both utilizes and reinforces the convention in which Yahweh defeats his enemies through a surrogate confrontation.

The text offers a secondary reprisal against Ahaziah's opposition to Yahweh, that of Ahaziah's death itself. This specific retribution against Ahaziah is simply stated: וַיָּמָת כְּדָבַר יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר אֵלָיָהוּ. Ahaziah dies but does so in accordance with Elijah's prediction that he would not heal from his injuries. The narrative's unadorned presentation of Ahaziah's death presents it as both obvious and inevitable. Through the destruction of the two royal military contingents and now Ahaziah's death, Elijah has twice been validated as Yahweh's messenger.

### **3.4 Bethel Youths Mauled by Bears (2 Kings 2:23–25)**

The pericope recounting the youths' mocking of Elisha in 2 Kgs 2:23-25 and their subsequent brutalization at the paws of bears also utilizes the type-scene to validate a prophet's status as divine messenger. The brief narrative will link Elisha not only to Elijah, but to Moses as well, establishing Elisha as Yahweh's choice for his preeminent prophet.

#### **The Statement by the Messenger of God Given in Divine Authority**

In this episode, Elisha makes no specific statement in his role as divine messenger leading to opposition. He offers neither a prediction nor an authoritative statement. Instead, he himself functions in the narrative as the divine statement.

The incident in 2 Kgs 2:23–24 is commonly assumed to be a narrative randomly placed by redaction, unanchored to the larger narrative framework of the Elisha cycle.<sup>177</sup> But this event falls squarely into the narrative survey of Elisha's taking up Elijah's position as the predominant prophet of Yahweh. The disappearance and search for Elijah after his ascension, the purification of the spring at Jericho, and the journey to Bethel—presumably to meet the prophetic association

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<sup>177</sup> See Alexander Rofé, *The Prophetic Stories: The Narratives about the Prophets in the Hebrew Bible, Their Literary Types and History* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1988), 49.

there—all occur as part of Elisha’s assumption of Elijah’s role. The encounter with the youths in 2 Kgs 2:23–24 is properly understood in that light. Elisha approaches Bethel as the divine messenger, and the heckling children oppose him on that very basis.

### **The Counter-statement by the Opposition**

The episode proper begins with a verbal confrontation. On this occasion, a group of youths begin to mock Elisha as he travels to Bethel. The traditional view held that the fate of the youths was linked to apostasy in Bethel: “Neither must we overlook the fact that these youths belonged to the city which was the centre and principal seat of the apostasy, and which, on this account, is called by the prophets, ‘Beth-Aven,’ i.e., House of the Idol, instead of Beth-El [House of God].”<sup>178</sup> Bethel certainly recurrently functioned as a cultic center. The town gained notoriety in the Northern Kingdom for Jeroboam’s erection there of a golden calf as an alternative to the Yahwistic cultus centered around the temple in Jerusalem. However, pluralism evidently flourished at Bethel, as evidenced by the company of Yahwistic prophets located there (2 Kgs 2:2–3). The religious climate of Bethel is pertinent to the episode insofar as the motives of Elisha’s opponents is concerned. A clear apostatical climate did not exist there, making unlikely a bold anti-Yahwistic outing on the part of the youths. The jeering directed at Elisha is not rooted in a loyalty to differing deities. Rather, the youths target him specifically because he is Elijah’s replacement.

Two equivalent terms are used to describe the young mockers. The first is נְעָרִים קְטָנִים, and the second is יְלָדִים. Both allow for a wide range of ages among children, but the additional adjective קְטָנִים attached to נְעָרִים qualifies the noun by diminution. These prophetic opponents are on the younger side of youth—younger children. Both words occur in the masculine plural,

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<sup>178</sup> Johann Peter Lange and Philip Schaff, *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Critical, Doctrinal, and Homiletical, with Special Reference to Ministers and Students* (New York: C. Scribner & Co., 1870), 25.

allowing for the presence of girls in the group, making the significance of the group the young age of its members rather than its gender composition.<sup>179</sup> Children will be mauled by bears. The age of these children is of theological interest because of the implications created regarding their culpability. Older teens would be expected to know better than to disrespect their elders—and one who is a prophet at that. If older teens are the recipients of the fate, their own behavior comes closer to justifying the expression of divine wrath. But, if younger children are the victims of the caniform attacks, than the theodicy problem created by the story intensifies. The convention under discussion relies on extremes, and young children being the recipients of divine retribution only serves to strengthen the prophetic validation paradigm: not even children may safely oppose a divine messenger.

The mocking Elisha receives is rendered as he “goes up” to Bethel. Chisholm suggests that the antonymic use of ילך, “go up,” is a parallel of the use of ירד in chapter 1, indicating that the youths are guilty of the same offense as Ahaziah’s troops and therefore merit the same punishment.<sup>180</sup>

David Mitchell argues that the specific taunt links the episode to the rebellion in Num 16 through the use of קרח as wordplay. The root refers to making a head bald, and Mitchell avers that Elisha is a Korahite, connected to his ancestor “Little Bald-head”:

...if Kereah was a jibe against Korahite Elisha, everything clicks into place. The elusive point of the story appears. It is another showdown between the prophets of YHWH and idolatrous Israel. Elisha’s harsh reaction is explained, for they were not laughing at his shiny pate, but at the second commandment and his tribal loyalty to it. The hypothesis is

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<sup>179</sup> Julie Faith Parker, *Valuable and Vulnerable: Children in the Hebrew Bible, Especially the Elisha Cycle* (SBL Press, 2013), 93.

<sup>180</sup> Robert B. Chisholm, *Interpreting the Historical Books: An Exegetical Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2006), 208.



confirmed by there being 42 boys mauled by the bears. For, in the Psalms at least, 42 is the Korahite number. The first Korah psalm is Psalm 42, introducing the first Korah group and the Elohist Psalter; and then, 42 psalms later. Psalm 84 introduces the second Korah group and the second YHWH collection. There even appears to have been a Hebrew tradition associating this very passage with the Korah Psalms. So it rather looks like the writer of 2 Kgs 2.23-24 is telling us, in his cryptic way, that the innominate ben Shaphat is a Korahite incognito.<sup>181</sup>

While this wordplay is likely present in 2 Kgs 2:23-24, a far better explanation than the dubious identification of Elisha as a Korahite is that the passage shares with Num 16 a similar convention regarding divine retribution. The mocking from the Bethel children links Elisha to Korah not through ancestry but through position. The taunt is tantamount to accusing Elisha of being a usurper—a wannabe leader illegitimately claiming the mantle of leadership for himself. Just as Korah opposed Moses over the right to participate in Israel’s upper-level leadership, the children’s taunt of Elisha deliberately invokes Moses’ opponent as a type to deny the legitimacy of Elisha’s status as Yahweh’s preeminent prophet. The wordplay on baldness and similarity to Korah’s fate was the implicit accusation that Elisha was being spiritually presumptuous to assume Elijah’s position.

If this suggestion possesses merit, then the offense of the youths on the route to Bethel was similarly comparable to that of Korah and his associates. As such, the entire incident becomes an offense in which Yahweh delivers divine retribution in an extreme and unusual form to once again make his involvement clear and validate his choice of messenger. Elisha is the legitimate prophet in the tradition of Moses.

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<sup>181</sup> David C. Mitchell, “‘God Will Redeem My Soul from Sheol’: The Psalms of the Sons of Korah” *JSOT* 30 (2006): 374.

## The Response by the Divine Messenger

The direct quote of Elisha's response to the youths is not recorded. The text merely offers וַיִּקְלֹלֵם בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה—"and he cursed them in the name of Yahweh"—as the content of his reply. The sense of the *piel* of קָלַל—used in 2 Kgs 2:24—is “exclusively declarative...identical with the factitive.”<sup>182</sup> A curse functioned as “a formal appeal to the Lord to vindicate one's cause through an act of judgment.”<sup>183</sup> Elisha's imprecation seeks the punishment of his opponents. His curse diminishes and denigrates his opponents, and it does so with divine authority. Ancient Near Eastern convention readily accepted premature death following a curse.<sup>184</sup> In the case of 2 Kgs 2:24, Yahweh's power manifests itself through divine support of the prophetic messenger.

## Receipt of Divine Retribution in the Form of a Unique Physical Punishment

Lev 26:22 warns that disobedience would cause bereavement of children at the hands of wild beasts, but the scenario is different here. In 2 Kgs 2, it is the youths themselves who merit the divine retribution rather than their loss that represents divine retribution against a disobedient society.

The fate received by the youths is extreme in several ways. First, the involvement of wild animals as a mode of death is unusual and signifies divine involvement. Similar to the killing of the disobedient prophet in 1 Kgs 13, the sudden appearance of a wild beast that kills a person indicates that that person has displeased the divine realm in some way. That wild bears came out of the woods does not necessarily suggest the author understood bears to be reclusive in relation to humans, but simply that their arrival coming from the woods was unexpected and a complete surprise to the terrified youths.

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<sup>182</sup> HALOT, 1103 קָלַל.

<sup>183</sup> Chisholm, 201.

<sup>184</sup> NIDOTTE, 4–923, קָלַל.

Second, even so, the narration displays the author's conventional understanding regarding the bears. An unusual encounter with animals elsewhere reflects divine involvement, an aspect of Hebrew historiography. The Hebrew convention incorporated an understanding of events in which Yahweh manifested his will through a unique use of animals. Talking donkeys, bare-handed lion kills, swarming frogs, biting snakes, and the like reveal Yahweh's presence in—as well as response to—human events. Yahweh overrides animal instincts, behavior, and limitations, using the animal kingdom to enact his will.

Third, the text focuses on the brutality of the bear-induced bloodbath rather than on the death of the youths, although the injuries they receive are certainly mortal wounds. The word choice leaves little room for the survival of the mauled youths. The *piel* of בקע is the same word used for ripping open pregnant women ( 2 Kgs 8:12, 15:15) and indicates a violent laceration.<sup>185</sup> While the death of an individual killed by wild animals was far more simply stated through the use of מוט in the *hiphil* (1 Kgs 13:24), the use of בקע here creates an ambiguity that opens the mind of the reader to more imaginative possibilities—it makes the fate more violent than a mere killing. The young mockers are violently shredded, suggesting that the divine retribution received lay in the experience itself rather than their ultimate fate.

Within the narrative, the episode is exemplary rather than didactic for the recipients. The boys have nothing to learn, but readers understand that the event has validated Elisha as Elijah's successor. The narrative of 2 Kgs 2:23-24 further reinforces the convention that opposing the legitimate prophet of God is the epitome of a foolish and dangerous recklessness.

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<sup>185</sup> The parallel poetic structure in Hos 13:8 utilizes קרע, “to tear open” as a synonym for בקע. בקע—a deep laceration—was uncommon outside of encounters in which blades or claws and teeth were used and were difficult to treat.

Ironically, the linking of Elisha to Korah by his opponents suggests that inherent in their opposition was the understanding that the same fate experienced by Korah should befall Elisha as well. The usurper who challenges the divine messenger deserves an extreme fate. The fire that destroyed Ahaziah's troops in 1 Kgs 1 is reminiscent of Korah's 250 co-conspirators consumed by fire for their part in opposing the divine messenger (Num 16:35). Elisha, presumptuous enough to assume Elijah's mantle, deserves an extreme fate similar to Korah. The ironic inversion in the text, of course, is that the youths themselves are guilty of the very nature of their taunt—they are attempting to delegitimize Yahweh's divine messenger, and they themselves receive divine retribution for their impertinence.

This observation regarding the probable implicit accusation of Elisha as usurper embedded in the youths' taunt begs the question, however, as to whether the community of Bethel would have possessed enough interest in the Yahwistic cultus to muster such a large-scale challenge to Elisha. Bethel was a cultic center, and the communal devotion to Yahweh there at this time would be at no doubt undermined by the broader pluralism present in the Northern Kingdom. But the youths need not hold any special regard for Elijah in order to mock the legitimacy of his successor. In fact, their taunt may simply reflect nothing more than their awareness of and reliance upon the original convention of divine retribution directed at opponents of divine messengers. Elisha's curse, and Yahweh's willingness to fulfill that curse, demonstrated how seriously deity and prophet took the issue, even if to the youths it was a trivial matter.

To accuse Elisha of responsibility for the specifics of the way in which the curse is fulfilled is improper. He merely curses the group of youths. A curse is given under the name of a specific deity—Yahweh in this instance. The power of a curse is not inherently in the vocalized

curse itself, but rather in the willingness and power of a particular deity to fulfill it. Goliath invokes a curse against David in the name of his gods (וַיִּקְלַל הַפְּלִשְׁתִּי אֶת־דָּוִד בְּאֱלֹהָיו) Sam 17:43) but fails and is himself slain. David's retort and subsequent victory reveals the impotence of the Philistine pantheon to enforce a curse made in their name. Here Yahweh reveals his willingness and power by sending two female bears to maul the youths.

That the efficacy of a curse is dependent on the deity, however, is a nuance irrelevant to the convention expressed in the fulfillment of the curse. The core of the convention reinforced by the episode is that Yahweh has validated his messenger by visiting an extreme and unique form of physical retribution against Elisha's opponents.

## Conclusion

The narrative of Elisha's interaction with the youths at Bethel and their mauling by bears in 2 Kgs 2:23–4 is frequently treated as an interloper—an alien encroachment in the broader Elijah-Elisha story arc.<sup>186</sup> David Marcus, for example, posits the narrative is written as anti-prophetic satire in which Elisha rather than the boys is critiqued for his conduct.<sup>187</sup>

But even if Marcus—or those offering a plethora of alternatives—is correct, the narrative supports the convention and accompanying scenes under broader discussion. The satire, Marcus argues, is reflected partly in the exaggeration of details—particularly in the grotesque nature of the punishment and the large number of children mauled. The retribution, Marcus insists, is disproportionate to the actual offense. Innocent playful jeering hardly merits the shredding of a town's children. Yet the very details that Marcus argues are exaggerated form the nature of

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<sup>186</sup> Due to its obvious implications for theodicy, the episode is a preferred candidate for interpretive alternatives provided by literary approaches to the passage. See, for instance, the mid-20th-century piece, Richard G. Messner, "Elisha and the Bears: A Critical Monograph on 2 Kings 2:23-25," *Grace Journal* 3 (1962): 2–24 in which an author argues against those espousing a non-literal view.

<sup>187</sup> Marcus, David. *From Balaam to Jonah: Anti-Prophetic Satire in the Hebrew Bible* (Brown Judaic Studies. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 43–65.

conventional expectation. Verbal opposition is directed at a divine messenger and represents opposition toward that messenger's deity—Yahweh in this case. And such opposition merits and receives divine retribution, delivered after a verbal response by the prophet. The retribution occurs in an extreme form and ultimately serves to validate Elisha's newly appointed status as divine prophet. Whether the text represents intended satire (particularly *anti-prophetic* satire) is open to debate. What may be asserted with more certainty is that the narrative reflects a scene structured around convention.

However the narrative is perceived, utilizing the conventional type-scene of divine retribution against divine messengers can be considered a cohesive part of the larger leitmotif of 2 Kgs 2. If this scene is present in the text, then several conclusions safely follow.

First, the text recording the incident is not a random inclusion of a prophetic legend merely grouped with other Elisha material. Rather, the event becomes a component in validating the status and ministry of Elisha. Far from functioning as a repository for Elisha legends, or as an indicator of redaction, the presence of such a type-scene in view of the larger thrust of chapter 2 makes the incident the zenith of the literary thread rather than a loose end.

Second, since Moses serves as the archetype for the prophet, mirroring a type-scene in which Moses is opposed creates a strong conventional link between Moses and Elisha. 2 Kgs 2 narrates Elisha's assuming Elijah's mantle by connecting the latter prophet's miracles with those of Moses. Elisha splits the water of the Jordan, linking him to Moses through Joshua's presiding over the same miracle (cf. Ex 14; Josh 3:5–17). Elisha's purification of Jericho's waters in vs. 14 (cf. Ex 15:22–25) further links Elisha and Moses. The bear incident might well play a similar role if the question is asked, "How might this narrative link Elisha to Moses?"

Third, the episode carries implications for Hebrew historiography. The convention of Yahweh's defending his interests through endorsing his messengers, expressed through a type-scene, illuminates the intersection between Hebrew theology and historiography. While the episode might easily be dismissed as fable, the ancient Israelite literary community simply held that Yahweh was a *part* of history. This incident would not have been considered improbable or impossible because of the improbable dynamics narrated in the story. On the contrary, the convention—repeated on multiple occasions through the proposed type-scene—existed precisely because it aligned with what the ancient Hebrews “knew” about Yahweh's intervention in human affairs.

The improbability that bears would be both quick enough and aggressive enough to maul 42 people who are fleeing speaks to the perceived divine involvement behind the attack. The number of youths mauled is 42, though the group may have been larger. The number 42 may in and of itself be a convention, albeit one no longer well understood.<sup>188</sup> Burnett suggests that the number is far less nebulous:

The number of them killed, forty-two, is also the number of young men of Judean royalty and with connections to the house of Omri whom Jehu slaughters later in the narrative (10:14). Forty-two figures regularly in the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near East as a symbolic number of potential blessing or curse, confirming that the disaster was the result neither of a natural coincidence nor the prophet's own caprice but of divine intent. Specific reasons for Yahweh's assault against the “young men” of Bethel are reflected in their words to Elisha.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Marcus, 53.

<sup>189</sup> Joel S. Burnett, “‘Going Down’ to Bethel: Elijah and Elisha in the Theological Geography of the Deuteronomistic History,” *JBL* 129 (2010): 296.

Such attributions to the symbolic nature of the number move modern interpreters toward a figurative understanding of the text. But the inclusion of symbolic details in a narrative do not necessarily undermine the intention of the author to produce historiography. And even if authorial intent was not historiographical per se, authorial utilization of a common type-scene is in no way negated.

### **3.5 Gehazi's Leprosy (2 Kings 5)**

The narrative of Elisha's curing Naaman's leprosy in 2 Kgs 5 includes an opposition type-scene as part of the story arc. After Naaman's healing, the Aramean general attempts to present Elisha with remuneration for his healing. The story that follows is structured with the scene as one more validation by the Historian of Elisha's status as divine messenger.

In the first half of the narrative, the Aramean general Namaan, stricken with leprosy, seeks out the Hebrew prophet Elisha in order to find a cure for his condition. Upon arriving at Elisha's house, Naaman's expectations are upended. He is seeking oracular theater, which Elisha refuses to provide. Naaman had expected Elisha's physical presence combined with a verbal invocation of Yahweh and ritualistic gestures to provide a cure. Instead, the prophet merely issues a verbal command through a messenger to ritually wash in the Jordan. Naaman is angered because his expectation of magic is replaced by a ritualistic bath. The location and specific obedience to Elisha's command are irrelevant to Naaman. Rather, he interprets Elisha's statements as meaningless because they are beneath him. The reader knows, however, that Naaman's healing is predicated on obedience to Elisha's command. Naaman's servants reason with him, persuading him that complying with Elisha's simple command is worth the effort. Naaman relents, washes in the Jordan, and is cured of his leprosy.



The broader narrative arc juxtaposes the stories of Naaman and Gehazi, inverting the expectations of the faithful and the faithless. Naaman is not only a foreigner, but the source of Israelite oppression. Gehazi is not only an Israelite, but the servant of Yahweh's primary prophet. Naaman is expected to be the epitome of evil while Gehazi should be the example of the respectable Israelite. The chapter inverts these expectations, placing an orthodox declaration of faith on the lips of the foreigner Naaman, while making Gehazi the foreign idolater through his heretical actions. Juxtaposed, the two characters invert the readers' expectations, and it is in that inversion that the nature of faith in Yahweh is revealed. Genetics and national citizenship do not guarantee fidelity to Yahweh, nor does a foreign pedigree preclude it. Obedience determines the identity of the true Israelite.<sup>190</sup>

It is the contrasting of Naaman and Gehazi that the type-scene is used to elucidate. The second half of the narrative arc will utilize the scene to clearly present Gehazi as a divine antagonist worthy of retribution for his disloyalty to Yahweh. Gehazi's efforts to acquire wealth and the retribution he receives reflect the typical treatment of divine retribution. The typical scene elements are present here.

### **The Declaration of Yahweh**

The type-scene unfolds at the beginning of the second half of the narrative arc in 2 Kgs 5:15. Cured of his leprosy, Naaman returns to Elisha's residence intent on presenting the prophet with an offering in gratitude for his healing. It is here that the contrast with Gehazi commences. Naaman makes a remarkably monotheistic and Yahwistic statement, professing the superiority of the Israelite deity. When Naaman first arrived at Elisha's residence, Elisha did not meet with him. In this second instance, Naaman meets Elisha, standing before Elisha to make his statement

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<sup>190</sup> Similar pairings would be the prostitute Rahab in Josh 2 and Achan in Josh 7 and the conduct of David and Uriah toward Bathsheba in 2 Sam 11.

about Yahweh. Following his affirmation, Naaman offers Elisha a gift, which the prophet declines.

The declaration by Yahweh appears on the lips of Elisha in 2 Kgs 5:16 when the prophet refuses any reward for the miracle he has performed. Elisha uses a standard oath formula in 1 Kgs 5:16—**חַי־יְהוָה**—to vow that he would not accept any remuneration for his role in healing Naaman. He nuances the oath with the phrase “in whose presence I stand” (**אֲשֶׁר־עִמָּדְתִּי לְפָנָיו**), emphasizing his relationship with Yahweh. The addition removes the oath formula from the possibility of being a flippant or common phrase invoked as a cultural habit and instead demonstrates that Elisha’s rejection of the gift is rooted in his relationship with God.

### **The Counter-statement by the Opposition**

Gehazi makes the counter-statement to Elisha’s vow that he will receive nothing from Naaman in exchange for curing the leprosy. In v. 20, the narrative does not simply follow Gehazi’s actions that encompass his pursuit of greed. Instead, the Historian makes the introduction to Gehazi’s actions *verbal* on the part of Elisha’s servant. Gehazi does not just act. He speaks, making a verbalized counter-statement to Elisha’s declaration.

But not only does Gehazi verbally voice his intentions to obtain something from Naaman, he does so in the form of an oath. That oath—**חַי־יְהוָה**—is the same as used by Elisha to decline Naaman’s offer. The use of the divine oath is crucial to illuminating the structure of the scene. The contrasting oaths uttered by Elisha and Gehazi in 1 Kgs 5:16 and 5:20 reveal the point of opposition between Elisha and Gehazi, who has positioned himself as the prophet’s adversary.

Elisha has used an oath to declare that he will not receive any remuneration from Naaman. Gehazi’s later use of the oath formula in 2 Kgs 5:20, then, is an ironic contradiction to Elisha’s use. Elisha’s oath is intended to give Yahweh credit for the miracle by declining any

personal benefit. Gehazi, on the other hand, uses the oath formula to cement his efforts to profit from the miracle. Elisha emphasized his role as divine messenger in connection to his oath. Gehazi's violation of the oath, while subservient to his master, moves beyond making a liar out of Elisha. Gehazi's lie and actions counteract Elisha's status as the messenger of God.

Elisha vows, aligned with and reflecting the character of Yahweh, to heal Naaman with no strings attached. Gehazi vows—in Yahweh's name—to violate that divine character for his own gain. In 1 Kgs 13, the old prophet lies to the younger man of God but misrepresents no one. He narratively functions as a prophetic voice used to test the obedience of the man of God. In the case of 2 Kgs 5, however, by lying about Elisha's spoken desires to Naaman, Gehazi's misuse of his master's authority is the misuse of divine authority. As Elisha's servant, Gehazi blasphemously misrepresents Yahweh by misrepresenting his divine messenger. Gehazi's lie to Naaman makes a liar out of Elisha, who in his capacity as divine messenger, has sworn the opposite. Gehazi's lie to Naaman makes Elisha's oath—and by extension the deity on which the oath is based—meaningless. Gehazi has stepped into the role of an opponent to the divine messenger by contradicting the message and will receive divine retribution as a result.

Gehazi pursues Naaman, and after catching up with him, voices a lie calculated to induce Naaman to provide him with a gift. Gehazi has carefully crafted the lie in his master's name to be plausible. The fictional need to offer hospitality to visiting prophets is believable. Gehazi is also careful to ask for an amount reasonable to his story: two changes of clothing and a talent of silver would be a generous but realistic request. Naaman generously urges Gehazi to take two talents of silver, playing into Gehazi's low-bid request.

## The Response by the Divine Messenger

With the loot obtained and safely stashed away, the narrative shifts to Elisha's confrontation of Gehazi. When Elisha asks Gehazi where he went, Gehazi lies. Elisha knows the truth and provides the divine messenger response. Gehazi's deceit of Naaman and desire for profit are merely the manifestations of Gehazi's true problem: his lack of Elisha's spirit.

How, though, does Gehazi oppose Elisha in his status as divine messenger? Simply put, Gehazi misrepresents Elisha by lying to Naaman about Elisha's words. As Elisha's servant, Gehazi held the authority of the prophet himself. He misused that authority for petty personal gain, which Elisha notes in reprimanding his servant. Elisha asks Gehazi an interesting rhetorical question: "Did not my heart go with you...?" (לֹא-לִבִּי הָלַךְ), implying that Gehazi should be spiritually aligned with Elisha's perspective, or, at the least, the servant should deliberately align himself with the prophet's values and function accordingly. Elisha's concern over Gehazi's duplicity was not over a contradictory verbal message, but rather over the lack of empathetic unity with his cognitive and emotional disposition (לֵב), which mirrored that of Yahweh.

Elisha's response reveals the deeper declaration by and about Yahweh. In this instance of Naaman's healing, Elisha's divine message is more implicit than a direct verbal statement from Yahweh. Elisha demonstrates a penchant for humble service even to his enemies, an uncommon ethic.<sup>191</sup> The God of Israel is generous and gives with no strings attached. By fulfilling his greed, under oath to Yahweh and in Elisha's name, Gehazi belies that declaration. His counter-statement and accompanying actions have undermined the reputation of Elisha, and by extension, the very character of Yahweh.

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<sup>191</sup> See 2 Kgs 6:18–23. Such merciful responses, at best, may be attributable to an inferior military and political position. Elisha's demonstrations of mercy, however, are portrayed as extensions of his character.

## **Receipt of Divine Retribution in the Form of a Unique Physical Punishment**

Elisha concludes his response by informing Gehazi that his punishment would be the receipt of leprosy that would be a permanent part of his family line. Generational leprosy as a form of retribution in scripture is exclusive to Gehazi. While seemingly unkind, this type of punishment was not unusual, and was even embedded in the law (Exodus 20:4). In the case of the Ten Commandments, children suffer for progenitors' hatred of God, the very hole into which Gehazi has fallen.

Gehazi not only receives leprosy as the retributive form of poetic justice, he receives *Naaman's* leprosy (2 Kgs 5:27). The leprosy is treated by Elisha as Naaman's leprosy and as existing independently of the host. Elisha removes the disease from Naaman, but the disease is not destroyed. Rather, it is still available to infect a meriting host. It is possible that the persistence of the leprosy is a function of the theology or character of the recipient. After recording the miracle of Naaman's healing, the text gives considerable attention to the general's newfound fidelity to Yahweh. The Aramaean general carts dirt home in order to facilitate his exclusive sacrificing to Yahweh. He also asks for leniency to accommodate his master's worship; the king apparently knelt in worship leaning on Naaman's arm. Naaman's kneeling would accommodate his master's infirmity rather than be an expression of worship to the Aramaean deities. Elisha apparently approves Naaman's request for an exception and dismisses him in peace. Naaman has been healed; he acknowledges Yahweh as the source of healing and pledges his fealty. Submissive to Yahweh, Naaman no longer merits leprosy.

But where Naaman demonstrates loyalty to Yahweh, Gehazi trivializes Yahweh's significance. In undermining Yahweh's identity by attempting to place a lie in the mouth of Elisha, Gehazi has positioned himself as the divine antagonist and so has become the new focus

of the retribution. The independent existence of the leprosy fits well within the broader arc of the Naaman-Gehzai narrative and the literary inversion that occurs between the two characters. The leprosy is attached to the deserving recipient: Gehzai.

The larger Elisha-arc repeatedly reinforces Elisha's position as Elijah's replacement—the preeminent prophet in Israel. Narrated retribution in the individual Elisha narratives elevates the prophet at the expense of his opponents. As part of the narrated retribution, the Historian uses the type-scene to validate Elisha's prophetic status. The Gehazi incident becomes one more scene in which divine retribution exalts the divine messenger.

### **3.6 The Trampling of a Court Official (2 Kings 7)**

A third instance in which Elisha is validated as a divine messenger through the use of the type-scene occurs during the narrative of the Aramaean siege in 2 Kings 7. While the Elisha arc repeatedly validates Elisha as divine messenger, 2 Kings 7 includes the additional elements of a narrowly narrated divine retribution against an individual who contradicts the word of the messenger.

The wider narrative into which 2 Kings 7 falls contains three oppositions targeted toward Elisha. All three narratives contain elements of the divine messenger opposition type scene. The first two reflect a less focused opposition/messenger response motif, while the third aligns more closely with the type-scene as it has been discussed so far.

The first opposition to Elisha is rooted in the Aramean king Ben-hadad's frustration regarding the leaking of information from his private military councils. 2 Kgs 6:10 indicates that the leaks occur on several occasions.<sup>192</sup> The problem becomes prevalent enough that Ben-hadad attributes the leaks to someone in his inner circle. His advisors instead pin the leaks on Elisha,

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<sup>192</sup> לֹא אַחַת וְלֹא שְׁתַּיִם (not once and not twice) is a colloquialism for “several.”

noting that his prophetic status, combined with his loyalty to Israel, allowed him to reveal the king's confidential information.

In order to prevent his plans from becoming known, Ben-hadad opts to capture Elisha. Upon being informed of Elisha's whereabouts, Ben-hadad dispatches a military contingent to Dothan in order to siege the city and force the prophet's surrender.

Elisha is completely undaunted by the presence of the Aramean army and soothes his servant's anxiety by allowing the servant to view the presence of supernatural forces defending the city. Elisha's response toward the Aramean army is to pray for their blindness. Blinded, the vulnerable Arameans are led to Samaria, treated well, and released. The Historian notes that the incident ended the incursion of Aramite raiders in Israelite territory.

In 2 Kgs 6:24 Ben-hadad alters his tactics. After the Aramean troops are defeated at Dothan, Elisha becomes a target that is too difficult to eliminate. Instead, Ben-hadad gathers his entire army (כָּל־מִקְהָלָוּ) and lays siege to Samaria. Ben-hadad shifts his opposition from Elisha to Israel itself, and it is this military pressure against Samaria that both forms the backdrop for Jehoram's resistance to Elisha and sets the stage for the third scene.

Within the narrative, the effects of the Aramean siege on Samaria are immediate. In v. 25, the city experiences a famine, severe enough to make normally unclean items valuable commodities. The severity of the starvation occurring in the city is encapsulated for both Jehoram and the reader in the incident in which two women make a compact to eat their own children. After the compact is broken by one of the women, the other woman seeks justice with the king. The king's horror at the incident and his public grieving culminate with his blame of Elisha for the predicament in which Samaria finds itself. Jehoram uses an oath formula (כִּהְיִיעֲשֶׂהָ)

לִי אֲלֹהִים וְכֹה יוֹסֵף) to promise Elisha’s immediate decapitation and dispatches a messenger with the authority to apparently do just that.

Elisha’s response to Jehoram’s threat is to simply bar the door against the messenger Jehoram sends to his house. Elisha has previously stated during the Moabite revolt in 2 Kgs 3:13–14 that he has no respect for Jehoram, in no small part because of his non-Yahwistic loyalties. To the elders present in his house, Elisha refers to Jehoram as the “son of a murderer.” The insult links the heart of Jehoram to his father Ahab—the two kings are made of the same stuff.

Ben-hadad’s opposition to Elisha leads to Jehoram’s opposition. Within that context occurs the third opposition and the use of the divine messenger opposition type-scene.

### **The Statement by the Messenger of God Given in Divine Authority**

This third opposition to Elisha occurs within 2 Kings 7 and involves a royal official. The messenger whom Jehoram sends to confront Elisha arrives at Elisha’s house with a specific message: “This evil is from Yahweh, why should we still wait for Yahweh?” Jehoram blames the despair of the besieged city on Yahweh and confronts his messenger. Elisha’s statement initiates the type-scene, which will serve as a sign to the king.

The word of the Lord to Elisha in 7:1 comes in direct response to Jehoram’s disillusioned impatience. Elisha makes the declarative statement, in this case using the emphatic double imagery of an oracle statement: “Hear the word of the Lord” and “This is what the Lord says.”<sup>193</sup> This double-statement provides the foundational basis for the convention. Elisha speaks a

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<sup>193</sup> Elisha’s command to “hear” is plural in the MT (שָׁמְעוּ), but the LXX makes the number singular, making King Jehoram (mentioned in the prior verse) the recipient of the prophecy. The LXX reading was likely an effort to align Elisha’s prophecy with the singular use in v. 18.



message from God as the divine prophetic emissary. It is in this capacity that Elisha is challenged by the officer.

Elisha is initially named both as the source of the oracle in 7:1 and the specific prophecy regarding the officer (7:2). In 7:17, however, the text transitions to the generic phrase “man of God” (אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים) to refer to Elisha. One function the transition serves is to emphasize once again Elisha’s identity as Yahweh’s representative. In 7:2, the officer rejects the words of Elisha, ignorant of or indifferent to his identity as divine messenger. But the transition to “man of God” makes the received retribution clear: the officer has not rejected a mere man, but instead has opposed Yahweh by contradicting his messenger.

### **The Counter-statement by the Opposition**

The royal official who will make the counter is a person “on whom the king’s arm was leaning” (הַשָּׁלִישׁ אֲשֶׁר-לְמֶלֶךְ נִשְׁעָן עָלָיו). Izabela Eph‘al-Jaruzelska suggests that the official was “responsible for the public order,” a royal adjutant functioning as law enforcement:

He was probably in charge of the gate, the most important public area in the city, disorganized following the withdrawal of Aramaeans. Maintaining interior order remained an important state function, which used a special apparatus for this purpose, namely police. Thus the royal adjutant’s activities present him as a military figure, occasionally belonging to a political substructure.<sup>194</sup>

The significance of the officer’s position as the king’s attendant is his special status among the community. As a recognized official, the officer is a public figure whose words carry weight among the people. His contradiction of Elisha’s prediction, then, carries implications

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<sup>194</sup> Izabela Eph‘al-Jaruzelska, “Officialdom and Society in the Book of Kings and the Social Relevance of the State,” in *The Books of Kings : Sources, Composition, Historiography and Reception*, ed. Matthew J. Adams, Baruch Halpern, and André Lemaire, *Formation and Interpretation of Old Testament Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 489.

beyond just his own disbelief. Jehoram blames Elisha for the city's predicament as he publicly grieves. The officer's challenge of Elisha's prediction similarly targets Elisha's—and by extension, Yahweh's—efficacy. The officer's role is significant, not least because of his perception by the community.

The officer's contradiction comes in the form of a rhetorical question.<sup>195</sup> He questions the possibility of Elisha's promise coming true, even if Yahweh himself were to supernaturally provide sustenance of the city. The officer's statement, "how could this thing be?" uses the Hebrew דבר, the same term used in the "word of the Lord" construct that Elisha delivers. Whether directly or indirectly, the officer verbally questions the divine word Elisha has given, consequently undermining his message.

The officer might be forgiven for his assessment of Elisha's promise as implausible. Elisha's statement is a divine promise of the seemingly impossible: the availability the following day of inexpensively priced staple commodities. The contrast is stark considering the emphasized severity of the famine in 2 Kings 6:25. The prices for normally-discardable refuse are exorbitant—price gouging to be expected during a military siege. Moving from the near-total absence of foodstuffs to an abundant supply in twenty-four hours seems unreasonable.

The convention reflected in the narrative, however, has little to do with the reasonableness of Elisha's prophecy and more to do with its divine source. By questioning the messenger, he questions both the knowledge and efficacy of the source—Yahweh himself.

### **The Verbal Response by the Divine Messenger**

Elisha's response to the officer in 2 Kgs 7:3 is succinct. First, Elisha reasserts the prediction personally to the officer, affirming that he will, in fact, see the prediction fulfilled. The second

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<sup>195</sup> הֲיִהְיֶה with an interrogative particle appears outside of 2 Kgs 7 only in Deut 4:32 and Joel 1:2, where the obvious answer is "no."

component of Elisha's response is to supplement the prediction by informing the officer that he will be excluded from partaking of the plenty that will soon be delivered. The reference to the officer's impending death is not exactly veiled; the officer will die of starvation if the siege does not soon end. Since he will not be eating the bounty, he will die anyway. Elisha's implication is clear. The officer will not be alive for much longer.

### **Receipt of Divine Retribution in the Form of a Unique Physical Punishment**

Elisha promises the royal official retribution, which the latter receives in 7:17. His death is caused by the stampede of Samarian residents, eager to collect the spoil from the Aramean camp. The crushing under the feet is a unique form of death, with the possible exception of Jezebel in 2 Kgs 9:33.

In countering Elisha, the unnamed royal official receives a retribution that brackets the scene. Vv. 18–20 recount the scene, repeating the episode in vv. 1–2. The passage is considered by some to be a later explanatory redaction.<sup>196</sup> The retribution-fulfillment in v. 17 seems to complete the narrative by itself, requiring no additional comment. If 1 Kgs 7:18–20 does indeed reflect a redactional addition, little changes in regard to the presence of the scene presently under discussion. The presence of an addition merely enhances the convention already present in the narrative. The redactor would, in this instance, be providing clarification about the convention present in the text. The divine messenger retribution motif was either created by the redactor and served to form subsequent convention among readers, or the convention was already present in the narrative, and the redactor merely amplified it.

The portrayal of God's presence and activity needed to be obvious to the people because of the siege—many would assume God's absence in the face of their own suffering. Even though

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<sup>196</sup> T. R. Hobbs, *2 Kings* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 85, 88.

the trampling of the official might not even be known by the mob until later, the inclusion of the incident in the narrative ensures that the validation of the divine messenger convention is reinforced.

All three instances in the broader narrative in which a character opposes Elisha also serve to validate the prophet's status as divine messenger. Elisha wields power over private conversations and blindness as well as his ability to predict the future. In each instance, he is opposed *because* of his ability. Ben-hadad seeks to capture Elisha because of his ability to supernaturally eavesdrop. Elisha responds to the Arameans by smiting the military contingent with blindness and then treating them kindly. Jehoram intends to kill Elisha because he holds the prophet responsible for the suffering of Samaria during the Aramean siege of the city. Elisha responds with a barred door and a promise of a broken siege. Within the narrative of the ending of the siege, the Historian uses the type-scene as a means of validating Elisha's prophetic status. The scene itself will also serve didactically, reminding Jehoram that Yahweh has always been in control.

### **3.7 The Persecution of Jeremiah**

No divine messenger in the Hebrew Bible attracted as much opposition as the prophet Jeremiah. Opposition to the prophet from Anathoth was ubiquitous, arising from political, cultic, and communal circles. Such prevalent opposition should provide ample opportunities for discovering narratives of divine retribution utilizing conventional forms. The central question for the discussion at hand, then, is whether or not the text of Jeremiah actually contains such conventions.

No fewer than five passages within Jeremiah immediately come to the forefront as passages in which the prophet encounters obvious opposition. None of the texts easily presents

itself as an obvious reflection of the type-scene under discussion. Nevertheless, a brief discussion will reveal the influence of the scene in each of these passages. Particularly when juxtaposed with Deut 18, the texts within Jeremiah suggest an interest in the content of the message rather than a validation of the messenger himself.

While Jer 15:15 and 17:18 briefly allude to Jeremiah's persecutors, Jer 11:18–23 offers the first well-rounded description of plot against the prophet's life. Jeremiah encounters a murder plot about which he was ignorant until the scheme was revealed to him by Yahweh. Jeremiah makes no statement himself to which his opponents offer a counter-statement. They merely offer a threefold metaphor for murder: destroying a tree and its fruit, cutting off Jeremiah from the land of the living, and the removing of his name from communal memory. Jeremiah's reply does not address his opponents at all. Rather, he makes an imprecatory appeal to Yahweh for their punishment. The punishment Jeremiah predicts, while extreme, is hardly unique in the book. Here the predicted retribution for opposing Jeremiah will follow the broader norms of punishment in the face of exile promised throughout the book: sword and famine.<sup>197</sup>

Jer 18:18–23 follows on the heels of Jeremiah's visit to the potter's house. Yahweh's promise to scatter the nation is followed by verse 18 in which an undesignated group plots against Jeremiah.<sup>198</sup> Their impetus for action against the prophet is apparently their offense at Jeremiah's prediction of the marginalization of the religious caste. Their plan is merely to "strike" (נכה) Jeremiah with their tongues. The unique phrase, occurring only here, suggests a coordinated oral attack designed to undermine and discredit the prophet. Their intention is to reject the messenger along with the message through verbal assault.

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<sup>197</sup> Cf. 14:12, 16:4, 18:21, 21:9, 24:10, 27:8, 29:18, and 44:12.

<sup>198</sup> The group has no specifiers beyond the use of the plural to indicate the opponents—וַיֹּאמְרוּ לְכוּ וְנַחֲשֶׁבֶה עֲלֵי-יְרֵמְיָהוּ.

Jeremiah's response reflects his extensive use of imprecatory cursing formulas but does not narrate a specific retribution received by his opponents.<sup>199</sup> Apart from the clear opposition to Jeremiah in the statement by his antagonists, little about the episode reflects a divine messenger opposition type-scene.

Jer 26 contains the beginnings of the divine messenger opposition type-scene, but unravels at the conclusion of the narrative. In Jer 26, the prophet receives and obeys the command of Yahweh to deliver a message of repentance in the temple courtyard. Upon hearing the clear message from Jeremiah, his opponents—temple priests and prophets—offer a terse counter-statement: מוֹת תָּמוּת (you will surely die!). They question Jeremiah's rationale for speaking against the temple and seek to have him put to death. The narrative moves away from the type-scene at this point. Rather than an escalating confrontation in which prophetic opponents receive a unique physical punishment, the narrative shifts toward the mundane as the religious leaders engage in a calm discussion with Judah's political leaders regarding Jeremiah's fate. Jeremiah also takes the opportunity to speak for himself, warning the officials against taking on the bloodguilt resulting from the execution of an innocent man. The officials and a portion of religious officials recount the similar negative prophecy of Micah during the time of Hezekiah, concurring with Jeremiah's warning about bloodguilt.

The text here inserts a second incident of prophecy against Jerusalem by the prophet Uriah, and notes that in that case, Uriah was murdered by Jehoiakim. But the king of Judea receives no retribution in the narrative, inserted in the text here only to function as an evil foil to Hezekiah. Righteous Hezekiah didn't execute a prophet speaking against Jerusalem, evil Jehoiakim did. The implication for Jeremiah's oppressors is clear: only an evil ruler would

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<sup>199</sup> John Arthur Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 440.

execute a prophet for speaking against the city in the name of Yahweh. Ultimately, Jeremiah's life is spared, preserved by the prominence of Ahikam.

Jer 20 and 28 move from generalized opposition to particularized hostility emanating from specific individuals. Both passages, therefore, have more in common with the scene as discussed so far. In Jer 20, the priest Pashhur provides the opposition to Jeremiah. Jeremiah functions as a messenger of God and is opposed in that capacity. Jer 20:1–6 records one incident but makes no indication of a verbal confrontation between the two. Pashhur's offense against the prophet is two-fold. First, Pashhur uses his religious authority to administer a beating to Jeremiah. The punishment is directed personally at the prophet, presumably in order to castigate him for the content of his message. The second punishment and offense involve restraining Jeremiah. The stocks (מִהֶפְקֵת) in which Jeremiah is placed differ from stereotypical Middle Ages imagery, but meant more than mere confinement. Walton suggests the similar usage of מִהֶפְקֵת in 2 Chronicles 16:10 indicates a jail rather than a "torture device."<sup>200</sup> Holladay more narrowly describes the word, considering it to be "a device to immobilize the prisoner. But the nature of the device must remain uncertain."<sup>201</sup>

Pashhur's offense is rooted not merely in his opposition to Jeremiah, but to his opposition in his capacity as a temple official. The term פְּקִיד נָגִיד refers to a primary official, possibly the high priest himself.<sup>202</sup> Pashhur is resisting Jeremiah in the name of Yahweh, effectively impersonating the true messenger and claiming authority over the message itself. Consequently, divine retribution is an appropriate consequence for the hypocritical priest.

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<sup>200</sup> John H. Walton, *Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 280.

<sup>201</sup> William Lee Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 1-25* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 543.

<sup>202</sup> HALOT, נָגִיד.

After his release, Jeremiah responds prophetically to the incident. Critical to note is that Jeremiah offers his prophesy specifically to Pashhur in response to the beating and confinement. Jeremiah has already delivered an oracle against Jerusalem promising disaster for the city. The impetus for the oracle after his release is his mistreatment at the hands of Pashhur. It is the specific offense committed by Pashhur that results in a divine response.

Part of the prophesy regards the priest's identity from the divine perspective, and part of the prophesy undermines the impetus for the beating, namely that the temple and city of Jerusalem are in and of themselves sacred.

Jeremiah offers Yahweh's new name for Pashhur: *מַגּוֹר מְסָבִיב*—"Terror on every side." The renaming may be a reflection of Jeremiah's confinement, insinuating that the real confinement will be experienced by the priest.

Jeremiah's proclamation about the fate of Jerusalem belies Pashhur's perspective on the temple and Jerusalem, not specifically stated, but implicit in the text and a recurring theme in the book. The reverence toward the temple and the holy city creates a sense of invulnerability among its adherents, and it is presumably the questioning of this invulnerability that Pashhur resents.

Pashhur's experience in the exile will punish him for his specific offense against Jeremiah and undermine the false theological paradigm he represents. The divine retribution he will ultimately receive will validate Jeremiah's message, but that retribution does not occur within the confines of the narrative.

In Jer 28, the individual opposition to Jeremiah comes from the prophet Hananiah. Hananiah appears on the scene as the prophet ostensibly offering a message from Yahweh. Jeremiah is in the position to offer a contrasting message to Hananiah's prediction of Israel's deliverance from Babylon. But rather than counter Hananiah's message, Jeremiah provides a



litmus test not for his own status as divine messenger or the veracity of his message, but for the nature of prophecy itself. The fulfilled prediction of peace, Jeremiah argues, is the only way to validate Hananiah's prediction of peace.

Hananiah's counter-statement is a sign-act in which he counters Jeremiah's sign-act of the yoke the latter constructed and wore in the previous chapter. Hananiah smashes the yoke and verbally defines the acts as symbolic of deliverance from Babylon. Jeremiah departs, but returns after receiving a command from God to confront Hananiah. Jeremiah denies Hananiah's status as divine messenger and predicts that the prophet will die. The time marker of the fifth month mentioned in 28:1 serves to emphasize the time frame of Hananiah's death. While Hananiah's death is not unique in form, it is in the timing of its occurrence. The narrative abruptly ends with the mention of his death in the seventh month, a quick two-month validation of Jeremiah's message. Matthews comes close to detecting the hint of the type-scene when he states, "Jeremiah knows that the lying message of Hananiah must be discredited and the cognitive dissonance ended. Therefore he goes on to predict the death of Hananiah, and the narrator subsequently notes that Hananiah died during that same year (28:16-17)."<sup>203</sup>

The broader sweep of Jer 26–29 seems to be grappling with the larger of issue of true vs. false prophecy. While the narrative arc here hints at the literary convention in which prophets are validated at the expense of their opponents, it moves far beyond it in pursuing its interests.<sup>204</sup> Part of the book of Jeremiah's engagement with the subject of prophecy arguably lies in its struggle with the pluralism of conflicting but ostensibly divine messages during a time of social

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<sup>203</sup> Matthews, 155.

<sup>204</sup> Anthony Chinedu Osuji, "True and False Prophecy in Jer 26-29 (MT): Thematic and Lexical Landmarks," *ETL* 82 (2006): 437–52.

and political turmoil. While Jeremiah stands firmly in the Moses tradition,<sup>205</sup> his opponents would have been understood to stand in that tradition as well. How then to discern between competing messages?

Many note that fulfillment of predictive prophecy as described in Deut 18 fails as a criterion for evaluating Jeremiah and his opponents, particularly Hananiah.<sup>206</sup> James Hibbard notes, “Hananiah’s death appears premature according to the standard of Deuteronomy 18. It occurs a mere two *months* after his utterance (28.17), but disconfirmation of his prophecy *qua* prediction would require two *years*.”<sup>207</sup> While Hananiah’s untimely death may seem inconsistent with the standards of Deut 18, it is loosely consistent with the immediate validation of a divine messenger through a clear act of divine retribution falling on a prophetic opponent. Yet even here, Hananiah’s punishment is because of his false prophecy (Jer 28:15–16), not his direct opposition to Jeremiah.

Criteria for evaluating prophets was fluid, and there seems no reason Hananiah should have been inherently considered to be offering false prophecy.<sup>208</sup> Hananiah appears, like Jeremiah, to be a prophet of Yahweh, leaving the people without a mechanism to immediately evaluate his veracity. Similarly, Pashhur’s status elsewhere is without hint of spiritual compromise. The priest’s genealogical records in 1 Chron 9 and Ezra 10 make no mention of his

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<sup>205</sup> Gary E. Yates, "Intertextuality and the Portrayal of Jeremiah the Prophet," *BibSac* 170 (2013): 286-303.

<sup>206</sup> See Paul Gallagher, "Discerning True and False Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah," *AJT* 28 (2014): 3-15.

<sup>207</sup> James Todd Hibbard, "True and False Prophecy: Jeremiah's Revision of Deuteronomy," *JSOT* 35.3 (2011): 347 (emphasis his).

<sup>208</sup> James L. Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict: Its Effect upon Israelite Religion* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 49-60.

evil character, noting only that his descendants were capable men (גְּבוּרֵי הַיָּל) (1 Chr 9:13).

Pashhur simply holds his place in the genealogical lists.<sup>209</sup>

Only the ultimate punishment against Pashhur and Hananiah will validate Jeremiah's message, and by lesser extension, the prophet himself. The punishment, however, is not consistent with the component in the suggested type-scene. Neither man suffers an extreme fate that is recorded. Hananiah merely dies within a non-coincidental time frame, while Pashhur exits the narrative with merely Jeremiah's promise of death.

### **Conclusion**

While admittedly fluid, the divine messenger opposition type-scene seems more mist than stone within the pages of Jeremiah. The type-scene under discussion serves primarily to validate the divine messenger, while the thrust of the book of Jeremiah is what makes a message true when the competing sources seem authentic. Ultimately, while opposition to the prophet is evident throughout the book, the text's focus is on navigating true and false prophecy rather than the specific validation of the messenger. Consequently, the divine messenger opposition type-scene is secondary to the status of the prophecy itself.

The priestly class and nobility oppose Jeremiah and seem symbolic of the larger resistance of Israel to Jeremiah's message throughout the book. Opposition to Jeremiah is not incidental on the part of a single individual or two. Resistance to Jeremiah is ongoing and systemic, forming a crucial part of the book's fabric in which the community's wrestling with the veracity of a prophetic message is reflected. In this sense, the type-scene under discussion is of limited value since the rhetorical function of the opposition has wider implications than the legitimacy of the divine messenger.

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<sup>209</sup> The genealogies in Chronicles and Ezra focus on lineage rather than theological evaluation, making any spiritual commentary on Pashhur unlikely.

The antagonists in the book of Jeremiah are not inherently opponents who are attempting to undermine Jeremiah's prophetic status (as in 2 Kings 2), nor are they opponents who attempt to ignore or nullify a message through persecuting the messenger (as in 1 Kgs 13). They are part of a wider treatment of the theme of false prophecy. This concern with true vs. false prophecy may be rooted in the more formalized delivery of prophecy in Jeremiah's day—the later prophetic corpus reflects more message than messenger.

### **3.8 The Persecution of Amos (Amos 7:10–17)**

Another text in which a Yahwistic messenger is opposed by a member of the prophetic guild occurs in Amos. Amos 7:9–17 is certainly the most controversial passage within the book, and the discussion centers around the seeming misplacement of a singular narrative section within the larger oracular content of the book.

The origin and nature of Amos 7:9-17 is uncertain. Some assert that the passage was a redactional insertion between the third and fourth visions of Amos, while others maintain that the section serves as a natural part of the context. Clements, for instance, suggests that the heavy dependence of 7:10–17 on 7:9 suggests that they were originally composed and intended as a single literary unit.<sup>210</sup> Of those who consider the passage an addition, Dijkstra's comments that the entire passage is wholly imported into its canonical context is typical: "The story of Amos 7:9–17 was intentionally inserted into the framework of visionary reports in order to present

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<sup>210</sup> Ronald E. Clements, "Amos and the Politics of Israel," in *Storia e Tradizioni Di Israele. Scritti in Onore Di J. Alberto Soggin*, ed. Daniele Garrone, Felice Israel, and Sabatino Moscati (Brescia: Paideia, 1991), 59. See also Paul R. Noble, "Amos and Amaziah in Context: Synchronic and Diachronic Approaches to Amos 7-8," *CBQ* 60 (1998): 423–39. Noble assesses diachronic and synchronic approaches to Amos 7–8, ultimately arguing that no evidence supporting diachronic construction of the text exists. For those considering the text to be a product of redaction, see Gene M. Tucker, "Prophetic Authenticity: A Form-Critical Study of Amos 7:10-17," *Interp.* 27 (October 1973): 423–34; and Peter R. Ackroyd, "Judgment Narrative between Kings and Chronicles: An Approach to Amos 7:9-17," in *Canon and Authority: Essays in Old Testament Religion and Theology*, ed. George W. Coats and Burke O. Long (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 71–87.

Amos as a new type of prophetic personage, a prophet like Moses.”<sup>211</sup> But while Dijkstra offers several intertextual links to support his argument, he does not discuss the relevance of the retribution scene in which Amos predicts Amaziah’s demise. If Dijkstra is correct, then a redactor has imported a narrative to link Amos to Moses. That a particular *kind* of narrative is present—one that includes elements in a conventional manner—is telling. Amos 7:9–17 narrates retribution through the divine messenger opposition type-scene—a tool that reinforces the identity of the divine messenger. Amos need not receive validation through a narrative describing his interaction with an opponent, but that is exactly what the passage does, narratively establishing Amos’ credentials at Amaziah’s expense.

The manner in which Amos’ prophetic status is validated is, once again, the divine messenger opposition type-scene. Ackroyd’s form-critical analysis leads him to the conclusion that the narrative section in Amos is a conflated exegesis of 1 Kings 13 and 2 Chronicles 25:14–16. The use of the names Amaziah and Jeroboam, combined with the actions of the unnamed prophet in 1 Kings 13, demonstrates, for Ackroyd, that Amos 7:9–17 utilizes material from the earlier passages in order to validate the prophetic status of Amos. Regarding the purpose of the presumed addition of vv. 9–17, Ackroyd asks,

May it not simply be that the basic purpose of this narrative is to pronounce doom on the dynasty of Jehu, within the larger theme of the apostasy of the Northern Kingdom, and in the context of this, equally to pronounce doom on the one who, like Jeroboam in 1 Kings 13, Jehoiakim in Jeremiah 36, and Amaziah in 2 Chronicles 25, endeavors to deflect the true will of the deity and the mediation of his word?<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Dijkstra, 127.

<sup>212</sup> Ackroyd, 81.

An alternative to Ackroyd's position relies not on the conflation with other intertexts (whether deliberate or unintentional), but rather on the ubiquitous nature of the convention under discussion. The assumption that those who oppose divine messengers are commonly expected to literarily suffer explains the presence in both 1 Kings 13 and 2 Chron 25 of an opponent who suffers for resisting a man of God.

Ackroyd comes close in attaching the scene to retribution against those who would "deflect the true will of the deity and the mediation of his word." He sees the similarity but explores no further because of his form-critical approach. Dijkstra attributes the presence of such similarities to a common literary convention: "We may assume that redactors of prophetic books writing Hebrew as their mother-tongue were conversant with existing relevant literature, stylistic funds of forms and discourses that were part of their literary stock in trade and that they applied from their network of intertexts."<sup>213</sup> The assumption is that the narrative section of Amos 7 and the similar passages to which Dijkstra refers utilize a common literary convention to narrate Yahweh's retribution against opponents to his divinely-dispatched messengers.

Tucker also takes a form-critical approach to the text, and argues that the focus of the narrative section

can be found by viewing the whole for what it is—a story—and looking for the line of a plot or at least the creation of tension and its resolution. And the unit does have a plot: a protagonist (Amos) is opposed by an antagonist (Amaziah) and up to a certain point the issue is in doubt, but it is resolved. Viewed from this perspective, we see an exposition, presenting the essential background to the conflict (10-11), a crisis, heightening the tension (12-14), a denouement in which the conflict finally is resolved (15), and a

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<sup>213</sup> Dijkstra, 121–2.

conclusion in the form of a prophetic speech which presents the results of the conflict and its resolution (16-17). The center of the story and its key are found in verse 15, Amos' affirmation of his vocation and commission. At this point for the first time the issue is stated explicitly in proper terms and at the same time resolved: "but Yahweh took me from behind the flock and Yahweh said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'" To this assertion no response by the priest can be allowed. The prophetic speech is the direct result of this resolution of this particular dispute.<sup>214</sup>

Ultimately, Tucker notes the thematic similarities to Jer 26 and Jer 28, but stops short of suggesting that the presence of such similarities constitutes any kind of a convention.<sup>215</sup> Rising above the form-critical fray in Amos 7, though, is the common thread connecting the thematic content of the prophetic and narrative passages in which an antagonist opposes a divine emissary: the presence of a common literary convention utilized by multiple authors to narrate the validation of a divine messenger.

### **The Declaration by Yahweh**

The narrative of Amos 7 is placed snugly between the third and fourth visions of the broader section of 7:1–8:3. The first two visions involve images of judgment—locusts and fire, respectively. The images prompt Amos in both instances to implore God for mercy due the nation's frailty. The type of symbolism switches in the third vision from the agency of judgment (locusts and fire) to the standard of judgment. The plumb line of the third vision, followed by Yahweh's declaration that he will no longer spare Israel is followed by an image of a basket of

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<sup>214</sup> Tucker, 428.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 429–30.

summer fruit, indicating that the time for judgment has arrived. The combined message of the four visions is that Israel's judgment, while temporarily delayed, is still imminent.

Amaziah's later counter-statement is crucial to sketching out the parameters of the scene's declaration by Yahweh. In v. 11, Amaziah engages Amos' prediction about Jeroboam. Because Jeroboam is not mentioned as meriting divine judgment until the third vision, as part of Amaziah's counter-statement, the oracle against Jeroboam is central to connecting the scene to the third vision. But the declaration also expands beyond the third vision, incorporating the Exile allusions from chapter 5.

Amos' third vision results in a three-part prediction. First, the high places will be emptied. The *niphal* of  $\text{נִשְׁמַד}$  used here often indicates a desolation caused by violence. The second prediction is that the sanctuaries in the Northern kingdom will be laid waste. Coupled together, these poetic stanzas promise the end of the cultus in Israel. The third stanza has no parallel and draws attention to the third vision's final prediction: Yahweh will bring the sword to the house of Jeroboam. Only after Amos' prediction about Jeroboam's fate does Amaziah respond.

While the oracles of Amos' broader ministry represent the words of Yahweh, the impetus for Amaziah's counter-response and inclusion of the conventional scene is the prediction Amos makes against Jeroboam. And the narrative section—whether a part of the original composition of Amos or not—is placed after the third vision because it fits there. While Clements argues that v. 9 is part of the interloping narrative, the section from v. 9 to v. 17 forms a narrative whole consistent with the opposition type-scene.



## The Counter-statement by the Opposition

The antagonist's counter-statement begins in Amos 7:11 with the introduction of the divine opponent. Amaziah is a priest at Bethel, presumably a member of the cultic guild overseeing the sanctuary there. Noble suggests that the Amaziah literarily serves as a symbol of the Northern Kingdom's denigration. "Amaziah's narrative function...is to portray the state into which, under royal patronage, the most prestigious sanctuary of the Northern Kingdom had fallen. Amos' carefully considered reply (w. 14-17) shows why, from a divine perspective, this is wholly inadequate. The unfolding drama thus justifies the pronouncement of judgment against the royal house and against the shrines that was announced in v. 9."<sup>216</sup> Contra Noble, rather than function as a literary type of Northern Kingdom's apostasy that merits judgment, Amaziah's role is to supplement the validation of Amos.

Amaziah's first act is to inform Jeroboam that Amos has initiated a conspiracy against the king. Corey notes that while Amos "may not be involved himself in political machinations against Jeroboam II, his words could be used by a conspirator to mobilize support against the king,"<sup>217</sup> making the Southern prophet's words that much more dangerous.

Another issue of scholarly interest concerns Amos' status as a divine messenger—in what capacity could he be considered a *nabi*? Amos' origins in Judah, his livelihood, connection to the prophetic guild at Bethel, as well as his opponent Amaziah's connection to the royal court of Jeroboam all come into play in determining the possible acceptance or rejection of the Southern prophet in the North. Divine messengers have been opposed by members of the prophetic guild before. Zedekiah opposed Micaiah, and Elisha's journey to Bethel was opposed by youths from

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<sup>216</sup> Noble, 429–30.

<sup>217</sup> Couey, 311.

the city, a cultic and prophetic center. Amaziah's opposition to Amos may very well be rooted in the latter's lack of association with the larger prophetic guild.

Zevit takes a slightly different tack and suggests that the resistance to Amos arises from the prophet's Judean origins and lack of connection to the royal court of the northern kingdom: When Amaziah addressed Amos as a *M<sup>eh</sup>*, he was not challenging the authenticity of his oracles nor was he casting a disparaging remark on his office, rather he was emphasizing the impropriety of Amos, whom he believed to be patronized by the king of Judah, in delivering oracles against Jeroboam at Bethel, an Israelite sanctuary. What irked Amaziah seems not to have been the content of Amos' oracles, but the fact that they were delivered by a Judean *hōzeh*.<sup>218</sup>

It is Amos' status as interloper that is questioned, as Ackroyd notes:

By what right...can a prophet of Judah pronounce doom on this royal figure and royal house? The credentials of the prophet must be challenged. The narrative of 1 Kings 13 has the king endeavor to have the prophet arrested. Amos 7 presents the attempt at frustrating the divine will by having Amaziah order the prophet out of the country. The response in each case is catastrophic. In 1 Kgs 13:4, the king's outstretched arm is withered so that he cannot withdraw it. In Amos 7, the priest's attempt is countered by the appeal to a divine commission which is ineluctable, and the priest who dares to counter that commission himself falls under judgment (vv 16–17). The attack on a true prophet is an attack on God himself. The same point is implicitly made in 2 Chr 25:14–16 and also in Jeremiah 28.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Ziony Zevit, "Misunderstanding at Bethel, Amos 7:12-17," *VT* 25 (October 1975): 789.

<sup>219</sup> Ackroyd, 82.

Ackroyd here has appropriately drawn the connection Jeroboam in 1 Kgs 13 and Amaziah in Amos 7. The central focus of both narratives, encapsulated in a type-scene, is the legitimacy of an individual making a statement on behalf of Yahweh. Amos has arrived on foreign turf with a message from God and will be supported by divine retribution against his opponent.

Amos' specific declaration on behalf of Yahweh occurs in v. 11. There, the prophet nuances the vision against Jeroboam in v. 9. The king will die by the sword and the people will be exiled. This repetition of the oracle against Jeroboam from the second vision occurs only after the introduction of Amaziah in v. 10. It is Amaziah who functions as the opponent to Amos—and by extension to Yahweh—in order to further validate the prophet and his message.

Amaziah's statement of opposition to Amos commands the Judean prophet to return home. Amaziah's forbidding Amos from prophesying in the north is rooted in the nature of the cultic center at Bethel: it belonged to and was patronized by the king. Amaziah's words make Dijkstra's suggestion that Amaziah is most probably acting at Jeroboam's direction quite reasonable.<sup>220</sup> If so, then Amaziah is acting in a royal capacity as a proxy for the king—it's possible that telling Amos to leave was a royal edict and Amaziah was the messenger. The scene, then, has political and spiritual implications.

Amaziah offers what he considers to be a decisive reason why Amos cannot prophesy there, but in fact the double use of the root *mlk* to qualify the shrine at Bethel neatly encapsulates what, from the narrator's perspective, is fundamentally wrong with the place: because it is completely under the control of the monarchy, its affairs are conducted in accordance with the requirements of national politics rather than religious

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<sup>220</sup> Dijkstra, 118–9. See also Couey, J. Blake. "Amos Vii 10-17 and Royal Attitudes toward Prophecy in the Ancient Near East." *VT* 58 (2008): 300–314.

propriety, with the consequence that those whom Yahweh has commissioned to prophesy are forbidden to speak there.<sup>221</sup>

The narrative inserts the encounter between Amaziah and Amos in order to portray the spiritual illegitimacy of the Northern sanctuary and uses a type-scene to do so.

### **The Response of the Divine Messenger**

Amos' response to Amaziah is twofold. First, Amos asserts in 7:14 his qualifications to deliver the message with which he was entrusted. The passage is relevant to the discussion of Amos' qualifications to deliver Yahweh's message because it contains the prophet's self-identification. Amos ostensibly denies being a prophet (לֹא-נָבִיא אֲנִי) and instead identifies himself as pastoralist. H. Neil Richardson argues that the *lamed* prefixing the *aleph* in Amos 7:14 is a mis-pointed asseverate, making Amos' statement an emphatic emphasis of his prophetic status rather than a negation.<sup>222</sup> In Richardson's perspective, Amos identifies himself as a prophet—albeit one separate from the prophetic guild—as opposed to a seer.<sup>223</sup> While Richardson's interpretation is plausible, it is in no way a necessity for a cogent understanding of the passage. The nature of Amos' credentialed status as a prophet is secondary to Yahweh's demand that he function in that capacity. How Amos understands himself in relation to the prophetic guild is moot—he functions as a prophet of Yahweh while delivering his message at Bethel. It is the command from Yahweh to prophecy that gives Amos legitimacy as a prophet.

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<sup>221</sup> Noble, 429.

<sup>222</sup> Richardson, H. Neil. "Critical Note on Amos 7:14." *JBL* 85 (1966): 89.

<sup>223</sup> Jack Lewis suggests that the term "prophet's son" refers not to a patrilineal inheritance of the prophetic role, but rather to a particular—if enigmatic—class of prophet ("'A Prophet's Son' (Amos 7:14) Reconsidered." *ResQ* 49 (2007): 229–40). Hans Stoebe also argues for a distinction between the use of נָבִיא and נְזִיר—arguing that Amos makes a distinction between the two terms in a manner that disassociates himself from the prophetic guild at Bethel ("Noch Einmal Zu Amos Vii 10-17." *VT* 39 (1989): 341–54).

The second component of Amos' response is the actual word of Yahweh. God through Amos targets Amaziah with a specific message. The impetus for the message is provided in v. 16. Amaziah has directly opposed Amos in his capacity as divine messenger. The emphatic addition of the second person pronoun before the verb (אַתָּה אָמַר) serves to amplify the contradiction between what has been stated in v. 13 and the reality. The construction is often used by a speaker to bring to mind the contrast between the saying and a previous statement (particularly when that statement is an assertion or promise).<sup>224</sup> The term sets up a direction opposition to the word of Yahweh: "Yahweh has said this; But *you're* saying *this*..." Yahweh commanded Amos to prophesy, but Amaziah is commanding him to stop. Amaziah, while intending to oppose Amos, is actually opposing Yahweh. As a result of his opposition to Yahweh—directed at his messenger Amos—Amaziah will be the recipient of divine retribution.

Verse 17 is juxtaposed to Amos' recount of Amaziah's opposition in v. 16. Amaziah is singled out not because of false prophecy or any detectable apostasy. Rather, Amaziah merely demands the cessation of Amos' prophesying and his departure. It is this opposition that becomes the impetus for the word of the Lord (דְּבַר־יְהוָה) targeting Amaziah. Amos promises Amaziah a bleak and humiliating demise, one that will mirror the retribution received by the Northern Kingdom during the Assyrian conquest.

### **Receipt of Divine Retribution in the Form of a Unique Physical Punishment**

The scene's treatment of divine retribution is similar to the Historian's account of the resistance of Zedekiah to Micaiah. The punishment the opponent of the divine messenger receives is not described within the confines of the narrative itself but is promised by the messenger.

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<sup>224</sup> Cf. Gen 32:12; Ex 33:12; Num 11:21; 1 Kings 18:14; Isa 14:13; Jer 32:35; Neh 6:8.

Amaziah's punishment is fourfold. First, Amaziah's wife would become a prostitute in the city. Prostitutes operated beyond the typical boundaries marriage placed on sexual activity.<sup>225</sup> Since his wife will be selling herself sexually, it is clear that Amaziah will be unable to exercise his right to sexual fidelity with his wife. His wife will be driven to support her needs through prostitution because both her husband and children are out of the picture.

This aspect of Amaziah's fate will also be particularly humiliating for a member of the priestly guild at Bethel. Amaziah's public status will make his wife's unwelcome trade a deeper source of shame for the priest. The mention of the location of her commerce—the city—further serves to emphasize the very public nature of her fate. While an abysmal fate for his wife, the humiliation will fall heaviest on Amaziah. The nature of sexuality in a patriarchal culture ensures that the loss of sexual agency on the part of a man undermines that man's honor.

Second, Amos prophesies that Amaziah's sons and daughters would fall by the sword. This promised fate is rare within the Hebrew Bible. Daughters are prophesied more frequently to be victims of exile (Ezek 23:10, 2 Chr 29:9) or famine (Jer 11:22). Daughters falling by the sword is not an unheard-of fate (Ezek 24:21) but is focused on a single individual only in Amos 7:17. Elsewhere, the fate of daughters as a form of retribution is applied exclusively to Israel at the corporate level.

Third, Amaziah would lose his land. Similar to his inability to exercise sexual agency in regard to his wife, Amaziah will lose ownership of his property and be powerless to prevent its division and resale to others.

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<sup>225</sup> Phyllis A. Bird, "Prostitutes in the Social World and Religious Rhetoric of Ancient Israel," in *Prostitutes and Courtesans in the Ancient World*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Laura K. McClure (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 42.

Fourth, Amaziah would himself be taken into exile where he would die. This fourth component of Amaziah's punishment provides the impetus for the previous three. Amaziah will be deprived of agency and efficacy regarding the norms of his life—family and property—because he will be in exile. And his death there will eliminate any hope of recovering any sense of the well-being associated with an enjoyable life.

Amaziah's punishment is not remarkably unique in terms of its individual components. Rather, it is the combination of those components that make the punishment both unique and extreme. Further, the fact that the combination of the particular elements is targeted singularly at Amaziah (rather than corporately toward Israel) make the retribution unique. While Amaziah's anticipated fate is reminiscent of the bleak fates promised by Jeremiah and Ezekiel, those other instances always target a corporate entity rather than an individual. Various kings are promised exile, or the death of loved ones, but to no other individual are such specific and combined elements promised as retribution for specific conduct. Combined with Amaziah's specific offense of directly opposing Amos, the retribution suggests a crafted narrative aligned with the divine messenger opposition type-scene.

It is also at this point of Amaziah's unique punishment that the divine retribution becomes bigger than the recipient. Ultimately, the extremity of Amaziah's punishment lies in the fact that it mirrors the exile the Northern Kingdom will experience. It is no coincidence that the components of Amaziah's fate make frequent appearances in prophetic rebukes to a community. The loss of family, land, freedom, and life are frequently promised as Yahweh's divine response to disobedience. Amaziah's fate is intended to reflect the larger fate of Israel.<sup>226</sup> Ultimately, the

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<sup>226</sup> Clements, 50.

unique punishment Amaziah will receive is that his retribution will be a type of Yahweh's retribution against Israel.

## Conclusion

Scholars often discuss *how* the narrative of Amos 7:10–17 functions. Comments such as Gene Tucker's are commonplace:

The purpose of the story emerges directly from the conclusions concerning its structure, genre, and setting. Its aim is not that of a biography, to present and interpret the facts of a man's life; nor does it function as a legend, to show the mighty powers of Amos in order to edify his followers. It is not even interested in demonstrating the prophet's powers of argumentation. In terms of tone and content, the narrative is partisan and apologetic. The narrator reported how Amaziah had challenged the right of Amos to speak the prophetic words and the prophet responded to defend and justify his right. The key to the intention of the narrative is verse 15. *The story's purpose is to authenticate the words of Amos—specifically his harsh prophecies of punishment—as legitimate prophetic words in the face of opposition.* The similarity of the response of Amos to the central elements in prophetic vocation reports—which also function to authenticate the prophetic words—supports this conclusion. The prophet's followers authenticated Amos' words by telling the story of how the prophet dealt with legal and jurisdictional challenges by appealing to the highest authority, Yahweh's commission.<sup>227</sup>

What these comments avoid is the mechanism through which these narratives communicate their purpose. Summarizing Amaziah's fate, Amos emphatically reiterates the certainty of Israel's upcoming deportation. The phrase *וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל גְּלוּהָ יִגְלוּהָ מֵעַל אֲדָמָתוֹ* in verse 17 is identical to the

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<sup>227</sup> Tucker, 433–4, emphasis mine.



introductory phrase Amos uses in v. 11. The identical phrases serve to bracket Amaziah's opposition. The elements of the type-scene—a divine message and messenger, a verbal opposition to that messenger, a verbal response by the prophet, and unique form of divine retribution—are all contained within the section.

### 3.9 Conclusion

Text	Divine Messenger	Opponent and Retribution Recipient	Declaration by Yahweh	Opponent's Counter Statement	Divine Messenger Response	Fate of the Antagonist
1 Kings 13	Man of God	Jeroboam	Prediction of altar's destruction and defilement	Command to seize the man of God	Prophet's choosing a preferable lie of divinely revealed truth	Shriveled arm; Prophet's death; Proximity of lion, donkey, and corpse
1 Kings 22	Michaiah	Ahab and Zedekiah	Revelation of divine council	Zedekiah: Incredulity and striking Michaiah; Ahab: Imprisoning Michaiah	Prediction of death for Ahab; Prediction of "hiding in inner room" for Zedekiah	Ahab dies in battle
2 Kings 1	Elijah	Ahaziah	Prediction of Ahaziah's death	"Man of God come down"	"Let fire come down"	Military contingents destroyed by heavenly fire
2 Kings 2:23–25	Elisha	Youths at Bethel	Elisha's presence as Elijah's successor	Insult targeting Elisha as an illegitimate successor to Elijah	Cursing in the name of the Lord	Mauling by bears
2 Kings 5	Elisha	Gehazi	Refusal to accept Naaman's gifts	Gehazi's lie and theft	Reminder of Elisha's spirit; Prediction of permanent leprosy	Leprosy
2 Kings 7	Elisha	Court Official	God's provision and end of the siege of Samaria	Questioning the possibility of deliverance	Prediction of officer's death	Trampling to death by mob
Jeremiah	Jeremiah	Passhur, Hananiah, Various others	Jeremiah's consistent message of punishment through exile	Messages counter to exile; physical persecution of Jeremiah		Exile and Death
Amo 7:10–17	Amos	Amaziah	Prediction of Jeroboam's demise	Harassment of Amos, urging him to leave Bethel	Defense of divine calling; Prediction of Amaziah's wife in prostitution; death for children; loss of land; exile; death	

The bizarre fates received by prophetic opponents are usually independent of the initial statement by the divine messenger. The messenger performs a divine function by arriving on the scene and communicating Yahweh's concerns. It is the antagonist's response to the message and messenger that merits an expression of retribution separate from the initial purpose of the messenger's purpose. Through Elisha, for example, God promises an end to the siege and provision in 2 Kgs 7. It is the royal official's rebuttal that receives a separate response from Elisha. A messenger announces God's planned activity, and the antagonist is punished within the scene for rebutting the messenger's statement. Ultimately the opponents are rejecting the authority of Yahweh himself and so are punished accordingly.

With the possible exception of Gehazi and the court official in 1 Kgs 7, the opponents as presented by the Historian are, at their core, antagonistic to the person of the divine messenger. The Historian has an interest in countering apostasy in the lives of the kings and expresses that through the using the type-scene in a manner that publicly validates the divine messenger. In the writings of the Historian, type-scenes portraying divine messengers and their opponents function in a northern context, reflecting the Historian's preferential treatment of the Southern Kingdom. The Historian further utilizes the type-scene exclusively during the divided monarchy. The scene is absent from Joshua —1 Kings 12, reflecting a different treatment of apostasy and deference to divine messengers there.

## 4. The Chronicler: The Apologist

### 4.1 The Chronicler's Reimagination of Theodicy

The author of Chronicles is commonly thought to concern himself with the theme of divine retribution. That concern is understood to be rooted in the post-exilic time of authorship in which the Chronicler wrote. One effect of the Exile on the Hebrew corporate mindset was a restructuring of theodicy in which the Hebrews recalibrated their theology to incorporate the impetus for their suffering during the Exile. The pre-exilic sense of political invulnerability disintegrated with the Assyrian and Babylonian deportations, forcing a theological explanation for the calamity.<sup>228</sup> The Chronicler's works reflect this theological reframing of Hebrew history.

Sara Japhet argues that Chronicles is shaped by the author's nuanced perception of Yahweh's intervention in human affairs.<sup>229</sup> Incidences mirrored in the Deuteronomistic History are filtered through a literary lens that depicts Yahweh's direct application of retribution for specific offenses. Japhet elsewhere offers a model of how the Chronicler reworked history:

1. In the case of any transgression (described as such in Samuel–Kings or conceived as such by the Chronicler), an appropriate punishment is added by the Chronicler;
2. Whenever righteousness or piety is displayed with no mention of recompense, the Chronicler adds a fitting reward;

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<sup>228</sup> Brian E. Kelly, *Retribution and Eschatology in Chronicles*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series 211* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); Raymond B. Dillard, "Reward and Punishment in Chronicles: The Theology of Immediate Retribution," *WTJ* 46 (1984): 164–72.

<sup>229</sup> Japhet, 98–107.

3. Every difficulty, affliction, and defeat is automatically perceived as retribution. For this reason, when any incident which might be a punishment remains unexplained, the Chronicler adds a suitable sin;
4. Every success, whether personal or public, is considered a reward. Whenever a possible reward is mentioned without the appropriate causes for it, the Chronicler provides the source of merit;
5. If two occurrences, one a possible sin, the other an apparent punishment, are described independently, the Chronicler makes a causal connection between the two.<sup>230</sup>

Causality is the thread that runs through Chronicles. The work reflects events as necessarily rooted in the morality of the events that spawned them.

Japhet's analysis of retribution in Chronicles focuses primarily on the macro scale; i.e., the communal culpability for sin and Yahweh's punishment of the community through military loss in battle or punishment through the Exile. To move beyond the macro-scale of the Chronicler's retribution paradigm, it is necessary to engage with the conventional portrayal of retribution in individual narratives.

One component of the Chronicler's perspective regarding divine retribution is that the impetus for punishment is rooted—at least partially—in the people's resistance to the prophets. The Chronicler's inclusion of Psalm 105 ends in 1 Chr 16:22 with Psalm 105:15: "Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm." Rather than continue to recount the journey of Israel at this point, the Chronicler inserts the worship of Psalm 96 after v. 22. The text here reveals his paradigm: prophets are not to be opposed.

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<sup>230</sup> Sara Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and Its Place in Biblical Thought* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 130–131.

The Chronicler's many portrayals of prophetic opposition involve the issue of not merely ignoring prophets, but actively *mocking* them—engaging in active persecution. Following the resistance of Zedekiah to Jeremiah, for instance, the Chronicler summarizes Israel's era of kings in 2 Chr 36:15–16: “The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord rose against his people, until there was no remedy.” The summary reveals the Chronicler's perspective on the collapse of Israel: the opposition of divine messengers is tantamount to resisting Yahweh himself.

This intersection in Chronicles between an interest in divine retribution and divine messenger veneration provides a focal point for the discussion of how those specific scenes are narrated. The Chronicler engages opposition to divine messengers and constructs narratives that reflect his theology of divine retribution.

#### **4.2 Josiah's Death (2 Chronicles 35:20-24)**

One of the clearest occurrences of the divine messenger opposition type-scene merging with the Chronicler's unique theology of retribution occurs in the Chronicler's treatment of the death of Josiah. When compared to the Historian's account of the same event, the details of the convention quickly become evident. The Kings account of Josiah's death merely records the Judean king's demise at the hands of the Egyptian ruler, Neco. The Chronicler's account, however, is highly complex, altering the storyline in a way that portrays Josiah's death as being caused by his rejection of a divine oracle. By constructing the death of Josiah in a way that mirrors the death of Ahab, the Chronicler presents Josiah in death not as the righteous messianic figure, but corrupted and punished just like Ahab. Before exploring the elements of the type-

scene, then, it will be beneficial to explore the Chronicler's portrayal of Josiah's death as a reflection of the Historian's treatment of Ahab's demise.

### **The Connection between 2 Kings 22:29–38 and 2 Chronicles 35:20–24**

The Chronicler is well known for freely incorporating various biblical texts—particularly texts from the Deuteronomistic History—for particular literary purposes. In many cases, the intertextual referent is obvious. Reflecting a seventy-five percent verbatim repetition of 1 Kgs 22:29–38, the pericope narrating the death of Ahab in 2 Chr 18:28–34 is clearly derived from the similar Kings narrative. In other instances, however, determining intertextuality is somewhat more elusive. Some passages lack a substantial linguistic connection to a specific intertext, leaving open to interpretation the more subtle nature of their intertextuality. Japhet describes well the difficulty of evaluating intertextuality in Chronicles. The nature of intertextuality, she says,

may...simply allude to earlier traditions; a single comment or even a mere adjective may embrace the contents of an entire earlier passage. In his reliance on earlier biblical material, the Chronicler displays different degrees of acceptance and agreement, from a whole-hearted adoption of the testimony and message of the earlier document, through deviation in detail, to a wholesale polemic and retroversion...The Chronicler's most distinctive feature in the reformulation of the synoptic sections is probably that he casts his own work as emanating from a core of venerated traditional statements while reserving for himself a large measure of freedom.<sup>231</sup>

2 Chronicles 35:20–24 appears to be just such a passage. While the pericope apparently borrows elements from various passages, vocabulary and syntax vary significantly enough to make

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<sup>231</sup> Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 15.

connections with specific passages uncertain. Japhet suggests 2 Chr 35:2–24 represents a convoluted “mosaic of borrowed motifs and complete citations, culled from various biblical contexts, illustrating the Chronicler’s anthological style.”<sup>232</sup> It must be asked, however, if the pericope represents a conglomerated stew of borrowed, scattered phrases or if the intertextual material utilized in the passage is not more unified. It is my argument that while 2 Chr 35:20–24 possesses minimal terminological connection to 1 Kgs 22:29–38, the presence of *הַקְּלִיטִי* and *הַתְּפִי* in both passages substantiates the presence of intertextuality between the two passages.

Commentators have long acknowledged the literary attributes of 2 Chr 35 that portray the death of Josiah in such a way that it mirrors the death of Ahab.<sup>233</sup> This depiction is particularly interesting, given the opposite polarity of the two kings. Ahab is paradigmatic of the worst the Northern Kingdom has to offer, while Josiah represents the epitome of loyalty to Yahweh. Why the Chronicler chose to paint the religious hero of Judah with the same brush as the villain of Israel represents a perplexing puzzle that is solved by the understanding of the proposed type-scene’s presence in the text, to be discussed below. The immediate focus, however, must be to provide the foundation for the that subsequent literary investigation by establishing the validity of the intertextual connection between the Kings and Chronicles passages.

Four passages deal with the deaths of Ahab or Josiah. Ahab’s death is recorded in both 1 Kgs 22:29–38 and 2 Chr 18:28–34. As mentioned previously, the intertextuality is easily observed between these two texts: with a few selective additions and omissions, the Chronicler basically inserts the Kings passage into the Chronicles text. But while 2 Kgs 23:29–30 succinctly relates Josiah’s death, the parallel passage in 2 Chr 35:20–24 is a vastly expanded account,

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 1057.

<sup>233</sup> See Christine Mitchell’s “The Ironic Death of Josiah in 2 Chronicles” (*CBQ* 68 (2006): 421–435) for a useful summary of the current state of scholarship, particularly the bibliography in note 1.

conflicting with the Kings passage in at least one significant detail.<sup>234</sup> While the Kings account of Josiah's death clearly forms the core of the parallel Chronicles account, other sources need to be considered as the origin of the expanded material. Holding to a cacophony of sources, Japhet says,

‘And the archers shot’ is a quotation of II Sam. 11.24 (with *môrîm* changed to *yôrîm*), as in I Chron. 10.3 in comparison to I Sam. 31.3); the king's request to his servants, ‘Take me away, for I am badly wounded’ is very similar to the words of Ahab in I Kings 22.34, while the change of carriage is expressed in words cited verbatim from Gen. 41.43, from another context altogether.<sup>235</sup>

Japhet's suggestion that the Chronicler incorporates II Sam 11:24 is weak. Archers are involved in both accounts, and the commonality of the use of the bow as a weapon results in the similar (but not equivalent) expression regarding its use. The literary details surrounding the death of Uriah are incongruous with that of Josiah. The field of battle is different, as is the portrayal of the death. The mention of archers in 2 Samuel is also contained in a direct quotation. The presence of archers in both passages simply does not demonstrate a necessary connection.

Similarly, Japhet is incorrect about Gen 41:43, and the connection to Pharaoh's treatment of Joseph is specious at best. The Genesis passage reads וַיִּרְכַּב אֹתוֹ בְּמִרְכָּבָה, while 2 Chr 35:24 reads וַיִּרְכַּבְהוּ עַל רֶכֶב. While both verbs are *hiphils* of רכב, Chr 35:24 is certainly not “cited verbatim.” Both texts do mention chariots, but the *hiphil* form of the verb is commonplace to describe one individual's initiation of transportation for another.

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<sup>234</sup> 2 Kgs 22:29 places Josiah's death at Megiddo, whereas in 2 Chr 35:24 he dies at Jerusalem.

<sup>235</sup> Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 1057–1058.



Although the opposite will be argued momentarily, the use of the same verb does not *necessarily* constitute intertextuality. In this case, the details between Genesis and Chronicles differ significantly enough that the simple presence of the verb does not suggest borrowing. In Genesis, Pharaoh places Joseph in a chariot as a place of honor. In 2 Chr 35, Josiah's servants place him in the chariot, and it serves as an ambulance and hearse. The closer literary connection between chariots is to be found with Ahab in 1 Kgs 22.

The initial appearance of intertextuality between 2 Chr 35:20–24 and 1 Kgs 22:29–38 is suggested by the common features of both accounts. The 2 Chronicles passage provides more detail about the death of Josiah than the terse narrative in 2 Kgs 23. The expanded material in Chronicles suggests the connection between the deaths of Ahab and Josiah. In both accounts:

1. The king battles a superior foreign king.
2. The king takes on a disguise to go into battle.
3. The king of Judah is not the target of the opposing army.
4. The king ignores prophetic counsel.
5. The king is wounded by archers.
6. The king commands the chariot driver to withdraw from the field of battle.
7. The reason given for retreat is the comment, "I am wounded."
8. The king sits out the battle in a chariot.
9. The body of the king is buried in his capital.

It should be noted that incidental details do not demonstrate intertextuality; rather it is concurrence of multiple details that suggests a possible connection. At this point in the process, the possible literary connection invites an investigation of possible linguistic connections; is the

connection hinted at by literary observation demonstrated by any textual evidence beyond a cursory reading?

Surprisingly, 2 Chr 35:20–24 possess little in the way of direct syntactical or terminological connection with 1 Kgs 22. Of the above nine connections between the Chronicles and Kings pericopes, only the second and seventh lend themselves easily to a textual analysis. The presence of archers, as previously discussed, without a precise syntactical connection, is too common to represent a solid case for intertextuality. The presence of chariots presents the same difficulty. The specific syntactic connections are Josiah’s donning of a disguise to enter the battle and his command to his servants to withdraw from the field of battle because he is wounded.

The “wounded” statement will be treated first. Josiah states that he has been heavily wounded: *כִּי הִחַלְתִּי*, the modifier *מְאֹד* intensifying the severity of the damage inflicted on him. While *חלה* is not uncommon in the Old Testament, it is used in the *hophal* elsewhere and in combination with the conjunction *כִּי* only in regard to the death of Ahab in 1 Kgs 22:34 and its parallel in 2 Chr 18:33 where it describes the death wound given the king.<sup>236</sup> The Chronicler uses *חלה* on three other occasions, suggesting that its presence in 35:23 does not necessarily make it unique enough to establish intertextuality. But the first-person usage of *חלה* in both chapters is a direct quote by both kings. Considered with the context of a battle, an archery wound, and a command to withdraw from the field, it appears that *חלה* in 2 Chr 35:23 establishes a connection to 1 Kgs 22:34.

While the argument for the Chronicler’s use of *חלה* demonstrating intertextuality may be made, the case is not overwhelmingly conclusive. A stronger argument for the intertextuality of 1 Kgs 22 and 2 Chr 35 is the Chronicler’s unexpected use of *הפֶּשׁ* to indicate Josiah’s assumption of

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<sup>236</sup> Charles Cutler Torrey, *Ezra Studies* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1970), 220–221.

a disguise to enter into battle against Neco. That Josiah disguises himself (שִׁתְּחַפֵּה) is an odd detail performed in scripture by no one else but Ahab. Others have disguised themselves for other purposes, but only Ahab and Josiah do so in order to participate in a military confrontation. The Chronicler's only other usage of the terms occurs twice in 2 Chr 18:29, where it is used to describe Ahab's employment of the ruse. And 18:29 is a direct quotation of the account of Ahab's death in 1 Kgs 22:30.

The Chronicler does not utilize 1 Kgs 20:38 where a prophet disguises himself in order to engineer a confrontation with Ahab. If the Chronicler were interested in disguise as a motif, both this instance and the account of Saul's disguising himself to consult the medium at Endor would have proven indispensable. 1 Chr 10, however, makes no mention of Saul's ruse, even though verse 13 recounts Saul's consultation of the medium as one of the reasons for his death. The usage of שִׁתְּחַפֵּה only in relation to the death narratives of Ahab and Josiah prevents the term from becoming a motif in the book and instead provides a direct correlation between the deaths of Ahab and Josiah.

It is precisely at this point that manuscript evidence diverges. The Masoretic text reads שִׁתְּחַפֵּה, "he disguised (himself)." Rather than reading "disguised," the Greek and Latin versions of the passage read ἐκραιναίωθη, "strengthened himself." Josiah, then, is considered in these versions not to be duplicitous in order to engage Neco in battle, but as fortifying his resolution to meet the military task at hand. "The word שִׁתְּחַפֵּה in 35:23 [sic] has often been challenged, partly because the 'disguise' comes so unexpectedly, and partly because the versions do not give the usual equivalent of this word."<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 221, n. 16.

The opening chapter of the apocryphal 1 Esdras, which also describes Josiah's death, reads ἐπιχειρεῖ in attempting to render שְׁתַּחֲפֹחַ, "but with an attempt to keep near to the usual root-meaning of שָׁחַח, 'seek.'" <sup>238</sup> Because the sources utilized in the composition of 2 Chr 35 are difficult to determine, whether Chronicles is linked to the composition of 1 Esdras or represents an original composition is debated. Esdras may represent a fragment of the original Chronicles compilation, a latter text that utilizes Chronicles, or a completely separate composition. The issue remains unsettled. <sup>239</sup> Consequently, 1 Esdras does possess relevancy for the development of the pericope under examination, but uncertainty about its priority makes its usefulness difficult to assess.

The Syriac is uncertain—"very likely led astray by the Greek, as so often happens—but certainly did *not* have הִתְחַזֵּק." <sup>240</sup> The Vulgate and Targum similarly reflect the same choice as Esdras, reflecting the root of meaning of שָׁחַח, "to seek," presenting Josiah as merely attempting to engage Neco in battle.

Unfortunately, the Dead Sea Scrolls are able to shine very little light on the discussion. The Chronicles manuscript (4Q118) lacks the section under discussion and reveals little more than the presence of Chronicles at Qumran. <sup>241</sup>

One improbable proposal suggests that the שָׁחַח of שְׁתַּחֲפֹחַ be read by translators as שָׁחַח. <sup>242</sup> The text would then read, "Josiah freed himself to fight him." שְׁתַּחֲפֹחַ provides no better alternative for

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Raymond B. Dillard, *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 15, 2 Chronicles* (Waco, TX: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 289.

<sup>240</sup> Torrey, 221, n. 16.

<sup>241</sup> Julio Trebolle Barrera, "Chronicles, First and Second Books of," in *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 129.

<sup>242</sup> Steve Delamarter, "The Death of Josiah in Scripture and Tradition: Wrestling with the Problem of Evil?" *VT* 54 (2004): 39, n. 20; see also the apparatus in *BHS*.

the text and represents a misplaced suggestion. Mitchell posits that this suggested emendation reflects the attempt to redeem the Chronicler's portrayal of Josiah in a negative light.<sup>243</sup>

Extrapolating backwards from the Greek translations, Raymond Dillard hypothesizes that a Hebrew version of Chronicles may have originally read *התחזק*, giving rise to the translation.<sup>244</sup> Winkler takes a similar approach, arguing for a heavily corrupted text whose omissions actually portray Josiah as obeying the word of the Lord in his confrontation with Neco.<sup>245</sup> His argument is largely from silence, however, and likely intended to recast the Chronicler's portrait of Josiah in a positive light.

The presence of variants at the point of *הפש* suggest that transmitters of the text well understood the intertextual implications of reading “disguise” in the passage. More than any other connector to 1 Kgs 22, the presence of *הפש* links the righteous king Josiah to the abominable Ahab. And while the origins of the appearance of non-*הפש* readings remain elusive, a reasonable conclusion is that transmitters adjusted the text to reconcile their positive assumptions about Josiah with the obvious negative connotations of his being equated with Ahab through the donning of a disguise.

The Midrash reflects this theological tension between a righteous king and his ignoble death by enhancing Josiah's death scene with a confession and the presence of the prophet Jeremiah in order to specifically establish the sin that led to Josiah's death:

They shot three hundred arrows into him until his body became like a sieve, and Jeremiah placed his ear behind [the dying king] to know what he was saying. And

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<sup>243</sup> Mitchell, 433.

<sup>244</sup> Dillard, *2 Chronicles*, 286.

<sup>245</sup> Edward Lewis Curtis, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Chronicles* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1965), 518.

what did he say? ‘The Lord is righteous; for I have rebelled against His word—  
against His word and the word of His agent’.<sup>246</sup>

Josiah’s admitted rebellion was rejecting Neco as the proper messenger of Yahweh and engaging the Egyptian ruler in battle. While Josiah is a righteous king, his single act of disobedience is reimbursed by death.

Ironically, this later textual development negated the intention of the Chronicler in compiling the passage. If the Chronicler truly did intend a connection between Ahab and Josiah, *התחפש* is certainly an appropriate focal point to make the connection. While the quantity of similarities may be said to connect the two death accounts, it is the detail of the disguise that provides the strongest link. It is the removal of this link throughout the transmission of the text—whether or not intentional in nature—that removes the certainty of intertextuality.

The translation that Josiah strengthened himself for battle simply does not fit the intertextual context of the two passages. This argument is admittedly circular in nature; the syntax is used to support the literary analysis, and the literary analysis assists in guiding the determination of syntax. But it should be acknowledged that the wealth of intertextual literary allusions in a passage is able to add weight to an argument in favor of a particular text-critical reading where uncertainty would otherwise exist. Consequently, 2 Chr 35:22 should be read with *התחפש* and not *ἐκραταιώθη* (from *התחזק*).

Intertextuality is easy to determine when a text obviously duplicates an extant source. Where such duplication does not occur, intertextuality is somewhat more difficult to substantiate. While 2 Chr 35:20–24 possesses minimal terminological connection to 1 Kgs 22:29–38, the presence of *הלה* and *הפש* in both passages is sufficient to warrant further exploration of the

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<sup>246</sup> *Midrash Rabbah* (London: Soncino Press, 1961), v.VII, 143.

intertextual connection between the two passages. Combined with his other allusions to Ahab's death, it appears clear that the Chronicler intentionally connected the demise of the two kings.

The question arises as to why.

### **The Chronicler's Portrayal of Josiah's Death as a Defense of Huldah's Prophecy**

Compared to the modified and expanded account of the death of Josiah in 2 Chr 35:20–40, the parallel account in 2 Kings 23:29–30 reads almost like an afterthought to the life of the righteous king.<sup>247</sup> It will be argued here that the Chronicler patterns the death of Josiah after the death of Ahab in order to defend the oracle delivered by the prophetess Huldah. To substantiate this theory, it is necessary to examine the Chronicler's theological dilemma, how the portrayal of Josiah's death solves that dilemma, and finally, why the Chronicler's solution necessitates portraying Josiah's death as a parallel to Ahab's.

### **The Chronicler's Dilemma: Theological Disparity**

As mentioned previously, the Chronicler possesses a theology of retribution that is expressed throughout his work. In constructing his account of Josiah's death from Kings, the Chronicler is believed to encounter something of a theological roadblock. In the Deuteronomistic History, Josiah represents the paradigm of the righteous Jewish king. That a righteous king should die at the hands of a foreign—and pagan—ruler seems unjustifiable from a theological standpoint. “For the Chronicler the death of Josiah presented a challenge to his theology of retribution; defeat in battle for him represented divine disfavor, whereas victory was a token of blessing. If Josiah was such a pious king, how is it that he suffered defeat and died in battle?”<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> The Kings account of Josiah's death occurs immediately *after* the formulaic close to Josiah's reign in 2 Kings 23:28.

<sup>248</sup> Dillard, 292.

Steve Delamarter summarizes the problem best: “Such an ignoble end to such a righteous reign needs an explanation.”<sup>249</sup>

The theological difficulty presented by Josiah’s early death is not a difficulty solely for the Chronicler. The writer of Kings likely struggles with the same issue. Stanley Frost suggests that the brevity of the Kings account indicates the author’s embarrassment at the circumstances surrounding the death of Josiah.<sup>250</sup> Marvin Sweeney concurs: “Josiah is...portrayed as disobedient and therefore deserving of punishment, but earlier generations were unable to account theologically for Josiah’s death and simply passed over the matter without comment.”<sup>251</sup>

Delamarter argues that the Kings account does provide an explanation for righteous Josiah’s untimely death. Immediately preceding Josiah’s death is 2 Kings 23:26–27, in which God rejects Judah because of Manasseh’s excessive wickedness.<sup>252</sup> Delamarter’s solution, however, completely ignores the difficulty created by Huldah’s prophecy and must be rejected.

Frost also understands the death of Josiah as carrying substantial implications for the whole of Old Testament theology: “We are left then with a general conspiracy of silence on the subject of the death of Josiah because, given the OT premises, no one could satisfactorily account for it theologically. The fact is that the death of Josiah proved to be the relatively small but sharp-edged rock on which the OT concept of divinely motivated history foundered.”<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Delamarter, 30.

<sup>250</sup> Stanley Brice Frost, “Death of Josiah: A Conspiracy of Silence,” *JBL* 87 (1968), 372–373.

<sup>251</sup> Marvin A. Sweeney, *King Josiah of Judah: The Lost Messiah of Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 4–5.

<sup>252</sup> Delamarter, 30.

<sup>253</sup> Frost, 381.



Frost avers that the writers of Hebrew scripture simply dealt with the dilemma with an unacknowledged commitment to avoid discussing the issue. Israel's historiography, he argues, simply could not deal with the theological implications of Josiah's death.

The silence following the death of Josiah which is so profound is the silence of the historiographers. Israel had invented history writing by accepting a premise: Yahweh is at work in the events of time achieving his will. Later, that premise is amplified by saying that he worked in history through the application of moral law as the expression of his own nature. Starting from that premise, Israel had told the story of her past in such a way as to disclose the purpose of God in history: the establishment of his kingdom. But now [Megiddo] had controverted the premise....Nationally, the ensuing fall of Jerusalem and the captivity of people were far greater events, but theologically the moment of disaster was the death of Josiah at Megiddo. Its effect was to destroy the premise on which all Hebrew historiography had been built.<sup>254</sup>

Frost, assuming that the "classic theology of the OT" is constituted by a nationalistic paradigm revolving around worship in Jerusalem, perhaps overstates the case. His perspective, however, does accentuate the theological difficulty presented by Josiah's death, which overturns Jewish hopes and expectations, becoming merely a delay in the inevitable.

Exacerbating the Chronicler's dilemma is Huldah's oracle in 2 Kings 22:14–20 where the prophetess predicts that Josiah will die in peace. Instead, Josiah dies in battle, apparently negating Huldah's prophecy. Huldah's prophecy describes Josiah's death as the result of his righteous life. While Judah as a nation will be punished for its disobedient wickedness, Josiah's

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<sup>254</sup> Frost, 381–382.

blessing is twofold: his peaceful death and his freedom from witnessing the curses recorded in the Law.

Attempting to sidestep Huldah's prophecy regarding Josiah's peaceful death is of little use. That the phrase used for dying "in peace" is capable of encompassing a battlefield death is unlikely. *Shalom* here is difficult to connect to anything other than a peaceful death. The phrase, "And you will be *gathered to your grave in peace*" (וְנִאֲסַפְתָּ אֶל־קְבֻרְתִּיךָ בְּשָׁלוֹם), occurs only in the death accounts of Josiah in 2 Kgs 22:20 and 2 Chr 34:28. Genesis 15:15 provides a slight modification on the phraseology: "And you will come to your fathers *in peace*; you will be *buried with good gray hair*" (וְאַתָּה תָּבוֹא אֶל־אֲבוֹתֶיךָ בְּשָׁלוֹם תִּקָּבֵר בְּשֵׂיבָה טוֹבָה). The promise in Genesis to Abraham is consistent with his death at the age of 175 and the summary of *shalom* in Genesis 25:8: "And Abraham breathed his last and died with good gray hair, old and satisfied, and he was gathered to his people." The lack of *shalom* in death terminology, on the other hand, refers to a violent death. David's admonition to Solomon regarding reprisal against Joab in 1 Kings 2:6 is clearly a command to locate and execute David's former general: "And you should not allow his gray hair to go down in peace to Sheol" (וְלֹא־תוֹרַד שֵׂיבָתוֹ בְּשָׁלוֹם שָׂאֵל). Josiah's death is anything but peaceful.

The implications of Huldah's prophecy are apparent. The Chronicler naturally has the desire to defend a prophet—and prophecy—of Yahweh. Josiah's death is important to the Chronicler because it possesses the potential to undermine Huldah's prophecy. Even the Chronicler's placement of Huldah's prophecy—at the midpoint of his Josiah narrative—indicates the significance of the words of the prophetess.<sup>255</sup>

### **The Chronicler's Solution**

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<sup>255</sup> Delamarter, 32.

These two fronts—righteous Josiah’s early death and Huldah’s prophecy promising a peaceful death—confront the Chronicler with an issue that must be reconciled. The Chronicler’s literary solution to the theological dilemma has already been hinted at and seems obvious: portray Josiah in such a way as to make his personal sin responsible for his death. “The Chronicler must explain the death of Josiah as a punishment for some sin, and the sin must be his own doing.”<sup>256</sup> This motif is not unknown in Hebrew scripture. Even Moses, the giver of the Law, is prevented from entering the Promised Land because of a single instance of sin (Numbers 20:23–24).

This treatment of Josiah is in accord with the Chronicler’s theology of retribution. The *raison d’être* of the passage is unmistakably in accordance with the Chronicler’s ideology. It would have been inexplicable, nay unforgivable, were the Chronicler to follow Kings on Josiah’s death without further comment, as the fate of this outstandingly pious king is not congruous with his system of retribution. The chain of causality demands that Josiah must have done something wrong. The Chronicler is very particular in describing the circumstances of royal deaths in general, and the sudden, shocking death of Josiah provides him with ample scope for interpretation.<sup>257</sup>

Since the Chronicler portrays Josiah as committing sin, the nature of the sin becomes an issue. One proposal is that Josiah is punished for engaging in unauthorized military

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<sup>256</sup> Paul K. Hooker, *First and Second Chronicles*, *Westminster Bible Companion*, 1st ed., (Louisville: WJK, 2001), 285.

<sup>257</sup> Zipora Talshir, “The Three Deaths of Josiah and the Strata of Biblical Historiography (2 Kings XXIII 29-30; 2 Chronicles XXXV 20-25; 1 Esdras I 23-31),” *VT* 46 (1996), 230–231.

aggression.<sup>258</sup> John Hicks suggests that God’s displeasure with Josiah’s aggression is demonstrated in that “Chronicles has articulated a conservative stance regarding Israel’s involvement in international politics....[T]he desire for international interventionism is inappropriate for the king whose theological base is the temple. Josiah displays a lack of trust in God’s presence at the temple and seeks a wider influence than God has given him.”<sup>259</sup> The Targum also chimes in on the issue, treating Josiah’s death as punishment for unauthorized military action. “Because Josiah had not sought instruction from before the Lord and had gone to wage war in the plain of Megiddo, the Lord of the universe punished him.”<sup>260</sup> Paul Hooker agrees, prioritizing Josiah’s primary sin as “seeking to become involved in foreign entanglements. In the background, there is also a sense in which Josiah’s campaign against Neco violates the Chronicler’s notions about war; namely, that it is the province of God and is waged only at divine behest.”<sup>261</sup> Fishbane concurs:

The Chronicler has the pagan Pharaoh Necho receive a divine oracle unknown in the received Book of Kings and recite it to a disbelieving Josiah (2 Chron. 35: 21–2). In this way, the historian was able to justify retroactively the death of the pious Judaeen monarch: for the oracle forecasting Josiah’s death if he continued his impetuous military intervention was forthwith fulfilled (vv. 23–4).<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> John Mark Hicks, *1 & 2 Chronicles*, (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2001), 527; *The Targum of Chronicles, Translated, with Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes* by J. Stanley McIvor (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 239; Hooker, 285–286; Fishbane, 469.

<sup>259</sup> Hicks, 527.

<sup>260</sup> *The Targum of Chronicles*, 239.

<sup>261</sup> Hooker, 285–286.

<sup>262</sup> Fishbane, 469.

This perspective holds that it may ironically be Huldah's prophecy that gives Josiah the impetus to engage Neco in battle. Huldah's prophecy may provide Josiah with a sense of invulnerability—a certainty that would allow him to rationalize acting foolishly. Frost states, "Certainly we may be quite sure that Josiah would not have dared to do battle with the overwhelmingly superior forces of Egypt, unless he had received specific assurances from the Prophets and the priests that divine aid will be afforded him in this task."<sup>263</sup> If true, Josiah's pursuit of his military interests can hardly be considered sinful. Huldah's oracle may well be the source of Josiah's expectation of a long life and an accompanying sense of invulnerability, but if anything, it causes him to act with the assumption of God's blessing. His actions may be foolish and arrogant but hardly represent sin meriting death.

Also, Josiah would have been highly unlikely to engage in military action without divine approval. Frost notes,

It is inconceivable that Josiah went up to him in Megiddo trusting in the very modest military strength of Judah alone. The story of Ahab seeking a reassuring oracle before he went up to Ramoth-gilead tells us how Hebrew kings set out upon a campaign. In the twentieth psalm we have a liturgy for a king going forth to battle. Verses 1-5 are the cultic oracle of the priest, promising the divine king aid, and vss. 6-8 are his reply.<sup>264</sup>

Huldah's prophecy functions in much the way as the prophecy of Ahab's prophets in 1 Kings 22. Both kings, in very different ways, are given affirmation for their military quest. The Chronicler,

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<sup>263</sup> Frost, 372.

<sup>264</sup> Frost, 371.

though, presents Josiah as assuming the blessing of Huldah's prophecy while ignoring Neco's, to his own detriment.

Further, military aggression itself is not necessarily perceived as sinful. In several cases war is considered a normal seasonal royal activity (2 Samuel 11:1, 1 Chronicles 20:1, 2 Chronicles 36:10). Especially in the case of David in 2 Samuel 11, engaging in military skirmishes is clearly preferable to the alternatives David pursues when he stays in Jerusalem. Rather than committing the nebulous sin of war, Josiah may simply be confidently engaging a superior enemy because he trusts Huldah's prophecy.

A second interesting proposal regarding the nature of Josiah's sin is offered by Christine Mitchell. Mitchell argues that the Chronicler's overall portrait of Josiah is intended to present the Judean king as evil. The pericope immediately preceding Josiah's death narrative in Chronicles is the description of Josiah's celebration of the Passover. Mitchell notes that Josiah's celebration of the Passover is in actuality heretical, compared to its celebration by the kings of Israel rather than the kings of Judah.<sup>265</sup> Ultimately, she argues that the Chronicles account of Josiah's death is intended to complete an entirely negative portrait of the Judean king.

Many commentators see Josiah's death as simply having been copied from Ahab's death in 1 Kings 22/2 Chronicles 18. It is more important, however, to recognize that this pattern deliberately says something about Josiah, placing him firmly in the shadow of Ahab (and Saul, Amaziah, and Ahaziah). The account also acts as a frame within 1–2 Chronicles: the first account of a king's death and the last account of a king's death show the king's death as occurring in the same way. This brings us back, however, to the question of why the Chronicler chose to

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<sup>265</sup> Christine Mitchell, "The Ironic Death of Josiah in 2 Chronicles," *CBQ* 68 (2006), 429.

pattern the death of Josiah on the accounts of the deaths of four kings who were evil in the eyes of the Chronicler (if not Yhwh). I think it has a great deal to do with the picture that the Chronicler wanted to draw of Josiah.<sup>266</sup>

Jonker's perspective is useful here in critiquing Mitchell's argument. If they are correct, Josiah functions literarily in Chronicles as a tool to bolster the Passover.

The main focus of the Chronistic account is on the Passover rather than the king. The Deuteronomistic account refers to the good deeds of King Josiah (his cultic reformation measures, in particular) in order to accentuate the celebration of the Passover. King Josiah is therefore *instrumentalized* rather than *idealized*. The Chronistic narrative portrays Josiah being instrumental to the first real celebration of the Passover.<sup>267</sup>

Kings' portrayal of Josiah as a righteous king would have been familiar to the readers of Chronicles. Further, Josiah's status in Israelite history would have been firmly embedded in the national psyche, especially in light of the Exile. Josiah represented the path subsequent kings should have taken in order to maintain the kingdom. Those kings, however, varied sinfully from Josiah's example, and the Exile was the result. The people had decades to sit ruefully in exile and enshrine Josiah as a paradigm for the way things ought to have been.

The Chronicler's inclusion of the mourning for Josiah further undermines the idea that the entire portrayal of Josiah is negative. The Chronicler "did not want the aberration of Josiah's

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<sup>266</sup> Mitchell, 431.

<sup>267</sup> Jonker, 33, emphasis his.

premature and humiliating end to overshadow this king's extremely positive contribution to the life of God's people."<sup>268</sup>

Consequently, were the Chronicler endeavoring to reconstruct the image of Josiah as evil—or at least meandering—as Mitchell suggests, he likely would have been far less subtle in such a portrayal. Read in the light of Kings and Josiah's high regard among the Hebrews, Chronicles' portrayal of Josiah is just what the reader expects: a righteous king who dies unexpectedly. The Chronicler may well be providing treatment to the theological disparity between Huldah's prophecy and Josiah's death, but Mitchell's assertion that that disparity is solved through an alleged heretical celebration of the Passover is difficult to maintain. Mitchell's proposal of the Chronicler's portrayal of Josiah as evil has the advantage of being innovative but the inconvenience of being fallacious. Jonker's perspective regarding the Chronicler's death account of Josiah is more balanced: "This ending does not cancel the positive evaluation of the king by the Chronicler, but it certainly negates any attempt to idealize King Josiah."<sup>269</sup>

Since Josiah's life cannot be undermined because of its theological importance, the Chronicler must look to another sin to construct Josiah's death account in a manner that reconciles the tension. The third and most common perspective is that the sin Josiah commits in the Chronicles account is his disobedience to the oracle of Yahweh. Dillard summarizes: "The Chronicler demonstrates the validity of his retribution theology by modifying the Kings account to show that Josiah's death resulted from his disobedience to a divine oracle."<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Leslie Allen, "The First and Second Books of Chronicles: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in vol. 3 of *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 649.

<sup>269</sup> Jonker, 33.

<sup>270</sup> Dillard, 292.



The reason Josiah's death is so unexpected is because of Huldah's prediction that Josiah will come to his grave in peace. Mitchell sidesteps the significance of Huldah's prophecy, but only because it interferes with her thesis that Josiah's sin is a heretical Passover celebration. Huldah's prophecy is not so easy to ignore.

Interestingly, if the Chronicler feels free to alter the death account of Josiah,<sup>271</sup> he is entirely unwilling to alter the prophecy of Huldah. Huldah offers a twofold promise to Josiah: that he will not see the punishment arrive upon his people and that he will die in peace. The easiest way for the Chronicler to reconcile the dilemma would be to simply omit from Huldah's prophecy the statement that Josiah will be brought to his grave in peace. The curses promised in the Book of the Law for disobedience were severe, and Josiah would have experienced more than sufficient blessing if, as Huldah predicts, he failed to live to see them. If the Chronicler had altered Huldah's prophecy to include only the latter promise, then the shorter account of Josiah's death reflected in Kings would be perfect for the Chronicler's purpose. In this scenario, Josiah's early death is not the result of a sin but becomes a fulfillment of prophecy and generous blessing.

That the Chronicler solves his dilemma through the difficult alteration of Josiah's death narrative rather than through a very simple change of Huldah's prophecy is telling. The Chronicler clearly prioritizes the accuracy of prophecy over his theological historiography. For the Chronicler, the apparent theological contradiction between Huldah's prophecy and Josiah's early death cannot be rooted in a difficulty with Huldah's prophecy; the difficulty must lie with the circumstances surrounding Josiah's death.

The Chronicler's unwillingness to alter Huldah's prophecy also reveals the purpose of the insertion of Neco's oracle. Like Ahab's death, Josiah's death must be divinely appointed.

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<sup>271</sup> This perspective assumes the Chronicles account of Josiah's death is a literary construction created by the Chronicler to address his theological agenda rather than a text rooted in an unknown *Vorlage*.

The Chronicler has the pagan Pharaoh Necho receive a divine oracle unknown in the received Book of Kings and recite it to a disbelieving Josiah (2 Chron. 35: 21–2). In this way, the historian was able to justify retroactively the death of the pious Judaeen monarch, for the oracle forecasting Josiah’s death if he continued his impetuous military intervention was forthwith fulfilled (vv. 23–4).<sup>272</sup>

Neco’s oracle becomes the mechanism whereby Josiah’s early death may safely navigate Huldah’s prophecy.

If repentance could cancel out oracles of judgment, presumably, then, defiance could annul an oracle of salvation (so Jer 18:9-10). From the chronicler’s perspective, the incident constituted a warning that to disregard God’s revealed will was dire folly and that, if one of the most spiritual of kings was not immune from backsliding, constant vigilance was required by all believers.<sup>273</sup>

Through Neco’s delivery of an oracle of Yahweh to Josiah, the Chronicler effectively safeguards the theological integrity of Huldah’s prophecy.

Even though Josiah may engage Neco because of a confidence obtained from Huldah’s prophecy, the Chronicler’s insertion of Neco’s oracle is designed to demonstrate that Josiah has received a divine imperative against his military actions immediately before he performs them. Josiah sins by disobeying God’s oracle delivered through Neco, and it costs him his life.

There are difficulties in the understanding that Josiah’s disobedience to Neco’s oracle is the sinful cause of his early death. Josiah, for instance, has absolutely no incentive to accept an oracle from an Egyptian as from Yahweh. Especially in light of the recent prophecy of a Jewish

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<sup>272</sup> Fishbane, 469.

<sup>273</sup> Allen, 649.

prophetess, the words of Neco would likely be perceived as deceitful and ignored. Josiah, then, can hardly be expected to obey an oracle from a pagan source.

The Targum translators were clearly uncomfortable with the idea of a foreign prophet of Yahweh confronting the righteous king, altering the text to make the nature of Neco's oracle idolatrous. Neco's speech in the Targum reads, "My idol has said that I should hurry! So now, stay away from me and from my idol which is with me, lest it destroy you." And when he heard how he mentioned his idol he did not turn back, and Josiah did not turn his face from him."<sup>274</sup> With a pagan source for the oracle, Josiah's engagement of Neco is one of righteous confrontation of idolatry.

The oracle that Josiah disobeys, however, must be placed within his death narrative. Considering the Chronicler's emphasis of cult, the Passover represents the pinnacle of Josiah's life. Consequently, Josiah's death is inserted as an afterthought, but an afterthought with a theological dilemma that must be solved. The Passover account immediately follows Huldah's prophecy. The Chronicler is forced to place Neco's oracle within Josiah's death narrative, because there is no place where the oracle would fit in with the zenith of cultic activity.<sup>275</sup>

This strategic placement of Neco's oracle has the further advantage of undermining Josiah only in his specific decision to engage Neco in battle. The sin Josiah commits in disobeying the oracle does not extend beyond the death narrative. The oracle's location addresses the theological dilemma arising from Huldah's prophecy while minimizing any damage to

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<sup>274</sup> *The Targum of Chronicles*, 239.

<sup>275</sup> In this sense, Josiah's death narrative in Chronicles represents a separate unit, functioning as an expansion of the typical formulaic transition to the subsequent king. In Chronicles, the transition formula occurs *after* Josiah's death (2 Chronicles 35:25–27), whereas the formula occurs *before* in the Kings account. In moving Josiah out of the narrative, the Chronicler engages the dilemma head on, whereas in the Kings account, the death of Josiah is a quickly passed-over addendum.

Josiah's reputation. Josiah's final sin may be great—the Chronicler compares him to Ahab, after all—but the status of Josiah as the reformer of Israel is in no way diminished.

A key component of the Chronicler's defense of Huldah's prophecy is his alteration of the location of Josiah's death. In 2 Kings 23:30, Josiah is killed at Megiddo and his body transported to and buried in Jerusalem. In Chronicles, Josiah receives his death wound at Megiddo and is transported alive to Jerusalem, where he then dies and is buried. "The king's having died in Jerusalem instead of Megiddo seems to reflect Huldah's oracle (34:28) and may have already featured in the chronicler's independent source."<sup>276</sup>

Hicks reconciles the different places of death simply by relying on the active participle *dying* (מת) in 23:30 as indicative of Josiah's receiving his death wound at Megiddo and, wounded, being transported to Jerusalem where he later dies.<sup>277</sup> Mitchell, however, suggests that Josiah's death at Jerusalem in the Chronicles account is a pun on Huldah's prophecy. Huldah's words that Josiah would die in peace (בְּשָׁלוֹם) become יְרוּשָׁלַם (Jerusalem) in the hands of the Chronicler.<sup>278</sup> This suggestion, though interesting, is not without difficulty. The addition of the preposition בְּ to Jerusalem in 2 Chronicles 35:24 would make the idea more believable. Josiah is brought to Jerusalem where he dies (וַיִּלְכְּדוּ יְרוּשָׁלַם וַיָּמָת). A better construction would be בְּיְרוּשָׁלַם וַיָּמָת. Mitchell's idea that Josiah's death in Jerusalem is an ironic fulfillment of Huldah's prophecy, though, is not without merit.

Another significant variation in Chronicles' death account of Josiah is the terminology regarding his burial. In 2 Chronicles 35:24, Josiah is "buried with his fathers" (וַיִּקְבְּרֵם בְּקִבְרֵם וְאָבֹתָיו), while in 2 Kings, Josiah is buried "in his [own] tomb" (וַיִּקְבְּרֵהוּ בְּקִבְרֵתוֹ). The significant change is

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<sup>276</sup> Allen, 649.

<sup>277</sup> Hicks, 527.

<sup>278</sup> Mitchell, 422–423.

that the Chronicler adapts Josiah's burial to conform to the terminology Huldah uses in her prophecy in 2 Chronicles 34:22-30 where she promises that Josiah will be "gathered to [his] fathers."

In relating Josiah's death, the Chronicler also omits any mention of Ahab's transport to and burial in Samaria, as well as the description Kings provides regarding the fulfillment of Elijah's prophecy in which dogs lap up Ahab's blood (1 Kings 21:19).<sup>279</sup>

This lack of intertextual connection within the Chronicler's own work is conspicuous. The omissions may be related to the Chronicler's emphasis on cult; for the Chronicler, Ahab does not undermine cult as much as he is personally wicked. Further, the north is not the Chronicler's focus—Judah is. Apostasy in the north was a given and assumed, making the north irrelevant to the Chronicler's discussion of cultic purity.

More probable is that these differences suggest that while deriving his account of Ahab's death from the narrative in Kings, the Chronicler apparently does not construct his own parallel account in 2 Chronicles 18:34 to serve as the intertext to 2 Chronicles 35:24. The narrative of Josiah's transport to Jerusalem and burial is intertextual in the sense that it is derived from 1 Kings 22, but not in the sense that the Chronicler tries to evoke his own narrative of Ahab's death in the verse. The likely reason for the subtle change in the intertextual referent is to evoke Huldah's prophecy. The death and burial of Josiah at Jerusalem is a further defense of Huldah's prophecy.

### **The Chronicler's Purpose in Linking the Deaths of Josiah and Ahab**

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<sup>279</sup> The Chronicler's omission of the entire Naboth narrative also suggests that his theology of retribution is not his primary literary agenda. How better to repay divine retribution than the fulfilled words of Elijah in 1 Kings 21?

Josiah's early death presents a theological dilemma that the Chronicler solves by portraying him as a sinner.<sup>280</sup> The remaining question is why the Chronicler opts to portray Josiah's sin by using the wicked Israelite king Ahab as the model after which to pattern Josiah's death. Connecting Josiah to Ahab seems like an extreme literary mechanism to employ simply to depict Josiah as a sinner. Manasseh, like Ahab, would be an example of extreme evil equivalent to Ahab, but Manasseh does not die in battle and therefore cannot serve as an adequate choice for the Chronicler. The Chronicler had other intertextual options. Saul, for instance, had a mixed character. Even simpler than intertextuality, the Chronicler simply could have stated that Josiah's death was a result of his disobedience. Instead, the Chronicler constructs a subtle and complex intertextual connection between the deaths of the two Hebrew kings.

The reason for the Chronicler's intertextual connection, then, must be rooted in the nature of Ahab's death. The Chronicler is not trying to connect the lives of the two kings; their characters are polar opposites, and he deliberately protects Josiah's reputation. Connecting Josiah's life to unrighteous Ahab would be pointless. It is Ahab's death, then, that provides the appropriate context within which to search for the Chronicler's purpose. When the wider context surrounding the deaths of Josiah and Ahab are compared—specifically the oracles with which they are provided before battle—it becomes clear that Josiah's death is linked to Ahab's because the Chronicler believes his final sin to be the same as Ahab's.

### **Ahab's Rebellion**

1 Kings 22:1–28 (and its parallel narrative in 2 Chronicles 1:1–27) narrates Ahab and Jehoshaphat's agreement to cooperate in a military venture to recapture Ramoth Gilead from

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<sup>280</sup> The Chronicler's solution creates its own difficulties. That the Chronicler connects the death of Josiah to the death of Ahab early on created its own theological tension. The desire to resolve this tension is perhaps seen in the Targum's adding that the archers "took aim," apparently to dissociate Josiah from Ahab in death.

Aram. The parallel accounts have several differences, primarily in the introduction to the narrative and some variances in terminology relating to God. However, Micaiah's prophecy itself in Chronicles is a straightforward copy of the Kings account containing only minor variations.

The theologically intriguing narrative follows Ahab's quest to obtain divine approval for his planned military action. At Jehoshaphat's recommendation to seek the Lord's counsel, Ahab gathers four hundred prophets—presumably Baalic—who provide a theological rubber stamp for Ahab's intentions. Jehoshaphat presses Ahab for a Yahwistic prophet, and Ahab sends for the prophet Micaiah.

Micaiah's initial "prophecy" is equivalent to the Baal Corps, predicting victory for the Israelites at Ramoth Gilead. Ahab immediately confronts Micaiah for the prophet's deceit. It should be noted that Ahab is not predisposed to rejecting or disbelieving Yahwistic prophets. The most redeeming incident in his life occurs when he repents in response to the prophecy of Elijah (1 Kings 21:27).

Micaiah's response to Ahab's confrontation is to provide the king with a window into Yahweh's divine council in which Ahab is divinely destined to die. Hearing the divine message, Ahab opts to go into battle.

Ahab's motivation for battle might be fatalistic. If he believes the prophecy of Micaiah, he may enter the battle resigned to the fact that he will not be leaving the field alive. Fatalism, however, does not seem to be on his mind. He shrewdly conceals his identity while maneuvering the gullible Jehoshaphat into volunteering for Aramean target practice.

Instead of fatalism, Ahab may be attempting to express his religious devotion to Baal. By entering the battle, he may be expressing faith in the deity by acting on the word of his prophets. However, religious faith on Ahab's part is also an unsatisfactory option for his motivation.

Ahab's initial resistance to Micaiah is not because the prophet serves Yahweh, but because "he never prophesies good upon me; only bad." Ahab's interest in prophecy has little to do with the deity and more to do with a favorable message.

In fact, Ahab demonstrates that he has predilection for Yahweh's prophecy. In the context of Micaiah's prophecy, Ahab's adopting of a disguise demonstrates that he is aware of the mortal danger he faces, yet he feels he can elude his divine destiny. His resistance to the oracle is further demonstrated in his imprisoning Micaiah pending his safe return from the battle. But while Ahab fully intends to return safely from the battle, the random arrow strike becomes a potent symbol of God's judgment: Ahab tests his significance against Yahweh and loses.

The best solution for Ahab's response to Micaiah's prophecy and his mindset upon going into battle is simple rebelliousness. Ahab believes the prophesy of Micaiah yet is determined to exercise his own will and sovereignty in blasphemous opposition to Yahweh.

### **Josiah's Rebellion**

Several reasons likely explain why the Chronicler chooses to connect the death of Josiah to the death of Ahab. First, because Huldah's prophecy and Josiah's righteous character preclude his untimely death, his death must be divinely preordained. The arrow striking Josiah renders his death preordained just as Ahab was destined by God to die. The theological dilemma is overcome in the simplest way possible: in spite of what should be expected regarding a long life for Josiah, God determined otherwise. Measured against Huldah's prophecy, the dilemma becomes more difficult. Because the Chronicler's theology demands God's actions be consistent with the words of his prophets, merely accepting that God has changed his mind is unacceptable. The alternative for the Chronicler, then, is to insert a second oracle that allows Josiah the



individual choice to rebelliously resist God and suffer the consequences. This strategy preserves the Chronicler's theology by preserving Huldah's prophecy.

Second, to preserve Huldah's prophecy and Josiah's reputation, in the mind of the Chronicler, Josiah's sin needs to be acute. Huldah's prophecy is immutable, and Josiah's character is inscrutable, both of which provide little room for theological maneuvering. Ancient Hebrew theology easily accommodated a gracious God who overlooked faults—some rather significant—of righteous followers.<sup>281</sup> Josiah's sin needs to be severe enough to merit his death. Deliberate, open rebellion against God is one of the few sins that often receives the quickly imputed divine censure of death. Perhaps here, more than anywhere else, does the Chronicler express the need for the connection between the deaths of Ahab and Josiah. In his mind, Josiah *must* be guilty of rebellion against God—how else can his death be explained? And if rebellion is the sin of which Josiah is guilty, how better to portray that sin than by connecting him to one of scripture's most notorious examples of openly rebellious leaders?<sup>282</sup>

The Chronicler understands Josiah, like Ahab, as resisting God's sovereignty by attempting to control the circumstances of the battle. "The Chronicler went so far as to present Josiah as a second Ahab, who disguised himself in an attempt to prevent the wound from the predicted arrow that necessitated his removal from the fray (18:19, 29, 33)."<sup>283</sup>

Ahab ardently resists the oracle of the Lord given through Micaiah. The Chronicler sees the ultimate affront to Yahweh in Ahab's resistance. Josiah must have committed the same offense in order to die early and negate Huldah's prophecy. Huldah's prophecy is negated not in

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<sup>281</sup> Abraham, Jacob, David, and the judges all serve as ready examples.

<sup>282</sup> That Ahab is the most discussed Northern king is not accidental. God invests himself heavily in the Northern king, making Ahab's stubborn resistance all the more piercing.

<sup>283</sup> Allen, 649.

the sense that God has replaced it with a different oracle. Rather, Neco's oracle exegetes Huldah's prophecy by pointing out that it is conditional; God is not obligated to bring Josiah to his grave in peace if the Judean king acts with disobedient and suicidal recklessness. Engaging the superior Egyptian army in battle certainly violates the conditions implied by Huldah's prophecy. H. Williamson avers that the Chronicler's presentation of Josiah's death as occurring at Jerusalem is an attempt to reconcile the fact that Huldah's prophecy regarding the king's death is left unfulfilled.<sup>284</sup> In reality, it is the insertion of Neco's oracle that provides the mechanism by which the integrity of Huldah's prophecy is maintained.

As well as being sinful, Josiah's death is also foolish. "While the author of 2 Kings has Josiah die a meaningless, almost accidental death, the author of 2 Chronicles has Josiah die an ironic death, and a foolish one. The irony of his death is emphasized only by the knowledge of the account in 2 Kings."<sup>285</sup> To the devout reader of Chronicles, one who rejects an oracle from God is not only rebellious, but foolish. Ahab, even though generously given the opportunity to observe a divine council, still chooses to act in resistance to his knowledge. Similarly, Neco's oracle is inserted just prior to the Megiddo battle to add foolishness to Josiah's decision to engage the Egyptian king in battle. Without Neco's oracle, Josiah's death is just the luck of the draw; he wagers that he could defeat Neco and loses. With the addition of the oracle, however, the reader knows Josiah's decision to be unwise.

The Chronicler's portrayal of Josiah's death as Ahab's is intended to safeguard Huldah's prophecy. The Chronicler holds prophecy in the highest regard, and consequently encounters a theological dilemma in constructing his narrative of Josiah's death. Josiah is too righteous and

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<sup>284</sup> H. G. M. Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 409.

<sup>285</sup> Mitchell, 424.

the meaning of Huldah's prophesy too certain to allow for the king's untimely death. The Chronicler solves this dilemma by portraying Josiah's engagement of Pharaoh Neco in battle as sinful. To make Josiah's military aggression sinful, the Chronicler inserts the Neco oracle, against which Josiah rebels and is appropriately punished with an early death. Josiah's resistance to the Neco oracle represents the zenith of the intertextual connection between the deaths of Josiah and Ahab. Linking Josiah's death to Ahab's maximizes the specific offense of Josiah while preserving the Judean king's reputation and the integrity of Huldah's prophecy.

### **The Chronicler's Utilization of the Type-scene**

The complexity of the Chronicler's literary connection of Josiah's death to Ahab's as a defense of Huldah's prophecy now arrives at the broader discussion at hand: the Chronicler's use of a type-scene to express that connection.

The Chronicler mirrors the Historian's use of a type-scene to portray Josiah's death in the same vein as Ahab. Ahab rejects the message of Micaiah and opposes the messenger.<sup>286</sup> The Chronicler shapes his account in the same manner, inserting a messenger of Yahweh that Josiah opposes. Josiah's death is not rooted in mere disobedience but occurs when he ignores the word of God delivered through Neco. The Chronicler's connection of Josiah's death to Ahab's is also intertextual in a conventional-literary sense. That the Chronicler also connects Josiah's death to Ahab's through a similar type-scene suggests the enduring prowess of the convention. When the Chronicler needs to find a reason for Josiah's death, he frames it around accepted convention. Josiah confronts a prophet of God, receives a verbal command, which he ignores to his own peril. There is divine retribution here, to be sure, structured around Josiah's resistance to the message. The presence of the scene is admittedly secondary to the larger purpose with which the

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<sup>286</sup> See discussion on the type-scene in Ahab and Micaiah in 3.2.

Chronicler approaches the narrative arc of Josiah's death. However, that purpose is embedded simply in the use of the type-scene.

Two elements figure prominently in the Chronicler's adaptation of the scene to bolster Huldah's status: The declaration by Yahweh and the unique physical fate suffered for opposing a divine messenger.

### **The Declaration by Yahweh**

The Chronicler places the declaration by Yahweh in the mouth of Neco. The Egyptian ruler's initial statement uses the standard complaint formula *מה-לי וְלֵךְ* and does not differ from other confrontations.<sup>287</sup> Where Neco's statement diverges from other complaints is in the addition of his overt claim to speak for God (*וְאֵלֹהִים אָמַר לְבַהֲלֹנִי תְדַלֶּלְךָ מֵאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר-עָמְי וְאֶל-יִשְׁחִיָּתְךָ*). Not only has Neco been tasked by God to fight at Carchemish, Josiah's potential interference in that task would be considered direct opposition to God and merit destruction. The Chronicler here opens the scene with a divine message and messenger. And it is that messenger whom Josiah will oppose.

Neco is for the Chronicler a convenient choice—albeit an ironic one—for the divine messenger. Neco is a foreigner—not the natural choice for a divine spokesman, but certainly the better choice for building the narrative.<sup>288</sup> While the Chronicler utilizes the broad strokes of the scene of Ahab's demise, he cannot effectively utilize the Historian's narrative itself. Ahab is confronted by a heavenly council in which a deity determines he must die. There is no deity in Chronicles, however, seeking Josiah's death. And Josiah has no history of employing prophets to provide him with an advantageous message. The Chronicler, as has been noted, has an interest in

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<sup>287</sup> Cf. Judg 11:12, 2 Sam 16:10, 1 Kgs 17:18, and 2 Kgs 3:13.

<sup>288</sup> While another common convention in the Hebrew Bible places statements of faith in Yahweh on the lips of non-Hebrews (e.g., Rahab, Balaam, Naaman, and Nebuchadnezzar), those statements are usually realizations by the speakers and used to identify a blossoming awareness of Yahweh's sovereignty.

validating Huldah's prophecy, which places Yahweh's reputation on the line by predicting a peaceful death for Josiah. The narrative of Ahab's opposition to the divine messenger as portrayed by the historian, then, is not easily mimicked by the circumstances confronting the Chronicler. So a narrative in which Josiah confronts a prophet in his pre-death scene lies beyond the easy construction of the narrative, but the addition of a type-scene that portrays an extreme punishment in response to opposing a divine messenger does not.

Josiah makes no verbal counter-statement in this instance, and Neco in his role as divine messenger makes no response. In this narrative, actions speak for themselves. Josiah refuses to comply with the message Neco delivers and instead mirrors Ahab by disguising himself to engage Neco in battle. This first linking of Josiah to Ahab through donning a disguise is the Chronicler's representation of Josiah's counter-statement: the king decides to deliberately act like Ahab, resisting Yahweh's divine messenger.

### **Receipt of Divine Retribution in the Form of a Unique Physical Punishment**

The Chronicler's description of Josiah's death in the remainder of the narrative is an elaboration on the historian's "he killed him at Megiddo" (2 Kgs 23:29). The entire intricate literary connection of the death of Josiah to that of Ahab culminates in an extreme form of retribution consistent with the type-scene. The unique punishment Josiah receives is not just a death that conflicts with the expectations created by Huldah's prophecy. Rather, Josiah's punishment is that he is linked to and dies *like Ahab*. The extremity of the retribution the Chronicler assigns to Judean king's death is, at its core, the ignoble death of a wicked man whom Yahweh has desired to destroy.

That the Chronicler nowhere provides a narrational presentation of Ahab's evil is significant. The retribution Ahab receives in Chronicles is limited to his opposition to Micaiah.

While his evil character is assumed and implicit in Chronicles—i.e., Ahab’s character and activities were undoubtedly an understood social convention among the Chronicler’s readers—it is not the basis for his immediate fate in Chronicles.<sup>289</sup> In other words, the Chronicler limits nearly his entire treatment of Ahab to the king’s demise portrayed through the Historian’s type-scene. That limitation serves to amplify the significance of the type-scene, making the connection between the type-scene treatment of the two kings obvious. In Chronicles, Ahab is present in the text only through his opposition to a divine messenger. Josiah, while righteous in his activities during life, is narrowly constrained by the Chronicler in his death to a mimicry of Ahab’s fate.

The Chronicler needed to explain Josiah’s death in manner consistent with his retribution theme, assigning an offense by Josiah that merited not only death, but a death that aligned him with the nature of Ahab. Of all possible offenses that could have been selected, the Chronicler chose as Josiah’s offense the ruler’s rejection of a divine oracle as the reason for the king’s death. It is reasonable to conclude that for the Chronicler, a lesser offense would not have sufficed to provide sufficient support for his wider retribution theology.

As a facet of theodicy, retribution theology must reflect parity between the offense and retribution. When the offense is—as with Ahab in Kings—a cumulative expression of an evil character, retribution seems delayed until finally delivered. When no flaw in character and activity exists, however, retribution on the scale of Josiah’s death—particularly in the light of Huldah’s prophecy—is surprising in its injustice. The Chronicler removes the injustice by inserting an offense appropriate to the retribution received: opposition to Yahweh’s messenger.

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<sup>289</sup> See 2 Chr 21:6 and 13.

The strength the convention carries cannot be understated. For the Chronicler, a single instance of opposing an oracle negates the blessing of a righteous life. The Chronicler was faced with the reality of Huldah's prophecy which promised Josiah that his end would be in peace (1 Chr 34:28). Josiah's violent death at the hands of Neco threatened to negate Huldah's prophecy and her concomitant status as a messenger of Yahweh. The Chronicler is not above highly selective editing, and could have eliminated the tension by omitting Huldah's prophecy altogether. Instead, he edited the narrative of Josiah's death in a way that the divine messenger opposition convention supersedes another divine oracle. Even a divine promise cannot help someone who rejects a messenger of Yahweh. The use of the convention here reveals—at least for the Chronicler—the import of the convention. Opposing the messenger of Yahweh is opposition to Yahweh himself and merits an extreme response.

#### **4.3 Joash's Assassination (2 Chronicles 24:17–27)**

In 2 Chr 24, the Chronicler recounts the events in the reign of Joash paralleled in 2 Kgs 12. The death of Joash, however, places the Chronicler in a predicament comparable to difficulty faced in portraying Josiah's death—how does a righteous king die an ignoble death? Joash is assassinated for unknown reasons in the Historian's account. The Chronicler is an exegete with a focus on divine retribution. He interprets his sources, and in so doing, incorporates details that align with his purpose. In 2 Chr 24, he alters the king's death account to reflect the retribution paradigm with which he writes. That alteration includes the use of the divine messenger opposition type-scene.

#### **The Declaration by Yahweh**

Yahweh's declaration in this instance is delivered through Zechariah. The narrative describes the priest in two ways to designate him as Yahweh's messenger. The first designation

is his identification as the son of Jehoiada. This component will serve to amplify Joash's sin and opposition. Joash will be described in 24:22 as not remembering the kindness of "his father" Jehoiada. Joash's offense is not merely the opposition toward a divine messenger, but a personal disrespect toward the man who saved and raised him.

The second identifier signifying Zechariah's unique status in this incident is the presence of the "Spirit of God." The Chronicler uses רוח אלהים לְבָשָׁה, a phrase used in scripture only here.<sup>290</sup> The term suggests that Zechariah is delivering a divinely inspired message given outside his role as a priest.

The content of Zechariah's message directly targets the apostasy described in the preceding context. Utilizing the common motif of the death of a righteous leader opening the door for apostasy, the Chronicler attributes the introduction of idolatry in Judah at this juncture to the death of Jehoiada.

The Kings account does not contain the Chronicler's record of Joash's apostasy. 2 Kgs 12:2 uses the standard formula describing how Joash "did right in the sight of the Lord all his days in which Jehoiada instructed him." The formulaic caveat in verse 3 sketches the parameters of the limits of Joash's reign—the persistence of the high places as unorthodox cultic centers.

The essential nature of Jehoiada's instruction of Joash in 1 Kgs 12:2 will allow the Chronicler to structure his narrative in a manner that reflects his retribution paradigm. It is not until after the death of Jehoiada in 2 Chr 24:17 that Joash abandons his fidelity to Yahweh.

The apostasy is twofold. First, the house of the Lord is abandoned. More common in the Chronicler's usage is the forsaking of the Lord himself. The forsaking of the temple in this case

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<sup>290</sup> The Spirit (רוח) clothes Amasai in 1 Chr 12:18, and it is the "Spirit of Yahweh" (rather than אלהים) that clothes Gideon in Judg 6:34. More frequently, the Spirit of Yahweh rushes (תִּצְלַח עָלָיו רוּחַ יְהוָה) or is said "to be on" (הִיטָה עָלָיו רוּחַ יְהוָה) a recipient.



refers to the repair efforts spearheaded by Jehoiada mentioned in the text. Jehoiada completed the temple restoration, but his death allowed the community to avoid utilizing the facility as its cultic center. Second, the people commit idolatry under Joash's watch. Both sins are committed in the third-person plural, a betrayal by the community in which Joash participates.

It is against this heretical worship that Zechariah, functioning as the divine messenger, speaks. His message is preceded in 24:18 by the Chronicler's assessment that wrath (קִצְוֹן) came upon Judah and Jerusalem. This introductory comment combines with God's dispatching prophets to provide the context for Zechariah's message: Judah deserves Yahweh's wrath, Yahweh sends prophets to encourage repentance, but those prophets are ignored.

Zechariah's message lacks accusations about specific communal sins or attitudes. Rather, the prophet merely confronts the people with their abandonment of obedience to Yahweh. The result of their infidelity will be the loss of success. The use of the imperfect tense in the causative *hiphil* (לֹא תִצְלִיחוּ) in verse 20 indicates that the people have lost God's future activity in producing their prosperity. While this predicted consequence is vague, it is still enough to elicit a strong response from the people.

### **The Counter-statement by the Opposition**

The counter-response the people make is not verbal, but physical. They conspire together, supported by the command of Joash, to murder Zechariah by stoning. The irony of the murder is that it occurs in the temple, the central player in the narrative of 2 Chr 24 to this point. The temple transitions from an expression of devotion to Yahweh on the part of Joash through its restoration to the site of the murder of the divine messenger in response to an unfavorable message. The offense in the opposition toward Zechariah, then, is compounded by the location in which Joash expresses his impiety.

2 Chr 24:22 summarizes Joash's role in opposing Zechariah. The Chronicler states that the king "did not remember" Jehoiada's kindness, making the obvious implication that Joash should have reciprocated the priest's disposition and actions. Jehoiada is identified here as "his father." While the link is no doubt intended in the spiritual sense, the writer offers another connection between Joash and Zechariah that the king violates through murdering the priest. Joash does not merely silence a dissenter. He engineers the murder of someone with whom he should have a personal connection. The reader of the Chronicler's account is left with little doubt that Joash merits divine retribution for this callous affront to Yahweh.

Verses 18–19 function as a transition from the apostasy to the specifics of Zechariah's murder. The third-person plurals in v. 18 link to Joash and his officials in v. 17. However, v. 19 recounts the sending of the נְבִיאִים to Jerusalem and Judah, emphasizing the Chronicler's broader theme of apostasy with which he deals throughout his work. In this way, the following scene involving Zechariah reflects the Chronicler's interest in this broader theme. The Chronicler uses the divine messenger opposition type-scene to illustrate the broader divine retribution delivered against the people.

The people's action could be considered to be a response to Zechariah's message rather than his person, but the Chronicler has previously emphasized in 24:19 the prophets as being sent by Yahweh. Their individual messages are not being rejected. Rather, their cumulative message encouraging fidelity to Yahweh is embodied in the prophets themselves, and hence it is the prophets themselves who are ignored by the people because of what they represent.

### **The Response by the Divine Messenger**

Zechariah remains coherent enough in his dying that he is able to issue a verbal response. His response is unusual in that it does not appear to be an oracle regarding a specific punishment.

Instead, he issues a unfocused statement expressing only his desire that Yahweh “see” and “avenge.” The jussive use of *ראה* and *שר* here indicates the prophet’s personal desire rather than any kind of message or prediction issued from his position as divine messenger. When it comes to the prophetic response to opposition, that desire can be enough to evoke a divine response.<sup>291</sup>

### **Receipt of Divine Retribution in the Form of a Unique Physical Punishment**

To analyze the divine retribution Joash receives, it is necessary to remember the Chronicler’s propensity to alter details of his sources to accommodate his literary purpose. His retribution principle shifts his work toward the realm of theodicy, causing him to shape narratives in a way that resolves problematic suffering on the part of the evidently righteous. The death of Joash presents no exception. The Chronicler narrates events in a manner that amplifies the divine retribution the Judean king receives.

The Historian mentions the assassination of Joash in 2 Kings 12, but the impetus for the attack goes unexplained. To begin with, the Kings account makes no mention of any activity on the part of Joash that merits punishment from Yahweh, including the murder of Zechariah. The Chronicler, on the other hand, has emphasized the reasons behind the retribution—Joash’s apostasy and his opposition to the divine messenger. But in recounting the details of the retribution itself, the Chronicler will also go further, presenting details of the assassination in a manner that highlights Joash’s punishment.

First, the Chronicler presents the successful Aramean incursion as a direct judgment against Joash. That Joash is an individual singled out as the recipient of corporate punishment is significant. Corporate punishment was occasionally received for the sin of an individual, and

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<sup>291</sup> This is true in the case of Elisha’s curse of the youths in 2 Kings 2:23-4. Elisha’s authority extended as far as divine retribution being applied because of his personal reaction to opposition rather than as an intended validation of his own message.

individual punishment for individual sin is consistent with the Hebrew ethos regarding personal responsibility.<sup>292</sup>

In the narrative in 2 Chr 24, corporate punishment for corporate sin is clearly received. The retribution received in the narrative narrowly targets a corporate entity. The victory by the Arameans results in the execution of the nobility (שָׂרֵי הַקָּצָוּם מָצְוּם) and the removal of plunder from Jerusalem. The third-person plurals link to the antecedent of the nobility—the advisors and officials of Joash who were responsible for his corruption. “Plunder” is also suffixed by a third-person plural in v. 23 (שָׁלַלְוּם), making the looting carried out by the Arameans an act against the nobility rather than a generalized defeat of the people of Judah. The nobility who initially enticed Joash toward apostasy are killed and their wealth deported to Damascus.

But the Chronicler connects the death of the nobles to the retribution Joash receives. The defeat of Judah by the much smaller Aramean army is theologically summarized by the Chronicler in v. 24: “they had forsaken Yahweh, the God of their fathers” (עָזְבוּ אֱת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי). The Chronicler takes that theological assessment of divine retribution against corporate sin and subsumes it under the concluding statement that singles out Joash as an entity against whom judgment has been directed. 2 Chr 24:24 uses the phrase, “וְנָאֵת־יּוֹאָשׁ עָשׂוּ שְׁפָטִים” (“and they did judgment [to] Joash”).<sup>293</sup> The plural suffixed to עָשׂוּ points to the Arameans as the agents of

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<sup>292</sup> David’s attempt to take a military census brought retribution against his people (2 Sam 24). Achan’s sin resulted in the death of 36 soldiers at the first battle at Ai and the death of his family (Josh 2). The question naturally arises from cases such as these regarding the culpability of an individual or group for the sin of others. Such narratives seemingly conflict with the expectations of personal responsibility in passages like Deut 24:16 and Ezek 18:20. In the case of Achan, the sin was treated by Yahweh as a corporate sin (Josh 7:1, 10). In both 2 Sam 24 and 1 Chr 24, the king is the significant subject in the narrative, making the people who suffer on his account a part of his punishment, rather than recipients of any retribution for which they are personally responsible. In this sense, both the Historian and Chronicler sidestep the theodicy problem by attributing the corporate receipt of divine retribution to the king.

<sup>293</sup> Joash is here found as the direct object of the verb עָשׂוּ rather than the more commonly used syntactical structure in which the object of judgment is the object of the preposition with a prefixed כִּי (Cf. Ex 12:12; Num 33:4; Ezek 5:10, 16:11, 25:11, 30:14, 19).

retribution, rather than to the upcoming retribution to be described in the remainder of the narrative.

The punishment the nobles receive is a part of the divine retribution Joash receives. The Chronicler's interest in theology drives him to weave together the divine retribution received by Joash and his officials to drive home for the reader the penalties for apostasy. The death of Joash cannot be properly considered a fluke or unfortunate side-effect of Judah's broader historical infidelity to Yahweh. Instead, Joash's specific engagement with idolatry leads to his murdering Zechariah and brings down divine retribution on his own head.

The second aspect of divine retribution against Joash is his murder, which occurs in his bed at the hands of his servants. This component of the retribution Joash receives is the most salient in relation to the type-scene. It is in unusual circumstances of the murder that the Chronicler utilizes the conventional expectations of the scene to further the reader's understanding that Joash's punishment has been fomented by Yahweh.

Assassination—as well as its supra-category of death—is common in Hebrew historiography. The political murder of a wicked individual is commonly connected to divine retribution.<sup>294</sup> By itself, assassination would not necessarily reflect the presence of the proposed type-scene. The Kings account also includes the actual assassination but places it within the summary-transition formula that typically concludes a royal narrative. The Chronicler, however, adds some additional details to ensure that the assassination stands out as unique and extreme.

1 Chr 24:25 notes that the assassins—Joash's servants—killed him because of his instigation of Zechariah's murder (בְּדַמֵי בְנֵי יְהוֹיָדָע הִכָּהוּ). While the Historian's account includes the assassination and the name of the king's assailants, the Chronicler goes further by inserting

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<sup>294</sup> In 2 Kgs 15:8–10 and 15:23–25, the Historian places the assassination account immediately following a description of a king's activities as evil.

their motive into the center of the episode. The shedding of innocent blood routinely merits divine retribution in Hebrew literature.<sup>295</sup> In the earthly realm, those connected to the killing of the innocent often desire to avoid the guilt and so take matters into their own hands, executing those who slay the innocent.<sup>296</sup>

An odd detail at variation with the Kings account is the killing of Joash in his bed. Heavily wounded during the Aramean incursion, Joash is apparently recovering in his bed when Zabad and Jehozabad kill him. David's encounter with two assassins in 2 Sam 4 illuminates the Chronicler's choice of this particular detail. After brothers Recab and Baanah murder Saul's son, Ish-bosheth, they bring the head of the corpse to David in an attempt to ingratiate themselves to him. Before executing them, David in 2 Sam 4:11 castigates the pair for killing "an innocent man in his own house and on his own bed." Beyond the fact that they had killed an innocent man, Recab and Baanah had killed that innocent man when he was at his most vulnerable and unable to properly defend himself. The killing on a bed implies that the assassins are dishonorable, both in 2 Sam 4 and 2 Chr 24. Joash has been killed dishonorably by lowlifes.

To further emphasize the unsavory nature of Zabad and Jehozabad, the Chronicler adds another detail not mentioned by the Historian. Zabad's mother is listed as an Ammonite, and Jehozabad's mother is listed as a Moabite. Both groups were Israel's perennial foes, and the literary mention of mixed lineage served to undermine the reputation of a character.<sup>297</sup>

The unscrupulous nature of the assassins would not normally serve to diminish the standing of the victim. But the Chronicler's treatment of the incident juxtaposes the villainous nature of the assassins with the very appropriate motive for the murder they commit. Zabad and

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<sup>295</sup> E.g., 2 Kgs 24:4, Jer 26:15, or Joel 3:19.

<sup>296</sup> 1 Kgs 2:31; Deut 21:1-9.

<sup>297</sup> Cf. 2 Chr 12:13 and Deut 23:3-6.

Jehozabad are prompted to kill Joash because of his murder of Zechariah. The two dishonorable men evaluate Joash and find him morally wanting. Joash is worse than the lowlifes who kill him. Zabad and Jehozabad at least have enough honor to retaliate against Joash for murdering an innocent man.

Third, Joash was not buried in the tombs of the kings. In the Historian's account, Joash receives an honorable burial—one out of place for the wicked. 2 Kings 12:21 mentions that Joash was buried “with his fathers.” This generic phrase does not necessarily place a burial in a specific location in which generations are interred together.<sup>298</sup> The concept instead presents death as the summation of a well-lived and righteous life and links the burial to the pride and identity that comes from joining the multi-generational ancestry. “Resting with his fathers” becomes the culmination of a fulfilled life. The Chronicler forgoes this detail in favor of the far more location-specific editorial comment that Joash is indeed buried in Jerusalem, but not entombed with the bodies of the previous kings of Judah. The change is yet another not-so-subtle editorial dig at Joash, linking his death to the death of Jehoram in 2 Chr 21:20, who died with “with no one's regret.” Jehoram was also “buried...in the city of David, but not in the tombs of the kings.” The Chronicler considers both rulers despicable, unfit for burial among the kings of Judah.

The statement in v. 27 regarding the “oracles” (אִשְׁמָרָה) against Joash should not properly be considered a fifth component of the retribution. The mention of oracles here serves not as a literary addition to the narrative focus on Joash's retribution, but as a part of the summary-transition formula commonly seen in the historiography of both the Chronicler and the Historian.

The Historian does not treat the death of Joash as divine retribution. Joash's righteousness, the lack of death details, and the king's honorable burial all combine to present

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<sup>298</sup> Cf. Gen 47:30 and Josh 24:32.

Joash as a righteous ruler. The differences in the Chronicler's account point to the emphasis the writer makes regarding divine retribution. These final two aspects of Joash's punishment—the lack of burial with Judah's kings and the additional details about the assassins—are not necessarily part of the type-scene proper, but combine with the scene to underscore the extreme retribution the king receives, reflecting the Chronicler's overall concern for presenting retribution as the solution to theodicy.

The recorded judgment against Joash is thorough, revealing his apostasy and infidelity to Yahweh, his impotency as a warrior, his humiliation at the nature of his death and lack of respectable burial, and the even moral superiority of his mixed-race assassins. Joash's punishment is unique, extreme, and complete.

#### **4.4 Asa's Diseased Feet (2 Chronicles 16)**

Divine retribution toward opponents of divine messengers is not always limited to evil characters or kings whose lives are summarized as evil. Like the Chronicler's portrayal of the death of Josiah, the fate of Asa is narrated through the use of a type-scene that filters the Historian's account through the lens of divine retribution.

The Historian's account of Asa's life is nearly all positive in its portrayal. The Chronicler, on the other hand, perceives Asa's actions more negatively. Particularly problematic for the Chronicler is Asa's treaty with Ben-hadad. Asa loots the Temple treasury in order to purchase the treaty with the Aramean ruler. While this desecration of the Temple is an irreligious act, like the Historian, the Chronicler does not editorialize about it beyond its mention. Asa's disrespect for the Temple is a symptom of his deeper problem, which is what interests the Chronicler. Asa's shortcoming is one of trust, which the Chronicler will spell out through the type-scene.



## The Declaration by Yahweh

The Chronicler's engagement with Asa's treaty deviates from his usual approach to theodicy. In 2 Chr 16, Asa receives no immediate retribution for the treaty. In fact, Judah has seen extremely positive effects springing from the treaty. Aramean pressure on Israel forced Baasha to rapidly abandon his fortifications in the Benjaminite city of Ramah. Not only was Northern pressure against Judah alleviated, but the supplies left behind by Israel at Ramah were pillaged by the South and utilized in fortifying the nearby cities of Mizpah and Geba. The fortification of those cities would effectively hinder further incursions by the North in the area. Asa's treaty with Ben-hadad was a gamble that paid off well for the South.

Politically, Asa's choice to pursue the treaty has been successful. Theologically, it is a failure, which the divine messenger in the scene arrives to point out. The narrative is here crafted as a theological assessment of Asa's political procurement of the treaty, and the divine messenger opposition type-scene will follow.

Hanani is a seer (נִחֵן), a less-common word choice for a divine messenger. His message begins with the true political consequence of Asa's actions: the treaty will prevent military engagement with and victory over Aram. Asa has closed the door for Judah's long-term political superiority over the region. The Chronicler will play out this consequence through the remainder of the book.<sup>299</sup>

Hanani in 16:9 provides the theological evaluation of Asa's treaty. First, Hanani criticizes Asa in 2 Chr 16:8 with the common motif of Yahweh's giving support to a smaller army depending on the faithfulness of the Hebrew king. Kings who are loyal to Yahweh overcome

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<sup>299</sup> Jehoshaphat, Ahaziah, Joash, Ahaz, and Jehoram will all experience military pressure from the Arameans (although Ahaziah will be the one to instigate the military conflict during his reign).

much larger armies, while the armies of wicked kings are overwhelmed by much smaller forces.<sup>300</sup>

Second, the seer indicates that God supports those whose hearts are fully committed to him (לְהִתְחַזֵּק עִם־לְבָבָם שְׁלֵם אֵלָיו). The implication Hanani makes, of course, is that Asa’s spiritual loyalty to Yahweh is only half-hearted.

Third, Hanani points out that in light of God’s provision for those loyal to him, Asa has made a politically foolish choice.<sup>301</sup> Asa has made the politically practical choice over the appropriate theological choice. But while the treaty has proven politically expedient, in reality it is the inferior choice because it provides an inferior solution to Asa’s political difficulties.

Fourth, the consequence of Asa’s actions will be that he will experience perpetual war. It has already been noted that the political consequence for the treaty paved the way for the ongoing presence of Aramean conflict with Judah. But the war Hanani promises is personally connected to Asa. 2 Chr 16:9 uses the phrase מִעַתָּה יִשׁ עִמָּךְ מִלְחָמוֹת—“from now there war is with you.” Hanani attaches no supplemental recipients to the term עִמָּךְ, making an intended connection with Asa’s descendants unlikely. Neither the Historian nor the Chronicler make specific mention of any conflicts with which Asa will engage in the remaining five years of his reign and life. Short of both such particulars for Asa and a connection between Hanani’s words and such conflicts among Asa’s descendants, not much more can be inferred than that Hanani was pointing out the obvious: Judah’s political resolution with Aram would be unattainable for Asa. Hanani’s point here is that Asa’s choice will have regrettable long-term consequences.

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<sup>300</sup> Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 104.

<sup>301</sup> Noteworthy here is that while Asa’s actions are described as “foolish,” they have not been committed independently of a sinful heart. כָּל often connects a foolish choice to spiritual failure when it appears elsewhere (1 Sam 13:13; 2 Sam 24:10; 1 Chr 21:8).

These four aspects of Hanani's divine declaration combine into a message that enrages Asa.

### **The Counter-statement by the Opposition**

Asa's response to Hanani is simply to imprison the seer. The narrative emphasizes Asa's anger in response to the message he receives. As a result, he blames the messenger. First, Asa is described with a standard term for anger, כעס. The second phrase, "because he was angry with him over this" (כִּי־בָזַעַר עִמוֹ עַל־זֹאת), emphasizes the king's rage. זעפּ conveys Asa's fury, fierce enough to motivate him to impulsively imprison Hanani. The narrative at this point cements his character, portraying Asa as stubbornly refusing to seek God's assistance.<sup>302</sup>

After narrating Hanani's imprisonment, the Chronicler adds another negative action by Asa. Concurrently to his imprisoning Hanani (designated by בָּצַעַת הַהֵיָא), Asa mistreats the people. The comment is presented without other details and simply reinforces the idea that Asa takes out some of his anger at Hanani's message on the people.

### **The Response by the Divine Messenger**

The scene deviates from the norm in regard to the response of the divine messenger to the opposition. Hanani makes no statement and takes no action in regards to Asa's imprisoning him. But while the scene makes no mention of the divine messenger's response in this instance, the Chronicler still moves toward the unique form of punishment Asa receives for mistreating Hanani.

### **Receipt of Divine Retribution in the Form of a Unique Physical Punishment**

Hanani has promised Asa that war would continually plague him. This consequence does not reflect active divine retribution for a particular instance of disobedience but functions as

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<sup>302</sup> See discussion on v. 12 below.

imminent natural retribution—a reasonable political consequence of Asa’s poor, faithless decision to forge a treaty with Aram.

The Chronicler is left, then, with the odd detail included in the Historian’s account—Asa’s severely diseased feet. The Historian’s mention of Asa’s diseased feet follows the affirming eulogy of Asa’s successful life. 1 Kings 15:11–13 has already offered a detailed accounting of the acts Asa performs that earn him an assessment as a righteous king. And other than the common formulaic caveat in v. 14 about his leaving the high places intact, the Historian nowhere else impugns Asa’s character. Even Asa’s looting the temple treasury to make a treaty with Ben-hadad receives no criticism from the Historian.

The appearance at the end of the narrative of Asa’s diseased feet is an oddity in Kings, detached from any clear frame of reference for its inclusion. The Historian mentions Asa’s podiatric problems after citing his source. The “Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah” (סֵפֶר דְּבָרֵי הַיָּמִים לְמַלְכֵי יְהוּדָה) presumably contains additional information which the Historian does not include. The only clue to the background, then, must be inferred from the phrase itself in 1 Kgs 15:23. The phrase is introduced by וְכִּי, which serves as a contrasting conjunction that qualifies the previous content.<sup>303</sup> Asa’s well-rounded life is marred by the presence of diseased feet in his old age. This oddity of Asa’s diseased feet at the end of his life merits mention by the Historian, but not the cause. The king’s feet are an odd detail but included in a way that does not negate the positive assessment of Asa’s life.

The Chronicler, however, treats Asa’s diseased feet in a manner entirely different from the Historian. The Chronicler aligns Asa’s infection with his overall paradigm of divine

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<sup>303</sup> *HALOT* suggests that usage of וְכִּי as a contrasting conjunction must “emerge from the context” (v. 3, p. 1286). *NIDOTTE* notes that “the restrictive sense is present when it introduces a summary...or a clarification of what precedes” (v. 4, p. 1029). The sense of “however” seems the best interpretive choice here.

retribution, presenting the ailment as byproduct of Asa's spiritual stubbornness. And that stubborn resistance to seeking Yahweh's assistance is expressed most strongly in verse 10 in which Asa imprisons Hanani and mistreats the people.

Compared to the Chronicler, the Historian's summary of Asa's affliction in 1 Kgs 15:23 is terse: "Only at the time of his old age he was diseased in his feet" (רק לעת זקנתו חלה את-רגליו).

2 Chr 16:12 provides far more detail regarding the disease. There, several additional details link the malady to the Chronicler's broader retribution paradigm. The narrative dates the disease to the thirty-ninth year of Asa's reign. The text also emphasizes the disease as severe (עָדָה) as an immediate prelude to Asa's resistance to seeking divine help. These details are followed by the spiritual summary of Asa's life given prior to his eulogy. He has become more entrenched in his response to his afflicted feet, petulantly refusing to seek Yahweh's assistance. The position of the physicians in the story—placed immediately prior to the eulogy—imply that Asa's infection was chronic, staying with the king until his death.

Several aspects of the Asa narrative push the limits of the Chronicler's use of the type-scene under discussion and exposes the complexity of the author's interaction with convention.

First, the retribution of Asa's foot disease is not immediate. Asa's treaty and imprisonment of Hanani occurs in the thirty-sixth year of his reign, but he is not afflicted with the foot disease until his thirty-ninth year. The malady lasts just two years until his death in the forty-first year of his reign. After his mistreatment of Hanani, then, Asa lives longer without the retribution of diseased feet than with it.

Second, Asa's resistance to seeking Yahweh's help for his affliction links the diseased feet not to any retribution for his opposition to Hanani as divine messenger, but to the earlier offense of faithlessness demonstrated in the pursuit of the treaty with the Arameans. After

Hanani criticizes Asa for not relying on Yahweh to solve his Aramean problems, Asa digs in and refuses to solicit help for Yahweh for anything else, either, including the extreme case of a disease that is making him miserable.

Third, divine retribution occurs after the formulaic summary of the royal life. The Chronicler inserts the material about Asa's feet after the eulogy in 1 Chr 16:11. Verse 12, then, should be considered part of Asa's death summary—a way for the Chronicler to convey that Asa died unrepentant with regard to his stubbornness.

Fourth, the Chronicler's burial account is decidedly more positive than the Historian's account. Both mention Asa's burial with his fathers, his interment in the City of David, and his forty-one year reign.<sup>304</sup> Chronicles also includes the details that Asa had cut his own tomb, had been placed on a bier filled with aromatic spices blended by professionals, and was given a large funeral pyre. These details hardly align with the Chronicler's minimizing the death account in favor of the negative portrayal created by the use of the type-scene.<sup>305</sup>

These details in the Asa narrative—in addition to the lack of a response from the divine messenger—seem to cause the type-scene to break apart, if not suggest that the scene is here altogether absent. However, the remaining elements—the declaration by Yahweh, the opposition to the divine messenger, and the unique form of the retribution still suggest the presence of the scene, even if in a less distinct form.

The Chronicler cannot be considered to be consciously using modern literary categories and devices. Instead, he considers what makes a good divine retribution story, and then naturally draws on the conventional milieu to write it. For the Chronicler, the divine retribution paradigm

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<sup>304</sup> The Historian places the length of the reign in his typical choice at the front of the narrative.

<sup>305</sup> See discussion of Josiah in 2 Chr 35.

through which he filters the history of Israel is paramount, resulting in his interpretive rendering of that history.

The type-scene of a divine messenger's opponent being punished by Yahweh can be expected to assert itself frequently in any narrative context that relates frequent tales of divine retribution. That the scene—or elements of the scene—appear so frequently in Chronicles is unsurprising. The scene holds a firm place in ancient Hebrew literary convention. This conventional permeation is seen so frequently in Chronicles precisely because of the book's heavy emphasis on retribution. This scene is certainly not the only conventional literary tool on which the Chronicler leans—it is one of many. But where retribution appears in a text, the divine messenger opposition type-scene is often not far behind.

#### **4.5 Uzziah's Leprosy (2 Chronicles 26:16–22)**

The prideful sin of Uzziah in 2 Chr 26 is another text in which the Chronicler inserts the type-scene in a way that fleshes out his theology of divine retribution. Like the narrative account explaining the source of Asa's diseased feet, the Chronicler will insert the scene in order to explain the source of Uzziah's leprosy.

The Historian's account regarding a king is here again relatively short in comparison to the Chronicler's treatment.<sup>306</sup> Both mention Uzziah's reign commencing at sixteen years old and lasting fifty-two years. The Historian includes the typical theological assessment of Uzziah's life as righteous, qualified by his non-removal of the high places.

The only unique incident the Historian includes regarding the life of Uzziah is the unfortunate state of his leprosy. The Historian identifies Yahweh as the source of the affliction but appears uninterested in Yahweh's motive, offering no impetus for Yahweh's action. He

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<sup>306</sup> 2 Kgs 15:1–6.

chooses the aggressive term, “And Yahweh touched the king and he was a leper” (וַיִּגַע יְהוָה אֶת־הַמֶּלֶךְ, quickly dumping the responsibility at God’s feet. The affliction sidelines Uzziah, permanently removing him from royal service and quarantining him.

The Historian concludes the Uzziah narrative arc with the standard mention of the king’s eulogy and burial. Other than his mention of the king’s disease, the Historian’s account of Uzziah is entirely unremarkable. And the disease, while unique enough to merit a mention, poses no theodicy problems for the Historian, even though Yahweh is responsible. The Chronicler, on the other hand, seems deeply concerned with the causes underlying Uzziah’s affliction, dedicating the bulk of his narrative to the explanation.

2 Chr 26:5 serves as a key foreshadowing Uzziah’s downfall, upon which the type-scene will elaborate. The standard introductory formula in 26:3-4 introduces Uzziah, whom the Chronicler in his formulaic manner assigns a righteous status. Verse 5 introduces a subtle shift to Uzziah’s character. Uzziah’s devotion to Yahweh is linked in verse 5 to the ministry of Zechariah. As long as a spiritual leader is present, Uzziah is able to maintain his fidelity.<sup>307</sup> The subsequent statement (“and in the days of his seeking Yahweh”) detaches Uzziah’s condition from Zechariah and moves the focus to the king’s action. Uzziah is ultimately responsible for his own spiritual loyalty to Yahweh.

Verse 5 is followed with a summary of Uzziah’s accomplishments. Placed immediately after this foreshadowing, verses 6-15 are not merely a catalog of Uzziah’s achievements. The section provides the foundation for the disrespect Uzziah later displays toward Yahweh.

Uzziah’s exploits are in many ways unique in Israel’s royal history. The deliberate investment in agricultural infrastructure and his love of the soil (פִּי־אֶהָב אֲדַמָּה הָיָה) are attributed in

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<sup>307</sup> Such statements linking fidelity to Yahweh with individual or communal righteousness on occasion precede narratives of spiritual failure. See Judg 2:7-15 and 1 Sam 14:52ff.



scripture to no one but Uzziah. And while other kings fortified cities and reinforced the military, Uzziah alone creates military technology (הַשְׁבִּנוֹת מִחֻשְׁבֵּת). These achievements, while spreading his reputation, also set the stage for his prideful downfall, which brings the type-scene into play.

### **The Declaration by Yahweh**

The declaration by Yahweh comes in response to Uzziah's prideful effort to enter the Temple and burn incense on the altar. Like Jeroboam in 1 Kgs 13, Uzziah attempts to function as a priest, encroaching in a role to which he is not entitled.

The Chronicler makes two statements regarding Uzziah's actions. First, Uzziah's "heart was elevated to destruction" (כְּהִזְקָתוֹ גָּבַהּ לִבּוֹ עַד־לְהַשְׁחִית). The destruction itself will come in the form of divine retribution in response to his impertinence. The theological assessment follows: "He acted unfaithfully to the Lord his God" (מָעַל בְּיַהוָה אֱלֹהָיו). Both statements are summarized in his actions: approaching the altar to burn incense.

As Uzziah knowingly oversteps the Israelite boundaries of the cult, he is confronted by Azariah and a contingent of priests. Azariah's priests are described in 2 Chr 26:17 as "sons of strength" (בְּנֵי־הַיָּל), a construct elsewhere used to describe gallant and strong men.<sup>308</sup> Azariah and the priests are bracing for a fight.

In the confrontation, the priests confront Uzziah collectively. The third plural of אָמַר in v. 18 indicates that the priests are the entity making the divine declaration. It is the priesthood itself, on Yahweh's behalf, confronting Uzziah for his sacrilege. The verbal statement reminds him of the Levite's exclusive role in leading the Israelite cult. The correction is followed by the imperative to leave the Temple interior. Uzziah has demonstrated unfaithfulness to Yahweh and must comply.

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<sup>308</sup> Deut 3:18, Judg 18:2, 1 Sam 14:52.

## The Counter-statement by the Opposition

The counter-statement Uzziah makes in terms of the scene at first glance seems minimal. He has already declared his intention to blaspheme by arriving at the Temple with a censor for the purpose of offering incense. He apparently engages with the priests in v. 19, although the Chronicler does not record the specifics of the conversation, emphasizing only Uzziah's anger. But it is the king's anger at the priests that is the core of the counter-statement toward the divine messengers.

The significance of Uzziah's anger at the priests as the cause of his leprosy may be seen in the syntax of v. 19. The initial ו in the construct וַיִּבְרַח עִם־הַכֹּהֲנִים וַהֲצִרְעַת וְרָחַהּ בְּמִצְחוֹ לִפְנֵי הַכֹּהֲנִים may be taken as an apodosis, connecting the clause וַיִּבְרַח עִם־הַכֹּהֲנִים to וַהֲצִרְעַת וְרָחַהּ בְּמִצְחוֹ לִפְנֵי הַכֹּהֲנִים.<sup>309</sup> The phrase may reasonably be translated temporally, “At his fury with the priests, leprosy rose on his forehead in the presence of the priests.” The syntax here connects the appearance of Uzziah's leprosy to his rage at the priests.

## The Response by the Divine Messenger

If the counter-statement in the scene is minimal, the divine messenger response is non-existent. The scene skips any response on the part of the priests toward Uzziah and instead moves directly to the divine retribution the king will experience at Yahweh's hands. The absence of this component of the scene does not necessarily negate its presence. The status and function of the priests as divine messengers is far less significant than the affront to Yahweh that Uzziah makes by entering the Temple and presuming to appropriate the role of priest. Uzziah's proximity to the understood presence of Yahweh needs no response that validates the message of the priests.

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<sup>309</sup> Joüon notes the presence of a Waw of apodosis here, even though its placement before a noun is uncommon (§177 l, 649).

However, the presence of the priests is completely irrelevant to the retribution Uzziah receives in the narrative. Uzziah would easily have been precluded from offering incense if he entered the Temple and was immediately smitten with leprosy. The priests in the account hint at the edges of the type-scene, placing Yahweh's words in the mouths of human messengers.

The dynamics of the story position Uzziah as a direct antagonist to Yahweh, and he suffers accordingly without a strong statement or action opposing the priests and without a response by those same priests.

### **Receipt of Divine Retribution in the Form of a Unique Physical Punishment**

As discussed above, Uzziah's counter-statement toward the divine messenger in the scene consists of his anger toward Azariah and the assembled priests. The priests have confronted the king, but instead of heeding their command, he reacts with anger. The Chronicler has already pointed out Uzziah's downfall-causing pride that is motivating his delusion that he has the authority to offer incense himself in the Temple. He is willing to allow neither his deficient inner righteousness nor an assembly of priests to impede him. But where Uzziah's character is unable to stop him from his sacrilegious conduct, leprosy will.

The sudden presence (as well as the sudden disappearance) of leprosy was commonly understood to be caused by the direct intervention of Yahweh.<sup>310</sup> God's immediate intervention prevents Uzziah's progress, and the retribution will remain as a permanent reminder to Uzziah of his place. The dominant flavor of the narrative at this point, however, is the immediate concern in the moment over his potential contamination to the Temple. The priests quickly remove Uzziah from the temple, presumably to prevent the presence of uncleanness. Uzziah himself

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<sup>310</sup> See discussion of Miriam in Num 12. The narrative of Gehazi's punishment for dishonesty in 2 Kings 5:27 also portrays Yahweh's active expression disapproval.

hurries as well, specifically because he is aware that God has inflicted the leprosy (נִדְחָה לְצֵאת כִּי נִגְעוּ יְהוָה).

Uzziah, if not attempting to appropriate the role of priest in its entirety, is at least taking it upon himself to perform part of the priestly function. The sudden appearance of leprosy, though, precludes him from even offering incense. The affliction isolates him not only from his pretentious attempt to function as a priest, but from the Temple itself. In an ironic move by the narrative, Uzziah is placed in a clearly subservient position to the priests—he is forced into his proper non-cultic role as Azariah and the priests perform the cultic function of evaluating the king's leprosy.<sup>311</sup>

The question must be asked why leprosy would prevent Uzziah from offering incense in the Temple when the Law and cultic decorum would not. Why was the proscription against priestly service while diseased or deformed a stronger taboo than the proscription against non-Levite service? Israel had seen violations of the clan-based Levitical priestly service before, making Uzziah's efforts uncommon, but not unheard of. Further, the taboos regarding cleanliness, disease, and deformity must be considered to be so heavily embedded in the corporate Hebrew culture that resistance to those taboos is unknown.

In v. 21, after completing the summary of the impetus for the divine retribution that Uzziah receives, the Chronicler returns to the Kings narrative. The Chronicler summarizes the offense of Uzziah by commenting that Uzziah lives in permanent isolation. Such quarantines because of disease were known elsewhere in the aNE.<sup>312</sup>

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<sup>311</sup> Lev 13.

<sup>312</sup> Saul M. Olyan, *Disability in the Hebrew Bible: Interpreting Mental and Physical Differences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 149 n. 21.

The ongoing quarantine permanently excludes the king from access to the temple in *any* capacity. Uzziah's days both as pretentious priest and legitimate worshipper are over. While the disabled are not necessarily excluded from being in the Temple, the presence of a contagious disease would bar him from interaction with anyone.<sup>313</sup> The disease also prevents him from fulfilling the responsibilities associated with his royal position, requiring his son Jotham to assume administrative tasks. In every way, Uzziah is cut off socially from his people.

In v. 23, the Chronicler adds a final additional detail regarding the retribution Uzziah receives. The leprosy prevents a regular burial for Uzziah, relegating the interment to the general vicinity of the royal graves. The Chronicler elsewhere uses the device to describe the less-than-honorable burial of particular kings as part of the retribution they receive.<sup>314</sup>

An otherwise righteous king, Uzziah is portrayed near the end of his life in Chronicles as unspiritual. The Chronicler provides the rationale for Uzziah's leprosy that was unattached to a cause in Kings. That rationale is fueled by the Chronicler's theodicy, which places the onus for the suffering of kings on their infidelity to Yahweh. In the case of Uzziah, as elsewhere, the Chronicler expresses that theodicy through the divine messenger opposition type-scene—modified in this instance—to clearly establish Uzziah's direct opposition to Yahweh.

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<sup>313</sup> Jeremy Schipper, *Disability Studies and the Hebrew Bible: Figuring Mephibosheth in the David Story* (A&C Black, 2006), 105 n.10. Disease and disfigurement/disability should be distinguished at this point. Regardless of the perceived source, deformity is self-contained in the individual, while disease carries the potential to pollute others. As such, disease manifests differently with regard to social stigma than does deformity or disability.

<sup>314</sup> Jehoram in 2 Chr 21:20, Joash in 2 Chr 24:25, and Ahaz in 2 Chr 28:27 all act sacrilegiously prior to their deaths. The flawed burial circumstances act as a final, permanent comment on their characters.

## 4.6 Conclusion

Text	Divine Messenger	Opponent and Retribution Recipient	Declaration by Yahweh	Opponent's Counter Statement	Divine Messenger Response	Fate of the Antagonist
2 Chronicles 35:20–24	Pharaoh Neco	Josiah	Neco's journey to Carchemis	Engaging in battle	Turn aside or God will destroy him	Josiah's death is portrayed to mirror the death of Ahab
2 Chronicles 24:17–27	Zechariah	Joash	Confrontation over apostasy	Joash arranges Zechariah's murder	—	Joash is assassinated
2 Chronicles 16	Hanani	Asa	Criticism over Asa's treaty with Aram	Hanani imprisoned; People treated brutally	—	Diseased feet
2 Chronicles 26:16–22	Azariah	Uzziah	The condemnation of the priests when Uzziah attempts to perform priestly service	Anger and rage directed at the priests	—	Permanent leprosy

The Chronicler utilizes the type-scene to round out his thematic treatment of divine retribution. A response by the divine messenger is commonly omitted by the Chronicler—Yahweh's representatives make no statements responding to the opposition they receive. Instead, the antagonists deliver their counter-statement and immediately receive punishment at the hands of God. The retribution itself is the divine response.

The Chronicler utilizes the type-scene to link Josiah's death to the death of Ahab. Neco functions as the divine messenger on a mission from God, and Josiah interferes. The portrayal of the Judean king's death goes far beyond the mere comeuppance for a poor choice. Instead, through the type-scene, the Chronicler demonstrates that Josiah has spiritually blundered in a way that denies God by challenging the plans being implemented by God's messenger. The extreme fate Josiah receives clearly validates Neco as Yahweh's representative. Ahab was humiliated in death by divine design, and Josiah's similar death in the same manner reveals both

Josiah's wickedness in the moment of his opposition to Neco and Yahweh's involvement in his demise.

One significant aspect of the Chronicler's treatment is his use of the scene in relation to kings described as righteous by the historian. Josiah, Joash, Asa, and Uzziah are righteous, yet all experience extreme fates. Those bizarre experiences, then, are not intended as just critiques on the entire life of the individual; rather, they merit an explanation that the type-scene can provide. The scene provides the context for the experience of a peculiar fate by linking it to the particular sin rather than the overall character of the opponent.

Another notable aspect of the type-scene in Chronicles is the inclusion of specific sins by the Chronicler that connect the bizarre fates to retribution. To the Historian, diseased feet or lingering leprosy are merely odd incidental circumstances. To the Chronicler, those circumstances are fates connected to specific sins, and the shaping of those sins is constructed using a type-scene that roots divine retribution in the recipient's opposition to a divine messenger. The Chronicler inserts sins where needed to elevate causality in relation to divine retribution, and when he does so, he utilizes the divine messenger opposition type-scene.

## **5. Into the New Testament: Falling Lightning**

This work has so far demonstrated the presence of a convention in the Hebrew Bible in which opponents of divine messengers are punished in a unique manner. If the convention can truly be said to exist as broadly as has been suggested, a reasonable assumption follows that such a type-scene would thread its way through Jewish culture and find expression in later literature—in this case, the New Testament. Messengers in the New Testament appear as Apostles, angels, and, of course, in the Incarnation itself. If the presence of the scene is as prevalent as has been suggested, it could reasonably be expected to appear in the New Testament. In keeping with the parameters of the study to this point, the exploration is properly confined to narrative passages. The scope of possible texts in the New Testament, then, is limited to the Gospels and Acts. The question becomes where to best look for the presence of the scene.

While Jesus might be expected to be the archetype of the opposed divine messenger, the type-scene is not clearly utilized in the Gospels. Several reasons may be suggested why the Gospel writers avoid applying the divine messenger opposition type-scene to Jesus, particularly in regard to the Crucifixion.

First, the theological perspective necessarily bypasses the purpose of the scene—to validate the divine messenger. From the perspective of the authors, the validation of Jesus occurs through the Resurrection, not through the punishment of his opponents. There is no need for validation of the messenger through the structuring their historiographies around the scene.

Second, while there is a unique form of physical retribution received in the Crucifixion narratives, it does not fall on Jesus' opponents. If anything, the unique form of punishment due



the antagonists falls on the messenger himself—a tidy theological inversion of the common scene. While Jesus repeatedly alludes to eventual punishment for his opponents, the narrative cannot provide immediate retribution against his opponents because it must make Jesus the object of retribution.

Third, the theological implications of the Crucifixion preclude the Gospel writers from limiting their treatment to a short scene. Because of its centrality, all four Gospels amplify the Crucifixion beyond the limits of scene structure into an event in and of itself. The Crucifixion and Resurrection function as the focal point of each Gospel rather than as a scene serving to validate Jesus.

While type-scenes structured around the death of a tyrant, birth annunciation scenes, divine calls, betrothals, or banquets are common occurrences within the pages of the New Testament,<sup>315</sup> Luke arguably provides the best option for investigation. Not only does he commonly utilize type-scenes, but he does so in a cumulative way that maximizes his literary and thematic agendas. This section will make an introductory exploration of the divine messenger opposition type-scene in the New Testament by considering the writings of Luke regarding Zacharias, Judas, and the early Church in Acts.

### **5.1 Zechariah's Muteness (Luke 1:5–25)**

Near the beginning of his Gospel, Luke interjects the conspicuous activity of the divine realm in order to lay the foundation for the life and ministry of Jesus. A divine messenger—no less than Gabriel himself—initiates God's communication regarding his plans. Gabriel makes his first stop at the temple to engage with the priest Zechariah.

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<sup>315</sup> See Pamela Lee Thimmes, "Convention and Invention: Studies in the Biblical Sea-Storm Type Scene" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1990), and Williams, "Beautiful and the Barren," 107–19. Williams is particularly useful here, providing an ample—though not exhaustive—catalog of scenes.

In Luke 1:5–25, the narrative has long been recognized as reflecting the common divine-birth annunciation type-scene in which the birth of an important child is divinely announced to a barren woman.<sup>316</sup> Chad Hartsock offers a typical framework for the scene:

1. Appearance of an angel of the Lord
2. Fear
3. The divine message (which itself has eight distinct parts)
4. An objection or request for a sign
5. The giving of a sign for reassurance.<sup>317</sup>

It is this classic divine-annunciation scene that Luke will modify, inserting elements from the divine retribution opposition type-scene. The divine realm will still provide an announcement to a barren woman of a significant birth, but the scene is modified in crucial ways that better reflect the convention under discussion.

The scene is initially unremarkable. A divine messenger appears to announce a significant birth to a childless parent. Consistent with the type-scene, the divine messenger—the angel Gabriel in this instance—appears in order to make a announcement on God’s behalf. Zechariah does not expect Gabriel’s shocking appearance adjacent to the altar of incense and reacts accordingly. Gabriel’s first statement to be unafraid is a typical exhortation, commonly delivered by angelic messengers faced with a terrified recipient.<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 51, 57. Alter perceives the scene as the birth of a hero to a barren woman. See also Scott A. Ashmon, *Birth Annunciations in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East: A Literary Analysis of the Forms and Functions of the Heavenly Foretelling of the Destiny of a Special Child* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 2012); Robert Alter, “How Convention Helps Us Read: The Case of the Bible’s Annunciation Type-Scene,” *Prooftexts* 3 (1983): 115–30; and James G. Williams, “The Beautiful and the Barren: Conventions in Biblical Type-Scenes,” *JSOT* 17 (1980): 107–19.

<sup>317</sup> Chad Hartsock, “The Call Stories in Luke: The Use of Type-Scene for Lucan Meaning,” *RvExp* 112 (2015): 574.

<sup>318</sup> Gen 15:1, 26:24, 46:3, Judg 6:23,

Gabriel then presents the core of his message: his prediction of the birth of John. Zechariah's response in v. 18—as well as that of Elizabeth in v. 25—indicate the couple is indeed barren and has been so for a lengthy period of time. Gabriel's message is at the front personal. Zechariah's prayer has been heard, and Gabriel is present to offer the answer. In light of the advanced age of the couple in v. 18, the prayer had ironically been abandoned years before. Nevertheless, Gabriel personally delivers the good news to Zechariah that his prayer will soon be answered with a son. After telling Zechariah what his son is to be named, Gabriel presents the birth as a source of joy for the elderly couple.

Only after informing Zechariah that he is receiving an answer to his prayer that will delight him does the angel continue. Gabriel's subsequent speech reveals that the answer Zechariah receives to his prayer will be a vehicle for the divine will. As an emissary, the child is assigned a Nazirite's abstinence from alcohol as a requirement. The narrative here is reminiscent of the annunciation of Samson's birth in Judg 13. Both scenes involve the divine promise of a birth which will result in a child who grows to fulfill the divine purpose. Unlike Samson in his impetuous nature and temporary influence of the Spirit, however, John will be filled with the Spirit while still in utero. His ultimate function will be as a preparatory agent for the Messiah. By receiving an answer to his no-doubt abandoned prayer, Zechariah will participate in the deliverance of Israel.

It is here that Luke inserts his first subtle alteration of the type-scene. While a childless spouse is still the recipient of the divine announcement, the recipient functions antagonistically to the divine messenger. Zechariah's counter-statement contradicts Gabriel's message and positions him oppositionally to the angel. Zechariah's counter-statement ignores the honor Gabriel is promising him, making no mention of the divine purpose of the son who has just been

promised. Instead, Zechariah focuses exclusively on the logistical improbability of him and his wife conceiving a child in the twilight years. Zechariah mentions his old age and is especially emphatic about the age of his wife. The perfect active participle *προβεβηκυῖα* in v. 18 places Elizabeth in the category of already existing in the state of advanced years—she’s been old for a while. Zechariah’s seemingly reasonable response reveals his naturalistic mindset—the possibility of conceiving a child is unimaginable. Zechariah is not wicked in the sense that he is spiritually oriented against the messenger and, by extension, God. Rather, he simply questions if conceiving a son is even possible. His naturalistic approach—ironic for a priest—ignores the power of God and elicits a response from Gabriel. Zechariah’s opposition is reminiscent of the royal official’s questioning Elisha’s proclamation in 2 Kings 7. The priest does not merely object to the announcement, he *doubts*. In v. 20, Luke emphasizes Zechariah’s disbelief through Gabriel’s response: it is Zechariah’s disbelief that directly results in the punishment Gabriel bestows on him.

Hartsock here strenuously objects, suggesting that the common position that Zechariah’s response should be interpreted negatively is flawed. “Mary will object ‘how can this be, since I am a virgin?’ I fail to see any substantial difference between that question and Zechariah’s ‘how will I know since I am old?’ Is there some semantic clue that should cause us to see ‘how will I know’ as obviously negative while ‘how can this be’ is clearly faithful? Certainly not. Why is one question seen as doubting, whereas the other is seen as faithful? Such a reading is absurd.”<sup>319</sup> Such a perspective, however, overlooks the assessment of Zechariah provided by the immediate narrative itself. While Zechariah’s question is seemingly indistinguishable from that of Mary, it is not the question itself that lies at the heart of the issue. Mary’s question, too, indicates that she

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<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 581.

could not comprehend the mechanism of her pregnancy. After Gabriel's explanation, however, Mary offers a faith-filled response in v. 38. She responds to Gabriel's declarative statement of God's power with obedient submission.

Luke's portrayal of Zechariah, on the other hand, gives the priest no opportunity to submit and obey. Rather, Luke shapes the narrative in a way that Zechariah's counter-statement to Gabriel elicits a reaction from the angel that aligns with the response commonly issued by divine messengers to their opponents: a unique physical punishment. Further, the negative portrayal of Zechariah is actually embedded in the narrative itself. Gabriel specifies that it is Zechariah's disbelief that prompted the retributive response. When the response of Zechariah in v. 20 is juxtaposed with that of Mary in v. 38, it becomes clear that the faith disposition of the two is radically different. Hartsock appears to be so vested in his schema that he must overlook v. 20. Contra Hartsock, the Zechariah annunciation scene is hardly "one hundred percent typical."<sup>320</sup> The scene is modified in a manner that evokes divine messenger retribution literary conventions.

The modified birth annunciation scene of John does not exist in isolation, and so must be considered in relation to the parallel scene of Jesus' birth annunciation which it abuts. The structure of the scenes is remarkably similar:

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<sup>320</sup> Ibid., 579.

Zechariah	Mary
Identification of the recipient 1:5–7	Identification of the recipient 1:27
Appearance of divine messenger 1:11a	Appearance of divine messenger 1:26a; 1:28a
Location of the appearance 1:11b	Location of the appearance 1:26b
—	Messenger greets recipient
Recipient responds in fear 1:12	Recipient responds in fear 1:29
Encouragement not to fear 1:13a	Encouragement not to fear 1:30
Promise of a child 1:13b	Promise of a child 1:31
Description of the child’s significance 1:14–17	Description of the child’s significance 1:32–33
Recipient questions the possibility 1:18	Recipient questions the possibility 1:34
Messenger asserts his identity 1:19	Messenger offers explanation 1:35–36
Messenger imposes retribution and its rationale 1:20	—
—	Recipient responds in faith 1:38a
Recipient departs 1:22	Messenger departs 1:38b

Initially, the birth annunciation scenes in Luke 1 are closely parallel. With the exception of the messenger’s greeting—Gabriel offers a greeting and blessing in Mary’s scene but not in Zechariah’s—the layout is nearly identical. The scenes diverge, however, with the response of the divine messenger to the objection. Both Zechariah and Mary question the possibility of producing children within the context of their individual circumstances. Zechariah questions the announcement based on his and Elizabeth’s ages, while Mary’s question is rooted in her virginity. To Mary, Gabriel’s response is threefold. First, the angel offers not a rebuke, but a straightforward explanation of the mechanism of her upcoming pregnancy. God himself would be involved and make the pregnancy occur. Second, Gabriel follows up with an earthy demonstration of God’s power. Elizabeth, even though old, is already expecting a child. Gabriel’s comment pulls Mary into the miraculous activity of God already present in her extended family. Third, Gabriel summarizes his explanation with a declarative statement about God’s sovereignty.

Gabriel's response to Mary reads as an encouraging gentle response that clears up her perplexity and uncertainty. Gabriel is responding to uncertainty rather than skepticism on Mary's part.

With Zechariah, however, Gabriel interacts differently. Gabriel's response to Zechariah's objection takes the form of a blunt rebuke, beginning with the angel's presentation of his credentials. When Zechariah questions the possibility of his and Elizabeth's conceiving a child in their old age, Gabriel responds not with an explanation of the mechanism behind the miracle but with the straightforward presentation of his identity as God's messenger. He starts with his name, known from the book of Daniel, Enoch, and sundry rabbinical literature and traditions. He then expands on his identity, claiming that he "stands in the presence of God." Gabriel is as close to God as a divine messenger can possibly be. Whatever message he delivers is validated merely because of his close proximity to God himself. Beyond his own qualifications to convey truth, Gabriel tells Zechariah that he has been sent to deliver the message to the priest. Gabriel is not merely relaying what he knows; he has been dispatched by God with a particular message to deliver. And that message is, in spite of Zechariah's faithless reaction, good news.

Gabriel's self-identification—his name, his connection to God, and his immediate task of informing Zechariah regarding his son—invokes the weight of Jewish tradition and its accompanying authority.<sup>321</sup> His statement asserts his identity as God's divine messenger. Zechariah's response questioning Gabriel's message is tantamount to questioning the source of the message—God himself. It is from this position of divine messenger that Gabriel visits divine retribution on Zechariah.

The second alteration of the standard birth-annunciation type-scene is the divine messenger's application of an unusual physical punishment to the antagonist's opposition. The

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<sup>321</sup> Ludwig Blau and Emil G. Hirsch, "Gabriel," *The Jewish Encyclopedia* 5:540–543.

specific reason Gabriel gives Zechariah for the punishment is because of his disbelief. Muteness is an unusual condition in the Bible and often attributed to supernatural sources.<sup>322</sup> As Luke continues with the narrative of John's birth, the supernatural nature of Zechariah's ability to speak is presumed by those around him. In Luke 1:22, worshippers at the temple realize Zechariah has seen a vision that has affected him, apparently expressed only through his gestures. And the eventual release of his speech after John's birth serves to validate the significance of John and his potential rooted in the divine interest (Luke 1:65–66).

Because Zechariah was unbelieving rather than wicked, the punishment serves didactically for both him and for the observers to his experience. For Zechariah, the retribution will culminate in his praise to God when he can finally be able to speak. But for both Zechariah and those in the surrounding region, the retribution will serve to validate the ministry of John and underscore the person of Jesus.

A second major divergence between Zechariah's and Mary's annunciation scenes is the bracketing of the scene with a response by Mary and Gabriel's departure. Mary responds to Gabriel with an expression of willing submission to God's activity and belief in Gabriel's testimony. Zechariah's scene, however, remains unclosed, actively preventing any response from Zechariah. The missing response from Zechariah is made more acute by the reason for its absence. Zechariah makes no response because he is unable. The reminder of his doubt is cemented in his forced silence.

An exit on the part of Gabriel is also missing from Zechariah's annunciation scene. When his conversation with Mary concludes, Gabriel leaves. The narrative then shifts to Mary's travel to visit Elizabeth. But in the Zechariah scene, Gabriel never leaves. He pronounces judgment on

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<sup>322</sup> Matt 9:32–33, 12:22; Mark 9:17–27.



Zechariah, and the priest leaves the temple. Since Gabriel encounters Zechariah in the confines of God's presence in the temple, the narrative reads almost as if the angel has nowhere to leave *to*. It is Zechariah who must exit God's presence in a perpetual state of retribution manifested in chronic muteness.

Why the departure between the narratives at the conclusion? An inversion motif is one possible option. The inversion of expectation through the juxtaposition of faithful-faithless pairs is common in scripture.<sup>323</sup> Inversion engages readers by forcing the move away from stereotyped assumptions and toward the thematic content in which an author is interested. Luke's use here certainly aligns well with other biblical uses of the mechanism. A similar angle is that Luke's interest in applying an inversion motif was to portray Mary in a superlative fashion. By juxtaposing Zechariah's faithless response with Mary's submissive response, Luke amplifies Mary's character. Comparing Mary to a priest ministering before the altar radically enhances Mary's status. Similarly, the status of the promised children themselves may be enhanced through a superlative comparison between the parents. A third and better option for the impetus behind the divergence between the two scenes is that the open-ended nature of the Zechariah scene serves as an introduction to Mary's scene. Gabriel does not exit the narrative because his annunciation task is not yet finished. And the child he announces to Zechariah is not the significant child. Rather, Zechariah's scene will point to Mary's in the same way John will point to Jesus. Regardless of the reason behind the differing conclusions to the scenes, the nature of how that divergence is expressed is pertinent to the discussion at hand: Luke moves away from a

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<sup>323</sup> Achan and Rahab; Gehazi and Naaman; David and Uriah; Judas and Mary; Simon and the sinful woman—each narrative coupling makes the expected unrighteous character the repository of virtue and faith, while the expected righteous character is portrayed as spiritually obtuse.

tidy conclusion to the Zechariah scene through the inclusion of a negative response on the part of the divine messenger and the application of a unique physical punishment.

## **Conclusion**

Luke's deviation from standard form of the birth annunciation type-scene in the case of Zechariah serves his purpose of emphasizing the significance of Jesus over that of John, though both births will be significant. To portray the two scenes differently, Luke draws lightly from conventions of retribution against opponents of divine messengers. Zechariah is not portrayed as wicked, but still meriting retribution because he dared to posture himself against a divine messenger (and one no less than the angel Gabriel) and in so doing opposed God himself.

## **5.2 Luke's Modification of the Type-scene in the Book of Acts**

### **5.2.1 Introduction**

Luke does not limit his interaction with retribution to the birth annunciation type-scenes in his Gospel. The book of Acts is saturated with antagonists who invite a literary treatment that scratches a reader's itch for the narrative closure created through retribution. Fortunately for the discussion at hand, Luke's careful historiography lends itself easily to an exploration of his use of the divine retribution type-scene.

Five narratives in the book of Acts have typically received the most treatment in the discussion of retribution in Acts: the death of Judas (1:15–22), the death of Ananias and Sapphira (4:36–5:11), the death of Herod Agrippa (12:21–23), and the blinding of Elymas (13:6–12). To these should be added the narrative concerning the seven sons of Sceva (19:11–20). But while various suggestions have been offered to explain the theme of retribution in one or more of the passages—Herod as the classic tyrant-death type-scene,<sup>324</sup> or Elymas as a type-scene related to

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<sup>324</sup> O. Wesley Allen, *The Death of Herod: The Narrative and Theological Function of Retribution in Luke-Acts* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997).

an opponent of God<sup>325</sup>—no one has endeavored to collectively examine the scenes commonly accepted as reflecting retribution for a connection.<sup>326</sup>

In order to explore the possibility of divine-retribution type-scenes in Acts and a connection among them, it is necessary to establish minimal criteria for texts to be examined. First, texts should reflect individuals who seem to merit divine retribution. This criterion supposes that recipients have offended the supernatural realm in some way. In the case of Acts, Christians function as protagonists. Recipients of divine retribution from the Lukan perspective, then, will be the antagonists—or at least act temporarily in an antagonistic way toward Christians or Christianity. Second, in keeping with other ancient divine-retribution type-scenes, possible scenes should reflect a physical form of retribution.<sup>327</sup> The five previous scenes seem to fit both these criteria and will now be explored.

## 5.2.2 Observations

### An Offender and Offense

The first criterion in selecting a possible divine-retribution type-scene text is the presence of an antagonist who merits judgment by God. Few in the Luke-Acts narrative fit this description better than Judas. In the Gospel of Luke, Judas has already been depicted as the betrayer of

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<sup>325</sup> Charles Talbert, *Reading Acts: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 127–28.

<sup>326</sup> In his heavy treatment of ancient literature in relation to Acts, Richard Pervo (*Profit with Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987) does not deal with the retribution in other than the broadest terms, even though his work would be the ideal place to do so. He briefly refers to the irony of “‘poetic justice’ that has delighted audiences for millennia” (59) and he mentions the occasional “punishment miracle” appearing in Acts (60). The narrative of Sceva’s sons qualifies only as a “burlesque and rowdy” event (63). He overlooks, however, retribution as a theme advancing the Acts narrative.

<sup>327</sup> The type of physical retribution is a matter of some debate. Allen incorrectly limits retribution to physical death. Physical maiming or illness should be certainly be viewed as retribution as well (Adoni-Bezek, Samson, Manasseh, Zedekiah, etc.). Negative emotional states (as experienced by an embarrassed Sanhedrin in Acts 5 or the threat of physical harm facing the magistrates at Philippi) offer enjoyable literary twists, but do not seem to possess a clear-cut retribution delivered because of their opposition to the divine will.

Jesus. He betrays the Son of God, but without any recompense quietly disappears from Luke's first volume in 22:48. But after the initial introduction in his second volume, the author of Acts returns to the theme of Judas' fate. Judas' offense is clearly stated by Peter in Acts 1:16. In a fulfillment of prophecy, Judas served as guide for those arresting Jesus. Judas has offended the divine by betraying his Son.

Ananias and Sapphira also function as antagonists to Christianity. Early in the life of the young church, they dishonestly offer the proceeds of a real estate sale to the congregation. Peter's words to each spouse are parallel concepts, specifying their sin. Ananias has "lied to God" and Sapphira has "tested the Spirit of the Lord." Their offense to the deity is clear. They have behaved in a way internally inconsistent with God's expectations.

Herod Agrippa in Acts 12 seems to commit a double offense. First, he opposes God by persecuting divine messengers. Herod executes James and imprisons John. The narrative temporarily suspends its treatment of Herod and deals with the supernatural rescue provided to Peter. When Herod is mentioned again in verse 19, he orders the execution of the guards presumed to have allowed Peter's escape. The ultimate offense, however, comes in 12:22-3, when Herod accepts accolades attributing him with deity. There is room on the throne of the universe for only one, as Herod's immediate death proclaims to any observers. Richard Pervo suggests that the wording of the narrative "permits the interpretation that Herod perished for his persecuting activity."<sup>328</sup> Both imitating God and persecuting divine messengers earn Herod divine retribution.

The sorcerer Elymas is the next candidate for divine retribution. Rick Strelan argues that the man's Jewish name—"Bar Jesus"—is the false prophet's claim to be a disciple of Jesus and

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<sup>328</sup> Richard Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 315.

that the man was familiar with the Way but corrupted its presentation.<sup>329</sup> Elymas opposes Paul at the personal level, undermining Paul's evangelistic efforts with Sergius Paulus. Elymas' sin, according to Paul, is a perversion of the "straight way of the Lord" (διαστρέφων τὰς ὁδοὺς κυρίου τὰς εὐθείας). Elymas' sin was a deliberate opposition to Paul's efforts on behalf of the Gospel.

The final opponents under examination are the seven sons of Sceva. The mention of their identity as offspring of the chief priest is not without significance. Darrell Bock notes that the distance from Jerusalem makes it unlikely that the men were the offspring of the high priest, but more likely closely associated with or relatives of the high priestly family.<sup>330</sup> Nevertheless, the phrase Ἰουδαίου ἀρχιερέως certainly makes it possible that the retribution the men receive serves as a comment on wider Jewish theology.

The offense of Sceva's sons is apparently related to their utilization of name theology, in which the use of the name controls the power of the name's owner. The use of both Jesus and Paul's names attempts to exert their power over the demonic realm. Pervo suggests that the use of name theology in this instance is a simple business decision: "what counted was a name that worked."<sup>331</sup> The attempt by Sceva's sons to confront demons with power they do not legitimately possess results in a humiliating retribution. This scene is somewhat anomalous in that the offended supernatural entity that delivers retribution may be the demons themselves. Regardless of the source of retribution, "Scaeva's heirs were punished for their audacity."<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> Rick Strelan, "Who was Bar Jesus (Acts 13, 6-12)?" *Bib* 85 (2004): 65–81.

<sup>330</sup> Darrell Bock, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 603.

<sup>331</sup> Pervo, *Acts*, 476.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*, 479.

Trompf notes that the Lukan agenda is to advance the kingdom of God, and those opponents are swept aside: “It is...an obvious theme in Acts that the enemies and betrayers of God’s new ways, whether they are powerful, marginal or even internal to the new movement, must suffer penalties befitting their recalcitrance.”<sup>333</sup>

So far, two aspects emerge regarding the offense in these five scenes. First, each of the individuals involved interfered with the Gospel in some way. Judas betrayed Jesus, Ananias and Sapphira threatened the moral integrity of the church, Herod actively persecuted the church, and Elymas and Sceva’s sons represented a contaminated message.

Second, each antagonist opposes a divine messenger. Judas opposes Jesus, Ananias and Sapphira resist the Holy Spirit, Herod persecutes Peter and James, Elymas undermines Paul, and Sceva’s sons attempt to illegitimately usurp Paul’s power.

A third facet may be added to the previous two. Each of the individuals may be considered as imposters of the legitimate messenger. Peter notes that while Judas was one of the twelve, his actions were obviously inconsistent with the genuine followers of Jesus. Ananias and Sapphira donate land only after Barnabas has done so. Their action mimics Barnabas’ generosity but without the internal sincerity. Herod is audacious enough to accept public appraisal as a deity, thereby impersonating God. Elymas mimics Paul in order to undermine the Apostle’s evangelism efforts. The seven sons of Sceva impersonate legitimate servants of God, attempting to utilize supernatural power wielded by others.

### **Nature of the Retribution**

Another thread connecting each of the scenes is the physical nature of the retribution. In the case of Judas, the Acts account of his death is carefully narrated in comparison to Matthew’s

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<sup>333</sup> Trompf, *Early Christian Historiography*, 77.

straightforward account. In Matthew, Judas simply hangs himself and the proceeds of his betrayal are used to purchase a pauper's burial field. In Acts, Judas "fell headlong" and "his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out" (1:18). Attempts to reconcile the details of the two accounts are misplaced. Acts' focus is on the embellishing of the details. Peter refers to Judas' role in prophecy in verse 16 but does not elaborate until verse 20. Verses 18–19 are an aside in which Judas' offense is alluded to, but the focus is on his fate. Judas' fall (while living or dead—the text is not clear) and the particularly grisly fate of his body serve little narrative purpose other than to portray Judas as receiving his just due.

Ananias and Sapphira also clearly experience divine retribution in the form of death. In exchange for their disingenuous offering, the couple are killed. Ananias' death may be perceived as unfortunate, but Sapphira's "demise eliminates any possibility that Ananias's expiration was a piece of particularly bad luck."<sup>334</sup> The close proximity of their deaths indicates divine displeasure with their actions. Further, Bock suggests that such a hasty burial by the community "indicates one struck down 'by the hands of heaven.'"<sup>335</sup> The motive and equity of the divine decision may be debated, but the deaths themselves are clearly God's retribution against Ananias and Sapphira for displeasing him.

The account of Herod's death contains elements of the previous two accounts of divine retribution. Like Ananias and Sapphira, Herod's death is immediate. Christopher Marshall uses the presence of ἐκψύχω in 12:23, 5:5, and 5:10 to link divine retribution against Herod to that against Ananias and Sapphira.<sup>336</sup> And, like Judas' death, Herod's death is especially ghastly and

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<sup>334</sup> Pervo, 129.

<sup>335</sup> Bock, 224.

<sup>336</sup> Christopher D. Marshall, *Beyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime, and Punishment, Studies in Peace and Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 164.

therefore indicative of divine retribution: “To be eaten by worms (or by lice) is the typical death for one who despises God.”<sup>337</sup> The macabre details are more fully cataloged in Josephus’ account, which emphasizes Herod’s death as divine retribution—“God’s judgment upon him for his sins” and “God inflicted this punishment on the king on account of his great impiety.”<sup>338</sup> In Herod’s case, the text notes the divine agency at work: the angel of the Lord. The angel’s presence is significant in connecting Herod’s retribution to the persecution of the church. Acts 12:23, like Josephus’ account, designates blasphemy as the cause of the retribution. The angel of the Lord in Acts 12, however, has already been active in the immediate narrative, protecting Peter in 12:7ff. The angel’s actions against Herod are easily an extension of that protection.

Elymas is the first character in Acts to receive retribution in a form other than death, but that the blindness he received is divine judgment is not in doubt. Before temporarily eliminating Elymas’ sight, Paul says, “The hand of the Lord is against you” (13:11). Luke Timothy Johnson observes, “The expression echoes passages such as Judg 2:15 and 1 Sam 12:15, where the ‘hand of the Lord,’ which always signifies power, is taken as an active force ‘against’ someone who opposes God’s will.”<sup>339</sup> In response to Elymas’ opposition, Paul strikes Elymas blind on God’s behalf.

The seven sons of Sceva receive physical retribution in dual form. First, they are exposed to physical shame. Public nudity, especially for Jews, was denigrating. Such a state, then, would have to be externally imposed. Sceva’s sons have been stripped naked and thus shamed by demons. The nudity, however, also serves to highlight the second aspect of retribution: the

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<sup>337</sup> Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 96–7.

<sup>338</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 17.6.5.

<sup>339</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 224.



beating they received. The word used for wounded in 19:16 (τετραυματισμένους) is usually used in the LXX to translate ללך, a word indicating a severe and often mortal wounding. Sceva's sons have not merely been scratched bloody but have been supernaturally pummeled.

In each of these scenes, the retribution received is both physical and extreme. The punishments are always immediate and often gruesome. The penalty in Acts for opposing a messenger of God carries concrete physical consequences.

### **Response and Result**

A third aspect linking these scenes seems to be some type of response by observers of the retribution. First, the community becomes aware of the retribution. After Judas' fate, "it became known to all those living in Jerusalem." This awareness is followed by a communal response that favors the Gospel. After the awareness of the retribution against Judas, the Jerusalem community names the paupers' burial field "Akeldama," and Aramaic term for "field of blood." The name is significant because it permanently connects a physical location with the betrayal of the innocent Jesus. The second communal response to Judas' demise is more narrowly focused within the new Christian community. It is only after the retribution delivered to Judas is narrated that Peter moves to replace him, and it seems that the designation of Matthias is the necessary literary precursor to the events of Pentecost narrated in Acts 2.

The narration of the retribution against Ananias and Sapphira also possesses a response and result. With each death, fear grips the church (5:5, 11). That fear expands to the larger Jerusalem community in 5:11 as well. The fear as a response sets the scene for the following

context in which the Apostles perform further miraculous signs (5:12)<sup>340</sup> and the church grows in reputation and number (5:13–14).

Christopher Marshall argues, “The New Testament writers usually depict temporal judgment as reformative or educative in purpose.”<sup>341</sup> Yet while he prefers and consistently argues for restorative justice, he acknowledges that the extreme penalty for the blasphemy committed by Ananias and Sapphira implies that “no restoration was possible for the offenders.” Even so, the incident serves as didactic instruction for the church,<sup>342</sup> as well as a foundation for further spread of the Gospel.

The result of the divine retribution against Herod is to remove him has an impediment to the Gospel. The conjunction δὲ in 12:24 links the continued spread of the word of God to Herod’s death in 12:23. If δὲ is translated as “but,” then the church grows in spite of Herod’s opposition. If δὲ is translated as “and” or “now,” then the Gospel spreads as a consequence of Herod’s death. Either way, divine retribution against Herod benefits the church.

After Paul strikes Elymas with blindness, the proconsul sees what happens and he believes. The road for his response is paved by Elymas’ blindness. Before receiving retribution, Elymas as a sorcerer is on an equal footing with Paul and able to confuse Sergius Paulus with conflicting messages. The physical retribution Elymas receives reveals his supernatural impotency.

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<sup>340</sup> By “further” miraculous signs, it is assumed that Peter was popularly considered to be the divine agent causing Ananias’ and Sapphira’s deaths, much like Paul actively causes Elymas’ blindness. Despite the likely popular perception, the text merely portrays Peter as the divine messenger in this instance.

<sup>341</sup> Marshall, 162.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 164.

Marshall suggests that Luke equates the “temporary blindness inflicted on Saul (9:8–12) and Elymas (13:8–11)” as equivalent in their pedagogical intent.<sup>343</sup> However, Marshall’s suggestion connecting the blindness of Paul with that of Elymas is weak. The Acts 13 narrative minimizes Elymas in terms of power. His blind meandering indicates his subservience to Paul, and by extension, to the truth of the Gospel. Further “the hand of the Lord” is not said to be against Paul in Acts 9, allowing more room for the pedagogical nature of Paul’s blindness. Paul does not express interest in redeeming Elymas, but in removing him as a satanic source of interference.

The communal response to the punishment of Sceva’s sons is particularly detailed. The event first becomes known to both ethnic communities (Jews and Greeks) in Ephesus, inspiring fear and elevating the name of Jesus (19:17). Marshall notes that the response is pedagogical in nature, serving “to provoke awe, repentance, and renunciation of magic among the residents of Ephesus (19:13–19).”<sup>344</sup> Even though the source of the retribution against Sceva’s sons is debatable, the effect seems to be a fear of both the demonic realm (leading to the abandonment of occultic paraphernalia) and the name of the more powerful Jesus (leading to conversion).

In each scene observers respond to divine retribution in a way that portrays Jesus and his church positively. Fear and conversion are common elements contained in the responses.

### **Disappearance from the Narrative**

The final element in these scenes is the antagonist’s disappearance from the narrative immediately after receiving retribution. Judas lingers the longest, referenced by Peter in 1:25. Sapphira is buried beside her husband in 5:10, and they are not mentioned again as the narrative

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<sup>343</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid., 163.

moves to the response by observers. Herod similarly quickly disappears, supplanted by the spread of the word of God. Elymas wanders away, blindly groping for a guide (13:11), and Sceva's sons disappear after leaving the reader with the soberingly humorous image of their humiliation.

Several aspects related to the antagonists' disappearance from the narrative may be stated. First, the physical retribution the character receives is permanent. While Elymas' blindness is temporary and the bruises demonically inflicted on Sceva's sons will heal, from the perspective of the narrative, the conditions are all permanent. The condition in which the antagonist is left after receiving divine retribution remains with the character when he or she disappears from the narrative. Death, blindness, and bruises are literarily permanent.

Second and most significantly, the advancing kingdom of God replaces the disappearing character. The antagonist fades into narrative obscurity and powerlessness, and the church is invigorated. The disappearance of an opposition character from a narrative certainly implies the insignificance of the opposition. While retribution may be construed as a warning to those who would oppose the gospel, the consignment to literary oblivion serves a bigger function. God's kingdom agenda cannot be effectively opposed.

### **5.2.3 The Tentative Type-scene**

At this point, a tentative type-scene utilized by Luke emerges from the five scenes under examination. The type-scene includes the following elements:

1. An individual antagonist, impersonating a legitimate servant of God, offends God by opposing a divine messenger.
2. The antagonist experiences divine retribution that is physical, extreme, and immediate in nature.

3. There is a response to the retribution by observers that serves to advance the church.
4. The subject of the divine retribution disappears from the narrative.

This fourth point may well be the purpose of the type-scene itself. Opponents to God's divine agenda are rendered powerless through retribution.

A likely corollary to the proposed type-scene is that the absence of divine retribution elevates a character within the narrative. Paul's experience on the island of Malta supplements this suggestion. Acts 28:1–6 narrates the *absence* of divine retribution. The story offers two opportunities for Paul to experience divine retribution: a shipwreck and a viper bite. Neither event results in Paul's death. The purpose of portraying Paul as unworthy of divine retribution establishes his righteous character. "The belief that the misfortunes which befall the wicked are in reality punishments meted out by the gods for their crimes was deeply ingrained in Greek thought well before the Hellenistic Age."<sup>345</sup> Acts 28:1–6 capitalizes on this idea and inverts it: No divine retribution is forthcoming against Paul because he does not merit it. "The failures of the gods to visit disaster upon an individual and his associates during a sea voyage would be regarded by a representative cross-section of Athenians as a legitimate, indeed, even as an especially persuasive, evidence of religious purity."<sup>346</sup>

Miles and Trompf emphasize the ancient concept of "pollution," in which the innocent are commonly caught up in retribution against the guilty. The Old Testament story of Jonah is paradigmatic of this perspective.<sup>347</sup> They relate the legal strategy utilized by Antiphon in defending the accused murderer Helos. Antiphon inverted the pollution expectation, arguing that innocents in close proximity to Helos did not suffer in multiple maritime voyages with the

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<sup>345</sup> Miles and Trompf, 260.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*, 264.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

murderer on board. Since no retribution was experienced, the accused was obviously innocent.<sup>348</sup> Miles and Trompf argue that Antiphon's inverted "pollution" argument is utilized by Luke to demonstrate that Paul is likewise innocent. Paul's clairvoyance, survival of the shipwreck (as well as the viper bite), and preservation of his fellow travelers all prove his innocence.<sup>349</sup> Charles Talbert concurs, stating, "There seems to be no other way to read Acts 28:1–6 in a Mediterranean context" [than to treat it as a divine statement of Paul's innocence].<sup>350</sup>

#### 5.2.4 Counterarguments

Several arguments may be offered against the proposed type-scene. First, the narrative of Simon the magician (Acts 8:2–24) could be considered a scene in which divine retribution seems warranted. On closer examination, however, the type-scene does not apply. Simon is by his own rights a powerful magician who is supplanted by the more powerful Phillip and Peter. At no time does Simon oppose Philip and Peter. He does not impersonate them with similar miracles, nor does he contradict their message. In fact, Simon ceases his own practice of magic after his conversion. As one used to wielding power, Simon desires to participate in the power of the Apostles and believes money will provide the access. Karl Nösgen notes the narrative difference between Simon and Elymas: "Simon der Magier wird nur mit ewigem Verderben im Falle der Unbußfertigkeit bedroht, Elymas empfängt selbst eine zeitliche Strafe, Simon der Magier hat sich durch Geld Apostelgleichheit erkaufen wollen, Elymas nimmt eine entschieden apostelfeindliche Haltung an."<sup>351</sup> Simon's method of acquiring power is certainly suspect, and

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<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 262.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>350</sup> Talbert, 222.

<sup>351</sup> Karl Nösgen, *Commentar über die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas* (Leipzig: Dörffling und Franke, 1882), 247. "Simon the magician is only threatened with eternal destruction in the case of impertinence; Elymas receives a

Peter confronts him with the inappropriate state of his heart. Peter's comment in 8:22–23 assumes that repentance, forgiveness, and restoration are possible for the magician. Simon does not act in opposition to the Apostles and does not receive retribution for it, making him an unsuitable candidate for divine retribution.

Second, Simon's status as an antagonist depends on the interpretation of his response to Peter's rebuke. "Pray for me yourselves" may be considered either a snide and sarcastic retort, or a legitimate appeal to a spiritual authority for intercession. If the former, Simon is unrepentant, but not an antagonist. If the latter, he clearly does not function as an antagonist in the narrative.

Third, a possible exception to Luke's use of the proposed type-scene does not negate the presence of that type-scene elsewhere in Acts. An author need not use a literary mechanism in every instance where that usage is possible. And, as already discussed, Simon's status as an antagonist meriting divine retribution is highly questionable.

A second and similar argument that might be proffered against the divine-retribution type-scene is the apparently sporadic nature of the retribution rendered against those who oppose divine messengers in Acts. The five examples that reflect the type-scene certainly do not represent the totality of narratives in which an individual or group resists a divine operative. How do the Sanhedrin or the Jews who persecute Paul in many narratives escape divinely rendered judgment—let alone in concert with the proposed type-scene—when they arguably deserve it more than Ananias and Sapphira?

The third response to the application of the proposed type-scene to Simon applies here: the occasional absence of the type-scene does not negate its presence. Further, the proffered type-

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temporal punishment. Simon the Magician wants to buy apostolic prestige with money; Elymas assumes a decidedly apostile-antagonistic stance" (translation mine).

scene proposes specified antagonists—usually individuals.<sup>352</sup> Groups like the Sanhedrin, city magistrates, or Diaspora Jews who persecute Paul are vague entities within the narrative and better targeted with divine retribution through eschatology.<sup>353</sup>

A third argument questions how the proposed type-scene is reconciled against Lukan descriptions of the righteous who suffer independently of divine retribution (Jesus, Peter, Paul, James, etc.). Especially in Acts, Luke has to wrestle with the innocent (Christians) as recipients of physical suffering unrelated to retribution. His solution, according to Trompf, is to advance the necessity of suffering on behalf of the kingdom while relying on the eschatological hope of the future reward of believers.<sup>354</sup>

A fourth argument would be the thorough work of O. Wesley Allen that posits that the death of Herod is a tyrant-death type-scene that plays a key role in the Luke-Acts narrative. Allen meticulously combs through ancient literature, analyzing the death of rulers to derive a seven-point type-scene: 1) The opening line summarizes the fate of the antagonist; 2) the antagonist exerts power—usually political—over others; 3) the fate generally occurs in a specific setting; 4) the tyrant acts in a way that offends the divine; 5) the antagonist falls ill and dies; 6) divine retribution is presented as the cause of the tyrant’s fate; and 7) “in the more complex stories, the punishment of the antagonist often brings about some sort of result.”<sup>355</sup>

Allen also argues that tyrant-death type-scenes are central to the narratives in which they appear: “Death of Tyrant type-scenes are not appendages to the narrative in which they are

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<sup>352</sup> Sceva’s sons make a group effort at exorcism, but their identity is precisely defined for the purposes of the retribution type-scene.

<sup>353</sup> O. Wesley Allen states, “Divine retribution is part and parcel of the eschatological salvation that is to be brought about by Jesus” (117). The proposed type-scene offers immediate retribution, and, as will be seen, serves to advance the “here and now” aspect of eschatological divine agenda.

<sup>354</sup> Trompf, *Early Christian Historiography*, 69–72.

<sup>355</sup> Allen, *The Death of Herod*, 36–38.



embedded, but contribute to the purpose and ideology of the longer narrative. Indeed, the type-scene is configured in accordance with its contextualization.”<sup>356</sup> Allen argues that chapter 12 functions as a template for other death passages in Acts, carrying “a certain paradigmatic force.”<sup>357</sup> For Allen, chapter 12 serves as the transition point between the centrality of Peter and Jerusalem and Paul and the Gentile mission.<sup>358</sup>

Allen’s proposed type-scene is certainly present in the Herod narrative in Acts 12. Herod opposes Judas: “The tyrant’s arrogant trespass on divine territory is often manifested in one of two ways: either by acting—often violently—against people in whom the divine power has some interest, or by claiming divine status for self. The two motifs are sometimes also combined.”<sup>359</sup> Herod’s death is also gruesome in alignment with the tyrant-death type-scene: “The illness is usually described in grotesque terms. The effect is to intensify the sense of the character’s suffering.”<sup>360</sup>

The tyrant-death type-scene Allen proposes also addresses the lack of narrative closure at the end of the book of Acts. He posits that one of the functions of Acts’ open ending is to suggest Caesar as the ultimate target of God’s retribution for his treatment of Paul.<sup>361</sup>

If Allen’s position is to be accepted, the Herod narrative clearly represents the tyrant-death type-scene. In light of Allen’s research, it is clear that the divine retribution type-scene in

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<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.*, 130–136.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

Acts is not new. However, an analysis of the differences in the Lukan type-scenes and Allen's model will prove fruitful.

Even if the Herod narrative is excluded for the moment, the other four examples previously discussed still offer substantial support for the presence of the proposed type-scene in the Acts narrative. Further examination is warranted, however, to determine if the Herod narrative is appropriately connected to the other four scenes.

The overarching question in relation to Allen's work is the connection of the Herod narrative to the other four passages discussed. First, there are two broad options. Either the Herod narrative is related to the other four, or it is not. If it is not related to the other four, then two possibilities exist. First, the Herod narrative may be a type-scene, but any connection between the other four is coincidental, and no type-scene other than the tyrant-death type-scene reflected in Acts 12 is present in Acts. This position must be rejected because of the preceding analysis. The second option is that the Herod narrative is a tyrant-death type-scene, and the other four narratives represent a completely different type of retributive type-scene in the Acts narrative. This option is unlikely because of the prevalence of similarities among all five.

The alternative, then, is that all five narratives are linked and reflect a similar type-scene. But if all five scenes are a similar type-scene, they clearly cannot be the tyrant-death type-scene Allen describes. Allen himself acknowledges several connections among the scenes already discussed. For Allen, Judas' gruesome death provides a link to the tyrant-death type-scene. Further, real estate, money, and Satan all connect the Ananias and Sapphira narrative with the narrative relating Judas' death in Acts 1.<sup>362</sup> But Allen treats Judas, Ananias and Sapphira, and Paul only briefly. In his conclusion, Allen presents Elymas as a counterpart to Paul in the same

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<sup>362</sup> Ibid., 123–25.

way Herod is to Peter. Allen acknowledges that “this scene deals with God’s retribution during Paul’s ministry,” but rejects the passage as reflecting the tyrant-death type-scene pattern.<sup>363</sup> Allen is locked into the tyrant-death type-scene, and does not accommodate retribution in scenes in which death does not occur.

Allen’s suggested type-scene may be too narrowly defined since the other Acts narratives do not include death or tyrants. After all, only Herod can be considered a tyrant in Acts, while retribution clearly occurs in all five scenes. Allen’s thorough research makes this possibility implausible. He clearly demonstrates the existence of the ancient tyrant-death type-scene as well as the conformity of Acts 12 to the pattern. Another possibility is that the Herod narrative is central in Luke’s purpose, and the other four narratives merely reflect or supplement Acts 12. This possibility, too, is unlikely because the Herod narrative can hardly be considered central to Acts. While Allen demonstrates that Acts 12 is logically and appropriately placed and therefore a contiguous part of the larger narrative,<sup>364</sup> he overestimates the significance of Herod’s death for Acts.<sup>365</sup>

Similar to Allen’s thesis is the type-scene that Talbert suggests is present in the Elymas narrative:

The story is told in the form of a prophetic response to a resister of God. There are five components: (1) the resistance to God’s word (13:8; cf. Jerusalem 36:27a); (2) the prophetic indictment (13:10; cf. Jer 36:29); (3) the prophecy (13:11a; cf. Jer 36:30–31); (4) the fulfillment of the prophetic word (13:11v; cf. Jer 37:1); and

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<sup>363</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid., 77–108.

<sup>365</sup> François Bovon, *Luke the Theologian* (Waco, TX: Baylor Press, 2006), 548.

(5) the result (13:12; cf. Jer 37:2). The purpose of such a story...is to indicate that there is one true and living God and that all other claims are counterfeit.<sup>366</sup>

Talbert's proposed type-scene is also narrowly defined and does not apply well to Acts 1, 12, or 19. The most viable solution that connects the Herod narrative and the other four retributive type-scenes in Acts is that all five narratives represent a Lukan modification of the tyrant-death type-scene for his own literary purposes.

### **5.2.5 Lukan Modification of the Tyrant-death Type-scene**

The Lukan modification of the tyrant-death type-scene relies on the probability of retribution by proxy. Just as an antagonist offends God by opposing his messenger, a recipient of retribution may receive it on behalf of someone else. This idea is in no way innovative in ancient literature and thought. The theology of the cross is perhaps the most well-known case of retribution by proxy, but other examples exist. Agathocles' sons were murdered in retaliation for his murdering Ophellas.<sup>367</sup> Just as resisting a divine messenger is an affront to the deity behind the messenger, so punishing an antagonist assaults the authority behind that antagonist. In Acts, God's messengers are opposed, and the antagonists are punished. Punishing the antagonist, then, delivers retribution to the authority behind the representative. The one strand that has yet to be examined in the proposed type-scene is the presence of Satanic authority behind the antagonists.

In Luke 22:3, Satan enters Judas prior to his betrayal of Jesus. Peter's rebuke of Ananias includes the query, "Why has Satan filled your heart?" Satan is not mentioned directly in the Herod narrative, but political power is clearly portrayed as being applied against the church. Elymas is a sorcerer, and Sceva's sons are beaten by the very demons they seek to control.

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<sup>366</sup> Talbert, 127–28.

<sup>367</sup> O. Wesley Allen, 157.

Joel Green suggests that retribution is a potential theme in the Gospel of Luke that the author deliberately avoids.<sup>368</sup> But Luke clearly contains the foreshadowing of Satan's demise that Acts fulfills. The template for Lukan modification of the tyrant-death type-scene may well be found in Luke 10. In Luke 10:18, Jesus makes the enigmatic statement, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." This statement foreshadows what divine retribution in Acts accomplishes: the destruction of Satan's kingdom.<sup>369</sup> The real antagonist receiving retribution in Acts is the real tyrant: Satan.<sup>370</sup>

Although it is unlikely that Luke thought in such categories, a multi-pronged satanic resistance to God's agenda may be seen in Acts. That resistance is countered with retribution against Satan's representative. Satan uses Judas to usurp total power. He fights for first place in the universe. Retribution against his representative Judas relegates him to second place. He uses Ananias and Sapphira to undermine the moral power of the church. Retribution against his married real estate team leaves the moral clarity and power of the young church intact. Although Satan is not mentioned in the Herod narrative, retribution against the would-be divine tyrant renders his political power inert against the kingdom of God. Satan's agent Elymas uses his power to undermine the truth of the Gospel. His blindness at Paul's hands reinforces the validity of Paul's message and identity as God's messenger. The demons themselves are the source of retribution against Sceva's sons. They acknowledge their own subservience to Jesus and Paul, but not to Jewish theology detached from Jesus. This contest essentially establishes the divine

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<sup>368</sup> Joel B. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 77.

<sup>369</sup> Susan Garrett argues that Jesus' statement is forward-looking as well as retrospective. Jesus' resurrection cements his power over Satan, and certain narratives in Acts bear it out (*The Demise of the Devil: Magic and the Demonic in Luke's Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, (1989), 49–55)).

<sup>370</sup> Garrett connects Luke 10:18 to Isaiah 14, noting that the Old Testament passage relates to the fall of a king: "The king in Isaiah 14 (like the devil in Luke's narrative) exalts himself in a blasphemous way; thus, it would be understandable if Luke thought that Satan, like the king, must be cast down" (53).

hierarchy of power. With Jesus and his representative Paul at the top, the demons and these Jewish exorcists are left to battle for a distant second place. “Paradoxically...the demon’s apparent victory is actually defeat of the devil. This ‘paradox’ comes about because both the demon and the exorcists are working for Satan’s side. The demon’s insubordinance toward the exorcists shows that the devil is no longer in control of his realm. His kingdom has been divided and will soon collapse.”<sup>371</sup> Jesus in Luke 11:17-19 has foreshadowed the situation perfectly: Satan and his subjects have finally turned on themselves, and his kingdom is disintegrating.

Divine retribution reflects a weakening Satanic influence in the Acts narrative. The representatives of Satan attack the church physically, morally, and intellectually before retribution renders them inert. With the narrative of Sceva’s sons, Satan’s kingdom is reduced to infighting as it heads into narrative obscurity. With Elymas and Sceva’s sons, “Luke does not say that magic is a fraud...but that it is destroyed by the power of Jesus.”<sup>372</sup>

### 5.2.6 Conclusion

In the Elymas scene, “We find...a power showdown between two humans representative combat of a much larger cosmic battle between Good and Evil.”<sup>373</sup> The same is true for the other divine retribution narratives in Acts. The one wielding the power of divine retribution possesses all the power. Retribution renders the recipient, as well as the authority behind him or her, powerless. Through the use of the divine retribution type-scene, Acts demonstrates a presently realized eschaton through the displacement of the impotent kingdom of Satan by the kingdom of

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<sup>371</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>372</sup> Conzelmann, 100.

<sup>373</sup> Chad Hartsock, *Sight and Blindness as an Index of Character in Luke-Acts and Its Cultural Milieu* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008), 200.

God. Luke's polished writing that interlinks divine retribution type-scenes furthers his broader literary interest: portraying the demise of Satan's kingdom.

## 6. Summary and Conclusion

Readers commonly expect the villain in any narrative to receive an appropriate comeuppance. This desire for literary reprisal is rooted in a sense of justice and fair play. Consequently, stories whose closure includes retribution satisfy the reader. Narrated well, the unfolding of retribution scenes in a narrative makes for engaging storytelling. This work has discussed one literary mechanism used in the Hebrew Bible to convey just such a sense of narrative closure: the divine retribution type-scene. In the broadest sense, resisting a divine messenger results in a unique form of divine retribution that validates the messenger through an opponent's punishment. More narrowly, the scenes commonly—but not universally—include a verbal declaration by the messenger, a challenge by an opponent, and a response by the messenger. The proposed type-scene is a modern categorization useful for understanding ancient literary conventions.

The scene functions in the immediate context to validate the divine messenger. A divine messenger is a proxy for Yahweh. Fire from heaven or a sinkhole that destroys the opponent of a divine messenger is Yahweh's response to an affront brought to bear against his personal emissary. The God of Israel responds forcefully and decisively to any attempt to undermine his sovereignty.

In relation to a messenger, Yahweh manifests his sovereignty in two ways. First, it is Yahweh who designates the messenger. As a result, to contest the identity of the messenger is to contest the sovereignty of Yahweh himself. Just such an affront is seen in Korah's rebellion and in Aaron and Miriam's challenge to Moses' leadership. The offense centers not on the message,



but on the messenger himself. As a proxy representative for Yahweh, Moses serves at Yahweh's pleasure. Opposing Moses or Elisha merely because of their position is equivalent to opposing Yahweh himself and merits a swift and forceful response.

The second expression of Yahweh's sovereignty is the veracity of the message itself. When a proxy for Yahweh makes an authoritative statement, Yahweh himself has made the declaration. Denying or even questioning the reliability of such statements challenges the correspondence between Yahweh's declaration and reality. Yahweh does not leave unanswered opposition that questions his sovereignty. So when Jehoram's servant questions Elisha's promise of Yahweh's provision during the Aramean siege of Samaria, Yahweh undermines even the suggestion of an alternative to his message through the trampling feet of a hungry mob.

One important facet governing this study is that the analysis has concerned the experience of retribution where no divine proscription exists. Bizarre fates are also handed out in instances of outright disobedience, but those instances are appropriate retribution for disobeying Yahweh. Saul, for instance, does not oppose Samuel because of the prophet's identity. Rather, Saul embraces Samuel's prophetic identity (to the extent that he even seeks Samuel's advice after the prophet has died). Saul's disobedience is more acute because he accepts Samuel as a messenger of Yahweh and disobeys anyway. The insanity and humiliating death Saul receive are predicted (1 Sam 15:10–29) and reasonably expected. But in episodes such as 1 Kgs 13, opponents such as Jeroboam act not against the message, but against the messenger himself. The type-scene conventionally functions to supplement Yahweh's authority where no proscription exists. The Law nowhere forbids disrespecting a prophet or challenges to the status of divine messengers. The convention itself steps in to fill that role by embedding the sentiment in narrative.

## Observations

One observation that arises from this study is the seeming lack of application of the scene to foreigners—outsiders to the covenant expectations of Israel. Encounters with foreigners do not easily lend themselves to the convention, particularly in terms of merited and expected retribution. In these encounters, retribution is frequently replaced by the glorification of Yahweh in the eyes of the antagonist and/or observers. Balaam opposes Israel in Num 22–24, yet receives no retribution.<sup>374</sup> Rather, his forced acquiescence to Yahweh results in blessings for Israel as the nation approaches the Promised Land. Similarly, Daniel describes Nebuchadnezzar’s placing of three representatives of Yahweh into a furnace and Darius’ casting of Daniel into a lion’s den, but instead of retaliation on behalf of his servants and reputation, Yahweh receives glory from the rulers after providing a miraculous delivery for his servants.

It is possible to shoehorn the Belshazzar narrative into the proposed type-scene, but the Babylonian ruler does not oppose a specific prophet. Instead, he disrespects the God of Israel through the abuse of his cultic utensils. Belshazzar’s actions are a statement about Yahweh’s inefficacy, which Yahweh counters with Babylon’s demise. Haman in the book of Esther also does not oppose Mordecai as a divine messenger but in his identity as a Jew (as the Persian official’s broader activity in the book suggests). While the narrative reads similarly to the type-scene (“Don’t mess with Yahweh’s people”), Haman’s retribution is foremost a literary culmination of plot and foreshadowing.

The two episodes describing Abram’s passing off Sarai as his sister results in retribution against his opponents—diseases for the Egyptians (Gen 12) and a dream promising doom to Abimelech (Gen 20). In the later instance, God identifies Abraham as a prophet, providing the

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<sup>374</sup> Balaam’s fate is mentioned only in passing in Josh 13:22.

foundation for the return of his wife (וְעָתָה הָשִׁב אִשְׁת־הָאִישׁ כִּי־נָבִיא הוּא) (Gen 20:7)). But both of these texts revolve not around the message or status of Abram as Yahweh's representative but as Yahweh's straightforward protection and blessing for his chosen servant.

Yahweh's approach to outsiders may be viewed as primarily didactic, somewhat akin to parenting. With one's own children, relationship and expectations for conforming to known rules of behavior are usually in place. With a neighbor's children, however, a didactic approach to family values is more likely to be taken. Similarly, interaction between foreigners and divine messengers usually results in a didactic approach. In the book of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar's opposition to divine representatives is not punished but functions within the broader narrative to bring the Babylonian king into a proper relationship with Yahweh. Similarly, when Naaman initially rejects Elisha's command to wash in the Jordan River as a cure for leprosy, no ill befalls him. Rather, humility gets the better of him and he exits the narrative as a follower of Yahweh. Even the Pharaoh of the Exodus experiences the plagues not for resisting Moses as a prophet, but as a pedagogy to observers.<sup>375</sup> One aspect of the convention regarding opposing divine messengers is that members of the Hebrew covenant community are expected to know better than to resist Yahweh's representative. No such expectation exists for those who lack knowledge of Yahweh.

As connected to Yahweh's people, then, the scene is suggestive of relationship—real or expected—and carries with it the implicit expectations of relationship. Trust, fidelity, humility, and submission are all components of the recipient of Yahweh's covenant. These elements are rejected when the representative of that relationship—the divine messenger—is resisted. Inherent

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<sup>375</sup> The use of plagues as pedagogy is a common recurring theme in the Exodus narrative. The plagues serve as a witness to the Egyptians (Ex 7:5); as a witness to the Israelites (Ex 6:6–8); as a witness to all the earth (Ex 9:16); and as a mechanism to expose the gods of Egypt (Ex 12:12).

in the interaction depicted in the type-scene is the idea that an individual in relationship with God can push back against a divine pronouncement but is quickly taught the foolishness of such an action, often at the cost of his life.

Another observation relates to the highly flexible and fluid nature of the scenes themselves. The elements suggested as common to the loosely generalized structure—a declaration by Yahweh, a counter-statement by the opposition, a response by the divine messenger, and the receipt of divine retribution in the form of a unique physical punishment—vary throughout the examined texts. Beyond the presence of a divine messenger in a text, the most common component is the unique form of the retribution. Indeed, it is the presence of an extreme form of divinely imposed punishment that is forced to carry much of the weight for the argument itself. Further muddying the waters is the scene's absence in contexts where it might be expected. But as stated previously, the absence of a scene in a particular narrative in no way negates its presence in others nor the convention it describes.

### **Implications**

The recurrent appearance of the type-scene carries implications for Hebrew historiography. In isolation, the scenes reflect a literary convention used in narrative. Taken together, they reinforce the historical metanarrative of the Hebrew Bible. The Hebrews' portrayal of their own past is framed, in part, through the theology embedded in the literary convention. The capacity of narrative to express the theological convention that Yahweh considers disrespect toward his messengers a personal affront with which he deals accordingly suggests that the convention ultimately has a role to play in Hebrew historiography.

It is important to remember that any modern classification of type-scenes is not a clearly delineated formula utilized by ancient authors. Rather, type-scenes were partly a reflection of the

way the world was thought to work, and partly the way the good stories were told. Type-scenes shaped and flavored these narratives in a manner that utilized and reinforced the convention through engaging storytelling. The fluid use and combination of the elements common to the scene flavored the story. While the extent to which such type-scenes were consciously implemented by authors and perceived by readers is ultimately speculative, they are deeply embedded in ancient convention.

All of this discussion connects to Hebrew history and historiography. If the proposed type-scene is present to the extent suggested, then historiography must be interpreted through the convention. This reality gives rise to several questions. First, does convention determine which events are recorded? In other words, is a particular kind of scene noticed because of convention, and therefore recorded, to the (possible) exclusion of other kinds of history? What, in other words, makes history noticeable or relevant? Was perceived divine involvement necessary to register as significant history? For Hebrew historiography, the answer is apparently yes. The strength of a convention unavoidably affects both what events are noticed and how an event is literarily constructed.

A second question is *how* the proffered convention informs Hebrew historiography. In one sense, divine retribution against the opponents of divine messengers serves the rhetorical function of counteracting pluralism.<sup>376</sup> The tendency toward pluralism experienced in the prophetic context was acute. Scenes that reinforce orthodoxy do so by validating the credentials of the divine messenger. Odd prophetic actions and bizarre punishments both make conventional sense to be understood not as curious legendary remnants untouched by ancient redaction but as a legitimate aspect of the theologized history which the composers of scripture were trying to

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<sup>376</sup> Or, at the very least, it may be said that the type-scene reinforces the particular representation of Yahwism reflected in scripture.

create. Texts heretofore considered enigmatic or peculiar are instead normalized, aligning with a conventional paradigm in the *Sitz em Leben* of the text. Further, such tests are linked—threads in a much larger strand running through the pages of scripture.

The use of the type-scene is related heavily to the portrayal of the classical prophets. Even minor prophetic figures such as Hanani or Azariah are connected to the prophetic lineage of Moses through templated scenes that validate their status as divine messengers. The of legitimacy that runs through the classical prophetic tradition, then, is not limited merely to perceptions about fulfilled prophecy made in retrospect. That is to say, the prophets later perceived as Yahwistic were considered so not only because theirs were the predictions that came true, but because their narratives had included the type-scene as part of their stories. Authors employed conventional scenes as a component of historiography that validated the classical prophets.

A second area related to the discussed type-scene is theodicy. Texts that have been traditionally viewed through a lens of theodicy become strong arguments validating Yahweh's messengers. Rather than capricious brutality targeting children, mauling bears validate Elisha's role as successor to Elijah in Moses' footsteps. The trampling of a doubting official or death of a righteous king become careful explanations for questions of theodicy arising from the text.

A third implication is the core of the convention itself: God's sovereignty. The type-scene repeatedly emphasizes Yahweh's sovereignty over selecting and validating his chosen messengers. The fate of the antagonist punctuates the scenes by forcefully ending the "discussion"—Yahweh alone defines his sovereignty. The application of sovereignty in the scenes is narrow—limited to miraculously-delivered retribution that silences opposition. Luke, as has been discussed, repurposes the scene and combines it with the tyrant-death type-scene to

communicate God's universal sovereignty. Whether occurring in the narrow focus of validating a messenger or the cosmic scale of dismantling Satan's kingdom, the bizarre form of divine retribution is an indicator of God's sovereign activity.

### **Possibilities for Further Exploration**

#### **Convention beyond the Type-scene**

This study has limited itself to the presence of the convention in the type-scenes associated with narrative. The convention underlying the scene is undoubtedly present in genres beyond narrative and scenes beyond the interaction between individuals. The parables of Jesus in which a master's servants are mistreated by antagonists serve as a ready example. Similarly, corporate episodes—as opposed to individual opposition to a divine messenger—also appear to reinforce the convention while following different dynamics. These scenes would include both prophetic groups (such as Elijah's encounter with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel) and armies (such as Ben-Hadad's defeat in 1 Kings 20 or Sennacherib's defeat in 2 Kings 19).

#### **Comparative Literature**

The presence of the convention in Israel naturally gives rise to the question of how that convention might be reflected in surrounding culture. Unfortunately, the paucity of historiographical narrative in the extant literary corpus of the ancient Near East would make an exploration of the convention difficult. While improper speech is cause for divine retribution, speech specifically targeting representatives of deities is virtually non-existent. Blasphemy as a broader category is considered an affront to the gods but is more often encountered as a capital offense than target of divine retribution.<sup>377</sup> While roles and even specific identities of divine

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<sup>377</sup> See "Akkadian Proverbs and Councils," trans. Robert H. Pfeiffer (*ANET*, 427) and "The Victory Stela of King Piye," trans. Miriam Lichtheim (*COS* 2.7:42–51).

representatives are known, the perspective regarding antagonists to those representatives is unknown.



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