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**Covenant Infidelity and Political Apostasy in the Judean Monarchy: Disobedience,  
Punishment, and the Promise of Redemption**

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the Faculty of the Rawlings School of Divinity

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by

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## APPROVAL SHEET

Covenant Infidelity and Political Apostasy in the Judean Monarchy: Disobedience, Punishment,  
and the Promise of Redemption

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## **Abstract**

This study will focus on an exegetical examination of political apostasy, the resulting judgment of God, and the promise of redemption for the Judean monarchy. Through an examination of specific texts in the book of Kings and the classical prophetic corpus, this dissertation will show how five out of twenty-one Judean kings ruling at key junctures in Israelite history were condemned and suffered punishment for violating the covenant by committing political apostasy with the surrounding nations. Yet, despite these infractions, Yahweh was still found to be a God of hope, compassion, and mercy, forgiving when his people repented, and faithful to his promises. The contribution of this study will be to show that covenant infidelity in the political arena was a significant factor contributing to the covenant curses given in Deuteronomy and the reversal of God's blessing of land and the punishment of exile. Accordingly, this study will, through an exegetical analysis of key texts, demonstrate the importance of God's covenant roles as Sovereign King and Divine Warrior, roles that are crucial for understanding how Judah's political apostasy resulted in punishment, exile, and the promise of redemption.

## Abbreviations

AYB	Anchor Yale Bible Commentary Series
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> Edited by David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992
ANET	James Bennett Pritchard, ed., <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> , 3. ed.
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BDB	Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C.A. Briggs. <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Oxford, 1907
DOTHB	Dictionary of Old Testament Historical Books
DOTP	Dictionary of Old Testament Prophets
EBC	Expositors Bible Commentary
IECOT	International Exegetical Commentary of the Old Testament
IVPBBC	IVP Bible Background Commentary
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JBQ	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
JBT	<i>Journal of Biblical Theology</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JSJ	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
NAC	New American Commentary
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDB	New Interpreters Bible Dictionary
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
TDOT	Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament
TNICOT	The New International Commentary on the Old Testament
TNOC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
ZIBBC	Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Overview

Set as capstone of the former prophets, the books of 1 and 2 Kings (Kings) are instrumental in providing not only the background of the monarchical period of Israel but also in conveying important theological truths. They sit as a central book in the canon and record the rise and fall of the monarchy from the beginning of Solomon's reign to the conclusion of the history of Israel with Judah's destruction and exile under King Zedekiah. The book of Kings explains how Israel rose to power and then lost the land they were given by God due to apostasy and disobedience. Even though Kings provides a political and social history, their central focus is on the spiritual response to God and the covenant relationship between the people, king, and Yahweh. The main thrust is theological as it details the success and failure of each monarch against the theology presented in the book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy stresses the success of the king and the people if they are faithful to their covenant with Yahweh, and the demise associated with disobedience to the covenant.

The classical prophets and the Twelve correspond with and expand on the theological emphasis presented in Kings as each prophet repeatedly accentuates that disobedience to the covenant would result in failure and expulsion from the land. Both the book of Kings and the latter prophets stress that the failure of the monarchy was not only due to their worship of other gods and injustice toward others but also because of their political unfaithfulness through reliance on and alliance with foreign nations. Consequently, Israel and Judah's apostasy included both idolatry because they did not worship God alone, *and* adultery in the political arena because they did not trust in God alone for their protection and safety. This apostasy resulted from a lack

of trust in the promises of Yahweh as their Sovereign King and Divine Warrior; and in each instance where the monarch was unfaithful, there were severe consequences for the nation.

Scholars have written extensively on the idolatry of the kings of Israel and Judah, which led to their demise and exile, but have neglected the importance of their apostasy in the political arena. This dissertation will focus on an exegetical examination of the political apostasy, punishment, and promise of redemption in the Judean monarchy. The purpose of this study is to examine the political infractions of five Judean kings that led to the covenantal curses listed in Deuteronomy 28 that resulted in exile. We will argue that political apostasy was a significant contributing factor to the reversal of blessing, leading to the ultimate curse of expulsion from the land. This study will prove that these infractions were in direct opposition to the covenant in Deuteronomy regarding Yahweh as Sovereign King and Divine Warrior (terms more fully defined in chapter two) and the Law of the King given in Deuteronomy 17:14-20. This study will prove that these infractions were unnecessary as God had proved himself faithful as their Divine Warrior in the past.

### Methodology

This study will follow a grammatical-historical approach that strives to discover the biblical authors' intended meaning for the original audience based on the cultural, historical, and literary context of the text. This examination will provide in detail the requirements of Yahweh for the monarchy and the infractions regarding the political apostasy of specific kings and the impact those infractions had on the kingdom, that ultimately resulted in destruction and expulsion from the land. The primary sources that will be used are the biblical text through a thorough examination of key passages in Deuteronomy, Kings, Chronicles, and the classical prophetic corpus. When applicable, extra-biblical texts of the ancient Near East (ANE) that

contribute to the historical, cultural, and political situation surrounding the biblical text will be studied.

The analysis of political apostasy in these key texts will be accomplished by highlighting the specific features of the covenant in Deuteronomy that convey central truths relating to God's sovereignty as King, and stress that he alone is the source of authority over the entire universe, including both the spiritual and physical realms. As the ruler of the cosmos, all nations and peoples are subject to him. The covenant between Yahweh and Israel included the sole worship of and reliance on Yahweh alone as their suzerain and sovereign, which also involved reliance upon Yahweh for protection against foreign foes. Yahweh was regarded as the Divine Warrior who would fight on behalf of his people against those who came against them (cf. Deut 20:1-4). The people and especially the king were to look to Yahweh for protection and aid rather than foreign nations for help or security. Particular attention will be given to the Law of the King in Deuteronomy 17:14-20 to expound on the specific limitations regarding the king's military power under the direct rule of God as their Sovereign. In addition, the Deuteronomic theology of blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience (Deut 28), which is central to the book of Kings, will be addressed as the covenant commitment of each king's reign is judged by the prophets with regard to the extent of their faithfulness. Their faithfulness was not only judged based on their spiritual loyalty; but, in fact, part of their commitment to doing what was "right" in the eyes of the Lord included complete trust in Yahweh alone in the political arena. When they were faithful in this area, they maintained their gift of land and experienced peace and rest.

Chapter three will prove that despite the severe limitations placed on the monarchy in the Law of the King, which were contrary to all other ANE kings, political infidelity was not necessary. Yahweh had proven himself faithful to protect in the past and had blessed those kings

that relied on him with rest and peace. This is an important contrasting feature to show political obedience as the *Sitz im Leben* of the text. David will be examined first, as the latter prophets and the book of Kings set him as the paradigm of spiritual and political fidelity through which all other kings are measured. Three other kings (Abijah, Asa, and Jehoshaphat), who were faithful to trust in God and his protection in the political arena at times of war, will also be examined. These kings remarkably demonstrate that when obedience and trust were exercised even against overwhelming odds, God was faithful in keeping his part of the covenant as their Divine Warrior and subsequently the land experienced rest and peace. Due to its synoptic nature and Deuteronomic theology of blessings and curses, parts of this section will rely on the text of Chronicles to point out the positive examples of political faithfulness and divine intervention.

The third section and bulk of the dissertation will focus on an exegetical analysis of the five kings who were unfaithful in the political arena, which caused the nation to suffer greatly and ultimately led to their exile. Because of the extensive nature of the period of the monarchy of both Israel and Judah in the books of Kings and Chronicles, attention is limited to the political infractions of the Judean monarchy with foreign nations. This limits the scope of the study to five out of twenty-one kings of Judah: Solomon,<sup>1</sup> Asa, Ahaz, Hezekiah, and Zedekiah. The final considerations of this section will point out that despite failure and punishment, God is forgiving and merciful. He remembers his people, and he promises hope and redemption for the future.

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<sup>1</sup> Even though Solomon was king over the United Monarchy, he was also the first Davidic monarch after David, and his political apostasy set the stage for subsequent kings. Thus, he will be examined along with the Judean kings.

## Assumptions and Delimitations

### The Synchronic Method

This study will approach the text of Kings and the prophetic corpus synchronically, that is, in its final canonical form. This method is sensitive to the historical and cultural background, the implied reader, the editorial unity of the text, and the authority of the narrator.<sup>2</sup> The focus will be on the unified message of the text, presupposing that those responsible had a theological agenda. The current scholarly debate regarding authorship, levels of composition, and date of the Deuteronomistic History are outside the scope of this study, thus, the narrative presented will be the focus rather than the chronological development of the text.<sup>3</sup> Although the Deuteronomic theology of the author/s (henceforth known as the Deuteronomistic Historian or Dtr) will be

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<sup>2</sup> For more information regarding the difference between the synchronic and diachronic methods see Robert Chisholm Jr, *Interpreting the Historical Books: An Exegetical Handbook*, ed. David Howard, Handbook for Old Testament Exegesis (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2006), 167-182. See also Steven McKenzie, *Introduction to the Historical Books Strategies for Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 26-38.

<sup>3</sup> The Deuteronomistic History has been the subject of much debate since it was proposed by Martin Noth in 1943. Noth's hypothesis was that the books of Deuteronomy-2 Kings were the work of a single author/editor composed during the exile who used sources once independent of each other to compile what is now called the "Deuteronomistic History" (DH). See Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, trans. J. Doull et al., JSOTSup 15 (Sheffield University Press, 1981); Alice L. Laffey, *First and Second Kings: Volume 9* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), ix. Since Noth's proposal, the date, redactional layering, and number of authors/editors have been widespread. For example, some scholars suggest the history was composed in two phases the first occurring in the time of Josiah and the second in the exile, see Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 274-289; Richard Nelson-Jones, John W. Wevers, and Michael Weigl, *Double Redaction of the Deuteronomistic History* (London, United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2009); K. L. Noll, "Deuteronomistic History or Deuteronomic Debate?: (A Thought Experiment)," *JSOT* 31, no. 3 (March 2007): 311-45. Others suggest three or more stages of composition (e.g., Rudolf Smend, Walter Dietrich, Timo Veijola) see Gerald Eddie Gerbrandt, "Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History," *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses* (Th.D., Ann Arbor, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1979), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (2583458018), 15-17; Lester L. Grabbe, *1 & 2 Kings History and Story in Ancient Israel* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2017), 18. For a more detailed synopsis of the various scholarly opinions on the Deuteronomistic History, see McKenzie, *Introduction to the Historical Books Strategies for Reading*, 13-18. See also Simon DeVries et al., *1 Kings*, 2nd ed., vol. 12, WBC (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2015), xxxviii-lii; Gary N. Knoppers and J. Gordon McConville, *Reconsidering Israel and Judah: Recent Studies on the Deuteronomistic History* (University Park, Panama: Penn State University Press, 2000).

emphasized as part of the argument, the spotlight will be on the disobedience and infractions of the kings against the covenant and on the theological factors of the Deuteronomistic History (DH) in the final form of the text.

### **The Date of Deuteronomy**

Even though great detail will not be given to the compositional characteristics of the DH, one important caveat needs to be made regarding the composition and date of Deuteronomy versus the rest of the DH (Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, and 1-2 Kings). Since the thesis of this study rests on a king's infractions against the covenant as given in Deuteronomy (especially the Law of the King), and Yahweh's punishment for those infractions, the assumption that Deuteronomy was pre-monarchal is crucial for determining the culpability of the king's unfaithfulness to the covenant. Raymond Person and Konrad Schmid consider the dating of Deuteronomy as the major lynchpin for the analysis of the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets.<sup>4</sup> Steven Sanchez (highlighted below) agrees and argues the importance of a pre-monarchal date for Deuteronomy especially as it relates to the Law of the King (Deut 17:14-20). He states of the Deuteronomist that "he chose to evaluate the nation and its leaders by the standards laid down in the Law of the King *because* Israel had been warned before the monarchy was established."<sup>5</sup> Eugene Merrill also points out the importance of a pre-monarchal date and avers that kingship was foreseen in patriarchal times and preparation was made for the monarchy both in tradition

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<sup>4</sup> Raymond F. Person and Konrad Schmid, *Deuteronomy in the Pentateuch, Hexateuch, and the Deuteronomistic History* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Steven H. Sanchez, "'Royal Limitation as the Distinctive of Israelite Monarchy,'" *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses* (Ph.D., Ann Arbor, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2010), ProQuest Central; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (305232115), 94.



and theology.<sup>6</sup>

Prior to the source-critical method, Jewish and Christian readers both assumed that Moses authored the book of Deuteronomy along with Genesis through Numbers.<sup>7</sup> After the enlightenment (18-19 centuries), W. M. L. de Wette proposed that Deuteronomy had been composed during the reign of Josiah. This view, popularized by J. Wellhausen and still held by most scholars, focuses on Deuteronomy as the product of the seventh-century Josianic reform.<sup>8</sup> Daniel Block states, “critical scholars generally tend to interpret the core of the book as a sort of manifesto, written in support of Josiah’s efforts to centralize the religion of Israel in Jerusalem.”<sup>9</sup> Virtually all critical scholars opine that Deuteronomy is not, as tradition has held, a work attributed to Moses or pre-monarchic but instead is a formulation by those during the Josianic reform who either adapted historical traditions or created “history” to fit their theological agenda.<sup>10</sup>

However, conservative scholars hold a different opinion and contest that the arguments for a seventh-century date are on purely hypothetical grounds.<sup>11</sup> Although they agree that there

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<sup>6</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (New York: B&H Publishing Group, 1994), 228.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Block, *The Gospel According to Moses: Theological and Ethical Reflections on the Book of Deuteronomy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Grisanti, *Deuteronomy*, ed. Tremper III Longman and David Garland, EBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), Introduction, Authorship and Date, e-book; Person and Schmid, *Deuteronomy in the Pentateuch, Hexateuch, and the Deuteronomistic History*, 1. Sanchez, “Royal Limitation,” 95.

<sup>9</sup> Block, *The Gospel According to Moses*, 5.

<sup>10</sup> K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 241; Block, *The Gospel According to Moses*, 5.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Grisanti sees the connection between Deuteronomy and the time of Josiah (7<sup>th</sup> century) to be flawed on several grounds. First, he stipulates that Deuteronomy seems to be the basis for the earlier reforms of Jehoshaphat, Amaziah, and Hezekiah. Second, he states, “the book *presupposes* the existence of earlier canonical

are streams of Deuteronomic thought throughout the DH, they do not agree that Deuteronomy was written by the Deuteronomistic Historian at the time of Josiah or with the concept of a redactional evolution of Deuteronomy. For example, Paul House argues that Joshua-2 Kings was written by a single author after the destruction of Jerusalem but does not believe it is necessary to conclude that the historian wrote any part of the Book of Deuteronomy.<sup>12</sup> In a similar vein, R. K. Harrison stresses the unity of the former prophets and agrees that one person wrote Joshua-2 Kings based on the theology of Deuteronomy, but he contends that this author did not write Deuteronomy.<sup>13</sup> K. A. Kitchen, even though he sees each of the books (Josh-2 Kings) as distinct works, states “Deuteronomy itself is a wholly separate and foundational work before these.”<sup>14</sup> Noting the cautions and observations made by such scholars, the current study will follow the consensus of the conservative scholars and hold to a pre-monarchal date for Deuteronomy.

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legislation in several instances (e.g., sacrificial ritual, tithes, the Ten Commandments).” Third, the reform of Josiah reflects laws that are not in Deuteronomy. Finally, Deuteronomy is not fundamentally concerned with the centralization of worship, just the proper place of worship (Deut 12) not high places, a temple, or Jerusalem. Grisanti also cautions one must be careful not to minimize the biblical evidence that supports Mosaic authorship. Grisanti, *Deuteronomy*, Introduction, Authorship and Date. Gordon Wenham in his article, *The Date of Deuteronomy: Linch-Pin of Old Testament Criticism* explores both sides of the argument giving convincing proof that a re-examination of six areas shows the plausibility of an earlier date. Gordon J. Wenham, “The Date of Deuteronomy: Linch-Pin of Old Testament Criticism,” *Themelios* 10, no. 3 (1985): 15, 18. Daniel Block argues that there are stylistic and literary features, certain historical notes, and the resemblance to second millennium BCE Hittite treaty documents that suggest Deuteronomy was written much earlier than most admit. Block, *The Gospel According to Moses*, 7. Eugene Merrill affirms that a comparison of Deuteronomy with Hittite suzerain-vassal treaties is a “matter of supreme importance in understanding Deuteronomy’s full implications.” Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 3. Sanchez enhances this view by giving significant evidence of extant treaties that confirm an early date based on the relationship between Deuteronomy to second millennium ANE treaty documents. For his complete argument and multiple examples see, Sanchez, “Royal Limitation,” 99-104.

<sup>12</sup> Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1995), 17y.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 240. Others such as John Sailhamer prefer to take a compositional approach that identifies Moses as the author but also acknowledges the book contains material that was inserted at a later date (e.g., Deut 34). John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition, and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 200, 204.

## Five Kings

Because of the extensive nature of the period of the monarchy of both Israel and Judah in the books of Kings and Chronicles, attention is limited to the foreign political infractions listed in the book of Kings (with supplemental material drawn from Chronicles and the classical prophetic corpus when applicable) that were also condemned by the prophets and only those committed by the kings of Judah. The choice of the Judean monarchy reflects the connection between the covenant in the book of Deuteronomy and the Davidic promises associated with Judah that form the basis for the hope and restoration given in the latter prophetic corpus. This limits the scope of the study to five out of twenty-one kings of Judah.<sup>15</sup> Three of the five kings (Ahaz, Hezekiah, and Zedekiah) are condemned for their infractions in the prophetic books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel; and 2 Chronicles presents the judgment given by the prophet Hanani regarding the apostasy of Asa. These texts, which add to and provide deeper understanding of the condemnation of Yahweh against alliances with and reliance on foreign power, will be examined alongside the text of Kings.

### Definition of Key Terms

There are several key terms related to this study that are important for gaining a better understanding of the concepts that will be presented in the following chapters. The first is the definition of “political apostasy” (coined for this study) and synonymous with political apostasy are the terms “fornication” and “adultery” which, as the study will argue, describe how God views the nation’s political apostasy (e.g., Is 30:7; Ezek 16:23-41; 23:37). The last term to be

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<sup>15</sup> This includes David and Solomon even though they were kings during the United Monarchy.

identified is “trust” as it relates to the complete security in and reliance on God alone in the political arena (e.g., 2 Chr 20:20; Is 7:9).

## Political Apostasy

“Political” is a term used to refer to government or the conduct of government.<sup>16</sup> For this study, it will be used to refer to the governing affairs of the Judean monarchy and the interaction of the Judean monarchy with the surrounding “governments” (city-states, nations, and empires) in the ANE. Apostasy is defined as “1) an act of refusing to continue to follow, obey, or recognize a religious faith, and 2) abandonment of a previous loyalty.”<sup>17</sup> Although this is a modern English definition, it fits well with the intended meaning behind the Hebrew definition. The Hebrew word for apostasy is the noun מְשִׁיבָה that comes from the root שׁוּב, which means to turn around or turn away. Even though שׁוּב has many connotations, מְשִׁיבָה is used exclusively to refer to turning from Yahweh.<sup>18</sup> The term מְשִׁיבָה is used 12 times in the Hebrew Bible, and, in addition to being used for “apostasy” (Jer 2:19; 5:6; 14:7), it refers to “waywardness” (Pro 1:32), “faithless” or “faithlessness” (Jer 3:6, 8, 11, 12, 22), “backsliding” (Jer 8:5), and “turning away” (Hos 11:7). In every instance, other than Proverbs 1:32 (and even here it describes turning from wisdom that ultimately is turning from Yahweh), מְשִׁיבָה is used to refer to Israel’s turning from

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<sup>16</sup> “Political,” in *Merriam-Webster.Com Dictionary*, s.v., n.d., Merriam-webster.com/dictionary/apostasy.

<sup>17</sup> “Apostasy,” in *Merriam-Webster.Com Dictionary*, s.v., n.d., Merriam-webster.com/dictionary/apostasy.

<sup>18</sup> Heinz-Josef Fabry states, “שׁוּב” originally represented a verb of motion with the following basic meaning: to move in an opposite direction from that toward which one previously moved.” Heinz-Josef Fabry, “שׁוּב,” in *TDOT*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), Etymology and Basic Meaning, e-book.

their covenantal commitment to Yahweh through faithlessness and backsliding.<sup>19</sup> Kevin Barker takes the concept a step further by using the term “apostate rejection” to render it is not just disobedience but the turning from and rejection of Yahweh in favor of another that is in view.<sup>20</sup> In essence, Judah’s political apostasy indicates they are refusing to follow, obey, or recognize their faith, and are abandoning and rejecting their loyalty to Yahweh and his covenant in favor of another.

In the prophetic corpus, political apostasy is described as fornication through the act of harlotry or prostitution (הַזְנָה), and adultery (רִצְוָה) (e.g., Is 30:7; Ezek 16:23-41; Hos 8:9). The verb הַזְנָה designates a sexual relationship outside of a formal union, and the participle is used of those with whom a woman does not have a formal covenant relationship.<sup>21</sup> Most of the occurrences of this verb are used figuratively to refer to Israel’s faithlessness toward Yahweh through idolatry; however, the noun form appears in Ezekiel 16 and 23 (22 times) and, in addition to idolatry, is used for Israel’s adultery in the political sense (e.g., 16:26, 28-29; 23:5, 30).<sup>22</sup> As Leslie Allen states, “Ezekiel inherited a developed prophetic tradition in which sexual infidelity was used as a metaphor both for Israel’s adoption of Canaanite religion (Hos 1:2, 2:7-15 [5-13]; 3:1; Jer 2:20) and for political alliances with foreign powers (Hos 8:9; Jer 2:33, 36).”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Fabry, “שִׁבְרָה,” III. OT, e-book.

<sup>20</sup> Kevin Barker, “Apostate Rejection in the United and Divided Monarchies,” *JBT* 1, no. 2 (April 2018): 222.

<sup>21</sup> Because a woman is always subordinate to a man in the ANE, she is always the subject of הַזְנָה rather than a man. Erlandsson, “הַזְנָה,” in *TDOT*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), Meaning, e-book.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, Etymology and Occurrences, e-book.

<sup>23</sup> Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19, Volume 28*, ed. David Allen Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, WBC (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2015), 235.

When a formal union is already established and then a sexual association is formed outside of that union, הִזְנָה then becomes synonymous with the narrower term הִזְנָה which translates “commit adultery” (Ezek 16:38; 23:37).<sup>24</sup> “An adulteress is therefore a woman who has sexual intercourse with others instead of her own husband.”<sup>25</sup> The seriousness of adultery can be found in the law. Adulterous behavior is condemned in Leviticus and Deuteronomy as a capital offense and the accused must be put to death (Lev. 20:10; Deut 22:22-27). Adultery is also included in the list of sexual sins that defile the land and cause it to “vomit out its inhabitants” (Lev 18:20-30). Thus, it was not only a social but also a religious crime and considered the height of treachery against the sanctity of the nuclear family and an abomination (Ezek 22:11) and sin against God (Gen 20:6; 39:9; Ps 51:6).<sup>26</sup> Daniel Block points out, that, according to Deuteronomy, adultery is a serious offense, and a crime against the fabric of the community as it violates the integrity of the nation as a whole. Therefore, covenantal righteousness demands punishment so that the evil is purged from Israel.<sup>27</sup>

In the prophetic corpus, the same terminology of the marriage contract is applied metaphorically to the covenant between Israel and Yahweh, and adultery is used as a metaphor for apostasy.<sup>28</sup> According to the prophets, because of the covenant relationship, Israel is to

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<sup>24</sup> Erlandsson, “הִזְנָה,” Meaning.

<sup>25</sup> Freedman and Willoughby, “הִזְנָה,” in *TDOT*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), Survey, e-book.

<sup>26</sup> Elaine Adler Goodfriend, “Adultery,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The ABD* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 82. Goodfriend also points out that the characterization of adultery as a great sin was not limited to Israel as Akkadian, Ugarit, and Egyptian texts indicate the same. *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Daniel Block, *Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2012), 377-378.

<sup>28</sup> Goodfriend, “Adultery,” 85.

refrain from “intercourse” with other nations, or their apostasy in this area is considered adultery.<sup>29</sup> Like other prophets before him (cf. Hos 8:9; Jer 22:20; 30:14), Ezekiel explores this additional facet of marital unfaithfulness in terms of an alliance with foreign powers.<sup>30</sup> Because of Israel’s covenantal commitment to Yahweh, Ezekiel 16 and 23 describe her political harlotry figuratively as that of an unfaithful wife who has sought out other nations with whom to have “relations” instead of with the Lord, her husband (16:32).<sup>31</sup> Thus, Judah’s political apostasy was, in fact, adultery in the eyes of Yahweh, and their political unfaithfulness was a contributing factor leading to punishment and expulsion (“vomiting”) from the land (Lev 18:25, 28; 20:22).

## Trust

The final word to be explored is the word “trust.” Several Hebrew words convey the idea of trust, but two stand out as significant for this study, אָמֵן and אָמַן. When used in the *niphal*, אָמֵן is defined as trustworthy, faithful, firm, and reliable.<sup>32</sup> In this form, it is used in connection with people who are reliable or are considered trustworthy (Is 8:2; Prov 11:13), and when applied to God, speaks of his faithfulness (Is 49:7; Jer 42:5). In the *hiphil* it means “to be (or become) firm, to have or gain stability.”<sup>33</sup> Most often, the *hiphil* form (אָמַן) was used to judge what does or does not deserve trust and, when used and directed toward God, it verified spiritual faith and

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<sup>29</sup> Erlandsson, “אָמֵן,” Metaphorical Use, e-book.

<sup>30</sup> Allen, Ezekiel 1-19, 240.

<sup>31</sup> Ralph Alexander, *Ezekiel*, EBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), Ezekiel 16:26-30, e-book.

<sup>32</sup> David J. A. Clines, ed., “אָמֵן,” in *The Concise Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2009), 23.

<sup>33</sup> Jepsen, “אָמַן,” in *TDOT*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), V. Hiphil, e-book.

belief in God and his promises (Num 14:11; Deut 1:32; 2 Kgs 17:14; Jon 3:5; Is 43:10) based on his signs (Ex 4:31), miracles (Ex 14:31), and word (Jon 3:5).<sup>34</sup> This kind of faith led to trust involving God's saving power often by doing nothing at all and leaving everything in the hands of God (2 Chr 20:20; Is 7:9).<sup>35</sup> For example, in the case of 2 Chronicles 20:20, Jehoshaphat is told to do nothing militarily and “believe in God” (הֶאֱמִינוּ בַיהוָה), which he also conveys to the people. As Frederick Mabie notes, “Jehoshaphat reiterates Jahaziel's exhortation that connects aspects of applied faith (e.g., being strong and courageous; stepping out in obedience) and divinely granted success.”<sup>36</sup> Thus, faith and belief (אֱמָן) preclude trust. Psalms 78:22 reiterates this concept and uses אֱמָן when referring to belief in God and בָּטַח when referring to trusting in him (or lack thereof) for salvation. For this reason, אֱמָן goes hand in hand with and is the precursor to בָּטַח, for when belief in God's faithfulness is present, trust in him becomes absolute.

The term בָּטַח is more directly related to reliance and security. The formal definition of בָּטַח is to “‘feel secure, be unconcerned,’ or, specifying the reason for the security, ‘to rely on something or someone.’”<sup>37</sup> Jepsen points out that בָּטַח and its derivatives can have a negative connotation in the idea of false security, or a positive implication as these terms also relate to complete security in and reliance on God alone. The translators of the LXX understood this incongruity and rendered the negative form of בָּטַח with the Greek term πείθω, “to trust in, believe in, put confidence in” but when the text used בָּטַח to point toward trust in and reliance on

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<sup>34</sup> Jepsen, “אֱמָן,” V. Hiphil, e-book.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.; Frederick J. Mabie, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, vol. 4, EBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 2 Chr 20:20-23, e-book.

<sup>36</sup> Mabie, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, 2 Chr 20:20-23.

<sup>37</sup> Jepsen, “בָּטַח,” in *TDOT*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), Meaning, e-book.



God, translators chose the term ἐλπίζω, “to hope.”<sup>38</sup> ἐλπίζω is forward-looking hope with confident expectation in that which is good and beneficial.<sup>39</sup> A good example of this can be found in Psalms 115:8-11 (LXX 113:16-19). In verse 8 (LXX v. 16) the translators render the verb פִּטְּנָה as πεποιθότες yet in verses 9, 10, and 11 (LXX v. 17, 18, 19) they render it as ἠλπισεν/ἠλπισαν.<sup>40</sup>

This duality directly relates to the current study because פִּטְּנָה is often used to describe someone who thinks they can find security in sources other than God, but in reality, the object or person in whom they have placed their trust is unreliable. The Bible includes many instances in which man fails in this area by placing his trust in unpredictable and untrustworthy sources, such as riches (e.g., Prov 11:28; Ps 49:7), fortified cities and walls (Jer 5:17; Deut 28:52), chariots, horses, and warriors (Is 31:1, Hos 10:13), idols and images (Ps 115:8; 135:18; Is 42:17; Hab 2:18), or even in himself (Is 30:12; Ps 62:11; Prov 21:22).<sup>41</sup> The negative sense of פִּטְּנָה as a “false security” is an important concept in the political arena as the kings are chastised for trusting in foreign nations for protection and aid instead of trusting completely in God (e.g., 2 Kgs 18:21; Is 30:15; 36:4-6, 9; Jer 17:5; Ezek 29:16). For instance, Isaiah 30:15 warns the house of Judah that all they need to do is return (turn away from trusting in Egypt and return to trusting in the Lord), rest, and trust fully in Yahweh who would be their strength and source of power. Relying on

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<sup>38</sup> Jepsen, “פִּטְּנָה.” Meaning, e-book.

<sup>39</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 295.

<sup>40</sup> Jepsen, “פִּטְּנָה,” Meaning, e-book.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

Egypt would only lead to disappointment, shame, and humiliation (v. 3). God promised victory if they trusted and obeyed, and defeat if they rebelled (Lev 26:7-8; Deut 32:30).<sup>42</sup>

In the positive use of *אֱמוּנָה*, the biblical text is clear, placing one's trust in Yahweh is never disappointing as those who rely on him can have confidence that they will be blessed (Prov 16:20), happy (Ps 40:5), protected, refreshed, and secure (Prov 14:26; Ps 112:7). Reliance on God is the only certain security one can have in life, all other sources are proven to be fickle and unreliable. However, as will be shown below, Yahweh demands complete trust and total commitment. Those who choose to trust in him only partially politically and look to others for aid (e.g., Hezekiah, 2 Kgs 18:21; 20:12-19; Is 30:1-5; 39:2-8), are punished for their unfaithfulness. Thus, this key term will be used in conjunction with each instance where the king turned from his commitment and complete trust in the Lord to place his trust elsewhere.

## Review of Literature

### **The Deuteronomist's View of the Role of the King (Gerald Gerbrandt)**

In *Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History*, Gerald Gerbrandt approaches the Deuteronomist's (Dtr) view of the role of the king as it is reflected in the whole of the Deuteronomistic History (DH).<sup>43</sup> He specifically sets out to address the scholarly debate concerning whether the Deuteronomist presents himself as pro or anti-monarchy; however,

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<sup>42</sup> Geoffrey W. Grogan, *Isaiah*, vol. 6, EBC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), Isaiah 30:15-18, e-book.

<sup>43</sup> Gerbrandt, "Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History," 57.

Gerbrandt chooses to begin with a different question.<sup>44</sup> Gerbrandt argues that most scholars base their pro or anti-monarchal stance of the Deuteronomist on 1 Samuel 7-12, but he stresses that this is an incorrect starting point and an insufficient amount of material for a proper analysis. Gerbrandt does not believe that the Dtr presents Yahweh as rejecting Israel's request for a king in 1 Samuel 7-12 because he was rejecting the monarchy; instead, Yahweh resisted the request because the people asked for the wrong *kind* of king.<sup>45</sup> Interestingly, he posits that it is important to recognize that the Dtr was neither pro-nor anti-monarchy, and the history does not reflect either stance.<sup>46</sup> He states, "in order to discover the Deuteronomist's view of kingship a new starting point needs to be found, and the whole history needs to be examined."<sup>47</sup> Thus, he bases his starting point on the narratives found in II Kings 18-22 (Hezekiah, Manasseh, and Josiah) and tests his thesis against the whole of the Deuteronomic History.<sup>48</sup>

This is important for the current study because Gerbrandt surmises that one should not ask whether the Dtr was pro or anti-monarchy because that would not have been a burning issue

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<sup>44</sup> Gerbrandt defines the Deuteronomist as the "producer" of the Deuteronomistic History instead of "writer" or "author" because he believes this describes how the Deuteronomist worked. He does not discount a single individual but also does not discount that the Deuteronomistic History could have been produced by a group. *Ibid.*, 57-58.

<sup>45</sup> Gerbrandt, "Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History," 88-102.

<sup>46</sup> Geoffrey Miller posits that based on political theory, "the author" (the term he uses to refer to the creator of the DH) supports the monarchy as the best form of government. He argues that the author sees it as a more favorable form of government over and above military rule, confederacy, or theocracy. Geoffrey P. Miller, *The Ways of a King: Legal and Political Ideas in the Bible* (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 24, 238.

<sup>47</sup> Gerbrandt, "Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History," 63.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-64.

for the Dtr as he would not have thought in those terms.<sup>49</sup> Instead, the question should be what kind of king the Dtr envisioned as ideal for Israel and what role the king was expected to play.<sup>50</sup> Gerbrandt states, “kingship is thus not important in and of itself, but it is of paramount importance for the Deuteronomist because of the role which kingship was expected to fulfill in the history of God’s people.”<sup>51</sup> He emphasizes, in order to understand what kind of king Yahweh considered acceptable, the theological emphasis of land and covenant set forth in Deuteronomy must be examined.<sup>52</sup> Based on the theology of Deuteronomy, he argues that the Deuteronomist expected the king to ensure the continued existence of the people in the land that God had given them.<sup>53</sup> This continued existence in the land was directly related to Israel’s response to the covenant and the king’s role in making sure the covenant was observed. Gerbrandt calls the king the “covenant administrator” and believes that for the Dtr, total loyalty and promotion of the covenant was the central obligation of the king.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Gerbrandt points out that this had been the only form of government for over 400 years and virtually all of the surrounding nations had a monarchy. The Deuteronomist would not have condemned the office of king because it was simply the way kingdoms were governed. *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 61, 63.

<sup>51</sup> Gerbrandt, “Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History,” 125.

<sup>52</sup> Even though Gerbrandt supports Noth’s view that Deuteronomy is part of the Deuteronomistic History, he believes that the majority of the present book of Deuteronomy was not written by the Dtr but was an independent document already in existence that was found during the time of Josiah. The Dtr used it because it significantly affected his thinking and provided a key for the entire history. *Ibid.*, 129, 143-144.

<sup>53</sup> Patrick Miller stresses that the essential theological message of Deuteronomy is the offer of a good life in a good land, and it is in the land that Israel would be blessed. He states, “almost all the references to blessing in Deuteronomy have to do with the land, the sphere where blessing is promised to the people.” Patrick D Miller and Patrick D Jr Miller, “Gift of God: Deuteronomic Theology of the Land,” *Interpretation* 23, no. 4 (October 1969): 458. Thus, the role of the king is magnified as the blessing of Yahweh was tied to his governance of the land.

<sup>54</sup> Gerbrandt, “Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History,” 137-138.

Gerbrandt bases his stance largely on the Law of the King in Deuteronomy 17:14-20. In his view, this pericope stipulates that it was ok for Israel to have a king. In fact, both the law and the Dtr assume kingship is natural; however, Israel was to adapt the culture of the king to fit into Yahweh's covenant and the monarchy was to be instituted on Yahweh's terms and conditions.<sup>55</sup> Another important contribution of Gerbrandt's research for the current study is his breakdown of the terms and conditions stipulated in Deuteronomy 17:14-20, mainly, Yahweh's role in Israel's defense, implying (unlike the surrounding nations) that this is *not* the duty of the king.<sup>56</sup> Using various passages in the whole of the DH, Gerbrandt supports his thesis that Yahweh was Israel's deliverer and kingship was wrong whenever it usurped this role.<sup>57</sup> He specifically focuses on Hezekiah, Manasseh, and Josiah as the greatest examples of the position of the Dtr regarding kingship and covenant obedience both religiously and politically. His final analysis reflected that the success or failure of each king was judged on their complete reliance on Yahweh, and this included military success. The Dtr expected the king to lead in covenant obedience and trust that military success was an accomplishment of Yahweh, not the king.<sup>58</sup>

### **The Limitations Placed on the King (Steven Sanchez)**

Steven Sanchez builds on Gerbrandt's thesis by examining in greater detail the limitations placed on the monarchy in Law of the King in Deuteronomy 17:14-20. He also sets out to expound on the similarities and differences between Israel's monarchy and the monarchies

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<sup>55</sup> Gerbrandt, "Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History," 154-156.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 272-273.

of the surrounding nations.<sup>59</sup> He specifically addresses the unique adaptations of Israel's kingship when compared with the evidence of what kingship was like in other ANE cultures.<sup>60</sup> Based on this analysis, he agrees with Gerbrandt that the Law of the King stands as the prescriptive factor that determines what type of monarch Yahweh desired for Israel.<sup>61</sup> He also finds that Yahweh intentionally limited the king in the areas of military, diplomatic, and monetary strength to force the king to focus on covenant faithfulness and dependence on Yahweh for national defense.<sup>62</sup> Sanchez states, "the Law of the King provides the lens through which the history of Israel's monarchy, including its origins, should be interpreted."<sup>63</sup>

Sanchez differs from Gerbrandt on the specific area in the Law of the King that contrasts Israel's monarchy the most dramatically from the rest of the ANE. Gerbrandt stresses that covenant faithfulness is the key difference between Israel's king and the surrounding nations. Sanchez, on the other hand, argues that the significant difference lies in the severe limitation of a king's ability to defend the nation.<sup>64</sup> He states, "the fundamental change the Law of Kingship imposed—that is, the change which made Israel's monarchy dissimilar from all other ancient Near Eastern monarchies—was the removal of national defense from the hands of the king

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<sup>59</sup> Sanchez, "Royal Limitation," 11.

<sup>60</sup> Sanchez bases this comparison on the nations and city-states of Western Asia and Mesopotamia during the Late Bronze Age and early Iron Age. He chooses this era because it is replete with epigraphic sources, and he believes that these are the ones that would have had the most impact on Israel. *Ibid.*, 11, 18.

<sup>61</sup> Sanchez devotes an entire chapter to the Law of the King and argues that the prescriptive nature of the Law demands a pre-monarchal date of Deuteronomy. Sanchez, "Royal Limitation," 94.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, iii.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 13. Michael Walzer sees the most remarkable feature of Israelite kingship as "the absence of cosmological significance" that makes them unlike their ANE neighbors. Michael Walzer, *In God's Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 58-59.

specifically, intentionally, and practically!”<sup>65</sup> He argues, Yahweh never intended for Israel to have a strong king, so that Yahweh could defend her and win honor for his name (Is 48:11).<sup>66</sup> Sanchez contends that military defense in the ANE was a necessity and building up a great army and weaponry was essential.<sup>67</sup> It is this part of the law that made Israel unique and counter-cultural. The relationship between Israel and her God required military weakness, not strength, on the part of the king.<sup>68</sup> Even though divine deliverance was a normal element for all the ANE in times of war, the difference was in the limitations placed on Israel and her ability to fight for and protect herself.<sup>69</sup>

Sanchez bases his thesis on the book of Chronicles to contend that the Chronicler shared the same view as the Deuteronomist regarding the limitation on the military readiness and national defense of the king as stipulated in Deuteronomy 17:14-20.<sup>70</sup> Sanchez focuses on five kings to support his thesis, those whom he feels the Chronicler considers worthy of praise in the area of military dependence on Yahweh. These five kings include Abijah, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah. He concludes that “when we consider the themes that the Deuteronomist emphasized, an examination of 2 Chronicles reveals that the Chronicler emphasized similar themes but magnified them purposefully...a close reading reveals that the Chronicler

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<sup>65</sup> Sanchez, “Royal Limitation,” 13.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> The most notable weapon of the ANE was the chariot, this represented the strength of the king’s military and power more so than infantry or calvary. Yigael Yadin, *The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963), 297.

<sup>68</sup> Sanchez, “Royal Limitation,” 46.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 15.

emphasized the themes of covenant faithfulness and national dependence at almost every turn.”<sup>71</sup>

Sanchez’s goal is to reveal that the Chronicler (much like the Dtr) employed the theme of military dependence on Yahweh as an indicator of a monarch’s faithfulness, and he used the themes of judgment and reward as an incentive for faithfulness.<sup>72</sup>

### **The Political Dynamics of Government and Law (Michael Walzer)**

Michael Walzer in his book, *In God’s Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible*, examines the political dynamics of government and law expressed in the Bible. Regarding the Law of the King, he agrees with Sanchez that the law restricted the king by establishing a set of limits on kingly rule.<sup>73</sup> The king was not to expand his household or increase his own power and wealth beyond what was necessary for his office. He states, “the reiterated phrase ‘to himself’ suggests that what is at issue here is personal and dynastic aggrandizement.”<sup>74</sup> Walzer stresses, the Dtr envisions a king whose household is above the others, but his heart is not. In his heart, he is the same as his brethren and his elevation is purely instrumental.<sup>75</sup>

In addition to an analysis of the Law of the King, he comments on the political alliances of the kings and how the prophetic voice responded in defiance. He notes that prophecy and monarchy often clashed because prophecy was at war with politics when it was a form of self-

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<sup>71</sup> Sanchez, “Royal Limitation,” 16.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Walzer, *In God’s Shadow*, 56.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 58.



aggrandizement, self-reliance, and self-help.<sup>76</sup> Monarchy was “normal” in pursuing what seemed sensible and conventional regarding foreign policy, yet prophecy demanded the “abnormal.” In this sense, he views the prophetic message as one of antipolitical radicalism that contended that “God’s message overrode the wisdom of men.”<sup>77</sup>

Walzer argues that after the division of the kingdom, Israel and Judah were always in the shadow of greater states like Egypt and Assyria. The natural political move, the one that made the most sense (and in which all ANE states vacillated), was to either align with the surrounding neighbors against the dominant empire or align with the empire against the surrounding neighbors.<sup>78</sup> He conceives that the politics of the 8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries were a time of ambassadors, calculating the balance of power, fortification, building armies, and paying or refusing to pay tribute. The prophets, however, denied the value of all of it, instead, stressing the importance of reliance on Yahweh in times of political distress.<sup>79</sup> Walzer argues that the Deuteronomic requirement of trust calls on the kings to “rely exclusively on divine protection.”<sup>80</sup> Walzer gives several examples of how the king was expected to act based on the words of Isaiah given to king Ahaz and king Hezekiah. Isaiah recommended a new politic that was a radical withdrawal from politics, and as the current study argued earlier, they were commanded to “do nothing.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Walzer, *In God’s Shadow*, 102, 67.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 68, 88.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 89-90.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 101-104. Wilson De Angelo Cunha also discusses the central criticism in Isaiah chapters two and thirty as a condemnation of trusting in human power represented by alliances with foreign nations, namely Egypt. He also states that Isaiah presents Yahweh as Israel’s sole protector. Wilson de Angelo Cunha, “Isaiah 39 and the Motif of Human Trust in First Isaiah,” *JBL* 141, no. 1 (2022), 113, 116

Walzer's main objective is to argue that the policy of social ethics and justice along with faith in God are the essential elements necessary for the preservation, protection, and existence in the land.<sup>82</sup>

### Contribution of This Study

This study argues that a contributing factor leading to the covenant curses listed in Deuteronomy 28, resulting in the ultimate curse of expulsion from the land, was political apostasy in the Judean monarchy. We will contend that an under-discussed cause of the Babylonian deportation was illegitimate political alliances that were regarded by Yahweh as political adultery. This study will combine the elements of God's directive given in the Law of the King to the kind of king Israel was to maintain and the limitation of power that God intended for the monarchy, stressing the differences between Israel and her ANE neighbors.

The current proposal will advance the discussion by illuminating *why* God limited the monarchy's power based on his sovereignty as King and his role as Israel's Divine Warrior. It will go beyond the previous work by engaging in a comprehensive study that will present each of the specific instances in the Deuteronomic History where a Davidic monarchy was warned by the prophets that their alliance with and reliance on other nations was not only condemned by Yahweh but was considered a form of political apostasy. It will demonstrate that from God's perspective, their political apostasy was a direct violation of the covenant and considered adultery against God, resulting in severe consequences for the kingdom. Both the Deuteronomic History and the latter prophets are united in this manner and illustrate that these actions were not simply a form of unintentional disobedience but were considered rebellion, betrayal, and a

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<sup>82</sup> Walzer, *In God's Shadow*, 210.

breach of covenant faithfulness. We will argue the overlooked fact that along with the nation's spiritual idolatry and social injustice, Judah's political adultery was a significant infraction that instituted the curses associated with Deuteronomic infidelity. This study will focus on each instance in the Judean monarchy where political apostasy occurred, detailing the reversal of blessing and the repercussions incurred, resulting in the final and most severe curse, expulsion from the land, and exile.

The current proposal will go a step further by pointing out that political infidelity was unnecessary based on Yahweh's past faithfulness to the monarchy. It will also consider the element of hope and forgiveness that God grants his people. It will delineate in which instances God chose to be gracious and merciful, forgiving when there was repentance (as in the case of Hezekiah), and where God's forward-reaching feature of messianic hope was evident, despite infidelity (e.g., Ahaz, Zedekiah).

## Chapter 2: God as King

### God as Sovereign Over the Universe

#### Yahweh the High God and Creator

Throughout the Old Testament, Yahweh is portrayed as the supreme sovereign who presides in power and authority over the cosmos, which includes the heavens and earth, all of creation, and the historical affairs of humanity. He alone is the Creator God<sup>83</sup> who provides order out of chaos, preserves the world, and acts as necessary to maintain its just order while bringing the world toward his ultimate goal, a new creation.<sup>84</sup> This is similar to the common worldview of deity in the ANE, where many nations and tribes exalted a high god who they perceived as having the highest ranking power and authority.<sup>85</sup> However, unlike their secular neighbors, the biblical writers continually reveal that Yahweh is in a class by himself and that there is no other being, human or divine, like him. Yahwism insists that only one god is truly worthy of worship and all other gods are “pretenders,” “imposters,” “incompetent,” or simply inferior beings

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<sup>83</sup> For consistency, the various terms associated with God will be capitalized when referring to a title used for God and left uncapitalized when referring to a function of God.

<sup>84</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 75, 96; Jinsung Seok, “‘God as Creator and Sovereign’: The Intertextual Relationship of Psalm 33 with the Book of Isaiah,” *ACTS 신학저널* 33 (2017): 15.

<sup>85</sup> It is important to note that all of the cultures around Israel were polytheistic with most being henotheistic, which is the belief in a supreme god over the region, race, or nation. Marion Benedict, *The God of the Old Testament in Relation to War* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1927), 5. In the ANE mindset, the gods were made up of an assembly with a high god ruling over them. In Sumeria, Anu is the head of the pantheon, with Enlil often taking a leading role. Marduk rises to the top in the second millennium in southern Mesopotamia. Ashur is the head in Assyria, and El leads the pantheon in Ugaritic literature. John Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 53, 55.

incapable of exercising divine authority.<sup>86</sup> This is evident, for example, in Deuteronomy 4:35-39 where Moses explains that “there is no other besides him” who is “God in heaven above and on the earth beneath.” It is also manifest in Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple which states that there is “no other like the Lord” (1 Kgs 8:60).<sup>87</sup> The prophetic speeches of Isaiah similarly contend that, before him no god was formed nor are there any after him, no other god saves, no other god can countermand Yahweh’s actions or decrees, and no other god can foretell the future (Is 43:10-13; 44:6-7; 45:5-6; 21-22).<sup>88</sup> In like manner, the Psalms celebrate Yahweh as King of the gods, King of creation, and King over all nations, including Israel (Ps 33; 47; 93; 95-99; 136:1-3).<sup>89</sup>

Yahweh is set apart because, unlike the common ANE thought associated with other gods, “Yahweh is not continuous with the cosmos. He is discontinuous with it; he is other than it.”<sup>90</sup> He is not subject to impersonal fate like the other deities who can be controlled by one another and harmed by circumstances outside of their control. He is the creator of the cosmos, and as such, all the earth belongs to him and he is Lord over all (e.g., Ex 19:5; Ps 24:1-2; 74:12-

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<sup>86</sup> John Walton, *Old Testament Theology for Christians: From Ancient Context to Enduring Belief* (Downers Grove: IVP Academics, 2017), 31.

<sup>87</sup> The English Standard Version (ESV) of the Bible will be used unless otherwise noted.

<sup>88</sup> Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought*, 75; Walton, *Old Testament Theology*, 31, 34.

<sup>89</sup> Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 95. Sigmund Mowinckel takes it a step further by hypothesizing that certain psalms (47, 93, 95-100) entitled “Enthronement Psalms” are at the core of a reconstructed enthronement festival celebrating annually the renewed kingship of Yahweh. Sigmund Mowinckel, *Psalms Studies, Volume 1*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 183-184, 186.

<sup>90</sup> John Oswalt, “God,” ed. Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville, DOTP (Downers Grove: IVP Academics, 2012), Revealers, e-book. John Walton presents this difference through the terms theogony (origin of the gods) and ontology (what it means for something to exist). He contends that the terms become intertwined in ancient creation mythology “as the natural world comes into being along with the gods who embody the various elements of the cosmos...[thus] something came into existence when it was separated out as a distinct entity, given a function, and given a name.” Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought*, 48.

17; 2 Kgs 19:15; 1 Chr 29:11). As Lord (יְיָ) of creation, there is no realm or god above him or beside him to limit his absolute sovereignty.<sup>91</sup> John Goldingay states of the meaning of יְיָ, “Lord is a word that applies to the master of the household or the king of the realm or the owner of some property. Being Lord means that your word goes [...] Yhwh can do anything, be anywhere, and know anything.”<sup>92</sup> Yahweh established his authority as King at creation when he set limits to the sea, brought light out of darkness, established the elements of weather, and set the seasons through the celestial beings (Gen 1:1-14; Job 38:8-38).<sup>93</sup> God is also called Lord in contexts that manifest his power (Ps 59:11; 147:5; Is 10:33). Marc Zvi Brettler contends that even though human kings are designated by the title “master” or “lord,” (יְיָ) God as Lord is distinguished syntactically and morphologically and when used of Yahweh, “Lord” expresses God’s ultimate royal power.<sup>94</sup>

### **Yahweh the Sustainer and Sovereign of All Nations**

Because Israel understood Yahweh as the Creator-God, they believed he not only ordered the cosmos but also maintained that order.<sup>95</sup> Yahweh was viewed as the sovereign over all the activities on earth; and as Creator, he controlled the weather, the crop cycles, and all people groups. As Creator, he alone is the supreme ruler over the affairs of every kingdom, state, and

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<sup>91</sup> Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 60.

<sup>92</sup> John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel’s Faith* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 59.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>94</sup> Marc Zvi Brettler, *God Is King: Understanding an Israelite Metaphor* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2009), 42, 44.

<sup>95</sup> Walton, *Old Testament Theology*, 54.

empire and can move and manipulate them as he sees fit. As Creator and Sovereign, he is enthroned in heaven and watches over all mankind and every nation is subservient to him and under his rule (e.g., Ps 33:13-19; 89:9-13).<sup>96</sup> John Oswalt states of Israel's theology, "Yahweh is not one of the gods of the world; he is the only God, and there is no nation that can independently shape its own destiny without reference to him."<sup>97</sup>

This characteristic of God's sovereignty as king and ruler over all nations is repeatedly evidenced in scripture. For example, the Song of Moses in Exodus 15:1-18 commemorates Yahweh's deliverance over Pharaoh and culminates with a doxology of enthronement; "the Lord will reign forever and ever" (v. 18), celebrating Yahweh as Sovereign King.<sup>98</sup> Isaiah not only reiterates God's sovereignty over the nations but also shows how much greater Yahweh is by metaphorically stating that Egypt and Assyria are like a "fly" and a "bee" controlled by the whistle of the Lord (Is 7:18). Daniel and Jeremiah attest that Nebuchadnezzar was Yahweh's servant doing his work; he ruled because Yahweh had given the kingdom to him (Jer 27:6-7; Dan 4:31). Daniel also asserts that the Most High rules kingdoms and gives them to whomever he chooses (Dan 4:17, 25, 32; 5:21). In a similar vein, the biblical prophets delivered oracles and judgments against the nations as a way of expressing that the whole world is under the sovereignty of God and is accountable to him (e.g., Hab 2; Zeph 2; Amos 1).<sup>99</sup> The greatness of God's sovereignty is layered throughout the biblical text as God is declared King of the nations (Jer 10:7), the Everlasting King (Jer 10:10; Ps 10:16), King over all the earth (Ps 47:8), King of

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<sup>96</sup> Seok, "God as Creator and Sovereign," 28.

<sup>97</sup> Oswalt, "God," Lord of History, e-book.

<sup>98</sup> Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 94.

<sup>99</sup> Oswalt, "God," Lord of History, e-book.

heaven (Dan 4:34), and the Great King of all divine beings (Ps 95:3; Is 19:4).<sup>100</sup> Thus, Yahweh alone is the Lord of Hosts and the Sovereign King whose rule is absolute (Is 44:6; Jer 10:10; 46:18; Zech 14:9, 16, 17; Mal 1:14).<sup>101</sup> Only he controls the destiny and actions of all humanity, including the political and military affairs of every kingdom; and subsequently, every king is under his direct authority.

### God as Israel's Divine King

#### **Yahweh, Israel's King through Covenant**

Though Yahweh is acknowledged as Lord and Creator over all nations, he is King over Israel in a unique way, through divine election, embodied within the covenant.<sup>102</sup> At Sinai, the agenda of the Sovereign of the earth becomes historical as he seeks the formation of a spiritual and political community that coheres with his plans and purposes as the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer of creation through covenant.<sup>103</sup> The covenant between Yahweh and Israel took the form of a familiar concept in the social and political thinking of the ANE. In the ANE, a covenant was not simply an agreement, but it was a solemn bond between parties and involved a firm commitment to the relationship and the obligations it established.<sup>104</sup> As J. A. Thompson states, “for all Semitic peoples, normal life was dominated by the covenant concept [...and] the

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<sup>100</sup> Brettler, *God Is King*, 32.

<sup>101</sup> Oswalt, “God,” Sovereign King, e-book.

<sup>102</sup> Robin Routledge, *Old Testament Theology: A Thematic Approach* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 228.

<sup>103</sup> Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 97.

<sup>104</sup> Routledge, *Old Testament Theology*, 163.



idea that a covenant existed between Israel and her God YHWH was a striking application of a well-known ‘secular’ picture to a ‘religious’ relationship.”<sup>105</sup>

Two forms of covenants/treaties were common practice in the Middle East by the second millennium B.C.; those between equals on a parity basis, and those between powerful monarchs and their lesser counterparts on a suzerain-vassal basis.<sup>106</sup> It is the latter, the suzerain-vassal treaty, that most closely resembles the covenant between Yahweh and his people. George Mendenhall notes that there are significant parallels between the Sinaitic covenant and the Hittite suzerain-vassal treaties of the same period.<sup>107</sup> In the Hittite suzerainty treaties, the inferior (the vassal) is bound by an oath and obligated to obey the suzerain, the great king.<sup>108</sup> Because of an act of benevolence and favor granted to the vassal by the suzerain (which in Israel’s case is the liberation from slavery in Egypt and promise of a land grant, cf. Ex 20:2; Deut 6:10), the

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<sup>105</sup> J. A. Thompson, “Near Eastern Suzerain-Vassal Concept in the Religion of Israel,” *The Journal of Religious History* 3, no. 1 (June 1964): 1. Thompson avers that the ‘covenant’ idea has a well-authenticated background with many extant treaty texts available. He also attests to the fact that references to covenants have been found in old Sumerian texts that date back to the third millennium B.C.; and by the second millennium, international treaties were common practice in the ANE. *Ibid.*, 1-2.

<sup>106</sup> There are many examples of these forms of treaties such as the Stele of Vultures, the Tell El Amarna letters, and the treaty between the Hittites and Egyptians during the reign of Ramses II. Thompson, “Near Eastern Suzerain-Vassal Concept,” 2; George E Mendenhall, “Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition,” *The Biblical Archaeologist* 17, no. 3 (September 1954): 55.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 55-56. See also Zuck et al. who argue that the Sinaitic covenant most closely resembles that of the New Kingdom Hittite documents which regulate the affairs between the Great Hittite kings and their vassals. Roy B. Zuck et al., *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1991), xli.

<sup>108</sup> There is debate regarding the dating of Deuteronomy that argues the covenant more closely resembles the Neo-Assyrian treaty texts, however, Mendenhall and others (e.g., Kitchen) find the structure of the Assyrian treaties to be too different. Mendenhall, “Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition,” 55-56. See also, Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 288. For further information regarding the similarities with the treaties of Assyria, see Moshe Weinfeld, who finds similarities between the curses of Deuteronomy 28 and the Assyrian “Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon”; Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford, England: Clarendon, 1972).

devotion of the vassal is expressed as the logical consequence.<sup>109</sup> Hence, Yahweh as Suzerain freed Israel from Egypt and now they were given the opportunity to become the willing vassal of him as their Divine Overlord.<sup>110</sup> Mendenhall stipulates that “the primary purpose of the suzerainty treaty was to establish a firm relationship of mutual support between the two parties...in which the interests of the Hittite sovereign were of primary and ultimate concern.”<sup>111</sup>

In the same way, the covenant between Israel and Yahweh bound the community of Israel to the will and purposes of God as their suzerain who presides over, not only Israel but all nation-states and all of creation.<sup>112</sup> In the suzerain treaties, the vassal swore an oath of allegiance to obey, and they exchanged future obedience for past benefit. In other words, the great king offered protection in return for loyalty and obedience to his stipulations. However, the stipulations were binding only upon the vassal, and only the vassal was sworn by oath to obey.<sup>113</sup> This procured faith on the part of the vassal who was obligated to trust in the benevolence of the sovereign.<sup>114</sup>

In light of the suzerain-vassal environment surrounding Israel, it is not surprising that she came to understand her relationship with Yahweh in similar terms.<sup>115</sup> In the Hebrew Bible, the

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<sup>109</sup> Mendenhall, “Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition,” 58.

<sup>110</sup> Routledge, *Old Testament Theology*, 162.

<sup>111</sup> Other points of similarity between the Sinaitic covenant and the Hittite suzerain-vassal treaties include the personal relationship assumed in the covenant, the impersonal statement of law, the detailed obligations imposed on the vassal, the placement of the treaty in the temple under the protection of the deity, and the establishment of blessings and curses. See Mendenhall, “Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition,” 56, 59-60.

<sup>112</sup> Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 97.

<sup>113</sup> Routledge, *Old Testament Theology*, 56.

<sup>114</sup> Mendenhall, “Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition,” 56.

<sup>115</sup> Thompson, “Near Eastern Suzerain-Vassal Concept in the Religion of Israel,” 6.

term used for all types of covenants or treaties (those at the personal, inter-tribal, interstate, or international level) is בְּרִית.<sup>116</sup> Similar to other ANE treaties, the term could be used for those of equal status (Gen 14:13; 21:27,32), or be imposed by an overlord on those of lesser status (Josh 9:11; 1 Sam 11:1-2; 1 Kgs 15:19-20; Ezek 17:13-19).<sup>117</sup> Weinfeld points out the importance placed on any type of covenant, and stresses that the term בְּרִית is not simply an agreement or settlement between two parties but implies the concept of “imposition,” “liability,” “obligation,” and “commandment.”<sup>118</sup> Thus, much like the covenants of the ANE, a Hebrew covenant had eternal validity and was to be observed faithfully and sincerely, and if the covenant was violated, transgressed, or forsaken, penalties were incurred (e.g., Jer 11:3-4).<sup>119</sup>

The fact that Yahweh liberated Israel from slavery (Ex 20:2; Deut 5:6), “commanded his covenant” (Ps 111:9; Judg 2:20) and promised to take his vassal under protection (Deut 1:30; 3:22; 7:18-24), aligns nicely with the cultural suzerain-vassal concept. Subsequently, Israel’s covenant was a commitment established and confirmed with an oath that gave the covenant binding validity (Ex 19:8; Deut 29:12-13; Josh 24:22-26).<sup>120</sup> “YHWH was Israel’s sovereign who had performed saving and delivering acts on her behalf in times past and who then appealed to her on the basis of these acts to enter into a covenant with him and to render him undivided

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<sup>116</sup> Mendenhall, “Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition,” 5.

<sup>117</sup> Routledge, *Old Testament Theology*, 164.

<sup>118</sup> Weinfeld, “בְּרִית,” in *TDOT*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), Meaning, e-book.

<sup>119</sup> The covenant often involved some type of ceremony in which the participants were reminded that if they broke the covenant, “such and such” would happen (e.g., the cutting of an animal in two, Gen 15, Jer 34). Ibid., IV Violation of Covenant, e-book.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., Meaning, e-book.

allegiance and loyal service.”<sup>121</sup> Consequently, this allegiance and loyal service included sole worship of and trust in Yahweh. This included a rejection of all foreign gods and entanglements where trust was placed elsewhere, which included garnering foreign protection and aid. Because Yahweh was Israel’s Suzerain, they were not to accept the help and subsequently the authority of another king, which would be considered betrayal. Israel’s covenant with Yahweh meant that they were to refrain from these types of covenants with their neighbors.<sup>122</sup> The covenant God made with Israel was as their Suzerain, he alone was Israel’s Great King from whom blessing was bestowed, protection was promised, and obedience was expected. As her King and Sovereign, Yahweh could command Israel’s total commitment and require her to depart from every false allegiance.<sup>123</sup>

### **Yahweh, Israel’s King Through Relationship**

Despite the similarities with the ANE, the covenant between God and Israel differed from the suzerain-vassal treaties in the reason for its establishment. Most treaties of this kind were based on conquest, where an emperor conquered a hostile people, and the vassal was obligated to submit to the overlord to avoid annihilation.<sup>124</sup> Yahweh, on the other hand, conquered on *behalf* of his people and offered something he did not have to offer to a people who could offer little back but love and devotion.<sup>125</sup> In a unique way, the covenant (בְּרִית) made between God and

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<sup>121</sup> Thompson, “Near Eastern Suzerain-Vassal Concept in the Religion of Israel,” 9.

<sup>122</sup> Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 62; Mendenhall, “Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition,” 64.

<sup>123</sup> Thompson, “Near Eastern Suzerain-Vassal Concept in the Religion of Israel,” 11.

<sup>124</sup> John Oswalt, “God,” Covenant Partner, e-book.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

Israel was expressed in the more personal terms of a marriage contract (e.g., Prov 2:17; Mal 2:14) and was likened to the bond of marriage between husband and wife. It went beyond just an agreement between a great king and his vassal, and involved a more intimate association (e.g., Is 54:5; Jer 2:2; 3:14, 20; 31:32; Hos 2:7, 16).<sup>126</sup> The covenant concept of marriage insinuated that it was a bond that included the commitment associated between husband and wife; and the obligations and responsibilities of loyalty and devotion the marriage relationship imposed. Israel was Yahweh's כִּנְיָן "treasured possession" denoting she was the personal property of the King (Ex 19:5; Deut 4:20).<sup>127</sup> When the covenant was violated, not only did God feel betrayed as Israel's Suzerain but he also felt betrayed on a personal level as her husband, provider, and protector. When Israel chose to go outside the covenantal bonds and the commitment she made to Yahweh, either by worshipping other gods or by relying on other nations and kings for protection and aid, it was a violation of the covenant and considered religious and/or political adultery.

The covenant reiterates and sets forth the idea of God as the Divine King of Israel; God alone is sovereign and the "ultimate source and repository of political and moral authority and as such can tolerate no competing claims to such authority from other gods or humans."<sup>128</sup> Even though God allowed Israel to have a monarchy, his kingship reigned supreme and it was expected that each human king placed over the nation would submit to the covenant established with Yahweh as the Suzerain. As Israel's husband, the covenant with Yahweh extended the

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<sup>126</sup> Routledge, *Old Testament Theology*, 164-165.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>128</sup> Martin Sicker, *The Rise and Fall of the Ancient Israelite States* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2003), 10.

obligations on a more intimate level, stressing the deep love God had for his people and the level of commitment he expected from them in return. Thus, the outcome of the Sinai covenant is the formation of a new entity, a new nation; one that participates in economic and sociopolitical life, sometimes even on a military basis. However, all of their involvement internationally was to be done in response to the invisible King who in power and sovereignty transcends all of the conventional limitations of human kingship.<sup>129</sup> God was to be deemed the overlord par excellence whose kingship is far above that of any other human monarch.<sup>130</sup> God was also to be considered Israel's provider, protector, and partner in a way that far exceeded any other covenant. Thompson summarizes it well,

The metaphor of the suzerain-vassal relationship gave expression to this relationship in a most vivid and concrete way. And yet, it was only a metaphor. The relationship between YHWH and Israel was something far deeper than could be defined as a legal compact. It was concerned with the solemn engagement and commitment of YHWH to Israel and of Israel to YHWH on the highest possible level. It involved a religious relationship of the highest order with reciprocal faithfulness of a kind that was unknown among the suzerains and vassals of the ancient Near East. In that relationship election and commitment were the fundamental elements. The suzerain-vassal metaphor only gave formal and concrete expression to the meaning of the relationship involved in that election and commitment.<sup>131</sup>

Yahweh was Israel's Suzerain through covenant, but because of his love for his people his dedication went beyond any normal treaty on a more intimate level. His election promised faithfulness, blessing, commitment, and divine protection.

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<sup>129</sup> Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 98.

<sup>130</sup> Brettler, *God Is King*, 33.

<sup>131</sup> Thompson, "Near Eastern Suzerain-Vassal Concept in the Religion of Israel," 16.

## God as Divine Warrior

### Similarities with ANE

As Israel's Suzerain King, Yahweh established himself as her sole protector and Divine Warrior.<sup>132</sup> Like the above comparison of the suzerain-vassal treaty, this too took on dimensions of the cultural environment surrounding Israel. In the ancient world, kings depended on many avenues to deliver them in times of war, diplomacy, military strength, marriage alliances, treasuries, etc. but they also depended on their patron deity.<sup>133</sup> Tremper Longman III states of the biblical text, "the imagery associated with the Divine Warrior theme is associated with a broader Near Eastern background, including Mesopotamian and Ugaritic gods and goddesses who are pictured as waging warfare on both a cosmic and historical level."<sup>134</sup> Divine warfare in the ANE was waged under the aegis of a deity and virtually all armies viewed warfare as fundamentally religious.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> There has been much scholarly debate regarding Yahweh as Warrior within the context of conquest involving holy war and extermination (*ḥāram*), but this facet of Yahweh as Warrior is outside the scope of this study and will not be addressed. The focus presented here will be on Yahweh as the Divine Warrior who protects against foreign foes and fights on behalf of his people when they, or the land he has granted them, are threatened. For more information regarding *ḥāram* warfare see Richard D. Nelson, "Destroy, Utterly," in *NIDB*, ed. Katherine Dobb (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009); Lohfink, "תָּרַם," in *TDOT*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977).

<sup>133</sup> Sanchez, "Royal Limitation," 61. See also Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 47-48.

<sup>134</sup> Tremper III Longman, "Psalm 98: A Divine Warrior Victory Song," *JETS* 27, no. 3 (September 1984): 272.

<sup>135</sup> Charlie Trimm, *Fighting for the King and the Gods: A Survey of Warfare in the Ancient Near East* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2017), 553; F.R. Ames, "Warfare and Divine Warfare," ed. Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville, *DOTP* (Downers Grove: IVP Academics, 2012), Definition, e-book. See also Bertil Albrektson, *History and the Gods* (Lund, Sweden: CWK Gleerup, 1967), 28-41.

Wars were considered divinely orchestrated with the chief god of each nation considered the most important participant.<sup>136</sup> Divine warfare was viewed as a cosmic struggle between natural and supernatural forces in the terrestrial and celestial realms. The deity was envisioned as a warrior leading the army to battle against an evil antagonist to protect those who were favored.<sup>137</sup> The deity could also assume the role of warrior to fight on behalf of his people to defend their land or expand their territory. Victory indicated the superiority and power of one god over another. However, defeat could indicate that the losing god did not exert his power to the full, or that he turned his back on his people.<sup>138</sup> Evidence of this cultural mindset can be found in many ANE hymns, myths, and stories in which the gods fought each other for supremacy, fought to bring order to the world, or simply battled over a particular goal.<sup>139</sup>

The thought process and literature of Israel were similar to her ANE neighbors, and references praising the martial ability of Yahweh are common in the Old Testament.<sup>140</sup> “Yahweh is depicted as warrior both at the beginnings of Israel’s history, as early poetry and prose testify, and also at the end of the Old Testament period, as stated in prophetic and apocalyptic

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<sup>136</sup> Jonathan Greer, John Hilber, and John Walton, *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2018), 512.

<sup>137</sup> Ames, “Warfare and Divine Warfare,” Definition, e-book.

<sup>138</sup> Benedict, *The God of the Old Testament in Relation to War*, 6.

<sup>139</sup> For example, the Leiden Hymns of Egypt refer frequently to the gods acting as divine warriors on behalf of a city or pharaoh. Divine combat is also incorporated in Hittite (cf. “The Illuyanka Tales”) and Mesopotamian myths (cf. “A Hymn to Papulegarra”), and Assyrian reliefs (cf. the relief from Nimrud). Trimm, *Fighting for the King and the Gods*, 554, 557, 559, 562. F. R. Ames gives several more examples in the Sumerian Stela, Epilogue to the Laws of Hammurabi, the Exaltation of Inanna, and the Baal cycle. Ames, “Warfare and Divine Warfare,” Ancient Near Eastern Context, e-book. See also P.D. Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973); Albrektson, *History and the Gods*.

<sup>140</sup> Trimm, *Fighting for the King and the Gods*, 564.



writings.”<sup>141</sup> In one of the earliest poems in the Old Testament, the Song of the Sea, Yahweh is presented as a victorious warrior who delivered and saved his people (Ex 15). The Song of the Sea attests, “The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is his name...your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy. In the greatness of your majesty you overthrew your adversaries” (Ex 15:3, 6b-7a NRSV). In the royal psalm in 2 Samuel 22:7-18 and its parallel in Psalm 18:7-18, the dominant image of Yahweh is that of a warrior who delivers the king in times of distress and trains and equips him for war.<sup>142</sup> Many of the Psalms parallel the same concept and present Yahweh as Israel’s Divine Suzerain and King. He is their Divine Warrior and protector, the God of the armies of Israel who fights on behalf of his people (Ps 18, Ps 24:8; 68 1-4; 114:1-8; 124:1-8).

Yahweh is consistently portrayed as Israel’s protector who goes before his people as a mighty conquering warrior in battle (e.g., Ex 14:13-14, 25; Num 10:33-36; 14:8-9; Is 30:31-32; Zeph 3:17).<sup>143</sup> As Suzerain over the entire earth, no one can pose a threat to him, nor is anything beyond his control.<sup>144</sup> This is especially evident in Deuteronomy when the renewal of the nation and covenant is in its infancy. God wants his people to know and understand that he is the one that fights for Israel against her enemies, and he is the one that gives victory (Deut 1:30; 3:22; 7:17-24; 20:4). The hymn in Deuteronomy 33 celebrates Yahweh as Warrior through a song of praise for Yahweh’s aid in the march of conquest and establishes Yahweh’s kingship over Israel

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<sup>141</sup> Millard Lind, *Yahweh Is a Warrior: The Theology of Warfare in Ancient Israel* (Scottsdale, PA: Herold Press, 1980), 23.

<sup>142</sup> Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel*, 121.

<sup>143</sup> Zuck et al., *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, 21b.

<sup>144</sup> Walton, *Old Testament Theology*, 56.

through his might and victory.<sup>145</sup> The cry of the latter prophets makes it abundantly clear that it is Yahweh who assumes the role of warrior against the adversaries of Israel, and he alone is sufficient to protect and guard them (Is 31:3-5; Jer 50:25; Hab 3:3-15).<sup>146</sup> The prophets also attest that any violation of trust in Yahweh as their Divine Warrior and protector was considered covenantal adultery and was condemned (e.g., Ezek 16; Hos 5; 7:4-16; 8:9).

### **Dissimilarities with ANE**

Despite these similarities with the ANE, Yahweh stands apart. He is beyond comparison with any other god and is depicted as the Great Warrior God whose name is “Yahweh of Armies” (e.g., Jer 32:18),<sup>147</sup> which is commonly associated with God as the commander of the heavenly armies that fight with and for Israel (1 Sam 17:45; 2 Kgs 6:8-23).<sup>148</sup> The title “Yahweh Armies/Lord of Hosts” or “Yahweh God of Hosts” (יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ צְבָאוֹת/יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת) as a divine epitaph occurs some 285 times and is the most common designation for God in the Old Testament.<sup>149</sup> The term צְבָאוֹת is simply defined as “hosts” or “armies” but it is never used alone and is only used exclusively with some form of the Divine Name. It contains an unmistakable

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<sup>145</sup> Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel*, 86.

<sup>146</sup> Ames, “Warfare and Divine Warfare,” *Etiology*, e-book.

<sup>147</sup> Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 65.

<sup>148</sup> E. Theodor Jr. Mullen, “Lord of Hosts,” in *NIDB*, ed. Katherine Dobb (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009). Lord of Hosts, e-book.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

reference to divine kingship, power, military might, and authority, and shows Yahweh to be incomparable among the heavenly beings (Ps 89:7, 9).<sup>150</sup>

Most of the occurrences of *צְבָאוֹת* יְהוָה are found in the latter prophets, mainly in the oracles against the nations in Isaiah and Jeremiah. In these instances, Yahweh is shown to have absolute power and prominence, particularly in those situations where Israel seems to be powerless before other nations.<sup>151</sup> Thus, as Walter Brueggemann states, “the prophets—both in their citation of foreign nations as instruments of YHWH’s judgment on Israel and in the Oracles Against the Nations dismiss autonomous imperial power [and] regularly assert YHWH’s rule and YHWH’s purpose” (e.g., Is 14:24-27).<sup>152</sup> Miller contends the Divine epitaph was used to show Israel need not fear, for her wars were Yahweh’s wars (1 Sam 18:17; 25:28; Num 21:14), and her victory was dependent upon his mighty intervention.<sup>153</sup>

Yahweh is portrayed as having absolute power and his mighty intervention was often displayed in extraordinary marvels (e.g., 1 Kgs 8:42) through the use of a “strong or mighty hand” (or “right hand”) and an “outstretched arm” (e.g., Ex 15:6, 12; Deut 7:19; Ps 44:3; 89:8-13).<sup>154</sup> Millard Lind argues that Yahweh fought by means of miracle, which he defines as an “act of deliverance that was outside of Israel’s control, beyond the manipulation of any human

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<sup>150</sup> Zobelt, “*צְבָאוֹת*,” in *TDOT*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977). I Expressions, The Meaning, e-book.

<sup>151</sup> Oswalt, “God,” Sovereign King, e-book.

<sup>152</sup> Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 78.

<sup>153</sup> Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel*, 91.

<sup>154</sup> Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 65.

agency.”<sup>155</sup> Yahweh’s relationship with Israel began as a miraculous deliverance from a great foreign power through the use of signs and wonders. This event, which occurred within the institution of warfare, provided the basis for a new way of thinking and a new structure which was given at Sinai.<sup>156</sup> Consequently, deliverance through the miraculous is how Israel differed from her ANE neighbors. As Lind states, “the central issue of Israel’s self-understanding therefore was Yahweh’s relation to history through Torah and prophetic word, as brought into tension with Near Eastern myth where the gods were related to history through the coercive structures of kingship law and military power.”<sup>157</sup> Instead of using military strength and the “kingship structures” of the ANE, Yahweh promised protection and salvation through obedience. As will be explained below, covenantal faith on the part of Israel and her king meant that they did not rely on their own military, soldiers, and weapons for defense but instead were to put their trust in Yahweh their Divine Warrior who proved miraculous to save.<sup>158</sup>

Another avenue important for the thesis of this study, as is attested in the Song of Moses (Deut 32) and the latter prophetic corpus, is that Yahweh may choose to turn and fight against Israel in judgment and punish her for violation of the covenant.<sup>159</sup> As stated above, in the ancient mindset a god could choose not to exert his full power against enemies, or he could abandon his

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<sup>155</sup> Lind, *Yahweh Is a Warrior*, 23.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 32-33.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>159</sup> Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 92.

people, or he could side with the enemy and actually fight against his people.<sup>160</sup> Lind states “when Israel became like Egypt, Yahweh turned against his own people just as he had been against Egypt.”<sup>161</sup> Jeremiah clearly threatens this in Jeremiah 21:5-6, “I myself will fight against you with outstretched hand and strong arm, in anger and in fury and in great wrath. And I will strike down the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast. They shall die of great pestilence.” Isaiah reiterates that Yahweh will fight against Israel and clarifies that exile was the method Yahweh used to turn against Israel as their enemy (Is 63:10).<sup>162</sup>

## The Law of the King

### The King as Vice-Regent

Yahweh is the Sovereign King of the universe who controls the destiny of every nation. Yahweh is not only the sovereign of the cosmos, but he is also the Suzerain King of Israel and her Divine Warrior. As King and Suzerain, the biblical text presents Yahweh as the divine ruler who appointed human monarchs who were to be subject to his authority (Deut 17:15).<sup>163</sup> In this regard, Israel’s king was not unlike the rest of the ANE where each king functioned as a servant and vice-regent of the god/s.<sup>164</sup> In each society, the king’s authority came from the deity who

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<sup>160</sup> Marion Benedict, *The God of the Old Testament in Relation to War* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1927), 7.

<sup>161</sup> Lind, *Yahweh Is a Warrior*, 33.

<sup>162</sup> Richard Nysse, “Yahweh Is a Warrior,” *Word & World* 7, no. 2 (1987): 193.

<sup>163</sup> Sanchez, “Royal Limitation,” iii.

<sup>164</sup> Sanchez points out that Egypt was the exception, as the Egyptian Pharaoh was thought to become the actual embodiment of the god. *Ibid.*, 20. See also Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 3-5; Ivan Engnell, *Studies in Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East* (Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell, 1967).

entrusted to him the care of the people, and the king's response was to stand in a position of submission to his god.<sup>165</sup> Henri Frankfort indicates that every king was subject to three broad duties. They were to interpret the will of the god, represent the people before the god, and manage the realm.<sup>166</sup> Daniel Block adds that ANE kings were to act as warriors to protect the nation, guarantee justice, and ensure the right order of worship in the cult.<sup>167</sup> Thus, as vice-regent to the god, the king's administration of the realm took on the responsibilities of justice, prosperity, military defense, and cult administrator.<sup>168</sup>

Like her neighbors, the institution of Israel's monarchy was to always be subordinate to Yahweh and under his direct rule.<sup>169</sup> As such, Israel's monarchy was never meant to usurp Yahweh's role as the Divine King.<sup>170</sup> Instead, the earthly king was to be a vice-regent with Yahweh, recognizing his royal dependence on Yahweh as the anointing one.<sup>171</sup> Ming Him Ko notes that the "kingship of Yahweh should be seen not as an antithesis to human kingship but as a foundational prerequisite to make a true human king possible."<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Sanchez, "Royal Limitation," 22, 25.

<sup>166</sup> Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, 252.

<sup>167</sup> Block, *Deuteronomy*, 304.

<sup>168</sup> For specific examples see Sanchez, "Royal Limitation," 22-31; Frankfort, *Kingship and the God*, chap. 18.

<sup>169</sup> Barker, "Apostate Rejection in the United and Divided Monarchies," 225.

<sup>170</sup> J. Edward Ownes and Daniel Durken, *Deuteronomy: Volume 6* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 30.

<sup>171</sup> Ming Him Ko, "Fusion-Point Hermeneutics: A Theological Interpretation of Saul's Rejection in Light of the Shema as the Rule of Faith," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 7, no. 1 (2013), 73.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

Israel's king, however, was also to be distinct from among the nations through his sole reliance on Yahweh as his Divine King and Warrior. As Gerbrandt surmised, Yahweh was not opposed to a human monarchy, instead, he stipulated the kind of monarchy Israel was to have.<sup>173</sup> It was only through the guidance and direction of Yahweh that the monarchy was to be established; and that establishment was to be continually under Yahweh's direct control. Israel was to adapt the culture of kingship that surrounded her in order to fit into Yahweh's covenant, and Deuteronomy describes these differences through limitations and covenant loyalty.<sup>174</sup> Sanchez points out that these limitations are the key difference between Israel's monarchy and that of her neighbors. Gerbrandt argues that Israel's monarchy was unique and countercultural because of her relationship with and reliance on the Torah and her God.<sup>175</sup> I will argue that Israel's king was to be "set apart" from the nations in *both* covenant loyalty and royal limitations, they go hand in hand to produce the kind of king Yahweh desired.

### **The Limitations of the King**

The stipulations placed on the monarchy are made explicit in The Law of the King in Deuteronomy 17:14-20, which limits the rule of the king under the ultimate rule of Yahweh the Divine Sovereign.<sup>176</sup> Patricia Dutcher-Walls reveals that the laws in Deuteronomy 16:18-18:22 are significant because they place all of the ruling authority of the nation under the authority of

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<sup>173</sup> Gerbrandt, "Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History," 88-102.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 154-156.

<sup>175</sup> Sanchez, "Royal Limitation," 19; Gerbrandt, "Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History," 190.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 152-153.

Yahweh and within the covenant character of the law for the people.<sup>177</sup> This section of Deuteronomy, which is at the structural center of the book, suggests that a primary concern of the book is the matter of proper leadership over the people of God.<sup>178</sup> These various “official” positions provide a balance of power that limits the power of any one office, especially that of the king, to assure a sort of “checks and balances” for the nation.<sup>179</sup> Bernard Levinson agrees and proposes that this is distinctive to Israel as the “legal corpus of Deuteronomy conceptualizes the king in a way that rejects all prevailing models of monarchic power within both ancient Israel and the broader Near East. Deuteronomy submits a utopian manifesto for a constitutional monarchy that sharply delimits the power of the king.”<sup>180</sup>

The Law of the King looks forward to a future context in which Israel has taken possession of the land that God was going to give them (Deut 17:14a). Sanchez notes “Israel’s ability to obtain the blessing of Yahweh in the land was predicated on faithfulness, [and] the provision of the king was one of those blessings.”<sup>181</sup> This text allows for a king who is like the other nations, but also safeguards against the type of king that the other nations have. The specifications listed represent the attitudes and characteristics of a king over a nation that was

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<sup>177</sup> Patricia Dutcher-Walls, “The Circumscription of the King: Deuteronomy 17:16-17 in Its Ancient Social Context,” *JBL* 121, no. 4 (2002), 604.

<sup>178</sup> Duane Christensen et al., *Deuteronomy 1-21:9, Volume 6A: Second Edition* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2014), 381.

<sup>179</sup> Dutcher-Walls, “The Circumscription of the King,” 604.

<sup>180</sup> Bernard M Levinson, “The Reconceptualization of Kingship in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History’s Transformation of Torah,” *Vetus Testamentum* 51, no. 4 (2001), 511.

<sup>181</sup> Sanchez, “Royal Limitation,” 110.



primarily a theocracy.<sup>182</sup> Earlier in Deuteronomy (4:15-19; 7:3-4; 11:16; 12:29-31; 13:2, 6, 13), Moses warned of the seductive attractions of Canaanite religion, here he warns of the seductive attractions of the Canaanite political system.<sup>183</sup> To protect against this kind of king, Moses places three broad requirements/limitations on the monarchy in a way that exemplifies the teaching of Deuteronomy. First, the monarch was to be instituted by Yahweh and from within the covenant and community of Israel (17:15).<sup>184</sup> Second, the Law markedly reduces the power of the king and any abuse of power by intentionally limiting the king in the areas of military, diplomatic, and monetary strength (17:16-17).<sup>185</sup> Third, the law reminds the king that his full allegiance and loyalty, and that of his people, are to be given to Yahweh, which results in a lasting reign in the land (17:18-20).<sup>186</sup>

*Instituted by Yahweh and Part of the Community (Deut 17:15)*

The first requirement in The Law of the King specifies that the king is to be chosen by Yahweh. Deuteronomy 17:15a declares, “you may indeed set a king over you whom the Lord your God will choose” (שָׁוֹם תַּשִּׂים עָלֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ). This confirmed the king was subordinate to Yahweh and continually under the sovereign rule of Yahweh. It also took the choice of the king out of the hands of the people, and the leadership, and put it directly under the

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<sup>182</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 20c, e-book.

<sup>183</sup> Daniel I Block, “The Burden of Leadership: The Mosaic Paradigm of Kingship (Deut 17:14-20),” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162, no. 647 (July 2005): 263.

<sup>184</sup> Dutcher-Walls, “The Circumscription of the King,” 604.

<sup>185</sup> Sanchez, “Royal Limitation,” iii.

<sup>186</sup> Dutcher-Walls, “The Circumscription of the King,” 604.

jurisdiction of Yahweh. Consequently, it ensured that the office was not dependent on popularity or military strength but filled only by one approved by God (cf., 1 Sam 16:7).<sup>187</sup>

The second half of verse 15 declares the king is to be “one from among your brothers” (מִקֵּרֶבְךָ אֶחָיִךָ). The text stresses this point by repeating this thought twice by using the subsequent phrase, לֹא תוֹכֵל לָתֵת עָלֶיךָ אִישׁ נָכְרִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא־אֶחָיִךָ הוּא, “do not put a foreigner over you who is not your brother,” emphasizing that the king is to be someone under the commands and conditions of the covenant (17:15b).<sup>188</sup> This eliminated the king as an idealistic or utopian ruler and restricted him to the fundamental theology of Deuteronomy which stresses the brotherhood of the nation under the covenant.<sup>189</sup> Craigie notes, “As a theocratic state, Israel’s only true king was the Lord...[and] the legislation given here makes certain that the king would remain aware both of his human status as a man among his brethren, and also of his status in relation to the kingship of God.”<sup>190</sup> Like his brethren, the king was subject to the covenant and under the rule of Yahweh.

#### *The Limitations of Military, Diplomatic, and Monetary Strength (Deut 17:16-17)*

The Law of the King markedly reduces the power of the king and subsequently any abuse of power by intentionally limiting the king in the areas of military, diplomatic, and monetary strength.<sup>191</sup> Militarily, the king was “not to acquire many horses” (וְלֹא יִרְכֹּבֶהָ לָּו סוּסִים, 17:16a). Horses represented wealth in the ANE, but they were primarily associated with warfare,

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<sup>187</sup> Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 20d.

<sup>188</sup> Gerbrandt, “Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History,” 152, 154.

<sup>189</sup> Greg (Gregory Ross) Goswell, “The Shape of Kingship in Deuteronomy 17: A Messianic Pentateuch?,” *Trinity Journal* 38, no. 2 (2017), 173.

<sup>190</sup> Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 20c.

<sup>191</sup> Sanchez, “Royal Limitation,” iii.

especially in relation to chariots and cavalry.<sup>192</sup> The limit on horses signifies a limit not only on a professional army but specifically on cavalry and chariots. Strategically, infantry troops were weak compared to a cavalry on horses or a chariot force. Chariots were symbols of power as attested in the many Egyptian paintings depicting the Pharaoh hunting, or at war in his chariot.<sup>193</sup> They were also the weapon of choice to show the power and might of a king in battle.<sup>194</sup> The stipulation on horses forced the king to concede that his strength was not in his military capabilities, the number of troops and chariots, but in the strength and presence of Yahweh as Israel's Divine Warrior in battle (e.g., Ex 15:1, 4; Deut 20:1, 4; Judg 4-5; Is 31:1-3; Ps 20:7).<sup>195</sup> As Gerbrandt argues, this was to ensure that Yahweh was responsible for Israel's defense, implying this was *not* the duty of the king.<sup>196</sup>

The king was also not to “cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire more horses” (וְלֹא־יָשִׁיב אֶת־הָעָם מִצִּירָיִם לְמַעַן הָרַבּוֹת סוּסִים, Deut 17:16b). The exact meaning of this rule is uncertain, however, this legislation may be prohibiting diplomatic trade with Egypt which would result in Israel trading men (mercenary Israelite soldiers) for horses or chariots.<sup>197</sup> These types of diplomatic negotiations were a common tool used by kings in the ANE to secure their thrones

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<sup>192</sup> Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 20e.

<sup>193</sup> Sanchez, “Royal Limitation,” 48. See also Yadin, *The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands*.

<sup>194</sup> For example, on the Kurkh Stela of Shalmaneser III, Shalmaneser III reports the number of infantry and chariots of each of the opposing kings in the Battle of Qarqar. See Patricia J Berlyn, “A Lost Battle of King Ahab Rediscovered,” *JBQ* 41, no. 1 (January 2013), 3. The Amarna Letters also show the value of a chariot in battle as the kings ask for assistance by sending troops and chariots. James B. Prichard, *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Oxford, England: Princeton University Press, 2011), 430 EA, no. 270, 271.

<sup>195</sup> Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 20e.

<sup>196</sup> Gerbrandt, “Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History,” 156.

<sup>197</sup> Craigie adds, “although Anatolia was the primary source of horses for trading purposes, the residents of Palestine would normally turn to Egypt as their main source of supply.” Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* 20e.

and protect their kingdoms.<sup>198</sup> Dutcher-Walls states it this way, “it also entails a limit on foreign entanglements and alliances to secure horses for military purposes.”<sup>199</sup> The result of such action for Israelite men would be a return to the bondage of Egypt which Yahweh strictly forbids.<sup>200</sup> This emphasis on the weakness of Israel fits well with the statement in Deuteronomy 7:7-8a which says that Yahweh chose Israel deliberately because they were “the fewest of all peoples.” Thus, ironically “the Deuteronomist sees the position of Israel as first among the nations (7:6) not as related to superior military power but to military weakness, a position due solely to Yahweh’s moral character and action.”<sup>201</sup>

The limit on the number of wives in verse 17a, “and he must not acquire many wives” (וְלֹא יִרְבֶּה־לּוֹ נָשִׁים), again signifies a limit on foreign entanglement. As Dutcher-Wells states, “from a sociological perspective, marriage among elites is an arrangement of economic, social, and political import...the use of marriage by elites, and kings in particular, [was used] to gain political advantage or establish strategic political alliances.”<sup>202</sup> Hence, the purpose behind a king acquiring many wives is political. A marriage alliance with a neighboring princess would add strength to a bond and or a treaty between two nations. Christensen, et al. specify that this “stands for political power achieved through international treaties sealed by marriage.”<sup>203</sup> A large

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<sup>198</sup> Sanchez, “Royal Limitation,” 36.

<sup>199</sup> Dutcher-Walls, “The Circumscription of the King,” 604.

<sup>200</sup> Daniel Block notes that “the specific warning is missing in previous narratives, but Moses seems to allude to a warning that has not been preserved in the biblical record.” Block, *Deuteronomy*, 305.

<sup>201</sup> Lind, *Yahweh Is a Warrior*, 147.

<sup>202</sup> Dutcher-Walls, “The Circumscription of the King,” 608.

<sup>203</sup> Christensen et al., *Deuteronomy*, 381.

and beautiful harem was also meant to impress foreign visitors and enhance the status of the king.<sup>204</sup> By limiting the number of wives, God was limiting the king's ability to visibly display his political prowess and his reliance on this tactic for status or security.<sup>205</sup>

The problem of too many wives is implicit in the next statement in verse 17b, “lest his heart turn away” (וְלֹא יִסּוּר לְבָבוֹ). His “heart” suggests the defection affects not only the outward act but the fundamental aspect of one's being (cf. Deut 6:5).<sup>206</sup> Political marriage covenants caused deviation and turning from the only true covenant Israel had with Yahweh, her husband. The command not to acquire many wives limits the temptation to apostasy that comes with marriages to those outside the community of Israel.<sup>207</sup> As will be explained below, Solomon is the perfect example of the importance of this rule. Solomon's many wives were an integral part of his foreign policy as many of his wives represented a formal political alliance.<sup>208</sup> Yet, Solomon's wives distracted him from Torah obedience as he indulged in idolatry to please them.<sup>209</sup> This apostasy led to his downfall, and the division of the kingdom (1 Kgs 11).

Lastly, the limit on wealth, “excessive silver and gold” (וְכֶסֶף וְזָהָב לֹא יִרְבֶּה־לּוֹ מְאֹד, v. 17c), restricted economic power and limited the king's accumulation of personal wealth which would extend his individual power and status above his fellow Israelites. In the ANE, a king's wealth

<sup>204</sup> Block, “The Burden of Leadership,” 268.

<sup>205</sup> Sanchez, “Royal Limitation,” 123.

<sup>206</sup> Block, *Deuteronomy*, 305.

<sup>207</sup> Christensen et al., *Deuteronomy*, 20e; Dutcher-Walls, “The Circumscription of the King,” 604.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 384.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

was gained at the expense of the people through taxation or tribute from subject states.<sup>210</sup> This limitation would restrict the king's rights in such areas as taxation, fees, plunder, and confiscation.<sup>211</sup> Peter Craigie suggests this also included limited commerce and trade with foreign nations. More importantly, the desire for wealth, which too often becomes a consuming passion, would be contrary to the ideal king whose passion is to be on the Torah and Yahweh.<sup>212</sup>

These three commands limiting military, diplomatic, and monetary strength would significantly take away any of the normal sources of royal power and force the king to solely trust in Yahweh.<sup>213</sup> Levinson points out these laws suppress the very attributes that represented the monarch's greatest source of dignity, and these limitations do more to hamstring the king than permit the exercise of any real authority.<sup>214</sup> These injunctions do not stipulate the king cannot have horses, wives, or wealth but the repetition of the phrase "make numerous for himself" (יִרְבֶּה־לֹ) emphasizes that he cannot exploit the office for his personal gain or to circumvent Yahweh.<sup>215</sup> Instead, his priority is to be on his covenantal responsibilities. The central clause in these restrictions is the statement in Deuteronomy 17:16b, "you shall never return that way again" (לֹא תִסָּפֹן לָשׁוּב בְּדֶרֶךְ הַזֶּה עוֹד), referring to Egypt. This serves as a warning that if the king fails to be obedient to the covenant, then the consequences for the people as a

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<sup>210</sup> Block, *Deuteronomy*, 305.

<sup>211</sup> Dutcher-Walls, "The Circumscription of the King," 609.

<sup>212</sup> Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 20e.

<sup>213</sup> Christensen et al., *Deuteronomy*, 384.

<sup>214</sup> Levinson, "The Reconceptualization of Kingship," 522.

<sup>215</sup> Block, *Deuteronomy*, 305-306.

whole will be a “return to Egypt,” a metaphorical statement that warns of the loss of the land God has given, and a return to slavery in a land not their own (cf. Hos 8:13; 11:5).<sup>216</sup>

*Torah Obedience and Loyalty to Yahweh (Deut 17:18-20)*

The third section of the Law reminds the king that his full allegiance and loyalty, and that of his people, are to be given to Yahweh and the covenant.<sup>217</sup> This section focuses on three overlapping areas of obedience regarding the Torah. First, the king must “write for himself a copy of this law in the presence of the Levitical priests” (וְנָכַתב לֹא אֶת־מִשְׁנֵה הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת עַל־סֵפֶר) v. 18).<sup>218</sup> Daniel Block suggests this charge is significant because it portrays the king, not as a legislator but as one who is also under legislation from a higher authority. Copying the law in the presence of the priests reveals that the king is also subordinate to the priest during this sacred act.<sup>219</sup> The second and third areas of Torah obedience go hand in hand. The king is to keep a copy of the law with him, and he is to read it “all the days of his life” (וְהָיְתָה עִמּוֹ וְקָרָא בּוֹ כָּל־יְמֵי חַיָּיו) v. 19a). Craigie calls it “the king’s *vade mecum*, his lifelong companion and source of wisdom and strength.”<sup>220</sup> Block states “the king must ‘wear the Torah’...providing a written reminder of

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<sup>216</sup> Christensen et al., *Deuteronomy*, 385.

<sup>217</sup> Dutcher-Walls, “The Circumscription of the King,” 604.

<sup>218</sup> Eugene Merrill describes that the transfer of documents, which provided the standard by which the king was to rule, was normal protocol for royal succession in the ANE. However, Christensen et al. point out that this specific act was unique to Israel for “nowhere else is the king placed in subjection to the law as it was formulated for the people as a whole, rather than one applicable to himself alone.” Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 229; Christensen et al., *Deuteronomy*, 385. The exact portion of the law the king is to write is unknown. It could mean a copy of the king’s legislation in the Law of the King (17:14-20), or it could entail just the legislative portion (vv. 12-26); perhaps it is the original document from Sinai, or it could be a reference to the entire law in Deuteronomy as the phrase is used elsewhere to describe the whole covenant (cf. 1:5; 27:3, 8, 26; 29:21, 29; 30:10, 31). Christensen et al., *Deuteronomy*, 385; Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 229; Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 20e.

<sup>219</sup> Block, *Deuteronomy*, 306.

<sup>220</sup> Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 20e.

his personal vassal status before Yahweh and his primary role as model of covenant righteousness.”<sup>221</sup> Regularly reading the Torah would express true reverence for and fear of Yahweh the Great King and be a reminder of what he was to observe and obey (v. 19b). It would also give him a proper disposition toward the covenant community (so that he does not exalt himself, v. 20a).<sup>222</sup> Through all these guidelines, the king was to model for the people the Deuteronomic ethic of Torah obedience<sup>223</sup> with the end result being a lasting dynasty in the land (v. 20b).

Based on the above analysis, what is the king’s role? First and foremost, Yahweh as the Great King, mandates that he is in control over the affairs of the nation, and as the vice-regent, the human ruler, was charged to listen and obey him.<sup>224</sup> Second, the Law of the King intentionally focuses on the military, diplomatic, and monetary restrictions of the Israelite monarchy to force the king of Israel to be subservient to Yahweh in the political arena and solely dependent on him.<sup>225</sup> This was not to be accomplished through military strength or a great army but by reliance on Yahweh and trust in his promised protection. Third, the king’s primary role was to adhere to the Torah and model covenant faithfulness, which would ensure the continued existence of the people in the land God had given them. These particular facets of the role of the king are elevated in the DH as the Dtr evaluates the role of each monarch based on their faithfulness to the covenant and Yahweh.

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<sup>221</sup> Block, *Deuteronomy*, 306.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Goswell, “The Shape of Kingship,” 173

<sup>224</sup> Barker, “Apostate Rejection,” 225.

<sup>225</sup> Sanchez, “Royal Limitation,” iii.



## The Land, Blessings, and Curses

### The Covenantal Promise of Land

The land of Canaan plays a significant role in the theological framework of Deuteronomy and the role of the king, as the land is associated with the covenantal promise God made with Abraham (Gen 12:7; 15:18; 17:8) and reestablished with Israel (Ex 6:8; 13:11; Deut 1:8, 21; 19:8-9; 29:12-13). Central to each affirmation about the land is the pronouncement that it is the gift of God to Israel based on the promises made to their fathers and to them. As Patrick Miller describes it, “all descriptions of it, of Israel’s relation to it, and of Israel’s life in it grow out of this fundamental presupposition.”<sup>226</sup>

Even though the land was a gift from God, the Old Testament is clear that the land does not belong to Israel, it belongs to Yahweh. Israel was simply gifted with occupying it (Lev 25:23-24; Deut 9:4-6; 11:8-9; Josh 22:19; Jer 2:7; Ezek 36:5; Hos 9:3). In ANE terminology, it is considered a “land grant,” a piece of land that God allows Israel to possess.<sup>227</sup> Much like the historical prologue in the Hittite treaties, the covenant in Deuteronomy refers to the land given to the vassal by the suzerain who urges the vassal to take possession of it (Deut 1:8, 21).<sup>228</sup> These feudal grants obligated the vassal to be loyal to their suzerain and the covenant.<sup>229</sup> The land was given to Israel because of Yahweh’s love and faithfulness; thus, possession of it and life in it were gifts of salvation. Accordingly, if Israel did not adhere to the terms of the covenant, the

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<sup>226</sup> Miller and Miller, “Gift of God,” 453.

<sup>227</sup> Walton, *Old Testament Theology*, 133.

<sup>228</sup> Weinfeld, “בְּרִית,” *Covenant and Law, Affinities with Ancient Near Eastern Treaties*, e-book.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., *Covenantal Theology*, e-book.

punishment resulted in the loss of the land, in other words, the land grant would be revoked (Deut 28:63; 29:28).<sup>230</sup> John Walton states it nicely, “the covenant does not therefore establish a right to the land; instead, it requires one to seek to be worthy of the gift of the land.”<sup>231</sup>

Even though these promises and stipulations do not mention the king specifically, the king’s role was extremely important in this relationship of obedience, land, and covenant.<sup>232</sup> As the chosen leader, the king was responsible for ensuring the continued existence of the people in the land. The Dtr clearly sees the king at the center of national fidelity and puts the responsibility of covenantal faithfulness squarely on his shoulders (cf. 2 Kgs 17:7-8).<sup>233</sup> The role of the king, which was highlighted above, was to exhibit covenant faithfulness through obedience, Torah adherence, and trust and sole reliance on Yahweh (cf. Josiah, 2 Kgs 23). When the king was obedient, the people followed and proved themselves worthy of the land.

Related to the gift of land is the promise that Yahweh will give Israel security and rest (נוח) from all their enemies when they possess the land (Deut 3:20; 12:10; 25:19).<sup>234</sup> The promise of rest (נוח) in each of these verses is in the *hiphil* and connotes the meaning “cause to settle down, give rest, bring to rest.”<sup>235</sup> Connected to the gift of land, rest is viewed as a God-given gift and encompasses the sense of relief from enemies and war, which is often expanded to peace and

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<sup>230</sup> Miller, “Gift of God,” 453-454.

<sup>231</sup> Walton, *Old Testament Theology*, 133.

<sup>232</sup> Gerbrandt, “Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History,” 134.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>234</sup> Miller, “Gift of God,” 458.

<sup>235</sup> Preuss, “נוח,” in *TDOT*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), General, e-book.

prosperity in the land (cf. שְׁלוֹם in 2 Chr 20:30).<sup>236</sup> Thus, “rest is living at peace in the land—a Deuteronomistic benefit of hope and the fruit of (Deuteronomistic) obedience, as well as the substance of God’s promise.”<sup>237</sup> The promise of land, rest, and peace will be developed more fully in chapter three.

Again, the limitations set in the Law of the King were given so the king did not usurp Yahweh’s role in this area of security.<sup>238</sup> The king’s role was not to trust in himself or his military strength to guarantee the possession of the land or rest from enemies, instead, his role was to trust in Yahweh as his Divine Warrior. The land and the rest were both promised based on obedience, not might. The king was not to be afraid and resort to those outside for help but instead to trust, because Yahweh promised to protect them with the same “mighty hand and outstretched arm” that he used when he brought them out of Egypt (Deut 4:34; 7:18-19).

### **Blessings and Curses Associated with the Covenant and the Land**

The gifts of land and rest are therefore based on covenantal commitment and the stipulations in the covenant come in the form of blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience (Deut 15:4; 23:21; 28; 30:16).<sup>239</sup> Like other suzerain-vassal treaties, the purpose of these benedictions and maledictions is to establish rewards for loyalty and consequences for

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<sup>236</sup> Preuss, “גִּידָה,” II Verb, Hiphil, e-book.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> Sanchez, “Royal Limitation,” 89-90.

<sup>239</sup> Miller, “Gift of God,” 458.

betrayal.<sup>240</sup> As Andrew Davis notes, the conditionality of the statements in Deuteronomy 28 is connected with the terms “if/then,” “*if* Israel obeys the divine commandments, *then* it will be blessed, *if* it does not, *then* it will be cursed.”<sup>241</sup> Blessings and curses are therefore intertwined with the land and rest, and covenantal obedience is the *sine qua non* for the continued existence of life in the land. Disobedience leads to unrest, war, catastrophe, and ultimately to loss of land, exile, and death (Deut 4:26; 28; 29:28).<sup>242</sup>

Even though the legislation in Deuteronomy holds the people accountable, the Dtr assigns primary responsibility for national obedience or apostasy, both religiously and politically, to the king.<sup>243</sup> Each evaluation of the monarchy is based on whether the king “did what was right in the eyes of the Lord” (וַיַּעַשׂ הַיְשָׁר בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה, e.g., 2 Kgs 18:3; 22:2). The expression יֵשֶׁר בְּעֵינֵי is an idiomatic formula exhorting obedience to the stipulations of the covenant, similar to “obey,” “walk in the way,” and “keep the commandments.” In each of these instances, it can be translated as “what pleases God.”<sup>244</sup> Alonso-Schokel stresses, “God’s judgment is not only sovereign (Jer. 27:5) but right and absolute; [and] can therefore serve as a criterion for judging a regime (2 K. 12:3 [2]; 14:3; 15:3; 16:2; etc.). Furthermore, what pleases

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<sup>240</sup> Andrew R Davis, “The Blessings and Curses of Deuteronomy 27-28,” *The Bible Today* 56, no. 3 (May 2018): 173.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>242</sup> Miller, “Gift of God,” 459.

<sup>243</sup> Levinson, “The Reconceptualization of Kingship,” 530.

<sup>244</sup> Alonso-Schokel, “יֵשֶׁר,” in *TDOT*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 5. Special Cases, e-book. Alonso-Schokel also states, “given that for the Hebrews the eyes are the seat of the evaluative faculty, the expression can cover a broad spectrum of judgments and evaluations, from neutral acceptance to formal and final approval.” Alonso-Schokel, “יֵשֶׁר,” Special Cases, e-book.

God, what he approves, coincides with what he chooses or commands.”<sup>245</sup> Hence, for the monarch, doing what was “right” (יָשָׁר) included covenantal obedience and absolute trust in God which resulted in blessing. It was God who had chosen Israel, God who had given the land, and God who had promised protection. By implication, the defense of the nation was not the primary responsibility of the king, instead, his role was to model and administer covenant faithfulness and be pleasing in the sight of God.<sup>246</sup>

When the king failed in covenantal obedience and trust in Yahweh either religiously and/or politically, the curses followed, eventually culminating in the ultimate curse, expulsion from the land (Deut 28:36; 28:47-57; 2 Kgs 18:11-12; 24:19-20; 25:21). As will be discussed in the chapters that follow, Hezekiah is a perfect example of one who waived in his role and his trust in Yahweh in the political arena. He looked to others for protection and aid, and, because of this oversight, he lost a significant portion of the land. However, in the end, he placed his complete trust in Yahweh and was redeemed (2 Kgs 18-19). Zedekiah also waived in his role as king, both religiously and politically, and because of his unfaithfulness, complete loss of land followed (2 Kgs 25:1-21; Ezek 17).

### Summary Conclusion of Chapter 2

This chapter focused on the sovereignty of God over the entire universe. It showed that the Creator Yahweh is outside the sphere of the cosmos. He is the High God who controls and sustains all of creation and all of mankind; including every nation and king, whom he can move

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<sup>245</sup> Alonso-Schokel, “יָשָׁר,” Special Cases, e-book.

<sup>246</sup> Gerbrandt, “Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History,” 141.

and use as he sees fit. Yahweh is also Israel's Divine King in a special way through the covenant. The covenant between God and Israel, however, extended beyond the typical ANE confines of a suzerain-vassal relationship to a relational bond expressed as a marriage contract. Through the covenant, Yahweh established himself as Israel's Divine Suzerain and husband and expected faithfulness, obedience, loyalty, and trust in exchange for blessing and access to his gift of land and rest. Through the covenant, Israel could count on the protection of Yahweh as her Divine Warrior who promised to come alongside Israel as a mighty conqueror in battle. As the Lord of Hosts, Yahweh established himself as incomparable and capable of fighting for Israel when she was powerless to defend herself.

Although Yahweh was Israel's Divine King, he allowed the establishment of a human monarch that would serve as his vice-regent. Yahweh allowed Israel to have a king like the surrounding nations; but unlike their neighbors, Israel's king was under extraordinary requirements given in the Law of the King (Deut 17:14-20). Israel's monarch differed from other ANE kings in the limitations placed on him regarding military, diplomatic, and monetary strength, for he was to look to Yahweh and rely solely on him for protection and aid. He also differed because his sole responsibility was to model Torah obedience and be the covenant administrator over the people. If the king adhered to these laws, trusted solely in Yahweh in military endeavors, and kept the Torah at the forefront of his administration, the covenantal promise of land, rest, and blessings were granted. If the king failed in obedience and trust in Yahweh, either religiously or politically, curses followed culminating with the ultimate curse, expulsion from the land. As Block states well, "The paradigm of kingship established in Deuteronomy 17:14-20 provides the lens used by Deuteronomistic historians and prophets to evaluate Israel's kings [...] in the end responsibility for Israel's exile rested on the shoulders of

kings who abused the people and led the nation in apostasy (2 Kgs 24:3-4).”<sup>247</sup> As the following chapters will reveal, there are a few kings who were obedient in this area and experienced blessing. However, there were many more who were disobedient and felt the punishment of the covenant curses.

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<sup>247</sup> Block, *Deuteronomy*, 308.

### Chapter 3: The Paradigm of God as Divine Warrior

Chapter three will focus on those instances in the Davidic monarchy where the king exercised complete trust and faithfulness in Yahweh in the political arena and was rewarded with divine protection, land, rest, and blessing. This is an important contrasting feature to show that political obedience was not only possible but was the standard set for the monarchy. Yahweh's political protection during times of monarchical faithfulness will prove that political infidelity was unnecessary, as God showed himself faithful as the Divine Warrior early in the Judean monarchy, setting a precedent for latter kings to follow. This demonstrates that when the king was faithful to his duty of Torah observance and covenant administration, God was faithful as Israel's Divine Warrior to keep his people safe in the land and provide the blessing of peace and rest from their enemies.

This section will begin by explaining that David was the prototype of covenant faithfulness and administration both spiritually and politically against which all subsequent kings were measured. Following the example of David, three additional instances of political faithfulness, that of Abijah, Asa, and Jehoshaphat, will be considered. Due to its synoptic nature and Deuteronomic theology of covenant obedience associated with blessings and curses, the examination of Abijah, Asa, and Jehoshaphat will rely on the text of Chronicles to point out the positive examples of political faithfulness and divine intervention. This is necessary since these narratives do not occur in Kings. Even though Chronicles is not part of the DH, the Chronicler emphasizes some of the same themes as the Dtr regarding covenant faithfulness and national



dependance, and in some cases, even magnifies them.<sup>248</sup> Therefore, even though there are varying opinions regarding the differences between the two, on the topic of military dependance on Yahweh, the DH and the Chronicler are aligned.

## David

### The Paradigm of a Godly King

Although David dies in the second chapter of First Kings, his name is mentioned ninety-one times throughout the book of Kings, stressing his importance as the paradigm of kingly rule as regulated in the Law of the King in Deuteronomy 17. Lissa Wray Beal explains that David's "paradigmatic value is not dependent on a perfect life (cf. Uriah), but one oriented to YHWH's ways."<sup>249</sup> The Dtr portrays David as the epitome of a cultically observant king who never wavers in his sole dedication to and reliance on Yahweh alone. David also sets the standard for what a politically loyal king looks like. Because of his faithfulness to the covenant, David becomes the model of proper royal behavior for all kings that follow.<sup>250</sup> Allison Joseph argues that based on

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<sup>248</sup> Sanchez, "Royal Limitation," 16. Mabie et al., stipulate that the Chronicler arranges historical information with an overarching political and/or religious agenda articulated through a theological framework centered on covenant. Frederick Mabie, Tremper Longman III, and David E. Garland, *1 and 2 Chronicles* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2017), 46. For more information see Gary N. Knoppers, "History and Historiography: The Royal Reforms," in *The Chronicler as Historian: Was the Chronicler a Historian?*, ed. M. Patrick Graham, Kenneth G. Hoglund, and Steven McKenzie (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1997), 178-203. Knoppers argues that the Chronicler is concerned with geopolitical and military interests.

<sup>249</sup> Lissa Wray Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 211.

<sup>250</sup> Greg (Gregory Ross) Goswell, "King and Cultus: The Image of David in the Book of Kings," *JETS* 5, no. 2 (2016): 167. Paul S Ash, "Jeroboam I and the Deuteronomistic Historian's Ideology of the Founder," *CBQ* 60, no. 1 (January 1998): 17.

the literary picture of David in the book of Kings, he is the exemplar of covenant fidelity and the prototype of the ideal king whom all others are to emulate.<sup>251</sup>

### **David's Rightness and Heart for Yahweh**

This raises the question, what about David made him the ideal king from which all other kings are evaluated? Joseph finds the answer in the literary structure of the regnal formula and stipulates that being “right” like David involves doing “what is right in the eyes of the Lord.”<sup>252</sup> As stated in the previous chapter, this phrase is a Deuteronomic injunction, inherently connected with observing the commandments. Deuteronomy 6:17-18 defines what it means to do what is right, “you shall diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and his testimonies and his statutes, which he has commanded you. And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord, that it may go well with you” (cf. Deut 13:18). The kings who “do what is right” are those that are obedient to God’s commands and covenant and like David, are administering their reigns by diligently observing the Torah, as they are called to do in the Law of the King.

The second area in which good and bad kings are evaluated against David is the direction of their heart (לִבָּ). The use of לִבָּ in relation to a king stresses his cultic loyalty, which is a prominent theme in Deuteronomy.<sup>253</sup> Joseph emphasizes that the concept of loving Yahweh with

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<sup>251</sup> Joseph explains how a literary prototype functions as a cognitive reference point that forms the basis for inferences that allow the reader to judge each king on a micro and macro level. She states, “the use of a prototype allows the reader to infer information about each king without the narrator supplying it because he is cast in a literary convention that the audience already recognizes.” Alison L. Joseph, *Portrait of the Kings: The Davidic Prototype in Deuteronomic Poetics* (Lanham: 1517 Media, 2015), 25, 79.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 92.

all one's heart, soul, and might (Deut 6:5) reflects a political loyalty like those in the suzerain-vassal treaties of the ANE. This kind of loyalty is connected with specific actions defined in Deuteronomy 10:12-13. These actions include fearing Yahweh, walking in all his ways, loving and serving him wholeheartedly, and obeying his commandments and laws.<sup>254</sup> These basic tenets of Deuteronomic theology relating to political loyalty permeate both the DH and Chronicles. As Fabry states, "in both the Deuteronomistic history and the Chronicler's history, the postulated relationship between the love of God, observance of the law, and fidelity to the *berît* is described as *belēḥ* or *belēḥ šālēm*."<sup>255</sup> He further argues that in the DH, the formulaic expression "his heart was wholly true to the Lord" (*הָיָה לִבָּו שְׁלֵם עִם־יְהוָה*) denotes absolute obedience with all one's being and will in response to a fundamental demand made by God (e.g., 1 Kgs 11:4; 15:3; 14).<sup>256</sup> Consequently, the direction of one's heart goes beyond simple obedience to the covenant to a whole-heart submission and internalization of one's commitment to Yahweh on every level.

The references to David at the beginning of Solomon's reign reveal these internalized characteristics in David's heart. Solomon states of David that he walked before the Lord "in faithfulness (*אֱמֶת*), in righteousness (*צִדְקָה*), and in uprightness of heart (*יִשְׁרָה לֵב*)" (1 Kgs 3:6). His faithfulness (*אֱמֶת*) demonstrated his inner steadfastness toward that which is true.<sup>257</sup> He showed this faithfulness/steadfastness to Yahweh by living righteously (*צִדְקָה*) through obedience

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<sup>254</sup> Joseph, *Portrait of the Kings*, 92.

<sup>255</sup> Fabry, "לֵבֶל כָּב," in *TDOT*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977). Religions and Ethical Realm, d, e-book.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> Jepsen comments that *אֱמֶת* was used for those who proved to be reliable, someone trustworthy in his innermost nature and the character of his actions and is only rarely used for a man in the Old Testament. Jepsen, "אֱמֶת," *Strictly Human* – g, e-book.

to God's commands and correct behavior before God. David's "upright heart" (יִשְׁרָה לִבָּהּ) goes a step further and coincides with what God approves and what pleases him.<sup>258</sup> Solomon's statement shows that David is not only right outwardly through faithfulness and righteousness but right inwardly. His "upright heart" conveys that his heart was in the right place; he was committed and wholly devoted to Yahweh and what pleases him.<sup>259</sup> Therefore, to be right like David and have a heart like David showed both an external dedication and obedience to the covenant, and an internal commitment to be wholly devoted to Yahweh. Both the outward and inward commitment were displayed through one's actions.

### **David's Political Trust in Yahweh**

David's wholehearted commitment to the Lord was manifest in every aspect of his monarchy. It can be found in his religious loyalty, worship of Yahweh alone, and his political entanglements with foreign states. In each instance where he came against a foe, he completely trusted in God as Israel's Divine Warrior. Hence, even in his political dealings, David was the model for all other kings to follow. David's military career began with the battle against Goliath, a battle in which he did not rely on his own strength but wholly trusted in the strength of Yahweh, the "Lord of Hosts" (יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת). David states, "you come to me with a sword and a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of Hosts the God of the armies of Israel" (1 Sam 17:45). Even at a young age, David understood the fundamental truth that Yahweh promised to fight for Israel, and if Yahweh fought for them, they had nothing to

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<sup>258</sup> Alonso-Schokel, "יִשְׁרָה," Special Cases, e-book.

<sup>259</sup> Martin J. Mulder, *1 Kings*, Historical Commentary on the Old Testament, Vol. 1 (Leuven: Peeters Press, 1998), 142.

fear. David's reference to *יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת*, implies the battle was not going to be won by military might but through dependence on the Lord.<sup>260</sup> He indicates trust in Yahweh as the Divine Warrior in his statement in 1 Samuel 17:47, "the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hands."

In subsequent battles that followed, David inquired of the Lord, asking for Yahweh's permission and help, and went into battle expecting God would fight for him and with him (e.g., 1 Sam 23:24; 30:8; 2 Sam 5:19, 23-24). David's song of thanksgiving in 2 Samuel 22 (Ps 18) portrays David's upright heart and his reliance on the Lord as his Divine Warrior and deliverer. Because of his righteousness and obedience to God's ways, ordinances, and statutes (vv. 21-23), the Lord gave him victory (vv. 25, 35-36, 40-41, 49).<sup>261</sup> Even though David was a warrior who fought against foreign enemies, David did not usurp Yahweh as the Great King and Divine Warrior. He humbly submitted to Yahweh and trusted him in military endeavors. Because of his obedience, God gave him victory wherever he went (2 Sam 8:6, 14) and rest (*נוֹחַ*) from his enemies (2 Sam 7:1). As stated above, *נוֹחַ* is a Deuteronomic benefit of obedience to God's law and the blessing associated with the gift of land.<sup>262</sup>

Consequently, David is the standard by which all other kings are evaluated because he is the model of the Deuteronomic king and vice-regent of Yahweh. He did what was right in the eyes of Yahweh by being faithful, righteous, and upright of heart, which involved being wholly

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<sup>260</sup> See above synopsis of *יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת* in chapter two.

<sup>261</sup> J.J.M. Roberts writes, "According to Israel's historical traditions, fairly early in David's reign, David succeeded in conquering the surrounding states of the Philistines, Edom, Moab, Ammon, and the Arameans of Zobah." J. J. M. Roberts, "Public Opinion, Royal Apologetics, and Imperial Ideology: A Political Analysis of the Portrait of David, a Man after God's Own Heart," *Theology Today* 69, no. 2 (July 2012): 130.

<sup>262</sup> Preuss, "נוֹחַ," II Verb, Hiphil, e-book.

committed to Yahweh through covenant obedience and trust in him as Sovereign King. The Dtr presents David as unconcerned with acquiring military, diplomatic, or monetary strength for himself. As Christian Hauer declares, “the cessation of his conquests at the height of his powers suggests that imperial ambition was not one of David’s overriding motives.”<sup>263</sup> Instead, his motivation was toward Yahweh and Yahweh’s people. He is shown to be faithful and obedient to the covenant, loyal to the worship of Yahweh alone, and dependent on Yahweh as his Divine Warrior.

### Abijah

The account of Abijam/Abijah<sup>264</sup> in Kings differs significantly from that of Chronicles. In 1 Kings 15:1-8, Abijam’s reign is limited to eight verses that portray the king in an unfavorable light. The Dtr relates that the king committed the sins of his father, and his heart was not wholly true (אֱשֶׁר) to the Lord like the heart of his father David (v. 3). The Chronicler’s account in 2 Chronicles 13, at first glance, seems to contradict the account in Kings as he portrays Abijah as a king who is obedient to God. He also suggests that Abijah is given divine support and blessing for his faithfulness.<sup>265</sup> The differences, however, are a matter of differing theological purposes

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<sup>263</sup> Christian E. Hauer, “David’s Battles,” *Concordia Journal* 6, no. 4 (July 1980): 153.

<sup>264</sup> In Kings, the name Abijam is used, but the Chronicler uses Abijah, indicating both authors use the names in association with theophoric elements. The Chronicler’s portrayal of Abijah in a positive light would naturally favor a name that praises Yahweh rather than dismissing him. Gwilym Jones links the name Abijam in Kings with non-Israelite Canaanite religion. He states, “the two versions of the name, Abijam and Abijah, have a common form, Abi being followed by a divine name; one name states that Yam (a Canaanite deity) is father and the other that Yah is father.” Gwilym H Jones, “From Abijam to Abijah,” *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 106, no. 3 (1994): 422. Ralph Klein has a different perspective and explains that the name Abijam is “probably a hypocristicon and hence not essentially different from the theophoric Abijah.” Ralph W. (Ralph Walter) Klein, “Abijah’s Campaign against the North (2 Chr 13): What Were the Chronicler’s Sources?,” *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 95, no. 2 (1983): 211.

<sup>265</sup> Jones, “From Abijam to Abijah,” 423. When referencing the Chronicler, I am referring to the author of 1-2 Chronicles. The historical accuracy of the Chronicler, the sources he used, and the various debates regarding the

between the authors and are not irreconcilable.<sup>266</sup> For example, the Chronicler's view is not entirely positive as he does not classify that Abijah "did what was right in the eyes of the Lord" like he does of Asa (2 Chr 14:2); but it is not overtly negative either.<sup>267</sup> He paints a fairly negative picture later by mentioning that Abijah's wife made an abominable image for Asherah (15:16), insinuating that idolatry was there, at least partly because of Abijah's indifference or even participation in the cult.<sup>268</sup> This assessment corresponds with the portrayal in Kings that his heart was not wholly/exclusively (חֲלָצָה) devoted to Yahweh.<sup>269</sup>

Sanchez points out that the Chronicler paints a more nuanced picture of some monarchs because he finds a king's reforming activity combined with military dependence as the most exemplary form of rule.<sup>270</sup> Deboys agrees and stresses that the Chronicler portrays war as divine

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differences in the name of his mother are beyond the scope of this paper and outside the focus on military victory resulting from obedience. For more information on these topics, see Jones, "From Abijam to Abijah," 420-434; Klein, "Abijah's Campaign against the North," 210-217; David G Deboys, "History and Theology in the Chronicler's Portrayal of Abijah," *Biblica* 71, no. 1 (1990): 48-62.

<sup>266</sup> Martin J. Selman, *2 Chronicles: An Introduction and Commentary* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 196.

<sup>267</sup> David G Deboys, "History and Theology," 50. The only other instance where the Chronicler is silent regarding praise or criticism of a monarch is in his portrayal of Jehoahaz (2 Chr 36:1-4). *Ibid.*, 59. Selman notes, "the lack of theological evaluation is notable, perhaps indicating that his reign as a whole lacked clear direction, despite the positive example here." Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 398.

<sup>268</sup> Deboys, "History and Theology," 52.

<sup>269</sup> As David Deboys notes, it is important to recognize that this change in attitude was not abnormal for the Chronicler as he was not opposed to shifting his view regarding a king's behavior if that king changed during his reign.<sup>269</sup> For example, in 2 Chronicles 26:4, the Chronicler states that Uzziah "did what was right in the eyes of the Lord," yet by verse 16, the sentiment changes because Uzziah's heart became corrupt from power and pride and "unfaithful to the Lord his God." His record of Manasseh, although reversed, is similar. The Chronicler first records the evil of Manasseh (2 Chr 33:2) but later records his repentance (2 Chr 33:12-13). The same is true of Abijah; the Chronicler chooses to highlight something that he did right, even if he was not an altogether righteous king. These instances illustrate that the Chronicler does not dismiss the final portrayal of Abijah in Kings, but he does enhance the story by showing that when a monarch was faithful, Yahweh responded with divine protection and blessing, but if he became corrupt, his fate could change. Deboys, "History and Theology," 59-60.

<sup>270</sup> Sanchez, "Royal Limitation," 131.

testing for the king to see how faithful his response will be.<sup>271</sup> The focus on military dependence and divine testing in Chronicles is evident in the additional information recorded of Abijah's reign. The narrative in Kings is scant and only notes that Abijah was involved in continuous wars with Jeroboam in the north (1 Kgs 15:7). The Chronicler details and preserves one of these conflicts in 2 Chronicles 13 to enhance the portrait of Yahweh's faithfulness to a loyal king. Yahweh's faithfulness corresponds with the thrust of chapters 13-16, which center around trust and reliance on the Lord, evidenced by the repeated use of the key verb *אָמַן* (used five times in this section, 13:18; 14:11; 16:7 [twice], 8), which means to "lean/rely on" or "trust in."<sup>272</sup> As J. A. Thompson affirms, "the Chronicler preferred to recount what was perhaps Abijah's one moment of glory when he trusted the Lord and was victorious in a war against Jeroboam I."<sup>273</sup> The Chronicler portrays Abijah as the first king since David to carry out the Deuteronomic ideal in the Law of the King regarding trust and faithfulness in Yahweh in the matter of national defense.

Besides the concise introductory and concluding material, the Chronicler's account of Abijah's reign is focused solely on this battle;<sup>274</sup> revealing its significant theological import. The structure of the passage can be divided as follows: the introduction of Abijah (2 Chr 13:1-2a), the specifications of the battle (13:2b-3), Abijah's speech/sermon (13:4-12), Judah's victory through the Lord's intervention (13:13-19), and Abijah's success versus Jeroboam's failure (13:20-23).

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<sup>271</sup> Deboys, "History and Theology," 50.

<sup>272</sup> Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 397.

<sup>273</sup> J. A. Thompson, *1, 2 Chronicles: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, NAC (B&H Publishing Group, 1994), Section V, pg. 5, e-book.

<sup>274</sup> Troy D. Cudworth, *War in Chronicles: Temple Faithfulness and Israel's Place in the Land* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2016), 62.



## Introduction and Specifications of the Battle (2 Chr 13:1-3)

After giving the standard account of the length of reign and maternal lineage (2 Chr 13:1-2a),<sup>275</sup> the pericope shifts to inform the reader of a specific battle between Jeroboam and Abijah in the hill country of Ephraim (vv. 2b-3).<sup>276</sup> The text states that Abijah and Jeroboam *each* had “chosen mighty warriors” (בְּחֹרִ גִּבּוֹרֵי חַיִּל). The use of the same adjectives for each army makes a strong statement that *in every way* both sides had the exact same quality in their fighting men. In other words, according to their skill, they were equally matched, and one would not prevail simply because they had superior forces. However, verse 3 stipulates they were not evenly matched regarding the number of warriors and specifies that Abijah had 400,000 men to Jeroboam’s 800,000. The point is to emphasize that Jeroboam outnumbered Abijah warrior for warrior, skill for skill, two to one, a perfect situation to highlight the need for trust in Yahweh as the Divine Warrior. As Thompson notes, the numbers given are unusually large, but the point the Chronicler makes is to stress that the victory achieved under these circumstances was exceptional.<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> As noted above, the various theories of maternal lineage are outside the scope and focus of this paper and will not be discussed.

<sup>276</sup> The location of Mt. Zemaraim is difficult to identify but is thought to be in the vicinity of Bethel. John Walton, Victor Matthews, and Mark Chavalas, *The IVPBBC* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000). 434. Selman states it should be linked with the Benjamite town of the same name (Josh 18:22) in Ephraim. Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 398.

<sup>277</sup> Many commentators argue that these numbers are unusually large and may represent symbolism and hyperbole. See Thompson, *1, 2 Chronicles*, Section V, pg. 5, e-book; Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 398; Klein, “Abijah’s Campaign against the North,” 212. For a discussion about historicity regarding the numbers and this battle, see Deboys, “History and Theology,” 52-59; J Barton (John Barton) Payne, “The Validity of the Numbers in Chronicles, Part 1,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136, no. 542 (April 1979): 109–28; J Barton (John Barton) Payne, “The Validity of the Numbers in Chronicles, Part 2,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136, no. 543 (July 1979): 206–20. The importance for this thesis is that the exact numbers are insignificant to the point the Chronicler is trying to make –Abijah’s army of equally matched soldiers were outnumbered two to one.

### Abijah's Speech/Sermon (2 Chr 13:4-12)

Despite the overwhelming odds stacked against him, Abijah does not run from the battle but instead presents a theological speech reminiscent of Moses' speeches in Deuteronomy (e.g., Deut 32). The speech centers on how a king should behave. It shows Abijah's faith and trust in Yahweh and demonstrates his commitment to covenant fidelity.<sup>278</sup> Abijah charges Jeroboam and all Israel with two specific sins. First, they rejected the house of David, which God had instituted with an eternal covenant (v. 5).<sup>279</sup> Second, he condemns them for their corrupt worship practices.<sup>280</sup>

In contrast, Abijah presents Judah as worshippers of Yahweh who follow the commands of the Lord and uphold his institutions for cultic leadership and practice. His charge is simple but effective as he states, "we have not forsaken (נִזְכָּרְנוּ) him [...] but you have forsaken (נִזְכָּרְתֶּם) him" (vv. 10-11).<sup>281</sup> Because of his faithfulness to the tenets of the covenant, Abijah had complete faith in God to fight his battles. He ends the sermon by stating confidently, "God is with us at our head ... do not fight against the Lord, the God of your fathers, for you cannot succeed" (v. 12). Abijah demonstrates that he is doing his job as king, per the Law of the King. He is submissive to Yahweh as vice-regent by acknowledging God as his head/chief (רֹאשׁ), the ultimate leader of the

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<sup>278</sup> Sanchez, "Royal Limitation," 149.

<sup>279</sup> Because salt was used as a preservative, it was utilized in conjunction with sealing treaties and covenants. The "covenant of salt" was an ancient custom in which salt was employed to symbolize that the terms of the agreement would be preserved for a long time. "Babylonian, Persian, Arabic and Greek contexts all testify to this symbolic usage." Walton et al., *The IVPBBC*, 434. See also Frederick J. Mabie, *2 Chronicles*, ed. John Walton, Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), Abijah's Reign, e-book.

<sup>280</sup> Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 398-399.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid., 399.

armies of Judah; and he is advocating the proper worship of God through obedience to the Torah. He recognized that it is futile to oppose God (this originates in the Exodus, cf. Ex 14:14; Deut 20:4), for success can only be attained with God's help (1 Chr 29:23; 2 Chr 20:20; 26:5).<sup>282</sup> Because of his fidelity, he does not doubt that God will be faithful as his Divine Warrior (Deut 20:1-4).

### **Judah's Victory Through the Lord's Intervention (2 Chr 13:13-19)**

The following section highlights the particulars of the battle and shows that God was with Abijah's army as their Divine Warrior.<sup>283</sup> This section informs the reader that Judah's army is not only outmanned but also outmaneuvered. While Abijah was giving his speech, the armies of Israel were setting up an ambush that resulted in Judah being surrounded (2 Chr 13:13-14).<sup>284</sup> Once again, their plight seems hopeless as they face even greater overwhelming odds. However, this is purposeful on the Chronicler's part as he intends to show that this situation is similar to the battles of the early days of Israel. The thrust of the passage, which is in verse 18, emphasizes that when God's people relied (יָצָוּ) on him, they prevailed. This battle was analogous to the ambush Israel faced in Judges 9:25, and the outmaneuvering of the opposing army (which flanked Israel on both sides) in 2 Samuel 10:9 and 1 Kings 20:13, 28. Another similarity is found in the battle cry and the blowing of trumpets at the battle of Jericho (Josh 6:1-20).<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 400.

<sup>283</sup> Thompson, *1, 2 Chronicles*, Section V, pg. 7, e-book.

<sup>284</sup> Sanchez, "Royal Limitation," 155.

<sup>285</sup> Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 400.

The text purposefully highlights aspects of God's promises in Deuteronomy 20:1-4 and 10-15 to emphasize Abijah's faithfulness to the principles of covenant war. Selman terms this kind of battle "Yahweh war" because, in these wars, Yahweh fought for his people.<sup>286</sup> "In Yahweh war, Yahweh fights, Israel depends on him, and he gets the glory for the victory. This is precisely the kind of behavior the Chronicler wants to emphasize for the king."<sup>287</sup> The king's primary responsibility was to be obedient and lead the people in covenant faithfulness.<sup>288</sup> Based on Deuteronomy 20, Abijah knew God was with him, fighting for Judah to give them victory (vv. 1, 4). When they saw the ambush, the people cried out to the Lord for help while the priests blew their trumpets. The trumpets should be interpreted in light of Numbers 10:9-10 as a significant factor to signal Yahweh to come into the battle as the central player.<sup>289</sup> Next, the people shouted a battle cry, and God intervened and routed the enemy (2 Chr 13:14-15). As Jacob Myers states, Jeroboam's "strategy (vss. 13-14), however brilliant, was no match against Yahweh who fought on the side of his devotees. The victory was his."<sup>290</sup>

Trust is at the heart of this pericope, "Judah defeated Israel on that occasion because they trusted in the Lord, the God of their ancestors" (v. 18). The focus is on the faithfulness of Abijah and the strength of Yahweh as the Divine Warrior. Judah could in no way claim the victory based on their military strength; they were helplessly outmanned and outmaneuvered. This

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<sup>286</sup> Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 401.

<sup>287</sup> Sanchez, "Royal Limitation," 157.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> Sanchez states, "when used of God, the root נָכַר is synonymous with God's actions on behalf of the petitioner. To say that God remembers is to say that he acts." Ibid., 158-159.

<sup>290</sup> Jacob M. Myers, "II Chronicles," in *II Chronicles: Introduction, Translation, and Notes By*, ed. Jacob M. Myers, 2nd ed., vol. 13, Anchor Yale Bible Commentary (New York: The Anchor Yale Bible, 1965), 81.

limited ability is exactly how God wanted it so that they would rely on him, and he would get the glory. Abijah is a perfect example of a king fulfilling his covenant responsibilities before Yahweh and letting Yahweh fight his battles. He models how to trust Yahweh for protection against an enemy rather than relying on his own strength, proving he was confident in God to uphold his end of the covenant.

### **Abijah's Success Versus Jeroboam's Failure (2 Chr 13:20-23)**

The pericope concludes with the results of Abijah's faithfulness and reliance on the Lord; Jeroboam was defeated, territory was gained, and Abijah grew strong through the blessing of a large family (2 Chr 13:17-21).<sup>291</sup> Nevertheless, the most critical factor can be found in 14:1 (Heb. 13:23), the land had "rest/peace" (שָׁלוֹם) for ten years. Bons writes, "the *qal* of the verb שָׁלוֹם is commonly used to express the aftermath of military actions and oppression [...] and can denote the state of internal and external peace that ensues when military actions have come to an end."<sup>292</sup> The absence of war was a blessing associated with trust in Yahweh. Because of Abijah's short reign (3 years), the blessing continued into his son Asa's reign. During Asa's reign, "peace/rest" (שָׁלוֹם) and the lack of war are highlighted to show Yahweh's grace and provision for faithfulness. As stated in chapter two, related to the gift of land is the Deuteronomic promise that Yahweh will give Israel security and "rest/peace" (שָׁלוֹם) from all their enemies when they possess the land (Deut 3:20; 12:10; 25:19).<sup>293</sup> Rest is viewed as a God-given gift that includes relief from

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<sup>291</sup> Cudworth, *War in Chronicles*, 68.

<sup>292</sup> Bons, "שָׁלוֹם," in *TDOT*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), Qal in Military Contexts, e-book.

<sup>293</sup> Miller, "Gift of God," 458.

enemies and war, which is often expanded to peace and prosperity in the land (cf. שָׁלוֹם 2 Chr 20:30).<sup>294</sup>

### Asa

King Asa is unique in that he is the only king that will occupy space in two chapters of this thesis. First, he will be presented here as a king who is granted victory for his faithfulness and trust in Yahweh in the political arena (2 Chr 14); and in the following chapter, he will be studied as one who lost sight of Yahweh's promise of divine protection, relied on another, and was rebuked (1 Kgs, 15:16-24; 2 Chr 16). He is the perfect example of how God protects as the Divine Warrior when a monarch is faithful to the covenant and trusts in him and how he lifts divine blessing when the king strays from the covenant and falters in his complete trust and reliance on the Lord (cf. 2 Chr 15:2).

The accounts of Asa's reign in 1 Kings 15:9-31 and 2 Chronicles 14-16 are similar yet different.<sup>295</sup> In both narratives, Asa is given a positive appraisal, yet both positive and negative actions characterize his reign. Chronicles expands significantly on the account in Kings by giving an in-depth assessment of Asa based on his adherence to the cult and his faithfulness to Yahweh, or lack thereof, in the political arena. Once again, as he did with Abijah, the Chronicler goes into detail concerning political conflict, military dependence, and cultic reform to enhance

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<sup>294</sup> Preuss, “גִּיחַ,” II Verb, Hiphil, e-book.

<sup>295</sup> There are significant chronological inconsistencies between the accounts in Kings and Chronicles and even further inconsistencies in various places in the Chronicler's account, which, for lack of space, cannot be addressed in this thesis. For the various theories regarding the issues and inconsistencies, see Itzhak Amar, “Form and Content in the Story of Asa in 2 Chr 13:23b-16:14: A Diachronic-Synchronic Reading,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period* 50, no. 3 (August 2019): 337–60; Raymond B. Dillard, “The Reign of Asa (2 Chronicles 14-16): An Example of the Chronicler's Theological Method,” *JETS* 23, no. 3 (September 1980): 213-218.

his theological agenda of the proper response and behavior of the king. Sanchez notes, “in this narrative, like no other, the Chronicler expresses his opinion explicitly on the matter of military dependence.”<sup>296</sup> Through military dependence and cultic reform, the Chronicler emphasizes that if a king fully trusts in the Lord, demonstrated through obedience to Torah and reliance on Yahweh in the political arena, he can expect the Lord’s protection and victory even against overwhelming odds (2 Chr 13:2-19; 14:8-15; 20:1-30; 25:7-13; 32:1-23). He further communicates that the result of trust and obedience is divine blessing and rest (2 Chr 14:1, 6; 17:10; 26:5; 27:6).

The first part of the reign of Asa (2 Chr 14-15) can be divided into three sections (only the first two will be discussed here). The first section consists of his first ten years of reign, characterized by peace and religious reform (14:1-8). The second section highlights the Ethiopian invasion and the victory of the Lord that occurred sometime between Asa’s 10<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> year (14:9-15). The third section is comprised of the prophetic word of Azariah after the battle, the influx of Israelites from the north that led to more religious reform, and consequently, to rest from war from Asa’s 15<sup>th</sup> – 35<sup>th</sup> year (15:1-19).

### **The First 10 Years – Peace and Religious Reform (2 Chr 14:1-8)**

As stated above, following Abijah’s victory, the Chronicler notes that the land had “rest” (שָׁלוֹם) for ten years (2 Chr 14:1).<sup>297</sup> He first insinuates that the “rest” in Asa’s reign carried over

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<sup>296</sup> Sanchez, “Royal Limitation,” 164.

<sup>297</sup> Raymond Dillard states, “there is an immediate contrast with the account in Kings, which describes warfare between Baasha and Asa ‘throughout their reigns’ (1 Kgs 15:16).” However, he goes on to specify he believes 2 Chronicles 14:4-15:15 to be an interpolation between 1 Kings 15:12 and 15:13. Dillard, “The Reign of Asa,” 212.

from, and was a result of, Abijah's victory over Jeroboam.<sup>298</sup> Though, he also implies through redundancy, that the "rest" (שָׁקֵט, vv. 5, 6), "peace" (שָׁלוֹם, vv. 6, 7), and "no war" (וְאֵין-עֶזְמוֹ מִלְחָמָה), v. 5), continued because of Asa's religious reforms and commitment to seeking the Lord and keeping the law (v. 4).

Asa's religious reforms consisted of destroying the illegitimate foreign cult objects (initiated by Solomon and augmented by Rehoboam and Abijah, cf. 1 Kgs 11:3-8; 14:22-24; 15:3), which included altars, shrines, high places,<sup>299</sup> Asherah poles, and standing stones representing Baal and other Canaanite deities (vv. 3, 5).<sup>300</sup> His reforms also included a renewed commitment to Yahweh. Asa commanded the people to "seek the Lord" and "obey the law and the commandments" (v. 4). Seeking the Lord through obedience was central to Asa's reform. There are eight references to "seeking" (דָּרַשׁ) the Lord" in chapters 14 and 15 (14:4, 7 [twice]; 15:2, 4, 12, 13, 15), which Thompson indicates is "a summary description [...] that involved more than a specific act of seeking God's help and guidance but stood for one's whole duty towards God (cf. v. 7; 15:2, 12-13). According to 1 Chr 28:9, it is equivalent to knowing God and serving him 'with wholehearted devotion.'"<sup>301</sup> These two commands, to "seek" and "obey," are therefore inseparably connected.<sup>302</sup> The law was the means of maintaining fellowship with

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<sup>298</sup> Myers, *II Chronicles*, 84; W. T. Purkiser et al., *Beacon Bible Commentary, Volume 2: Joshua Through Esther* (Kansas City: The Foundry Publishing, 1965), 571.

<sup>299</sup> Duguid et al., adds, "the removal of the 'high places' appears to contradict 1 Kings 15:14 ('but the high places were taken away'), but the Chronicler notes that the removal was from 'all the cities of Judah' (2 Chr 14:5) but not 'out of Israel' (15:17)." Iain M. Duguid et al., *1 Samuel-2 Chronicles*, vol. 3, ESV Expository Commentary (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), 1628.

<sup>300</sup> Walton et al., *The IVPBBC*, 435.

<sup>301</sup> Thompson, *1, 2 Chronicles*, Section V, The Reign of Asa, pg. 10, e-book.

<sup>302</sup> Frederick J. Mabie, *1-2 Chronicles*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 4, EBC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), The Reign of Asa, 1, e-book.



God, and wholehearted devotion to seeking God was displayed through obedience to God's commands (cf. 2 Chr 6:16; 12:1, 5).<sup>303</sup> This portrayal of an Israelite king seeking the Lord with his whole being while promoting living out the law of God to the people is central to the concept of the ideal leader based on the Law of the King. Asa was further able to build and fortify cities, the country prospered, and he expanded the army (vv. 6-8).<sup>304</sup> However, as revealed below, even though Yahweh allowed the king to strengthen the country through fortified cities and militia, he still expected the king to maintain trust and reliance on him in times of conflict and not on their fortifications or military.

### **The Ethiopian Invasion and the Victory of the Lord (2 Chr 14:9-15)**

A test of Asa's military dependence is illustrated in the next pericope, which features a battle waged sometime between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> year of Asa's reign (2 Chr 14:1; 15:10).<sup>305</sup> This battle took place on Judah's southwest border at Mareshah (14:9). To point out the irony of placing too much trust in fortified cities, Mareshah was one of Rehoboam's fortified cities along the western edge of the Shephelah that was captured by Shishak of Egypt. The Chronicler informs the reader that Rehoboam lost these cities because he abandoned the law and was unfaithful to the Lord (cf., 2 Chr 11:5-12; 12:1-4). As one can see from the previous pericope

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<sup>303</sup> Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 406.

<sup>304</sup> Thompson and Walton et al. indicate that building projects were a sign of God's blessing. Walton et al. affirm this by pointing to Mesopotamian annals and regnal-year titles that regularly comment on a king's building activities as a sign of his success. Contra Cudworth who argues that building projects for military purposes serve as a source of pride (e.g., 2 Chr 26:16) or false hope (e.g., 2 Chr 11:5-12) that presents a potential obstacle for the king. Thompson, *I, 2 Chronicles*, Section V, pg. 10, e-book; Walton et al., *The IVPBBC*, 435; Cudworth, *War in Chronicles*, 118.

<sup>305</sup> Duguid et al., *1 Samuel-2 Chronicles*, 1629.

(14:1-8), abandonment of the law was not the problem for Asa, which begs the question, why did he get attacked? Itzhak Amar makes an important observation about the battle regarding the premise that hostilities are always a form of punishment. He states, “according to the Chronicler, war is a routine occurrence—a natural part of relations between those who seek to dominate one another and conquer territory. While it may be triggered by sins and forestalled by righteousness, sooner or later it will break out once again.”<sup>306</sup> Sara Japhet adds that although the Chronicler often views war as retributive judgement, some wars are representative of divine trials and tests rather than punishment for sin. She asserts that Asa’s war against Zerah represents this kind of divine test of moral fiber, faith, and trust in God.<sup>307</sup> Whether the war was just a natural phenomenon or a divine test, the emphasis is clear, deliverance does not come from fortified cities or large armies but through trusting in Yahweh before, during, and after the battle.<sup>308</sup>

2 Chronicles 14:9-10 lays out the conditions of the battle, which, like the battle of Abijah, shows Asa to be at a disadvantage in two ways. He was severely outmanned and outgunned. The text states that Zerah, the Ethiopian/Cushite, came against Asa with literally a “thousand thousands” (אֶלְפֵי אֶלְפִים) and 300 chariots. This represented a vast number, possibly 1,000 military units (some translations use “a million” ESV, NRSV),<sup>309</sup> and a large chariot force. As stated

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<sup>306</sup> Amar, “Form and Content,” 355.

<sup>307</sup> Sara Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and Its Place in Biblical Thought* (University Park, Panama: Penn State University Press, 2009), 149-154. Selman agrees and does not believe the chronological framework supports a rigid theology of reward and punishment, especially since both of Asa’s attacks happened after periods of faithfulness. Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 405.

<sup>308</sup> Amar, “Form and Content,” 355.

<sup>309</sup> Duguid et al., *1 Samuel-2 Chronicles*, 1629. There is some speculation as to the identity of Zerah since he is unknown outside of Chronicles. He could be a field general of Libyan origin from the army of Pharaoh Osorkon I, son of Shishak (cf. 2 Chr 12:2-4; 16:8), or the chief of an Arab coalition from the Sinai region since Cushites are often paired with Midianites in OT texts. Frederick J. Mabie, *2 Chronicles*, Zerah the Cushite, e-book. Selman points out that the first is more likely since local Bedouin tribes were unlikely to have 300 chariots,

above, chariots were the weapon of choice in battle as they were strategically superior to cavalry. Once again, the Chronicler wants to emphasize that Zerah's forces were nearly twice the size of Asa's 580,000 troops (v. 8), and he had superior weaponry.<sup>310</sup> Like Abijah, Asa did not stand a chance. Also, like Abijah, Asa does not hesitate to cry to the Lord for help, stipulating that nothing is too small or too great for the Lord to intervene (v. 11). He humbly asks (per Solomon's instructions, 6:34-35), specifying that they are "relying" (רָצִי) on the Lord, and it is in his name they are coming against the "multitude" (cf. Deut 20:1). In other words, this is Yahweh's war against which no mortal can prevail (v. 11b). With no other explanation given, the text merely states that the Lord defeated them (v. 12). Myers sums it up this way, "the victory over Zerah was Yahweh's, a powerful illustration of what could be expected by those who relied upon him. No forces of mortal man can withstand Yahweh."<sup>311</sup>

The result was that the credit for victory went to Yahweh (recalling Abijah). His miraculous intervention and not the might of Asa's military brought about the victory. The Ethiopians fled in terror and Judah pursued them, and the text specifies they all fell and were "broken" (שָׁבַר) before the Lord and *his* army (notice Asa's army is the Lord's army, v. 13-14a). Like the victory brought to Abijah, Asa's victory illustrates that it was the Lord as the Divine Warrior who fought on behalf of his people; they need only to rely on him. The outcome was not only the defeat of Zerah, but the defeat of all the cities around Gerar and the accumulation of a vast amount of plunder (vv. 14b-15). Not only did God grant them victory for what they had

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especially when Judah had none. Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 407. Myers combines the two theories stating they were probably Egyptian mercenaries that could have been Arabs who were settled there by Shishak in a kind of buffer state after the campaign against Rehoboam. Myers, *II Chronicles*, 84.

<sup>310</sup> Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 407.

<sup>311</sup> Myers, *II Chronicles*, 84.

asked for, but he also granted them an abundant victory that resulted in gained territory, extensive monetary blessing, and rest/peace.

### Jehoshaphat

Like the previous two kings (Abijah and Asa), the narrative of Jehoshaphat in Chronicles (2 Chr 17-20) is significantly longer than the account recorded in Kings (1 Kgs 22).<sup>312</sup> Also, like Abijah and Asa, the Chronicler chooses to record an additional battle not recorded in Kings that reflects the king's trust in Yahweh for national defense.<sup>313</sup> The battle is concerned with detailing political conflict, military dependence, and cultic reform to enhance the theological agenda of the proper conduct of a godly king. Thus, showing that cultic adherence and dependence on Yahweh in military conflict, lead to the blessing of land, peace, and prosperity.

Jehoshaphat's narrative parallels Asa in many ways, and he is presented as a righteous king who walked in the ways of his father Asa (or possibly even David), and the Lord was with him (2 Chr 17:3-4).<sup>314</sup> Also, like Asa, Jehoshaphat is shown to be concerned with Torah obedience, as per the Law of the King, and the responsibilities of covenant administrator. Jehoshaphat went beyond just committing to covenant adherence and seeking the Lord. He put faith into action by sending officials, Levites, and priests throughout the kingdom to teach the people the "Book of the Law" (17:7-9). He also appointed judges (19:4-11) throughout the land

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<sup>312</sup> It is also significantly different in that the account in Kings focuses more attention on the reign of Ahab and the prophetic ministries of Elijah and Elisha, and the Chronicler focuses on the reign and importance of Jehoshaphat.

<sup>313</sup> Sanchez, "Royal Limitation," 183.

<sup>314</sup> Coggins and Dunn comment that "the NRSV modifies the Hebrew text at verse two by omitting "David"; it may be right that the comparison is with Jehoshaphat's physical father Asa, but it is also possible that the comparison is intended to be with David." Richard J. Coggins, *First and Second Chronicles*, Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2019), 21.

according to the law in Deuteronomy (16:18-20). Not only does this result in the absence of war (17:10), but peace is escalated by the fact that the surrounding nations fear Yahweh, and some even bring tribute (v. 11). The text also states, Jehoshaphat grew stronger through his elevated status, his building projects and fortifications, and a large army (vv.12-19).<sup>315</sup>

Jehoshaphat's reign covers four chapters in Chronicles and can be outlined as follows: Jehoshaphat's early years of covenant fidelity, religious reform, and blessing (2 Chr 17:1-19), Jehoshaphat's alliance with King Ahab of Israel and condemnation by the prophet Jehu (18:1-19:3), his judicial reforms (19:4-11), the invasion from the east and victory of Yahweh (20:1-30), and the conclusion of his reign (20:31-21:3). Because of the extensive nature of the reign of Jehoshaphat, only the battle with the Moabites and Ammonites in chapter 20 will be covered as it pertains to the victory achieved by Yahweh through the king's faithfulness and trust. In this pericope, the credit for the battle is due entirely to God who routed the enemy without the aid of the Judean army, who were reduced to mere spectators in the battle.<sup>316</sup>

### **Invasion From the East (2 Chr 20:1-4)**

After Jehoshaphat's religious reforms and unfortunate alliance with Ahab, Jehoshaphat finds himself engaged in battle, this time on his own front. Perhaps after the defeat of Ahab and Jehoshaphat, and the death of Ahab at Ramoth Gilead (chap 18), the nations to the east (the Moabites, Ammonites, and Meunites) sensed weakness and decided to form a coalition against

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<sup>315</sup> Jehoshaphat does falter in his commitment to the Lord and, like Asa, compromises through ungodly alliances. However, this weakness is noted by the Chronicler who, through the prophetic voice (19:1-3; 20:37), condemns each violation as a breach of faithfulness and trust in Yahweh, and subsequently Jehoshaphat repents. Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 421.

<sup>316</sup> Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 440.

Jehoshaphat.<sup>317</sup> Selman points out that since the Moabites are listed first (2 Chr 20:1), and the coalition seems to have entered from Moabite territory (v. 2), this invasion may be a renewed attempt at revenge against Israel and her allies for their prior attack on Moab for trying to throw off their Israelite yolk (2 Kgs 3). He asserts that after that battle, the Moabites were “bloodied but unbowed” (2 Kgs 3:27), which makes their defeat here very strong and final (2 Chr 20:22-25).<sup>318</sup> The importance for the Chronicler is to intentionally shift the focus from the unsanctioned military alliance with Ahab, which resulted in defeat, to the proper alliance and dependence on Yahweh alone in times of military conflict. Sanchez notes the point of the Chronicler is that “Jehoshaphat did not need to ally himself with Ahab because he was already allied with Yahweh,” as this battle will prove.<sup>319</sup>

The text notes (v. 2), by the time Jehoshaphat was warned about the large advancing army, the coalition was already at Hazazon Tamar (En-Gedi), which is approximately twenty-five miles southeast of Jerusalem.<sup>320</sup> Once again, the vastness of the enemy army is highlighted, which must have been significantly larger than Judah’s army (which was itself extensive, cf. 17:14-19), to cause such alarm. Upon hearing the news, Jehoshaphat was afraid (v. 3), yet, in his

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<sup>317</sup> Geographical uncertainties over the repetition in the MT of “Ammonites” and the reference to “Aram” (vv. 1-2) are amended by the NRSV and most modern translations to “Meunites” (cf. 1 Chr 4:41), which is also attested in the LXX. Since the third party is later referred to as the “people of Seir” in verse 22 this favors the reading of Meunites. Mabie contends that the “Menuites were an Arabian tribe living in the southern region of Transjordan and parts of the Sinai.” Mabie, *1-2 Chronicles*, Commentary 20:1-2, e-book; see Coggins, *First and Second Chronicles*, 22.

<sup>318</sup> Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 441. Selman adds that this series of events would mean that the two sections of this chapter, 1-30 and 35-37, are not in chronological order, but this is a practice familiar in Chronicles (e.g., 1 Chr 14; 18-19). Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> Sanchez, “Royal Limitation,” 188.

<sup>320</sup> Andrew E. Hill, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2003), 14t, e-book. En-Gedi is near the center of the western shore, but Hazazon Tamar is more difficult to locate. Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 442.

fear, Jehoshaphat set himself to “seek” (שׁוֹרֵךְ) the Lord. As in the reign of Asa, this verb is significant to the reign of Jehoshaphat, but in the case of Jehoshaphat, “seek” (שׁוֹרֵךְ) has the sense of worship and discovery of God’s will (cf. 17:3-4; 18:4; 19:3).<sup>321</sup> Jehoshaphat’s act of piety reveals that he trusts in God more than he trusts in his military resources. He further proclaimed a fast, and many people from all the cities of Judah assembled to ask for the Lord’s help (vv. 3-4). This is significant and reveals the impact the king had on the spiritual fortitude of the people; when the king led in covenant faithfulness, the people followed.

### **Jehoshaphat’s Prayer (2 Chr 20:5-12)**

In the midst of the assembly in the temple, Jehoshaphat prays. First, he draws attention to Yahweh’s cosmological (creative) power, and his sovereignty and might over every nation on earth (2 Chr 20:5-6).<sup>322</sup> Andrew Hill adds that to acknowledge God as “God in heaven” extols his greatness (cf. 2 Chr 2:5; 6:18); and the presentation of his prayer through rhetorical questions is a poetic method to express one’s absolute certainty in something (e.g., 32:13-14).<sup>323</sup> Next, Jehoshaphat reflects on God’s past faithfulness to Israel in times of war, when God, as their Divine Warrior, drove out the inhabitants of Canaan on Israel’s behalf because he promised to give the land to Abraham (v. 7). He then reminds the Lord of his gracious gift of land and his promise to be with his people in the place built for his name, recalling Solomon’s prayer of deliverance for those who call on the Lord from the temple (vv. 8-9; 2 Chr 6:2-30).

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<sup>321</sup> Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 442.

<sup>322</sup> Mabie, *1-2 Chronicles*, Commentary 20:5-13, e-book.

<sup>323</sup> Hill, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, 14t, e-book.

The prayer concludes by referencing the enemy's ingratitude for God's salvation during the wilderness wandering (cf. Deut 2:1-19). He then includes another reminder that God was the one who had given his people the land to possess and inherit (vv. 10-11, cf. Deut 6:10). In the final line of his prayer, Jehoshaphat makes his plea for God's help. His petition is "not for one particular answer but for God to show his power, in this case to judge those who have challenged his purposes (cf. 1 Chr 16:35; 2 Chr 14:1)."<sup>324</sup> Jehoshaphat's last statement of "waiting faith" is one of the most crucial examples given to signify the king's ultimate trust and reliance on Yahweh to deliver and save.<sup>325</sup> He states, "we are powerless against this great multitude that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you" (2 Chr 20:12b NRSV). Jehoshaphat admits that he is powerless, but God is powerful (v. 6), and even though he does not know what course to take, he knows where to turn for answers and trusts God to be faithful.

### **Jahaziel's Oracle of Salvation and the King's Response (2 Chr 20:13-19)**

While all Judah (including their wives and children) waited before the Lord (2 Chr 20:13), the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel (reminiscent of Azariah cf. 15:1), who proceeded to bring forth a word from the Lord that had four main elements in response to Jehoshaphat's prayer and plight. 1) A repeated admonition not to fear or be discouraged/broken (vv. 15, 17, cf. 3). 2) A repeated statement that the battle was not theirs but the Lord's (vv. 15, 17, cf. 9). 3) The instructions for the battle, which distinctly tells them what to do (vv. 16, 17, cf. 12). 4) The repeated promise that God would be "with" them (עִמָּם, used twice in v. 17, cf.

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<sup>324</sup> Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 445.

<sup>325</sup> Mabie, *1-2 Chronicles*, Commentary 20:5-13, e-book.



12).<sup>326</sup> God responds to Jehoshaphat's appeal by reiterating that this war was his (an attitude repeated five times in this short prophecy).<sup>327</sup> The substance of Jahaziel's oracle was God's role as the Divine Warrior (cf. Deut 20:1-4) who fights on behalf of his covenant people.<sup>328</sup> The people were simply to "stand firm" and wait on the deliverance of the Lord who was with them (v. 17). This admonition of faith that God was with them was reminiscent of Exodus 14:13 and Moses' command to the people when they were backed against the Red Sea. It was also similar to Yahweh's words to Joshua regarding Jericho (Josh 6:2).<sup>329</sup> Thompson explains, "the assurance of God's presence was more than a theological statement, it was to be a source of strength."<sup>330</sup>

Jehoshaphat's response reiterates how the king was expected to behave. He was the first to prostrate himself in worship and thankfulness, and then his people followed. He was the first to believe and praise, and then the people followed. Sara Japhet concludes, "Jehoshaphat's reaction here is a powerful gesture of piety: he does not delay his praise and thanksgiving until the battle has proven God's promise. His trust in the Lord is such that he is content with the prophetic assurance that his prayer has been heard."<sup>331</sup> Once again, the king's faith is reflected in the people's actions, they too, put their faith in the Lord.

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<sup>326</sup> Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 446; Sara Japhet, *I And II Chronicles: A Commentary* (Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 1993), 793.

<sup>327</sup> Japhet, *I and II Chronicles*, 794.

<sup>328</sup> Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 446.

<sup>329</sup> Mabie, *1-2 Chronicles*, Commentary 20:14-17, e-book.

<sup>330</sup> Thompson, *I, 2 Chronicles*, 191, e-book.

<sup>331</sup> Japhet, *I and II Chronicles*, 796.

### Yahweh's Victory and the Blessing of Obedience (2 Chr 20:20-30)

Jehoshaphat does exactly what the prophet counseled and sets out the next morning for Tekoa. This time, because of his faith in the Lord, he was no longer fearful and bewildered but is decisive and strong.<sup>332</sup> In turn, he commends the people to “believe/trust” (יִמְנָן) in the Lord and “believe/trust” (יִמְנָן) in his word through the prophets (2 Chr 20:20, cf. Is 7:9). As stated in chapter one, the use of the *hiphil* form of יָמַן verified spiritual faith and belief in God and his promises based on his miraculous works.<sup>333</sup> Selman adds, “to believe’ really means ‘to exercise firm trust,’ so that the person who believes is made firm or secure.”<sup>334</sup> Not only does Jehoshaphat commend the people to trust but he commands the people to worship by praising and thanking God for his splendor and faithfulness before the battle even begins (v. 21). The outstanding feature of the entire pericope is that *as they began to sing and praise*, the Lord began the battle (v. 22). As Selman aptly states, “this was neither an ordinary battle nor a traditional holy war, but Yahweh’s war in which he acted on his own.”<sup>335</sup> Because of Jehoshaphat’s faith and reliance on the Lord, the Lord set an ambush, routed the enemy, and they all destroyed each other (v. 23).<sup>336</sup>

When Jehoshaphat’s army arrived at the scene, the battle was already won, and all that remained was to gather the plunder (vv. 24-25). This, too, is an example of how increased faith

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<sup>332</sup> Japhet, *I and II Chronicles*, 797.

<sup>333</sup> Jepsen, “יָמַן,” V. Hiphil, e-book.

<sup>334</sup> Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 447.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid., 447.

<sup>336</sup> Some scholars interpret the confusion and ambush as superhuman agents. However, as Selman and Japhet point out, the use of מְצַדִּים always means “people in ambush,” not supernatural entities (e.g., Judg 9:25). Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 448; Japhet, *I and II Chronicles*, 798.

and covenant loyalty resulted in increased aid from Yahweh. Despite Jehoshaphat's large army (2 Chr 17:14-19), not a single soldier was used except to pick up the booty that was left behind. The enormous quantity of spoil (it took them three days to collect it all!) also emphasizes the victory's magnitude.<sup>337</sup> The result was that all the credit for the victory went to Yahweh, the whole assembly joyfully rejoiced in the triumph of their God, singing and praising Yahweh for his victory (vv. 26-28). Once again, this narrative shows that when the king relies on Yahweh as his Divine Warrior, Yahweh is faithful. He protects the land, and not only does he win the battle, but he blesses the king and the people for their obedience. Jehoshaphat and the kingdom gained great plunder, they had rest (נוח) and peace (שקט), and the fear of the Lord was on all of the surrounding kingdoms (vv. 29-30).

### Summary Conclusion of Chapter 3

This chapter highlighted the reign of four different kings and the faithfulness of Yahweh as Israel's Divine Warrior. David, Abijah, Asa, and Jehoshaphat prove to subsequent kings that when the king relied on and trusted in the Lord in political encounters, even against overwhelming odds, Yahweh never failed to come to their aid. These four kings are illustrations of Yahweh's perfect faithfulness proving there is no reason to doubt him. When each king upheld the principles laid out in the Law of the King by putting covenant loyalty and obedience to the Torah at the forefront of his rule (setting aside his own military might in favor of relying on God), God not only granted victory, but the kingdom experienced the blessing of peace and rest associated with obedience.

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<sup>337</sup> Thompson, *1, 2 Chronicles*, 19m, e-book.

Through the example set forth by David, the paradigm of the ideal king was established. The king was to do what was right in God's eyes, like David, and have a heart like David. David did what was right externally by being obedient to God's commands and diligently observing the Torah. Internally, David's heart was directed toward walking in the ways of Yahweh and loving and serving him wholeheartedly. These characteristics are displayed in David's political entanglements as he trusts and relies on Yahweh as his Divine Warrior in battle.

Abijah, Asa, and Jehoshaphat each show these aspects of commitment to Yahweh and experience a substantial victory from Yahweh as their Divine Warrior. When they were challenged with a battle well beyond their ability, they displayed the necessary attributes of a king based on the Law of the King by upholding the covenant and being obedient to the Torah. Asa and Jehoshaphat went even further by executing extensive cultic reforms. Thus, they are perfect examples of what a king should do. Through their covenant commitment and obedience, when political strife threatened to annihilate them, they relied on the Lord to fight for them. The Lord, in turn, delivered an enormous victory, he received credit for the battle, and the kingdom was blessed. In each instance, trust brought deliverance, the land was secured (or territory was gained), they were blessed, and experienced peace and rest from their enemies.

## Chapter 4: Political Apostasy and the Reversal of Blessing, Early Monarchy

Solomon and Asa are ideal examples of God's covenant loyalty and blessing when the king was faithful, righteous, and upright in heart. On the other hand, they are also good illustrations of how foreign alliances and political apostasy weaken the king's dependence on God and lead to covenant curses and loss of blessing. Both kings begin their reigns strong by adhering to the Torah, administering the covenant through cultic institutions and reform, and relying on God for wisdom and strength. Yet, both lose sight of God as their Divine Suzerain and Warrior and find themselves looking to others for stability, protection, and aid, essentially mimicking the behavior of the kings from the surrounding nations (contra the Law of the King Deut 17). For Solomon, political protection and stability came in the form of diplomatic marriage alliances. This infraction of the covenant and political apostasy led to a division of loyalty in his heart, and he was led astray. Asa sought protection and deliverance through the help of Aram instead of trusting in the strength of Yahweh. In the eyes of God, these acts showed a lack of faith in God as the Divine King and Warrior and were considered a breach of covenant and political adultery.

### Solomon

First Kings 1-12:24 centers on a description of the life of Solomon.<sup>338</sup> It describes how he became king, received wisdom from the Lord, and had great success. It also describes how

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<sup>338</sup> While many scholars propose that Solomon's narrative ends at 1 Kings 11:43, Amos Frisch argues that Solomon's reign concludes at 1 Kings 12:24. He bases his argument on several factors. The one most aligned with this thesis is the fact that after his apostasy, Solomon was punished for his wrongdoing through the division of the kingdom. Frisch states, "to fix the limit of NSR [narrative of Solomon's reign] at the end of ch. 11 is, therefore, to separate a prophecy from its immediate realization and to isolate the stages of Solomon's punishment from one another." Amos Frisch, "Structure and Its Significance: The Narrative of Solomon's Reign (1 Kings 1-12:24)," *JSOT* 16, no. 51 (September 1991), 8-9.

Solomon abused his wisdom, turned from the Lord, and experienced punishment. 1 Kings 1:1-2:46 provides insight and background into the events surrounding the death of David and Solomon's ascent to the throne. The events of chapter 3:1-15 provide a pivotal moment in Solomon's life in which God grants Solomon wisdom, riches, honor, and the promise of long life if Solomon is obedient to walking in God's ways and keeping God's commands like his father David (3:14). The following passages in this unit, 3:16-12:24, hinge on these points: 1) Solomon's successful reign and great blessing when he was faithful to God as Israel's covenant administrator, and 2) his downfall because of disobedience, a divided heart, and redirection of loyalty (1 Kgs 5:4; 6:12-13; 8:61; 9:25; 11:2-4; 9-11). 1 Kings 9:4-5 reiterates the responsibility of the king outlined in chapter three above; God expected more than just ritual observance; he expected wholehearted obedience, loyalty, and integrity of heart.<sup>339</sup> He wanted the king to show the same devotion as David by modeling his faithfulness, righteousness, and uprightness of heart (cf. 1 Kgs 3:6). Solomon was found wanting and compromised in the loyalty of his heart. He did not wholeheartedly trust Yahweh, instead, he substituted faith in God for faith in worldly wisdom. 1 Kings 11:14-12:24 outlines the result of his political and religious apostasy and his ensuing punishment through adversity (loss of rest and peace) and the loss of blessing and territory. The rest of the book of Kings outlines the unfortunate consequences of Solomon's disobedience—the division of the kingdom.

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<sup>339</sup> Richard Patterson and Hermann Austel, *1 & 2 Kings*, ed. Tremper III Longman, EBC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), Commentary 9:4-5, e-book.

## The Early Years, Wisdom, Peace, and Prosperity

During the beginning of his reign (1 Kgs 3-10), Solomon is shown to be a king who loves the Lord, relies on him, and is blessed because of his commitment to walking in the ways of the Lord (1 Kgs 3:3, 10-13; 4:29). He is presented as the ideal Near Eastern ruler who performs the right religious rituals and is accepted by the people and God, who subsequently grants him the gift of wisdom and judgment.<sup>340</sup> Not only is he blessed with understanding, wealth, and the admiration of his peers, but his reign begins to mirror the covenant promises God made to Abraham, as Israel became the people God intended when he instituted the covenant. They were as numerous as the sand on the seashore (Gen 22:17; Deut 7:13; 1 Kgs 4:20); through the conquest of David, they possessed all the land God promised (Gen 15:18-21; Deut 11:24; 1 Kgs 4:21);<sup>341</sup> Solomon's name became great, he had dominion, and Israel was the head and not the tail (Gen 12:2; Deut 28:13; 1 Kgs 4:24; cf. Ps 72:1, 8, 10-11).<sup>342</sup> They were the priests and holy nation that reflected the blessing of God, they made his name known, and rulers from other nations came to Israel and were blessed (Gen 22:18; Deut 26:19; 1 Kgs 4:34; 8:60; 10:1-13).

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<sup>340</sup> L.K. Handy, "Solomon," ed. Bill T. Arnold and H.G.M. Williamson, DOTHB (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), State, e-book.

<sup>341</sup> For more on the conquest of David into Syria, see Abraham Malamat, *History of Biblical Israel: Major Problems and Minor Issues* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 208-218.

<sup>342</sup> L.K. Handy states that the kingdom David left for Solomon included Israel, Aram, Ammon, Moab, and Edom, with the Philistine cities as vassal territory. The relationship with Phenicia was one of equals, and Solomon appears to be superior to Egypt as the princess came to him instead of the other way around (more on this below). Ibid. For more on the relationship between Solomon and Egypt, see James K. Hoffmeijer, "Egypt As an Arm of Flesh: A Prophetic Response," in *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison*, ed. Avraham Gileadi (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 81-83.

The kingdom is presented as well-ordered, happy, and prosperous, everyone having what they need to live well;<sup>343</sup> in other words, the people experienced the blessing of abundance, rest, and peace (Deut 28; 1 Kgs 4:24-25; 5:4). Solomon achieved extensive building projects, including the temple, and was able to fortify cities and accumulate a vast military (1 Kgs 6; 7; 9:15-19; 10:26). Abraham Malamat describes Solomon's kingdom as the major power of its day, "it was the only point in history that the Holy Land ever attained primary status in international politics."<sup>344</sup> This illustrates what the king of Israel (per the Law of the King), under the direction of Yahweh as sovereign, was meant to do, and how the nations were meant to respond.

### **Solomon's Political Compromise and Downfall**

Unfortunately, the utopian rule of Solomon did not last as political and religious compromise led to apostasy. Amos Frisch states, "the first part [of his reign] gives a favorable account of Solomon for the way in which he combines Torah and wisdom, whereas 'the hostile description of Solomon in 9-11.13 occurs when wisdom has become antagonistic to Torah.'"<sup>345</sup> Despite Solomon's gift of wisdom and blessing, over time he parted from his duty as covenant administrator of the law to pursue his own ideals of how the kingdom should be run. He relied on his wisdom instead of the Lord, even though the Lord spoke directly to him twice warning him to guard his heart and his walk (1 Kgs 11:9; 3:5-14; 9:1-9). He departed from God as Suzerain and Divine Warrior and the stipulations and limitations presented in Deuteronomy, resorting to a

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<sup>343</sup> Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2003), 248.

<sup>344</sup> Abraham Malamat, *History of Biblical Israel*, 207.

<sup>345</sup> Amos Frisch, "Structure and Its Significance," 4.



form of political diplomacy “like the other nations” (he became the wrong kind of king predicted in 1 Samuel 8).

This reversal of obedience is hinted at the beginning of Solomon’s reign through his marriage to Pharaoh’s daughter (1 Kgs 3:1), which was the start of his acquisition of many foreign wives for political purposes (contra Deut 17:17). The Law of the King was also disobeyed by his multiplication of horses and chariots (1 Kgs 4:26; cf., Deut 17:16). As L. K. Handy confirms, “in accumulating vast wealth and many wives, and ordering the populace to serve the royal family, Solomon comes across as the antithesis of the wise ruler (cf. Deut 17:14-19) and indeed as the embodiment of the evil that Samuel described as defining kingship (1 Sam 8:11-18).”<sup>346</sup> Essentially, Solomon became the wrong kind of king.

*Solomon’s Compromise—Alliance with Egypt (1 Kgs 3:1)*

As mentioned above, Solomon’s political apostasy started in the first few years of his reign.<sup>347</sup> After taking care of the internal divisions, Solomon sought to further establish his kingdom from the standpoint of international affairs. One of the very first acts listed in this regard is his marriage alliance with the daughter of Pharaoh, king of Egypt (1 Kgs 3:1).<sup>348</sup> Pharaoh’s daughter is mentioned five times in the narrative of Kings, pointing to the harmful significance of this marriage from the perspective of the Dtr. In contrast, in the eyes of the

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<sup>346</sup> Handy, “Solomon,” Wisdom Traditions, e-book.

<sup>347</sup> Paul House points out that the events of chapters 3-4 occur during the first years of Solomon’s reign (ca. 970-966 B.C.) before the temple construction begins “in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign” (1 Kgs 6:1). House, *1, 2 King*, 16.

<sup>348</sup> Abraham Malamat contends the Pharaoh who gave his daughter to Solomon was Siamun king of the twenty-first dynasty. Abraham Malamat, *History of Biblical Israel*, 200. Marriage alliances were a common practice as a means of cementing treaties and securing borders. Patterson and Austel, *1 & 2 Kings*, Commentary 3:1, e-book.

political community, the marriage signified the importance of Solomon's reign and power. Patterson and Austel point out that while the Pharaohs of Egypt often took the daughters of foreign monarchs as wives, they did not let their daughters marry even the most powerful kings, indicating the importance of Israel during the time of Solomon as well as the decline of Egyptian power.<sup>349</sup> Malamat confirms that other than this instance in Kings, no other record is found where a daughter of a Pharaoh is given in marriage to a foreign ruler. He states, "there is explicit evidence, from the Amarna age down to the time of Herodotus, that an actual daughter of Pharaoh was never married to a foreigner. It follows from the foregoing facts that Solomon's marriage with Pharaoh's daughter was an act of exceptional political significance which testifies, in our opinion, to Egypt's inferior status as a political power vis-a-vis Israel at that time."<sup>350</sup>

In addition, in 1 Kings 9:16, this marriage seemed to be fruitful as Pharaoh is presented as capturing the city of Gezer and giving it to Solomon as a dowry.<sup>351</sup> However, even though it seemed fruitful politically, in the eyes of the Dtr it shows the danger of actions based purely on political expediency.<sup>352</sup> Solomon's foreign marriage to Pharaoh's daughter was contrary to the commands the Lord laid out in Deuteronomy that strictly forbade intermarriage with foreigners because they would lead the Israelites astray (Deut 7:3; cf., Ex 34:15-16; Josh 23:7, 12). The subtle condemnation of this marriage is found in the use of the same verb for "intermarry" (יָתַן)

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<sup>349</sup> Richard Patterson and Hermann Austel, *1 & 2 Kings*, Commentary 3:1, e-book.

<sup>350</sup> Malamat, *History of Biblical Israel*, 222.

<sup>351</sup> Malamat speculates that due to the superior status of Israel, that in actuality, Pharaoh's handing over Gezer was probably a territorial concession made in the guise of a dowry for his daughter. Malamat, *History of Biblical Israel*, 222.

<sup>352</sup> Donald J. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 89.

in 1 Kings 3:1 (also in 11:2b) that was used in Deuteronomy 7:3-4.<sup>353</sup> Provan et al. further indicate the negative association with Egypt that resonates throughout the Old Testament as they are regarded as the oppressors, archenemies of old, and a source of temptation (e.g., Ex 1-15, esp. 13:17-18). In addition, the Law of the King warned against “a return to Egypt” (Deut 17:16).<sup>354</sup>

The subtle hint of compromise regarding the marriage alliance with Egypt at the beginning of Solomon’s reign is an indicator of the political apostasy and the turning of his heart that would later be his downfall. While the Dtr stops short of questioning his basic commitment and certainly records that he was tremendously blessed by God, he suggests throughout 1 Kings 1-10 that all is not well with Solomon’s heart (e.g., 3:1-3; 4:26, 28; 5:14; 6:38-7:1).<sup>355</sup> Even though his reign started strong, Solomon’s compromise indicates that he did not adhere to the warning in the law, or heed the instructions given to him by David to completely dedicate his heart to the Lord (1 Kgs 2:1-4). In addition, he no longer possessed the “discerning heart” he requested in 1 Kings 3:9.<sup>356</sup> In fact, instead of trusting solely in Yahweh, Solomon, above all other kings of Israel, made international marriage alliances the cornerstone of his foreign policy.<sup>357</sup> In total disregard to the Law of the King (Deut 17:17), he acquired many wives for political security in place of relying on God as the only ally he needed. In essence, he relied on

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<sup>353</sup> Iain W. Provan, Robert Hubbard, and Robert Johnston, *1 and 2 Kings*, Understanding the Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 40-41.

<sup>354</sup> Provan et al., *1 and 2 Kings*, 40.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>356</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2000), 142.

<sup>357</sup> Malamat, *History of Biblical Israel*, 220.

the diplomacy used by other kings instead of that stipulated by God. Though his original intention seemed like a harmless cementing of foreign alliances, his continued disobedience and lack of faith in the Lord turned into political apostasy that proved to be disastrous for the kingdom.

*Solomon's Downfall and Yahweh's Judgment (1 Kgs 11-12:24)*

First Kings 11:1-8 forms an inclusio with 1 Kings 3:1-3, bracketing Solomon's narrative with his foreign marriage alliances, first to Pharaoh's daughter, and then to many others.<sup>358</sup> In 3:3 the text states Solomon "loved" (אהב) the Lord and in 11:1-2 we are told that Solomon "loved" (אהב) many foreign women. "Love" likely being used here in the sense of covenantal attachment. The Dtr specifies that his seven hundred wives were royal women/princesses alluding to the diplomatic nature of these marriages (v. 3). The vast number reflects his endless political arrangements sealed and made visible by political marriages.<sup>359</sup> Despite the commands given in the law against foreign marriage and the accumulation of many wives, verse 2 declares Solomon "held fast" (דבק) to them in love (אהב) (2b). Consequently, stressing that he harbored a strong loyalty to these women, which ultimately led him astray (as the law warned in Deut 7:3 and 17:17).<sup>360</sup> This correlates to the command in Deuteronomy to "love (אהב) the Lord and hold fast/cling (דבק) to him" (e.g., Deut 6:5; 10:12; 11:22; 30:20; cf., Josh 23:8). Nevertheless, due to his political apostasy, instead of "clinging" to the Lord in obedience, love, and devotion,

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<sup>358</sup> It should be noted that political marriages of this kind were a normal practice in the ANE and considered good politics. Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings*, 2597q, e-book. However, as stated in chapter two, God did not want his king to be like the other nations. He limited the acquisition of too many wives (diplomatic alliances) so that Israel would have to rely on him.

<sup>359</sup> Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, 142.

<sup>360</sup> Patterson and Austel, *1 & 2 Kings*, Commentary 11:1-3, e-book.

Solomon's heart was divided (it was "not fully devoted (לֹא־שָׁלֵם) to the Lord" 11:4), and inevitably his heart turned from the Lord (11:3, 9) to his wives and their gods.<sup>361</sup> Provan, et al. point out that, Solomon is the only monarch in Kings, who is said to have "loved" the Lord (1 Kgs 3:3); yet he also "loved" (was devoted to) foreign women. "Love" reappears twice in 1 Kings 11 (vv. 1, 2) concerning Solomon's other great "loves"—the foreign women, displaying the division these women produced in his heart between his covenant with God and with them.<sup>362</sup>

The inclusio with chapter three continues with the mention of Solomon's Torah obedience at the beginning of his reign (3:3) and his evident disobedience in chapter eleven (vv. 3-8), inextricably linking the diplomatic marriages to his apostasy and downfall.<sup>363</sup> Solomon's sin may have begun with one marriage alliance but over time it was fueled by each successive diplomatic marriage. Solomon's political apostasy through his foreign marriages became the catalyst that led to his religious apostasy. This, in turn, led to the anger and judgment of the Lord. 1 Kings 11:9 states, "and the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice." Solomon had no excuse; he had received a direct revelation from the Lord, and he still did not walk in obedience. The judgment of the Lord was manifested in the covenant curses—loss of peace, rest, and land. 1 Kings 11:11 stipulates, "the Lord said to Solomon, since this has been your practice and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear (קָרַע) the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant." The same wording was used when the

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<sup>361</sup> Patterson and Austel, *1 & 2 Kings*, Commentary 11:1-3, e-book.

<sup>362</sup> Provan, et al., *1 and 2 Kings*, 42.

<sup>363</sup> Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, 169.

kingdom was “torn” (קָרַע) from Saul and given to David (1 Sam 15:28; 28:17; 1 Kgs 11:11, 31). What David received as a gift from God, was taken from Solomon because, like Saul, his heart was not loyal, and he no longer recognized the importance of obedience.<sup>364</sup> Solomon could no longer lead the nation in covenant faithfulness because he had become unfaithful through disobedience (1 Kgs 11:10-11, cf., 2:4; 8:25; 9:4-5). He had ceased to be like David, his heart was not wholly committed (11:4), and he “did evil in the sight of the Lord” (11:6). The Lord was no longer the focus of his life, and adherence to Torah no longer his priority. He relinquished his role as the right kind of king, the covenant administrator, to promote the worship of gods from other nations, and, for that, God promised to “tear the kingdom” from him (11:7-8, 11).

The consequence of his sin, the loss of peace, rest, and territory, came in the form of three adversaries who, ironically, were political opponents sent by God (1 Kgs 11:14, 23, 25).<sup>365</sup> The blessing of peace that Solomon experienced in 1 Kings 5:4 was now fractured as God raised up enemies against him.<sup>366</sup> As addressed in chapter two above, God could turn on his people and instead of protecting them, he could be antagonistic toward Israel in judgment when the covenant was violated (cf., Deut 32:21-24). 1 Kings 11:14-25 indicates that due to Solomon’s apostasy, the Lord raised up the first two adversaries to trouble him from the north and south, Hadad and Rezon. Hadad (a member of the royal family from Edom) reemerged from Egypt to take back possession of the land of Edom which had been subdued by David (2 Sam 8:3-14), and under the control of Solomon as a vassal state. Rezon, a refugee from Zobah, organized a guerilla

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<sup>364</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, 143.

<sup>365</sup> More ironic is that two out of three of these enemies found refuge with Egypt, an old enemy of Israel whom Solomon had unwisely trusted as an ally and friend (1 Kgs 3:1). Provan et al., *1 and 2 Kings*, 78.

<sup>366</sup> Provan et al., *1 and 2 Kings*, 78.

movement to retake control of Damascus, which had also been garrisoned by David (2 Sam 8:6) and part of the territory controlled by Solomon (cf., 1 Kgs 4:24).<sup>367</sup> Rezon became the founder of a dynasty ruling over the kingdom of Aram-Damascus, which would grow to be the most powerful Syrian state and a constant enemy of Israel (e.g., 1 Kgs 20; 22; 2 Kgs 5).<sup>368</sup>

Paradoxically, “instead of securing his kingdom, Solomon’s numerous diplomatic marriages paved the way following his death, to its division and decline.”<sup>369</sup> His political and religious apostasy became both a personal and national disaster.<sup>370</sup> The final political enemy came from within Israel, as God raised up Jeroboam an Ephraimite to usurp the throne and take away most of the kingdom from Solomon’s son, Rehoboam (1 Kgs 12). Sadly, the account of Solomon ends on a somber note, as the illustrious nation built by David and managed effectively at first by Solomon, was chipped away and the nation torn apart. Yahweh’s punishment was swift and lasting as the land was torn from Solomon and given to another.

### **God Remembers His Covenant**

Despite Solomon’s apostasy and unfaithfulness to the covenant, God still showed himself merciful and faithful to his covenant by reiterating six times in chapter eleven that “on account of David” he will refrain from total judgment (vv. 12, 13, 32, 34, 36, 39). Yahweh’s acts are in accordance with his promises to David (2 Sam 7:13; 23:5), revealing that God’s promises are not

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<sup>367</sup> August H. Konkel, *1 and 2 Kings*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2006), 14.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

<sup>369</sup> Yosef Green, “The Reign of King Solomon: Diplomatic and Economic Perspectives,” *JBQ* 42, no. 3 (July 2014): 156.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

undone by Solomon's apostasy and judgment.<sup>371</sup> First, God declares that "on account of David," Solomon will not experience the final division of the kingdom, instead it will be enacted upon his son (1 Kgs 11:12). The father-son language is reminiscent of the Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 7:14).<sup>372</sup> God treats Solomon very much like a son to whom he is handing down fatherly discipline.<sup>373</sup>

Second, "on account of David," Yahweh's servant, the kingdom will not be entirely removed, and one tribe will remain (1 Kgs 11:13).<sup>374</sup> In the prophecy to Jeroboam, God reiterates the fact that one tribe will remain "on account of David" (v. 32). God also promises that Solomon will not experience the division in his lifetime (v. 34). This act of grace, which mitigates the full measure of the law, is an assurance that "on account of David" there will always be a lamp in Jerusalem (v. 36). God will punish but "on account of David" it will not last forever, and judgment will ultimately be transformed into blessing (v. 39).<sup>375</sup> Solomon's accumulated indiscretions eventually led to his outright apostasy and downfall; however, God still promised an everlasting dynasty and despite the waywardness of Israel's human king, God ensured there would someday be an eternal one.<sup>376</sup>

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<sup>371</sup> Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, 174.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

<sup>373</sup> Provan et al., *1 and 2 Kings*, 79.

<sup>374</sup> In actuality the monarchy of David was left with two tribes, Judah and Benjamin (see 1 Kgs 12:21; 15:22).

<sup>375</sup> Provan et al., *1 and 2 Kings*, 79.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid., 81.



## Asa

According to both Kings (15:9) and Chronicles (16:13), the reign of Asa was the third longest reign of any Judean monarch (after Uzziah and Manasseh, 2 Kgs 15:2; 21:1), lasting forty-one years. While the Dtr's assessment of this long-reigning king is sparse (only 15 verses), Chronicles commits three chapters to Asa, filling in many details that are not found in Kings. As already established in chapter three above, overall, Asa had a positive assessment from the Dtr and the Chronicler, who both state he "did what was right in the eyes of Yahweh" (1 Kgs 15:11; 2 Chr 14:2) and that he had a true heart toward Yahweh all his days (1 Kgs 15:14; 2 Chr 15:17). His positive evaluation was especially true in the early years of his reign when he exercised religious reform (2 Kgs 15:12-14; 2 Chr 14:1-8; 15:8-18), dedicated items to the temple (2 Kgs 15:15; 2 Chr 15:18), and, as noted above, committed himself to seek Yahweh (2 Chr 15:12-15). He was also praised by the Chronicler for his reliance on God in the battle against Zerah where he was blessed with peace and rest (2 Chr 15:15).

Yet, as with other monarchs "who did what was right," there are exceptions to perfect stewardship (v. 14a).<sup>377</sup> Provan et al. point out that understanding Asa's evaluation as a "good" king does not insinuate he was perfect but that he followed the Davidic pattern of eschewing idolatry.<sup>378</sup> Because of his religious commitment to Yahweh (he did not serve other gods), he was granted a positive evaluation by the Dtr. However, both the Dtr (although more subtly) and the Chronicler give Asa a mixed appraisal in the political arena as both record that later in his reign he made an alliance with Aram against Israel. His reliance on Aram, instead of Yahweh,

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<sup>377</sup> Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, 167.

<sup>378</sup> Provan et al., *1 and 2 Kings*, 99.

will be shown as a negative affront that is considered political apostasy against Yahweh. Even though temporarily successful, this alliance is the motive behind the removal of the treasury of the Lord, the forced labor of the people, the consequence of loss of peace and Israelite land, and possibly the disease Asa incurred in his feet leading to his death (1 Kgs 15:16-23; 2 Chr 16:1-12).

### **Asa's Alliance with Aram (1 Kgs 15:16-21)**

The negative, albeit subtle, disapproval of Asa begins in verse 16 as the Dtr relates that there was war between Baasha and Asa “all their days.”<sup>379</sup> The text states that Baasha king of Israel “went up against Judah and built Ramah, that he might permit no one to go out or come into Asa king of Judah” (v. 17). David Elgavish argues that the “wars” mentioned here were more than likely the result of continued conflict over the nature of their common boundary. He further adds that Baasha fought Judah to annex the southern portion of Benjamin which had been captured by Abijah at the battle of Zemaraim (2 Chr 13:19).<sup>380</sup> The border area of Benjamin had good economic, commercial, and agricultural potential, plus access to nearby water sources. Baasha chose to fortify Ramah as a stronghold because of its strategic and commercial significance. Ramah occupied a central position at the junction of three roads, one that ran north-

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<sup>379</sup> Dillard comments that the seeming contrast with the account in Kings that there was war between Baasha and Asa “all their days” (1 Kgs 15:16) can be explained if the text of 2 Chronicles 14:4-15:15 is inserted as an interpolation between 1 Kings 15:12 and 13 with “the wars” starting later. Dillard, “The Reign of Asa,” 212. Selman adds that Chronicles follows the basic framework of Kings in which 2 Chronicles 14:3-15:15 fills out 1 Kings 15:11-15, thus, confirming Asa’s years of “doing what was right”; and Chronicles 16 offers more details of his later years, his wars with Israel, illness, and death (c.f., 1 Kgs 15:17-24). Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 404-405. The question of chronology regarding Baasha’s death before Asa’s 36<sup>th</sup> year of reign is outside the scope of this paper, for the theories surrounding this difference see Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 414-415; Mabie, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, 251.

<sup>380</sup> David Elgavish, “Objective of Baasha’s War Against Asa,” in *Studies in Historical Geography and Biblical Historiography: Presented to Zecharia Kallai*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 142.

south on the watershed ridge, and two others that went east to west on the central mountain spine. The most important of these was known as the Ascent of Beth Horan and was the only access route into the hill country for miles (Josh 10:10, 11; 1 Sam 14:31).<sup>381</sup> The city of Ramah was also located a mere 5 miles north of Jerusalem and since it sat on a major trade route, any shift of the boundary would add economic stability and security to one nation, and danger to the other.<sup>382</sup> Thus, the seizure of Ramah presented a serious threat to Judah taking away control of the trade route and blocking the Judeans from going to the north and west of their land.<sup>383</sup> However, it was nowhere near the threat of Zerah that he had experienced earlier, when he had faith to trust in Yahweh for his salvation.

Asa reacted to the threat of Baasha by taking “all” of the silver and gold from the temple and the king’s house and sending it to Ben-Hadad of Aram as a bribe in hope of forming an alliance (בְּרִית) with him (1 Kgs 15:18-19).<sup>384</sup> The Law of the King prohibited a king from amassing too much wealth precisely because he might be tempted to rely on buying help rather than relying on Yahweh (although this is not the only reason they were not to amass too much wealth). Asa’s reaction although seemingly smart from a political point of view, and achieving the hoped-for result, was not viewed positively by either the Dtr or the Chronicler.

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<sup>381</sup> Sanchez, “Royal Limitation,” 176.

<sup>382</sup> Elgavish, “Objective of Baasha’s War Against Asa,” 147.

<sup>383</sup> Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, 212.

<sup>384</sup> The mention of an alliance between the fathers of Asa and Ben-Hadad may indicate that Abijah and Tabrimmon had made a treaty of peace in the past. Konkel, *1 and 2 Kings*, 33. Sweeney contends it could be a reference to the “former alliance between the house of David under David and Solomon with the Arameans, including Hadadezer of Zobah, the Arameans of Damascus, Toi of Hamath, and others (2 Sam 8:3-12; 10:6-19).” Marvin A. Sweeney, *1 & 2 Kings, A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 194. Ben-Hadad is the title used first by the present king, and then by several successive kings of Aram-Damascus. Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1st ed., vol. 10, AYB (New Haven & London: The Anchor Yale Bible, 2001), 399.

The disapproval of the Dtr is evident in several ways. First, it is a response to the threat of loss of land (1 Kgs 15:16-17), of which Yahweh, as Sovereign, was in control; he made it very clear it was his land (Lev 25:23-24; Deut 9:4-6; 11:8-9). As Suzerain, he was the one to dictate who possessed and occupied the land, and as a vassal, Asa was to trust in Yahweh as Sovereign. Second, Asa looks to a foreign king for deliverance and aid which is out of line with his commitment to Yahweh and his reliance on him as the Divine Warrior (e.g., Deut 20:4; 28:7). He does this by sending a “gift” (שֶׁחַד) which is translated almost everywhere else in the Old Testament as “bribe” (e.g., Ex 23:8; Deut 10:17; 16:19; 1 Sam 8:3; Ezek 22:12).<sup>385</sup> Beal points out that in Kings, the word is used again only in 2 Kings 16:8 in reference to Ahaz’s “gift” (שֶׁחַד) to the king of Assyria in which he also took silver and gold from the treasury of the house of the Lord.<sup>386</sup> She further indicates that although Asa is not evaluated as seriously, his payment of a שֶׁחַד reveals whom he trusts, and reveals his dishonor and disloyalty in the eyes of the Dtr.<sup>387</sup> Third, “depleting the treasuries of the temple and palace” (אֶזְרָחַת בֵּית־יְהוָה וְאֶת־אֶזְרָחַת בֵּית־מֶלֶךְ) is consistently viewed by the Dtr as a negative act. This phrase, used seven times throughout Kings (with some slight variations), is always employed disapprovingly.<sup>388</sup> The critical nature of this appraisal is most likely due to the special nature of this wealth as the result of the victories of Yahweh in the past and the sacrificial gifts of his people (2 Sam 8:6; 1 Chr 18:11; 29:3-9; cf. 2

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<sup>385</sup> Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, 191.

<sup>386</sup> Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, 212.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid., 212-213. Mordechai Cogan adds that the word שֶׁחַד was inserted by the Dtr to taint Asa’s actions. Cogan, *1 Kings*, 400.

<sup>388</sup> Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, 213.

Chr 12:9).<sup>389</sup> Beal asserts that depleting temple and palace funds are a litmus test signaling the disapproval and judgment of Yahweh, primarily due to cultic shortcomings or non-trust of Yahweh.<sup>390</sup> “The irony is that instead of trusting in Yahweh to fight for him, Asa took the money dedicated to Yahweh and used it to reinforce his diplomatic efforts.”<sup>391</sup>

Asa’s apostasy and consequences are easier to recognize in Chronicles. Chronicles specifies that despite Asa’s long commitment to Yahweh and the prophetic encouragement from Azariah to remain “with” the Lord (2 Chr 15:1-7), he replaced his covenant to seek the Lord (“they entered into a covenant (בְּרִית) to seek the Lord,” v. 12) with a covenant with Ben-Hadad of Aram (“Let there be an alliance (בְּרִית) between me and you,” 2 Chr 16:3 NRSV). Even though these third-party alliances were not always condemned (e.g., Hiram in 1 Kgs 2; 2 Chr 2:11; the Queen of Sheba in 1 Kgs 5:12; 2 Chr 9:8), if they replaced the king’s covenant with Yahweh and his complete trust and reliance on Yahweh as Divine Warrior and defender, they were recognized as a form of political apostasy.<sup>392</sup> This is further apparent in Asa’s rebuke by the prophet Hanani who said, “because you relied (שָׁעַן) on the king of Syria, and did not rely (שָׁעַן) on the Lord your God, the army of the king of Syria has escaped you” (2 Chr 16:7). The seer Hanani accused Asa of the misguided act of political dependence on the king of Aram which is

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<sup>389</sup> Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 418.

<sup>390</sup> Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, 213. See also E Theodore Mullen, “Crime and Punishment: The Sins of the King and the Despoliation of the Treasuries,” *CBQ* 54, no. 2 (April 1992): 238.

<sup>391</sup> Sanchez, “Royal Limitation,” 177.

<sup>392</sup> Amar further contends that alliances with third parties were only effective if Yahweh was recognized as sovereign over them. This explains why Solomon and Hiram flourished in maritime trade (2 Chr 9:21) and Jehoshaphat and Ahaziah did not. Amar, “Form and Content in the Story of Asa,” 358-359.

especially unthinkable after relying (יָצַף) on Yahweh as their Divine Warrior in the battle against Zerah had brought such great success (16:8).

Because of Asa's "folly," Hanani specifies two consequences. First, Asa missed an opportunity to defeat the Syrian (rather than Israelite!) army. Instead of receiving the blessing of victory over multiple enemies associated with obedience (c.f., Deut 20:4; 28:10), this missed opportunity would have lasting results as Syria would become an increasing threat to Asa's successors (cf., 2 Chr 18:30; 22:5; 2 Kgs 15:5). Hanani implies Asa could have defeated them like he did the Ethiopians.<sup>393</sup> Second, Asa's foolishness reversed God's previous blessing (2 Chr 15:15). He lost the peace he had encountered when he was faithful and was now going to experience continual war without the complete protection of God (16: 9).<sup>394</sup> Consequently, even though Asa reestablished his hold on the northern border in Benjamin, Asa's political apostasy resulted in the loss of Israelite land to a foreign king (1 Kgs 15:20).<sup>395</sup> Even though it was land belonging to Israel instead of Judah, nevertheless, it was land granted to the Israelites by Yahweh. Ben-Hadad ravished and conquered the northern borders of Israel gaining dominion over all of the land of Naphtali (including the fertile plain adjacent to the Sea of Galilee and the Galilean uplands). Subsequently, he also gained control over agricultural land and the trade routes running west to Tyre and Sidon and south to the plains of Jezreel.<sup>396</sup>

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<sup>393</sup> Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 419.

<sup>394</sup> Mabie, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, 254.

<sup>395</sup> Provan, *1 and 2 Kings*, 100.

<sup>396</sup> Konkel, *1 and 2 Kings*, 33; Sweeney, *1 Kings*, 191.

### Asa's Forced Labor and Disease in His Feet (1 Kgs 15:22-24)

The tone of the Dtr's negative appraisal continues in the next section as he relates that king Asa proclaimed that all Judah, without exception (יְהוּדָה כָּלָה), take the stones and timber of Ramah to build up the cities of Geba and Mizpah (1 Kgs 15:22). Brueggemann comments that the Dtr adversely conveys that "Asa reconstitutes the policy of forced labor that was decisive in the collapse of the great Solomonic achievements."<sup>397</sup> He concludes that Asa bought an ally, which depleted his resources and caused him to conscript forced labor from his own people.<sup>398</sup> Second Chronicles 16:10 further adds that "Asa inflicted cruelties (רָצַח) upon some of the people." The word רָצַח is in the *piel* and portrays Asa's actions more severely as crushing to pieces and grievously oppressing.<sup>399</sup> Elsewhere in the OT, this word is used for social injustice and mistreatment of the weak, needy, and poor (e.g., Amos 4:1; Hos 5:11).<sup>400</sup> This type of state service done by public proclamation was not unheard of and, in fact, was a common practice in Mesopotamia. Cogan reports "the terms *šišīt nāgiri*, 'the proclamation of the herald,' and *dīkut māti*, 'the call-up of the land,' often appear synonymously in Neo-Assyrian texts in referring to the corvée."<sup>401</sup> However, although Asa's acts, were "normal" for the culture of the ANE, they were a violation of the Deuteronomic Law of the King. Asa abused his power by elevating himself over his brethren through oppression (Deut 17:20). Just like his use of a diplomatic

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<sup>397</sup> Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, 191.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

<sup>399</sup> Olive Tree Bible Software, ed., "רָצַח," in *Olive Tree Enhanced Strong's Dictionary* (Olive Tree, 2020), e-book.

<sup>400</sup> Ringgren, "רָצַח," in *TDOT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), Other forms, e-book.

<sup>401</sup> Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings*, 402.

bribe, he had once again become a king “like the other nations” and the wrong kind of king stipulated by Yahweh.

Not only is Asa guilty of ANE tactics of oppression but he is guilty of building up his national defense rather than relying on God and placing national security in God’s hands. He used the laborers to fortify two cities, Geba and Mitzpah (Mitzpah is a military term for watchtower).<sup>402</sup> A fortress at these two cities was a strategic move that would have provided security and control over the territory of Benjamin.<sup>403</sup> The concluding formula shares that he fortified other cities as well (1 Kgs 15:23-24), proving that in his latter days, he had switched from reliance on Yahweh to reliance on his own might and military fortifications.

The last comment of Asa’s reign further alludes to his unfaithfulness in his later years. 2 Kings 15:23 explains that although successful in power, accomplishments, and the fortification of cities, later in life he was diseased in his feet (2 Kgs 15:23). The Lucianic recensions of LXX adds “he did evil” after “in his old age” to explain the king’s disease.<sup>404</sup> The disease is unknown although some contend it could be gout, dropsy, gangrene, or some sort of genital ailment, possibly prostate cancer or venereal disease.<sup>405</sup> Comments like this from the Dtr, although subtle, were regarded as evidence of divine disfavor since he rarely recorded royal diseases.<sup>406</sup> Cogan

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<sup>402</sup> The prophet Jeremiah 41:9 confirms that Mizpah was built as a fortification against Baasha king of Israel.

<sup>403</sup> Cogan, *1 Kings*, 402.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid.

<sup>405</sup> Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 420; Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 195; Patterson and Austel, *I & 2 Kings*, Notes, e-book.

<sup>406</sup> Jeremy Schipper, “Deuteronomy 24:5 and King Asa’s Foot Disease in 1 Kings 15:23b,” *JBL* 128, no. 4 (2009): 644.



observes “as a rule, Dtr did not note royal illnesses; the only other instances recorded in Kings concerns the leprosy of Azariah (2 Kgs 15:5), which led to his quarantine and removal from office, and Hezekiah’s disease (2 Kgs 20). Concerning Asa, the implication seems to be that it led to his death.”<sup>407</sup> Some commentators contend that the praise of all three kings from the Dtr (1 Kgs 15:11-13; 2 Kgs 15:3; 18:3-7) argues against interpreting this notation of their illness as divine punishment; instead, they believe the proper interpretation should be diagnostic rather than theological.<sup>408</sup> However, as Jeremy Schipper argues, since the Dtr explicitly places these other instances in a theological framework (Azariah’s skin disease was caused by divine causation, 2 Kgs 15:5a, and Hezekiah’s illness was under divine control, 2 Kgs 20:1-11), Asa’s foot disease should be interpreted that way as well and is intended as an intentionally negative statement of Asa’s reign.<sup>409</sup> Inferential statements such as this one related to an illness, are normal for the Dtr who often presented events into the theological schema without comment or further explanation. As Richard Nelson points out about the Dtr, he writes with “the assumption that the reader can draw the proper conclusion without intrusive guidance.”<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>407</sup> Cogan, *I Kings*, 402.

<sup>408</sup> Schipper, “Deuteronomy 24:5 and King Asa’s Foot Disease,” 644.

<sup>409</sup> Schipper notes that interpreters of this text have noticed a link between Deut 24:5 and Asa’s foot disease since the time of the Talmud. These interpreters identify Asa’s disease as a form of punishment for violating the law in Deuteronomy 24:5 by demanding that “all” Judah, including newly married men, work on fortifying the two cities (1 Kgs 15:22). Schipper argues that Asa’s action then correlates to the foot disease if the disease is interpreted as a type of genital dysfunction associated with Asa’s violation of the marriage law (elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible גִּזְלָה in its various forms are a euphemism for genitalia). *Ibid.*, 644-647.

<sup>410</sup> Richard D. Nelson, *First and Second Kings: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2012), 98.

The Chronicler, more forthright in his analysis, develops this point well, as an adverse consequence of disobedience.<sup>411</sup> 2 Chronicles explains, “yet even in his disease (which was severe) he did not seek the Lord, but sought help from physicians” (16:12). This statement is not intended to convey that consulting a physician is wrong (there are no other instances in the Bible where consulting a physician is considered a sin) but was intended to show the extent of Asa’s spiritual decline.<sup>412</sup> In his early years he was devoted to seeking the Lord and leading the nation in seeking the Lord with all their heart (2 Chr 14:4, 7; 15:12-15). Later in life he had neglected his prior commitment to seeking the Lord with his whole heart. As Peter Leithart acknowledges, this is consistent with Asa’s other actions toward the end of his reign, where he had become accustomed to relying on humans instead of Yahweh.<sup>413</sup> The text is indicative of his political failure, and spiritual decline and stresses that even in this matter, Asa did not “seek” (פָּרַשׁ) the Lord or trust in his power when he was in trouble, thereby paralleling his political mistrust. Brueggemann points out that in both situations, Asa is judged for lacking the kind of faith that would affect his actions.<sup>414</sup>

#### Summary Conclusion of Chapter 4

Chapter four has provided the first glimpse of political apostasy in the monarchy and the effect it had on the kingdom. This chapter shows how both Solomon and Asa began their reigns according to the Law of the King but faltered over time and became “like the other nations.”

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<sup>411</sup> Konkel, *1 and 2 Kings*, 33.

<sup>412</sup> Selman, *2 Chronicles*, 420.

<sup>413</sup> Peter J. Leithart, *1 and 2 Kings*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 116.

<sup>414</sup> Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, 192.

They imitated those around them by relying on others for political security and protection instead of trusting in Yahweh as their Suzerain and Divine protector. Both kings prove that unsanctioned foreign alliances weaken the king's loyalty to God and fracture the covenant. In God's eyes, these types of alliances are considered political apostasy that result in the loss of covenant blessing.

When Solomon was obedient, he and the nation experienced God's abundant blessing of wisdom, peace, and prosperity. During the early part of his rule, the kingdom experienced the realization of the covenantal promises of God, and they reflected the purposes God intended. However, as Solomon's wealth and status grew, his dependence on his own wisdom superseded his reliance on the Lord and his commitment to being the covenant administrator God intended. He departed from being God's vice-regent and viewing God as his Suzerain and Divine Protector and fell into the trap of political diplomacy "like the other nations." He went against the Law of the King by multiplying wives for political gain, accumulating horses and wealth "for himself," and elevating himself above his brethren (cf., Deut 17:16-20). Because of his political apostasy, Solomon's heart was divided and Solomon "clung" (דָּבַק) to his foreign wives (1 Kgs 11:2) instead of "clinging" to the Lord (cf., Deut 6:5), turning his loyalty from the Lord to other gods. He had ceased to be like David in the commitment of his heart and the consequence was the loss of peace, rest, and territory. Solomon's numerous diplomatic marriages led to adversaries in Solomon's time and the division and destruction of the kingdom during his son's reign following his death.

Yet, even after Solomon's great sin, God remained faithful to his covenant with David. Despite Solomon's apostasy and judgment God's word was not completely undone and he promised "on account of David" that a lamp would remain in Jerusalem. God revealed his justice

through punishment but also his grace that punishment would not last forever. Because of David, judgment would eventually give way to the blessing of an eternal Davidic king.

King Asa, who started his reign strong in Torah adherence and dependence on Yahweh, also eventually succumbed to the lure of contemporary diplomacy. Asa is evaluated as a “good” king because he did not succumb to idolatry, however, both the Dtr and the Chronicler give him a mixed appraisal in the political arena because of his alliance with the king of Aram against Israel. This alliance, although successful, was viewed negatively by both biblical authors as mistrusting Yahweh as Judah’s Divine Warrior. Instead of relying on the Lord as he had in the battle against Zerah, Asa relied on his wealth (contra the Law of the King) to bribe another king to come to his aid. His payment from the temple treasury reveals whom he trusts and exposes his infidelity against Yahweh in favor of another. His betrayal initiated not only the loss of Israelite land, but also the loss of a victory over a much greater enemy, and the reversal of God’s blessing of peace. Sadly, Asa ended his monarchy much like the kings that surrounded him. He showed his lack of trust and faith in Yahweh by relying on his own military fortifications and oppressing his brethren. Although seemingly successful politically, the last statement recorded regarding his disease and his lack of “seeking” the Lord is the final appraisal linking his political apostasy and redirection of loyalty from Yahweh to another.

## Chapter 5: Political Apostasy and Reversal of Blessing, Middle Monarchy

This chapter will focus on the reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah in the latter half of the eighth century BC. In the eyes of the Dtr, the differences between this father and son could not be more severe. Cultically, Ahaz is regarded as the worst king of the Judean monarchy thus far, and the antithesis of David. This judgment is due to his engagement in every appalling idolatrous practice, including those of Israel and the surrounding nations. On the other hand, Hezekiah is considered the most godly king, and the most like David because he removes the detestable objects of pagan worship and adheres to the worship of Yahweh alone.

However, despite these differences, both are guilty of political apostasy through their reliance on other nations instead of Yahweh for protection and aid; and both experience the covenant curses and loss of blessing. Ahaz commits political apostasy by buying the help of Assyria during a time of crisis, thus, submitting himself and the nation to the yolk of a new suzerain and overlord. Hezekiah, even though he worships Yahweh alone, relies on his wealth, strength, and military prowess to secure allies from the neighboring states and aid from Egypt (actions much like the surrounding nations and contra the Law of the King, Deut 17). The prophet Isaiah warns and condemns them both for their unfaithfulness in the political arena, reminding them that Yahweh is Israel's Divine Warrior and King and there is no need for another. As is expected of a king who does not adhere to Yahwistic worship or Torah, Ahaz refuses to listen to Isaiah, and the nation becomes a vassal of Assyria, and Tiglath-Pileser III becomes Judah's new suzerain. Hezekiah, albeit after a tough lesson, because of his faith in Yahweh, listens to the prophet, realizes the error of his ways, turns his trust fully back to Yahweh, and is redeemed.

## Ahaz

The reign of Ahaz is well documented in scripture and various aspects of his monarchy can be found in three different texts, 2 Kings 16, 2 Chronicles 28, and Isaiah 7-12.<sup>415</sup> He is also listed in the Assyrian annals and inscriptions relating to Tiglath-Pileser III, where his full name is recorded as Yauhazi (Akk.), which is an exact translation of the Hebrew Jehoahaz (“the Lord has seized”).<sup>416</sup> Additionally, even though not mentioned directly, the prophetic books of Hosea and Micah correlate to and enhance the picture of the tumultuous period of Ahaz’s reign.<sup>417</sup> All of this documentation indicates the importance the biblical writers place on Ahaz’s political apostasy. His apostasy had severe consequences and cannot be overstated because his reliance on a foreign power constituted the beginning of Judah’s vassalship to Assyria and invited another suzerain to reign over Judah instead of Yahweh.

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<sup>415</sup> There are problems associated with the chronology of Ahaz and the dates of his reign. The conflicting accounts obscure the precise timing of his accession in 2 Kings 16:2 and 2 Chronicles 28:1 and the contradictory information regarding the death of Ahaz and the accession of Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:2; 2 Chr 29:1). If Hezekiah was twenty-five years old when he assumed the throne, and Ahaz was twenty and ruled for sixteen years, then he would have only been eleven years old when he fathered Hezekiah. The most prominent theory to reconcile this problem is a co-regency with Jothan before Ahaz’s sole reign adding about three to four years onto his sixteen years of rule (possibly 735-715 BC). This theory puts Ahaz’s age at around twenty-four or twenty-five at his accession as sole ruler. Additional support for this theory is found in the manuscripts of the LXX of 2 Chronicles 28:1, which states, “Ahaz was twenty-five when he became king. See Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, 437; Steven McKenzie, *1 Kings 16-2 Kings 16*, ed. Walter Dietrich and David Carr, *IECOT* (Stuttgart, Germany: Kohlhammer, 2019), 529; Carl Rasmussen, *Essential Atlas of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 131; David Allen Hubbard et al., *2 Kings*, vol. 13, WBC (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2015), 212; Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, “II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary,” 1st ed., vol. 11, AYB (New Haven & London: The Anchor Yale Bible, 1988), 186.

<sup>416</sup> Blake Scurlock, “Ahaz,” ed. Katherine Dobb, NIDB (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009), Ahaz, e-book; Keith W. Whitlam, “Ahaz,” in *ABD: A–C* (Doubleday: Yale University Press, 1992), 106; Prichard, *The Ancient Near East*, 264-265; James B. Prichard, *ANET* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1955), 282.

<sup>417</sup> Hosea preached for over three decades (755-725 BC) to the northern kingdom of Israel. His ministry began in the last years of the reign of the powerful King Jeroboam II when Israel was at the height of prosperity, continued throughout the war-torn reign of King Pekah, and ended just before the Assyrian siege of Samaria under King Hoshea (722 BC). The ministry of Micah covered the reigns of four kings of Judah (742-685 BC). Micah 1-2 relates to the time of Kings Jotham and Ahaz. Gary Smith, *Interpreting the Prophetic Books: An Exegetical Handbook* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2014), 73, 77.

The presentation of Ahaz in Kings shows his importance to the Dtr when compared to the rapid and brief descriptions of the reigns of seven kings listed in the previous chapter (2 Kgs 15). The fact that the Dtr devotes an entire chapter to Ahaz demonstrates the significance of his actions regarding the political and religious affairs of Judah.<sup>418</sup> Aside from an opening (2 Kgs 16:1-4) and closing formula (vv. 19-20), the remaining account of the reign of Ahaz (vv. 5-18) focuses solely on his political and religious apostasy during and after the Syro-Ephraimite War (735-732 BC).<sup>419</sup> The opening regnal formula paints a dire picture of his religious apostasy and his resemblance to the northern kings of Israel and the pre-Israelite inhabitants of the land (vv. 1-4). Verses 5-6 explain the political situation and several attacks from a coalition formed against Judah (the Syro-Ephraimite War) that led to an appeal to Tiglath-Pileser III for aid and salvation (vv. 7-9). The following verses (vv. 10-18) detail the religious consequences associated with Ahaz's political apostasy and alliance with Assyria.<sup>420</sup> Steven McKenzie suggests there is a chiasmic structure to the chapter that highlights the focus of the Dtr, showing that, much like Solomon, political and religious apostasy are intertwined and lead to the covenant curses of loss of monetary blessing, rest, security, and land. His structure is as follows:

- A Opening regnal formulae and religious evaluation (vv. 1-4)
- B Ahaz sends a bribe to Tiglath-Pileser III (vv. 5-9)
- C Ahaz has an altar built after the design of one in Damascus (vv. 10-11)
- X Ahaz worships at the new altar and moves the old one (vv. 12-14)
- C' Ahaz commands daily sacrifices on the altar he had built (vv. 15-16)
- B' Ahaz raids the temple because of the king of Assyria (vv. 17-18)

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<sup>418</sup> Robert Cohn, *2 Kings*, Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 111.

<sup>419</sup> The Syro-Ephraimite War (detailed below) is a phrase used by scholars to refer to the brief military encounter between the coalition formed by Syria and Israel against Judah. Walter Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, 465.

<sup>420</sup> Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 379.

A' Closing regnal formula (vv. 19-20)<sup>421</sup>

Isaiah chapters 7-12 concentrate on the same period of Ahaz's reign, filling in many details and providing a theological analysis of the political and religious events from a prophetic perspective. The account in Isaiah details Yahweh's assessment of the situation and prediction of the outcome. Therefore, because of the importance of the prophetic account to understanding the context of Kings, examination of Isaiah (focusing on chap 7-8) alongside Kings is essential to achieving a correct interpretation of the extent of Ahaz's apostasy. The record of Ahaz in 2 Chronicles 28 will be used minimally and only to add additional details to the account in Kings when needed.<sup>422</sup>

### **Opening Regnal Formula and Theological Verdict of Ahaz (2 Kgs 16:1-4)**

Although similar to the standard introduction of other kings, the opening regnal formula contains distinct differences of theological import. The negative assessment that Ahaz "did not do what was right" (2 Kgs 16:2) is noticeably different from the positive "he did what was right..." followed by exceptions (cf., 1 Kgs 22:43; 2 Kgs 12:2-3; 14:3; 15:3-4, 34-35).<sup>423</sup> This difference, with the addition that he did not do what was right "like David" (v. 2), is purposeful and meaningful. Since not every king is compared explicitly to David (the paradigm of the "right kind of king") in the regnal formula, the negative comparison stresses his actions as being directly opposed to the behavior of David. As stated in chapter three above, David's actions

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<sup>421</sup> McKenzie, *1 Kings 16-2 Kings 16*, 526.

<sup>422</sup> The additional material in 2 Chronicles 28 includes information that is difficult to reconcile with the account in Kings and Isaiah. Yet, the tumultuous time between the years 738 and 732 BC is clearly visible, showing the invasion of the coalition from the north, southeast, and southwest. Hubbard et al., *2 Kings*, 211.

<sup>423</sup> Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, 437.



involve being obedient to God's commands, loyalty to the covenant, and the right administrator of the kingdom by observing and modeling the Torah (Deut 6:17-18; 13:18; 17:18-19). The unfavorable comparison of Ahaz highlights that none of his actions are like David. In fact, the Dtr presents him as the antithesis of David and the most contemptible king of Judah to assume the throne up to this point.<sup>424</sup>

Even more damning from the Dtr's perspective is the evaluation that Ahaz "walked in the ways of the kings of Israel" (וַיֵּלֶךְ בְּדַרְכֵי מַלְכֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל v. 3a), an assessment only made of two other southern kings, Jehoram (2 Kgs 8:18) and Ahaziah (although Ahaziah specifically "walked in the way of the house of Ahab" 2 Kgs 8:27). The Dtr blames the waywardness and apostasy of Jehoram and Ahaziah on a marriage alliance with the daughter of Ahab. Yet, for Ahaz, the Dtr gives no excuse.<sup>425</sup> He is simply guilty of the "ways of the kings of Israel," which involves the syncretistic worship practices of Jeroboam son of Nebat, and the arch-apostasy of Ahab, that includes the worship of Baal and other gods.<sup>426</sup>

The text in Kings builds on the negative assessment of Ahaz by escalating the progression of his sin as worse than that of the Israelite kings, for he also practices the abominations of the surrounding nations (v. 3b), particularly the detestable sin of child sacrifice (cf., Lev 18:24-30; Deut 18:9-12). This particular Canaanite practice was abhorrent to Yahweh (Deut 12:31) and condemned elsewhere in scripture (Jer 7:31; 2 Kgs 21:6).<sup>427</sup> The "abomination"

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<sup>424</sup> Cohn, *2 Kings*, 112.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid.

<sup>426</sup> Hubbard et al., *2 Kings*, 213.

<sup>427</sup> Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, 437. Child sacrifices were especially repulsive to the Dtr and are listed three other times in the DH, first, in association with the end of the monarchy of Israel (1 Kgs 17:17); second, in the evil

(תועבה) of child sacrifice is also linked to the liturgical abuses that defile the land and cause it to expel its inhabitants (Lev 18:20-30).<sup>428</sup>

The final damning analysis in verse 4 finds Ahaz going beyond just looking the other way regarding the high places (בָּמֹת), as other kings before him had done, to engaging in sacrifices on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree. The Dtr's disdain is evident as he records Ahaz's abundant idolatry. He will worship anything without regard for the command to worship Yahweh alone (Ex 20:3); and he will worship anywhere and everywhere without regard for the distinctiveness of worship at the temple in Jerusalem (cf., Deut 12:5-6; 2 Kgs 21:4).<sup>429</sup> This list of offenses immediately reveals from the start that Ahaz is the wrong kind of king per the Law of the King. He was the antithesis of David, had no regard for Yahweh or the Torah, and in every way, he had become "like the other nations" (Deut 17:14; 1 Sam 8:4-9).

Ahaz's grave theological assessment and religious apostasy in the opening verses set the stage for the political apostasy that follows. As Brueggemann proposes, "the *theological verdict* of vv. 1-4 provides a context and anticipation for the *political judgment* rendered in the remainder of the chapter."<sup>430</sup> Once again, the Dtr judges infidelity in the religious arena as characteristically linked to political weakness and apostasy, which compromises Judah's independence and distinctiveness as a nation that relies on and trusts Yahweh alone.<sup>431</sup>

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practices of Manasseh (21:6), and third in the cult of Molek and the reformations of King Josiah (23:10). John Gray, *I and II Kings* (Bloomsbury Street, London: SCM Press LTD, 1970), 631.

<sup>428</sup> Leithart, *1 and 2 Kings*, 246.

<sup>429</sup> Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Kings*, 463.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid., 463-464.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid., 464.

### The Attack-- The Syro-Ephraimite War (2 Kgs 16:5-6)

In usual Deuteronomistic fashion, the demonstrative adverb *כֵּן* (“then”) insinuates that the political invasion of Pekah and Rezin (v. 5) is a form of judgment (covenant curses) on Ahaz as a result of his sin and religious infidelity. The placement of the war right after the critical religious assessment (vv. 1-4) joins the two events in a sin-punishment pattern.<sup>432</sup> Cogan and Tadmor add that the second citation of the loss of the port at Elath in verse 6 insinuates a double punishment for Ahaz’s sin, much like the presentation of Solomon’s crime and punishment (see 1 Kgs 11:14-22, 23-26).<sup>433</sup> As Beal confirms, “juxtaposed to the negative evaluation, the aggression of Aram-Israel and Edom is the familiar trope of judgment for wickedness at the hands of foreign aggressors. Indeed, the coalition’s earlier action against Ahaz’s father, Jotham, is explicitly by YHWH’s instrumentality (15:37).”<sup>434</sup> The account of Ahaz in 2 Chronicles 28:16-19 confirms and enhances the connection between his religious apostasy and the political ramifications associated with the loss of peace and land. The Chronicler adds that in addition to the attack from Aram and Israel, the Edomites invaded from the east and defeated Judah, and the Philistines raided and took cities in the Shephelah and the Negeb (vv. 16-18); “for the Lord humbled Judah because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he had made Judah act sinfully and had been very unfaithful to the Lord” (v. 19). As noted above, loss of peace, rest, and land are directly linked to judgment

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<sup>432</sup> Song-Mi Suzie Park, *2 Kings*, vol. 12, Wisdom Commentary (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2019), 214.

<sup>433</sup> Hayim Tadmor and Mordechai Cogan, “Ahaz and Tiglath-Pileser in the Book of Kings: Historiographic Considerations,” *Biblica* 60, no. 4 (1979): 498. Nadav Na’aman adds that the deliberate juxtaposition of the religious apostasy and war conveys the sense of punishment meted out to Ahaz for his sins (cf. 1 Kgs 11; 14:21-26; 22:52-2 Kgs 1:1; 2 Kgs 8:16-22; 13:1-3). Nadav Na’aman, “The Deuteronomist and Voluntary Servitude to Foreign Powers,” *JSOT* 20, no. 65 (March 1995): 41.

<sup>434</sup> Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, 437.

associated with apostasy (e.g., 1 Kgs 11:14-25; 2 Kgs 1:1; 10:32-33).<sup>435</sup> Yahweh's judgment, however, did not change the ways of Ahaz or his heart. Instead of turning back to Yahweh, his religious apostasy turned into political apostasy as he looked to another as his sovereign and protector in the time of crisis.

Verses 5 and 6 present the problem. Verse 5 states, "then Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, came up to wage war on Jerusalem, and they besieged Ahaz but could not conquer him." The coalition of Aram and Israel against Judah (often called the Syro-Ephraimite War) is thought to be an anti-Assyrian alliance spearheaded by Rezin that included Israel and several smaller states such as Tyre, Gaza, Arabia, Edom, Moab, and Ammon.<sup>436</sup> The coalition was formed in response to the rapid expansion of Assyria under the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC).<sup>437</sup> After ascending the throne, Tiglath-Pileser began campaigning to expand his empire. Within six years (743-740 BC), he had conquered and annexed north Syria and its environs reaching all the way to the desert east of Damascus.<sup>438</sup> Prior to the rise of Tiglath-Pileser, Assyria had been receiving tribute from many of these smaller states, including Israel and Aram. However, due to the shift in power and purpose under Tiglath-Pileser, which was sharp and determined, Assyria went from being an ally and "savior" to the "eraser of borders" (Is 10, 13).<sup>439</sup> Under his rule, each new annexation was accompanied by

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<sup>435</sup> Hubbard et al., *2 Kings*, 211.

<sup>436</sup> Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, 438.

<sup>437</sup> Tiglath-Pileser III, also known as Pul in the text, was the dominant force in the Fertile Crescent during his rule. Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Kings*, 468.

<sup>438</sup> Tadmor and Cogan, "Ahaz and Tiglath-Pileser," 491.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid.

deportation and population exchange, which sought to make the uprooted entirely dependent on the central government, thus essentially forcing those amalgamated to “become Assyrian.”<sup>440</sup> From 737-735 BC, Tiglath-Pileser was occupied by enemies to the east (Media) and north (Urartu), and his campaign against Urartu seemed to be challenging and unsuccessful. While Tiglath-Pileser was preoccupied with the east and north, and due to the heavy cost of tribute and the policy changes, the situation seemed ripe for a revolt, and the anti-Assyrian coalition formed in Syria-Palestine.<sup>441</sup>

Even though the causes and purposes of the Syro-Ephraimite War are debated, the prevailing view is that the goal of the attack from Aram and Israel was to force Judah into joining their alliance against Assyria.<sup>442</sup> The alliance knew it needed the cooperation of all of the smaller states, including Judah, to be successful;<sup>443</sup> consequently, the coalition began to exert pressure on Judah during the co-regency of Jotham and Ahaz (approximately 736-735 BC). However, amid this turmoil, Jotham died, leaving his young son Ahaz to handle the situation on his own (2 Kgs 15:37-38).<sup>444</sup> When Ahaz refused to join the alliance, they attacked Judah

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<sup>440</sup> Cogan and Tadmor, “II Kings,” 177.

<sup>441</sup> Henri Cazelles, “Syro-Ephraimite War,” in *ABD: Si-Z*, 1st ed., vol. 6 (Doubleday: Yale University Press, 1992), 284.

<sup>442</sup> Park, *2 Kings*, 214; Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 382. John D. W. Watts et al., *Isaiah 1-33*, vol. 24, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2015), 112; Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Kings*, 465; B.E. Kelle and B.A. Strawn, “History of Israel 5: Assyrian Period,” ed. Bill T. Arnold and H.G.M. Williamson, DOTHB (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005)., 5 The final Years, e-book. The debate regarding the purpose of the war is outside the scope of this paper and will not be addressed. For a differing opinion, Bustenay Oded asserts that the cause of the war was to throw off Jotham’s control of Israel and Damascus and to dislodge Judah from Transjordanian. For a thorough explanation regarding this view, see Bustenay Oded, “Historical Background of the Syro-Ephraimite War Reconsidered,” *CBQ* 34, no. 2 (April 1972): 160-161.

<sup>443</sup> Park, *2 Kings*, 382.

<sup>444</sup> Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, 438.

(possibly 734 BC) intending to conquer Jerusalem, and put a non-Davidic king, the son of their Tyrian ally Tabeel, on the throne (Is 7:6).<sup>445</sup> The vulnerability of Ahaz is further underscored in verse 6 as the Dtr documents the contemporaneous (תַּעֲרָב) attack and capture of the vital port city of Elath in the south. This city, which Judah had held since the reign of Azariah (2 Kgs 14:22), was now taken by the Edomites, and the Judeans were driven out.<sup>446</sup> As stated above, the Chronicler also notes that Rezin and Pekah inflicted significant casualties on Judah by taking some of their inhabitants captive and killing thousands of others (2 Chr 28:5-7). Chronicles also records that in addition to the Edomite attack, the Philistines attacked Judaeian cities in the Shephelah and the Negeb (2 Chr 28:17). Ahaz was in a dire situation, he was being threatened on all sides, and the final blow would be the capture of Jerusalem.

### **Isaiah's Words of Hope and Judgment (Is 7-8:4)**

The oracles in Isaiah 7-12 supply additional information on the historical situation, the disposition and actions of Ahaz, and the word of God regarding not only the Syro-Ephraimite War but also his sovereignty over the entire situation and the future of his people. Isaiah 7:1 reads much like 2 Kings 16:5, chronicling the threat of both Aram and Israel against Judah. Isaiah 7:2-25 backtracks somewhat to provide details of what happened before the coalition

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<sup>445</sup> J.J.M. Roberts states, "Aram's candidate for the throne was a son of the Tubail (= Ittobal) of Tyre mentioned in Tiglath-pileser III's tribute list from 737 BCE." J. J. M. Roberts, *First Isaiah* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 111.

<sup>446</sup> Cohn, *2 Kings*, 112. There is debate over the proper name and correct reading of the text. BHS suggests that the proper name "Rezin" was added and offers the alternative reading of "Edom" for "Aram." Hubbard et al. agree and argue that "restored" implies the city reverted back to Edom, not to Aram. Hubbard et al., *2 Kings*, 214. Sweeney states that the translation of "Edom" is more likely because of its proximity to Elath and because 2 Chronicles 28:17 mentions an Edomite attack simultaneously. He concludes that it is possible that Rezin may have instigated the attack by Edom on Elath and may have provided support. Excavations at Tell el-Khaleifeh also support the presence of Edomites on the northern shores of the Gulf of Aqaba in the eighth century BC. Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 383.

attacked Jerusalem,<sup>447</sup> and, as will be argued below, Isaiah 8:1-15 records God's response to the threat after the city was under siege.

Isaiah 7:2 declares that "when the house of David was told, Syria is in league with Ephraim, the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees in the forest shake before the wind." Isaiah accentuates the extreme threat of this crisis, and the panic felt by both the king and the people. Even though it was Yahweh who had allowed the calamity to befall Judah due to the sin of Ahaz and the people (see above, cf. 2 Chr 28:5, 9, 19), because of their intense fear, Yahweh sends Isaiah to remind them that he is in control, and he would protect and save Jerusalem. Isaiah's words are meant to bring hope to the faithless king and assure him that God was sovereign over every nation in both judgment and deliverance (e.g., Is 9:11-12; 10:5, 8, 12; 10:16).<sup>448</sup> Isaiah 7 and 8 comprise several oracles that center on the importance of the king placing all his faith and trust in Yahweh as Judah's hope and salvation in the face of overwhelming odds against a foreign foe. These oracles also record the grave consequences for the king and the nation when trust and reliance are placed elsewhere.

*Isaiah's First Oracle: Do not Fear, Stand Firm, and Trust in Yahweh (Is 7:4-9)*

Even though the threat and attacks from the coalition may have occurred because of the sin of Ahaz, Yahweh who is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (cf., Ex 34:6; Ps 86:15; Joel 2:13) offers the wayward king a second chance. The immediate response of Isaiah to the fear of Ahaz and the people of Judah regarding both the attack and the threat of placing a non-Davidic puppet king on the Jerusalem throne is

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<sup>447</sup> Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 109.

<sup>448</sup> Andrew T. Abernethy, *The Book of Isaiah and God's Kingdom: A Thematic-Theological Approach*. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academics, 2016), 123.

presented in two ways. First, through the dual reference to the “house of David” (Is 7:2, 13). Isaiah intends to remind the king and the people of God’s covenantal promises to David (2 Sam 7) and the security and protection of Yahweh associated with David’s house.<sup>449</sup> Not only was the coalition’s plan against God’s covenant with David regarding these promises, but it was also contra the Law of the King, which stipulated that a foreigner could not rule over them (Deut 17:15). In an understated way, Isaiah also stresses the importance of David’s house by only referencing Pekah, Israel’s king as, “the son of Remaliah” (Is 7:4, 9; 8:6). The prophet does not address him by name, as a reminder of his illegitimacy with no authentic royal claim to the throne.<sup>450</sup> Thus, reaffirming Yahweh’s sovereignty and choice of David and his promise to protect David’s house.<sup>451</sup> Isaiah, also affirms that Yahweh declares the coalition’s intentions would not succeed (v. 7).

Second, Yahweh sent Isaiah along with his son Shear-Jashub (שָׁאֵר יָשׁוּב) “a remnant will return”) to meet Ahaz as he was inspecting the weakest point in his defense, the water system “at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Washer’s Field” (v. 3). Jerusalem was easily defended because of its location between two valleys, however, like most walled cities the weakest point was where the water system opened outside of the wall. If the city could defend the water system, it could withstand a siege for months, if not years, depending on its food supply.<sup>452</sup> Knowing the siege was coming, Ahaz went to check on the most important factor

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<sup>449</sup> Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant and God’s Unfolding Purpose* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academics, 2007), 127.

<sup>450</sup> Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Kings*, 465.

<sup>451</sup> Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12, Second Edition (1983): A Commentary* (Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 1983), 140.

<sup>452</sup> Sweeney, *1 and 2 Kings*, 382-383.



for survival: the water supply. The Lord, knowing the king was in a state of panic, sends Isaiah, whose name means “Yahweh will save,” and his son (“a remnant will return”) in response. The child’s presence was most likely intended as either a warning, suggesting Judah would someday return from exile, or a promise that the nation would spiritually return to God.<sup>453</sup> Geoffrey Grogan suggests that the ambiguity is intentional and can indicate either the warning of exile (for failing to heed the message) or hope of survival (through obedience to God’s word).<sup>454</sup> The hope would signify the name meant that after the defeat of the coalition, only a remnant of the opposing nations would be left to return to their land. This explanation would be consistent with other passages where the OT concept of a remnant usually referred to survivors of military conflict (e.g., Amos 3:12; 4:11; 5:3; Is. 17:3).<sup>455</sup> The significance of the location and the accompaniment of Isaiah’s son were to reaffirm Yahweh’s words to the king that he need not worry about the logistics of battle (e.g., the water supply); the Lord was in control, and he had the situation in hand. If Ahaz would trust and be obedient, God would deliver and save.

Isaiah’s first oracle to Ahaz begins in verse 4 as he exhorts the king with four verbs commanding trust instead of fear. He admonishes the king to הִשָּׁמֶר וְהִשְׁקֵט אֶל־תִּירָא וּלְבָבְךָ אֶל־יְיָ “take heed/be careful,” “be quiet/calm,” “do not fear,” and “do not let your heart be faint/weak.” J. J. M. Roberts contends, “This is holy war language, as can be seen by a comparison with Deut 20:3, which contains the same idiom with רָכַךְ (*rākak*), ‘be faint,’ and also includes the synonyms

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<sup>453</sup> Geoffrey Grogan, *Isaiah*, vol. 6, EBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), Commentary 7:3, e-book.

<sup>454</sup> Ibid.

<sup>455</sup> Greg (Gregory Ross) Goswell, “Royal Names: Naming and Wordplay in Isaiah 7,” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 75, no. 1 (2013): 102.

ירא (*yārē*), ‘to fear,’ חפז (*hāpaz*), ‘to be alarmed,’ and ערץ (*āras*), ‘to tremble, stand in awe.’”<sup>456</sup>

Isaiah uses the word of God as a reminder to the king that Yahweh promised to be their Divine Warrior, and even when faced with an army greater than their own, they need not fear, “for the Lord their God was with them” (בְּיְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם עִמָּם, Deut 20:1), a mantra he will repeat in the following two oracles (Is 7:14; 8:8, 10). Yahweh had promised to go/be with his people and fight for them (Deut 20:4), and he had proven faithful in this regard with past kings (cf., Ahijah, Asa, Jehoshaphat); all they needed to do was to “be still and see the salvation of the Lord” (Ex 14:14). Isaiah warns the king to watch himself and guard his thoughts, so he does not rashly make the wrong decision. The greatest danger was being controlled by fear and discouragement, so Isaiah encourages him to “not be afraid” and “not lose heart.”<sup>457</sup>

Isaiah next gives a message of encouragement that God knows the plans of the coalition, and he declares that their scheme would not stand or come to pass (vv. 6-7). He dismisses the two enemies as being only as strong as their “heads” (רֹאשׁ), referring to both the capital cities and the leaders (vv. 8-9). Since Jerusalem is God’s chosen city and David God’s anointed ruler, Yahweh, as Sovereign and רֹאשׁ (cf. Abijah, chapter three above, 2 Chr 13:12) of all nations and kings, would see that their plan failed.<sup>458</sup> The Lord declares they will sputter out like the smoking stubs of two burned-out sticks (Is 7:4; cf. Amos 4:11; Zech 3:2).<sup>459</sup> In other words, even though

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<sup>456</sup> Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 110.

<sup>457</sup> Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1-39: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, The New American Commentary (Piraiá, Brazil: B&H Publishing Group, 2007), 194.

<sup>458</sup> Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 113-114.

<sup>459</sup> Goswell “Royal Names,” 104; Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 110. Roberts suggests that the text should read as 5-6 years, and many scholars agree. He notes that the repetition in vv. 8-9 insinuates textual corruption by haplography. Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 112.

these enemies may seem fierce, there is no real fire in them, and their time of burning has come to an end.

Isaiah admonishes Ahaz to “stand firm,” “trust and believe” (תַּאֲמִינוּ *hiphil* v. 9b); if he does not, then he will not be “confirmed” (נִפְּלָה *niphal*) by Yahweh.<sup>460</sup> The same root (נָפַח) was used in the promises to David that Yahweh would build him a strong house (1 Sam 25:28; 2 Sam 7:16) and keep for him a firm covenant (Ps 89:29; Is 55:3).<sup>461</sup> As stated in chapter one above, when used in the *hiphil*, this verb calls on spiritual faith and belief in God’s promises based on his past signs, miracles, and word. In the *niphal*, it attests to Yahweh’s firmness, faithfulness, and reliability to do what he says he will do. The kind of faith Isaiah is advising leads to trust involving God’s saving power, often through no work of one’s own but leaving everything in the hands of God. Jehoshaphat (see chapter three above) gave the same admonition before his battle against a vast enemy; “believe (תַּאֲמִינוּ *hiphil*) in the Lord your God, and you will be established (נִפְּלָה *niphal*); believe (תַּאֲמִינוּ *hiphil*) in his prophets” (2 Chr 20:20). In the same way, Isaiah confirms that Judah and the king can believe in the Lord’s promise of deliverance from this threat.<sup>462</sup> Roberts writes, “Just as in Isa 28:16-17, the implication seems to be that Yahweh’s foundational commitments will remain firm and unmovable, providing security for the one who trusts Yahweh, but the one who attempts to find security on some other foundation will be washed away.”<sup>463</sup> Isaiah makes it very clear; the nation’s destiny is tied up with the decision of

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<sup>460</sup> Watts et al., *Isaiah 1-33*, 131.

<sup>461</sup> Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 114.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid.

Ahaz and his readiness to believe in Yahweh and trust in him for salvation.<sup>464</sup> Ahaz is not to align himself with Rezin and Pekah or rely on outside help for deliverance; rather the king was to believe, trust, and rely only on God.<sup>465</sup>

*Isaiah's Second Oracle: The Sign of Immanuel (Is 7:10-17)*

The time lapse between the first oracle and the second is unknown, but the interconnectedness of the material suggests a relatively short period of time.<sup>466</sup> Based on his religious apostasy mentioned in the first four verses of 2 Kings 16, it is not surprising that Ahaz does not respond to Isaiah's first oracle with immediate belief. God knew it would be difficult for this king to respond with faith, so the Lord graciously allowed the king to ask for a sign to build the faith needed for such trust (Is 7:11).<sup>467</sup> Even though signs are typical in scripture (e.g., Ex 3:11-12; Judg 6:15-18; 1 Sam 10:1-7), the scope of this sign is unusual. God was willing to

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<sup>464</sup> H.C. Leupold, *Exposition of Isaiah: Chapters 1-30*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971), 152.

<sup>465</sup> Ben III Witherington, *Isaiah Old and New: Exegesis, Intertextuality, and Hermeneutics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 76-77. Smith adds that if Ahaz summoned needless help from other nations to protect himself, this would show he was not trusting God's strength to deliver him. Smith, *Isaiah 1-39*, 195. Watts et al. disagree that Isaiah is condemning Assyrian aid. They state, "the message is often interpreted as an attempt to dissuade Ahaz from calling for the Assyrians because 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles accuse Ahaz of asking Assyria for help. But there is no reference to this possibility in Isaiah." Watts et al., *Isaiah 1-39*, 131. Blenkinsopp counters that even though not explicitly stated, Isaiah advises Ahaz that in addition to not surrendering to the allies, he must also resist the temptation to submit to Assyria (although he admits this is less clear). He also suggests that Isaiah's mission is to "reassure Ahaz that the attack will fail, and by implication, to dissuade him from responding to the threat by submitting to Assyria." 231-232. Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Isaiah 1-12," in *Isaiah 1-39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1st ed., vol. 19, AYB (New Haven & London: The Anchor Yale Bible, 2000), 231-232. Oswalt asserts that the theme of these chapters (Is 7-12), which are united by the theme of trust in God instead of human nations, points to the notion that Ahaz is to completely trust in Yahweh for deliverance. The rejection of Isaiah's message in chapter 7 insinuates that Ahaz would rather trust his ultimate enemy Assyria to deliver him rather than risk trusting in God. John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah, The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2003), 115. I would further argue that both Deuteronomy (e.g., 20:1-4) and the Dtr (e.g., 2 Kgs 19:35) show Yahweh fully capable of deliverance from foreign enemies on his own. He is Israel's Divine Warrior and needs no help from human sources.

<sup>466</sup> Smith, *Isaiah 1-39*, 196.

<sup>467</sup> Leupold, *Exposition of Isaiah*, 154.

go as far as it took (“as deep as Sheol or high as heaven”) to secure the king’s faith. Ahaz could ask anything! Nevertheless, Ahaz, who unfortunately has proven to have no faith in Yahweh, chooses to hide behind false piety and refuses God’s invitation (Is 7:12).<sup>468</sup> He attempts to dismiss the prophet’s words by alluding to Deuteronomy 6:16 “you shall not put the Lord your God to the test.” The reason for this false piety is not given, but Ahaz likely knew that if the sign asked came to pass, he would be obligated to believe and trust in God. In other words, he did not want to be locked into waiting on a God in which he did not have faith. He did not want the involvement of God because he wanted the freedom to make his own choice.<sup>469</sup> With this additional affront, God stresses his weariness (לָאָץ). Watts reveals that the word לָאָץ (“to weary” “wear out”) is a keyword in Isaiah (e.g., 1:14) and “belongs to the vocabulary of the רִיב, “argument,” as Mic 6:3 and Job 4:2 show. It means someone has had enough of his opponent’s argument, and he will accept no more.”<sup>470</sup> Yahweh is worn out with Ahaz’s argument and the unbelief of the people and will no longer tolerate it; Ahaz and the nation have put themselves in a dire position, for they have exhausted the patience of God (v. 13).

Because God is weary of the unbelief of the faithless king, he chooses to back up his word by declaring to the whole “house of David” (plural)<sup>471</sup> a sign of his own; proving that he alone controls destiny, and he will do what he declares (Is 7:13-14). This crisis was a direct threat to the house of David and the continuation of God’s choice of the Davidic dynasty, so God stepped in to prove the threat would not stand. God’s sign involves the birth of a child, which

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<sup>468</sup> Leupold, *Exposition of Isaiah*, 154-155.

<sup>469</sup> Ibid.; Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 118.

<sup>470</sup> Watts et al., *Isaiah 1-33*, 134.

<sup>471</sup> Ibid.

will signify two things. First, the child will be named Immanuel (עִמָּנוּאֵל), which means “God with us.”<sup>472</sup> Again, this harkens back to Deuteronomy 20:1 and God’s promise to go before his people and be “with” them in battle. It also attests to the larger tradition of the Davidic dynasty in which God promised to be “with” the sons of David in a unique and special way (2 Sam 7:9; 1 Kgs 1:37, 11:38).<sup>473</sup> Part of the Davidic promise reiterates God’s presence in battle to cut off Israel’s enemies as her Divine Warrior, the “Lord of Hosts” (יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת, 2 Sam 7:9, 26, 27). The birth of a royal child is also a prediction of the end of Ahaz’s control of Judah and the appointment of a godly Davidic ruler.<sup>474</sup>

Second, this sign signified a time frame crucial to the immediate crisis that stressed that within two to three years, “he shall eat curds and honey [...] and before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good,” both enemy nations would be desolate (Is 7:15-16). Thus, by the time the child is old enough to eat the characteristic food of the Promised Land (and the food of royalty in some Mesopotamian texts) in solid form, and before the age of moral discretion, the land of the two kings will be deserted.<sup>475</sup> Abernathy states,

the significance of this child resides in his serving as a temporal marker and having a name that points attention away from himself to God. By the time the woman gives birth,

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<sup>472</sup> The relationship between this passage and Is 9:6-8 as a prophecy fulfilled in Christ is discussed briefly below. For the purpose of this thesis, it is only minimally addressed as the historical significance of its immediate context concerning Ahaz in the late 730’s BC is the main focus. For more information on the full scope of the prophecy and fulfillment in Matthew, see Watts et al., *Isaiah 1-33*, 136-142; Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 118; Witherington, *Isaiah Old and New*, 73-80.

<sup>473</sup> Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, 138.

<sup>474</sup> Smith, *Isaiah 1-39*, 198.

<sup>475</sup> Witherington, *Isaiah Old and New*, 75; Grogan, *Isaiah*, Commentary 13-16, e-book. Contra this view regarding the “curds and honey,” Leupold argues that the “curds and honey” represent a scarce diet because that will be all the infant has to eat. Leupold, *Exposition of Isaiah*, 159. Roberts argues that milk products and honey are not readily available to a city under siege, so Isaiah is promising that the siege will not last. Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 120. More important for this thesis is the time frame regarding the child’s ability to eat, not necessarily the exact nature of the food.

names her son ‘Immanuel’ and he is old enough to learn good from evil two things will take place: (1) the lands of the threatening nations will be laid waste (7:16), and (2) the child will be living in the aftermath of desolation in the land [...] who this child is, then seems to be of little importance; what matters is that by the time this child is a few years old it will be evident that God is with his people both in salvation, by removing the threatening nations, and in judgment.<sup>476</sup>

The hope in the message of Isaiah is found in a God who has promised to be with his people in protection and aid. If they simply believe in his word and trust in him, the Lord declared the crisis would be over within two to three years.<sup>477</sup> As the next section proves, judgment will surely come if they failed to believe.

The remaining verses of this oracle (Is 7:17-25) paint the negative picture of judgment to the earlier positive promise. Assyria will indeed destroy Israel and Rezin through the hand of the all-sovereign and all-knowing God (vv. 18, 20). However, because of Ahaz’s unbelief and lack of response to the promise, Judah will also be judged and only a small remnant would escape (vv. 17, 21).<sup>478</sup> Isaiah warns the young king that he is risking the fate of the nation by taking his faith off of Yahweh and placing it elsewhere, which would include his courtship of Assyrian aid. Yahweh, as sovereign, is the one he should look to and rely on, not anything or anyone else, including a foreign nation (to point out the insignificance of these nations in comparison with the greatness of Yahweh, Isaiah intentionally adds that Yahweh’s whistle controls both the Egyptians and the Assyrians v. 18; cf. 5:26). Grogan and Oswalt point out the word שָׂכִיר “hired” (v. 20) seems particularly pointed as an allusion to the king’s own inducement to Assyria to

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<sup>476</sup> Abernethy, *The Book of Isaiah and God’s Kingdom*, 123.

<sup>477</sup> Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 119.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid., 127.

come west against his enemies (2 Kgs 16:7-8).<sup>479</sup> Ahaz might think he is gaining a deliverer and an ally, instead, his political apostasy and faithlessness would cause the land to be overrun and trampled by the very one in whom he is putting his trust, till it is destroyed and no longer recognizable (vv. 23-25).

*Isaiah's third Oracle: The Sign of Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (Is 8:1-4)*

After the first two oracles addressing Ahaz, and the house of David concerning the crisis of the Syro-Ephraimite war, and the ramification associated with unbelief, Isaiah gives a third oracle now addressed to the people.<sup>480</sup> The third oracle, presented through another birth announcement, concerns the military situation regarding the war, the siege, and God's plans for the nations, including Israel and Judah.<sup>481</sup> Similar to the prophetic birth announcements of Hosea's children (1:6-8), God promises judgment on Israel and pity on Judah, but not through military might, not by "bow, sword, war, or horses and horsemen" (v. 7). Isaiah's oracle promises that before Isaiah's son Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (מֶהֱרַיִשָׁלַל הַשָּׁלַבַּז), which could be translated as "quick to plunder, swift to the spoil," could speak (about one-two years), God would deliver, the war would be over, and the two nations would be carried away like plunder by

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<sup>479</sup> Grogan, *Isaiah*, Commentary 7:18-19. John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 15j, e-book.

<sup>480</sup> Isaiah is instructed to write on a large tablet in common letters, which suggests it is intended for public display. It is a message verified by two witnesses (per Deut 17:6; 19:15) so that it can be cited later as evidence when it is fulfilled. Grogan, *Isaiah*, Commentary 8:2, e-book. This is similar to Habakkuk's commission to write his vision so it could be read on the run (Hab 2:2). Blenkinsopp, "Isaiah 1-12," 238.

<sup>481</sup> Smith, *Isaiah 1-39*, 204.



Assyria (Is 8:4).<sup>482</sup> However, also like Hosea, Isaiah prophesies punishment on Judah for her unbelief and infidelity (Hos 5:8-15; Is 7:17-25; 8:7-8).

Roberts contends that with each successive oracle, Yahweh promises victory over the coalition and diminishes the time frame in which the two nations would be laid waste. The first oracle predicted their demise in five to six years (Is 7:8), the second promised they would fall in three to four years (7:16), and the third declared the war was limited to one to two years (8:4).<sup>483</sup> Leupold suggests a time frame of about one year between the second (Immanuel) and third (Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz) oracle.<sup>484</sup> Blenkinsopp and Oswalt disagree and argue that the two oracles (Immanuel in 7:14-16 and Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz 8:1-4) are too close to be coincidental and are the same message addressed to different groups, the first to the house of David and the second to the people.<sup>485</sup> The importance lies in the message regardless of whom the oracle directly addresses. It is unknown when this oracle took place, but it is possible that the third oracle came after the coalition attacked Jerusalem and the city was under siege (734 BC). As Judah's patience was wearing thin, Isaiah promised a speedy end to the siege.<sup>486</sup> God wanted the king and people to be confident that he would do what he said, so much so that he declared that

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<sup>482</sup> Grogan, *Isaiah*, Commentary 8:2, e-book. The identification of Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz as the child named Immanuel in 7:14 will not be addressed as it is not directly related to the thesis of this study. For more information regarding the identity of these children, see Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 127; Grogan, *Isaiah*, Commentary 14-17, e-book.

<sup>483</sup> Roberts contends the first oracle was early in 735 BC and the second either later in 735 BC or early in 734 BC. Thus, he believes the third oracle is given before Ahaz sent the embassy to Tiglath-Pileser III as another attempt to get the king to trust Yahweh before the Assyrian invasion in 733 BC. Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 129.

<sup>484</sup> Leupold, *Exposition of Isaiah*, 166.

<sup>485</sup> Blenkinsopp, "Isaiah 1-12," 238-239. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 151, e-book.

<sup>486</sup> Watts et al., *Isaiah 1-33*, 151. Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled less than two years after this oracle; in 732 BC, Damascus and Samaria were both defeated. Smith, *Isaiah 1-39*, 205.

Isaiah was to write down the oracle and have it confirmed by witnesses. The child's birth was another sign that would have occurred at least nine months after the oracle, confirming that military relief was in sight.<sup>487</sup> If the king and the people would simply trust Yahweh for their survival, there was no need for a defensive alliance that required submission to a foreign suzerain.<sup>488</sup> God promised to crush the threatening alliance through belief, not military engagement, or aid from another.

### **Political Apostasy and Isaiah's fourth Oracle (2 Kgs 16:7-9; Is 8:5-15)**

#### *The Appeal to Assyria (2 Kgs 16:7-9)*

As Ahaz has proven through his religious apostasy mentioned in the first four verses of 2 Kings 16 and his dismissal of each oracle given thus far by Isaiah, he lacks the faith necessary to believe in Yahweh as his Divine Warrior and Savior. Instead, Ahaz casts aside the Lord in favor of another redeemer. Thus, relieving the pressure the war has exerted on Jerusalem and Judah by appealing to Tiglath-Pileser III for salvation (2 Kgs 16:7). Much like King Asa before him (1 Kgs 15:16-22), when threatened, he seeks help by bribing (תָּנַחַל) a foreign nation to come to his aid with money pilfered from the temple (vv. 7-8).<sup>489</sup> As stated above, taking money from the temple is always viewed negatively by the Dtr and is a litmus test signaling the disapproval and judgment of Yahweh for one's lack of trust. In addition, the term תָּנַחַל ("bribe") bears negative connotations in scripture; the law forbids it (e.g., Ex 23:8; Deut 16:19), the prophets speak

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<sup>487</sup> Watts et al., *Isaiah 11-33*, 151. Oswalt adds, "the birth may have taken place two or three years prior to 732." Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 15n, e-book.

<sup>488</sup> Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 130.

<sup>489</sup> Leithart, *1 and 2 Kings*, 245.

against it (e.g., Is 5:23; Ezek 22:12), and wisdom literature considers it a corrupt act (e.g., Prov 17:23; Ps 15:5).<sup>490</sup> There are only two instances where it is used in biblical historical literature, in the account of Asa's war against Baasha (1 Kgs 15:19) and in the account of Ahaz (2 Kgs 16:8), and both times it is condemned.<sup>491</sup>

In contrast to the relative absence of the term in biblical historical literature, the semantic parallel to the term 𐎶𐎶𐎵 (Akkadian *ṭātu*) is documented often in Neo-Assyrian royal historical annals where it is used in the same manner of requesting aid from a neighboring monarch to ward off a foe. For example, in the annals of Sargon II of Assyria, on the eve of his conquest of Babylon (710 BC), he accuses the Chaldean Merodach-Baladan of sending a "bribe" to Shutruk-Nahhunte, the king of Elam.

He sent his gift to Shutruk-Nahhunte, the Elamite that he might avenge him. The wicked Elamite accepted his bribe.<sup>492</sup>

Similarly, Sargon II accuses the Hittite *Ia-ma-ni* of sending "bribes" to Pir'u, king of Musru, to be his ally and come to his aid.

[he spread] countless evil lies to alienate (them) from me, and (also) sent bribes to Pir'u king of Musru—a potentate, incapable to save them—and asked him to be an ally.<sup>493</sup>

Another instance is recorded in the annals of Sennacherib, where during a rebellion, he accuses the Chaldeans of raiding their temple to send "bribes" to the Elamites.

[They (the Babylonians) opened the treasury of Esagil, and sent my gift(s)—the silver, gold (and) precious stones that I had given as presents to the god Bel (Marduk) and the

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<sup>490</sup> Tadmor and Cogan, "Ahaz and Tiglath-Pileser," 499.

<sup>491</sup> Ibid.

<sup>492</sup> Ibid., 500.

<sup>493</sup> Prichard, *ANET*, 287.

goddess Zarpanitu, [the property (and) possession(s) of the temple of their gods—as a bribe to Umman-men]anu (Humban-menanu), the king of the land Elam, [who does not have sense or insight....].<sup>494</sup>

The above texts are just a sampling from the literature of the ANE where bribery, often through the use of temple treasuries, was implemented. I use these examples to show that bribing another to come to one's aid was not uncommon and, in fact, was a regular practice in the ANE; however, both times it is used by a king in the biblical text, it is criticized. The reason it is condemned harkens back to the Law of the King and the nature of the king as vice-regent under the sovereign rule of Yahweh. The kings of Israel and Judah were not to resort to the same tactics of the surrounding nations; they were not to be “like” them (Deut 17:14). Instead, they were to solely trust in God as their suzerain in military matters. As stated in chapter one, this meant that they were purposefully limited in diplomatic relations and monetary strength, specifically so they would have to trust in Yahweh. If they chose a course of action like their neighbors, one in which they trusted another, it was considered a breach of loyalty to the covenant and Yahweh as their King. In the eyes of Yahweh, these actions symbolized unfaithfulness and infidelity and were viewed as the “wrong kind of king” predicted in 1 Samuel 8. Trusting in another through a bribe coupled with religious apostasy showed that Ahaz was the epitome of a king “like the other nations.”

To further stress his unfaithfulness, the Dtr records in 2 Kings 16:7 Ahaz's appeal and bribe couched in the terms “I am your servant and your son” (עַבְדְּךָ וּבֶןְךָ אֲנִי). This phrase, which constitutes the use of both words (“servant” and “son”) together, is unique not only in the biblical text but also in extra-biblical sources. Most texts (biblical and otherwise) use the terms

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<sup>494</sup> A. Kirk Grayson and Jamie Novotny, *Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704-681 BC)*, Part 2 (Winona Lake: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014), 200.

separately. Using them together, the Dtr stresses the extent of Ahaz's submission as a covenant vassal of Assyria.<sup>495</sup> These terms indicate a relationship of both subservience and dependence on the Assyrian king.<sup>496</sup> From the perspective of the Dtr, this is appalling, for not only should an Israelite king be exclusively subservient and dependent on Yahweh, but the Davidic king should only be a son and servant of Yahweh (cf., Ps 2:7; 89:20, 26; 2 Sam 7:14). As Brueggemann states "thus the submission of the king to Tiglath-pileser is a direct repudiation of the identity of the Jerusalemite king and a rejection of the only theological rationale for the Davidic kingdom."<sup>497</sup>

Just as the roles of servant and son in 2 Kings 16:7 are redirected to another suzerain, so are the terms "come up" (עָלָה) and "rescue/save" (הוֹשִׁיעַ), which are verbs typically used to address or describe the activity of Yahweh.<sup>498</sup> "Save" (הוֹשִׁיעַ) is most often used as a military action of Yahweh especially pertaining to the saving acts of God in the context of battle (e.g., Ex 14:30; Deut 20:4; Judg 6:37; 7:7; 2 Sam 3:18; 2 Chr 20:17).<sup>499</sup> The verb הוֹשִׁיעַ and the noun form הַשׁוּעָה in the specific sense of divine intervention on behalf of Israel, are used thirty-seven times in the DH and another three times in Deuteronomy, stressing the correlation of salvation to an act

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<sup>495</sup> Tadmor and Cogan, "Ahaz and Tiglath-Pileser," 504.

<sup>496</sup> Ibid.

<sup>497</sup> Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Kings*, 468.

<sup>498</sup> Ibid.

<sup>499</sup> Sawyer, "שׁוּעָה," in *TDOT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), II Distribution, e-book.

of Yahweh.<sup>500</sup> Ahaz's bribe and appeal couched in these terms is a drastic departure from and rejection of Yahweh as his Divine Warrior and Suzerain.

Thus, in a moment of panic, Ahaz went beyond the apostasy of the other kings, for not only has he asked for political aid, but he has pledged covenant loyalty and submission to another suzerain. In his appeal, he gave the Lord's kingdom to another and invited the Assyrian king to be his overlord instead of Yahweh. As Isaiah predicted, this will prove to be detrimental, for in becoming a vassal to Assyria, he has handed Assyria control of the affairs of Judah. In the narrative context of the preceding chapters in Kings, this invitation becomes even more foolhardy as Ahaz's actions are found to mimic the action of Menahem of Israel (2 Kgs 15:19-20) and the events that followed.<sup>501</sup> When Israel chose to put their faith in another by becoming the vassal of Assyria, the consequences were costly, and they lost the blessing of rest, peace, and land. Hubbard et al. comment, "the dramatic effect is quite clear, Assyria, once involved, is difficult to dislodge."<sup>502</sup> Verse 9 shares that, like Menahem, the bribe had the desired result, and Assyria came to Judah's aid (ultimately fulfilling Isaiah's prediction in chapters 7-8). In 733 BC Tiglath-Pileser invaded Israel. His annals report "Bit-Humria (= Israel) with all its inhabitants and its goods, I led to Assyria. They overthrew their king Paqaha (= Pekah) and I crowned Ausi (= Hoshea) king over them."<sup>503</sup> In 732 BC, after a two-year siege, he also killed Rezin and

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<sup>500</sup> Sawyer concludes, "the peculiar soteriological meaning of these terms is also evident in a number of dialogues where God's power to 'save' is at first doubted and then demonstrated dramatically." Ibid., עשׂ, OT Usage, e-book.

<sup>501</sup> Hubbard et al., *2 Kings*, 210.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid.

<sup>503</sup> Prichard, *ANET*, 284.

conquered Damascus.<sup>504</sup> The bribe might have had the desired result in the immediate crisis, but the long-term consequences would prove disastrous.

*Isaiah's Fourth Oracle: The Assyrian Flood (Is 8:5-15)*

There is no indication of the exact time frame for Isaiah's fourth oracle. Yet, the mounting critique in Isaiah 8:5-15 seems to imply that Ahaz has already chosen to reject Isaiah's previous revelations from the Lord to trust and rely on him for salvation and has sealed his fate by turning to Assyria (2 Kgs 16:7).<sup>505</sup> The king and the people probably thought they had made the right choice in trusting in the Assyrian king for deliverance from Syria and Israel, but Isaiah would soon disclose that this was a grave mistake.<sup>506</sup> As Gary Smith reveals, the first part of this oracle (Is 8:1-10) is given as a typical judgment speech that includes both an accusation (עָן כִּי "because" v. 6) and punishment (לָכֵן "therefore" v. 7).<sup>507</sup> The accusation in verse 6 is twofold, first, "this people" have rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah; and second, they are "rejoicing" over Rezin and Pekah or "melting in fear" in Rezin and Pekah (v. 6). The interpretation of this accusation is complicated by the fact that "this people" (v. 6) is not specifically identified (causing one to question whether it is referring to Israel or Judah). In addition, the phrase וּמְשֹׁשׁ אֶת־רִצְיִן וּבֶן־רִמְלִיָּהוּ "and rejoice Rezin and the son of Remaliah" is

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<sup>504</sup> Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, 439.

<sup>505</sup> Oswalt speculates that if the word "rejoicing" in verse 6 is correct, then this oracle could have occurred after the campaign of Tiglath-Pileser forced Syria and Ephraim to withdraw from Jerusalem. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 150.

<sup>506</sup> Smith, *Isaiah 1-39*, 206.

<sup>507</sup> Ibid., 206-207.

syntactically awkward, thus, several commentators prefer to emend the verb “rejoice” to “melt.”<sup>508</sup>

Regarding the identity of “this people” (הָעָם הַזֶּה), scholars’ debate whether it references Israel, Judah, or both. Watts et al. interpret “this people” as Israel, which they explain echoes the covenant identification in 1:3b and the people without understanding destined for destruction and exile in 6:9, 10. They also think the “waters of Shiloah” refers to the policy decisions of Ahaz, “who accepts the necessity of loyalty to Assyria as being in the will of God for that time.”<sup>509</sup> Roberts agrees that “this people” refers to Israel’s rejection of David and ultimately Yahweh but not with the loyalty of Assyria as being the will of God.<sup>510</sup> Page Kelly offers that it could be a pro-coalition group in Jerusalem that conspired to see Rezin and Pekah succeed.<sup>511</sup> In response to this, Csaba Balogh asserts that such historical speculations fall short of textual support and the reasoning is challenged both exegetically (he states, הָעָם הַזֶּה generally refers to the people of Judah in Isaiah) and grammatically.<sup>512</sup> Lastly, some contend that “this people” refers to both houses of Ephraim and Judah.<sup>513</sup>

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<sup>508</sup> Smith, *Isaiah 1-39*, 207. The RSV emends the Hebrew text to read “melt in fear.” Roberts notes, “the text is difficult but [...] the LXX, Syriac, Vulgate, and Targum all support the MT, which may be translated as “and they rejoice with or in Rezin.” Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 133. Since it will be argued below that “this people” most likely refers to Judah, either translation would be appropriate, they either rejoice over the demise of Pekah or melt in fear because of Pekah. For an extensive analysis of this phrase, see Csaba Balogh, “Historicizing Interpolations in the Isaiah-Memoir,” *Vetus Testamentum* 64, no. 4 (2014): 519-538.

<sup>509</sup> Watts et al., *Isaiah 1-39*, 154.

<sup>510</sup> Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 133-134.

<sup>511</sup> Page Kelly, *Isaiah*, The Broadman Bible Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1971), 219-220.

<sup>512</sup> Balogh, “Historicizing Interpolations in the Isaiah-Memoir,” 525.

<sup>513</sup> Harry L Poe, “Isaiah 8:5-15,” *Review & Expositor* 88, no. 2 (1991): 190.



In light of the reference to Rezin and Pekah (v. 6b), Oswalt writes, “*this people* has been interpreted by some as being Ephraim and Syria. Yet, everywhere else where the identification can be ascertained the phrase refers to Judah, the people immediately at hand (cf. 6:9; 8:12; 9:15 [Eng. 16]; 28:11, 14; 29:13), and there is every reason to believe the same is true here.”<sup>514</sup> Smith adds, when reading the oracle in context after the previous announcement of the defeat of Rezin and Pekah (vv. 1-4), it seems that the accusation is referring to Judah, who has chosen to reject the Lord, the gently flowing waters of Shiloah, in favor of the “the River” (Assyria) and now they are rejoicing in the imminent destruction of their enemies because of their appeal to Assyria.<sup>515</sup> Kaiser makes an interesting point that the people of Judah have rejected the word of their God, and have despised the “waters of Shiloah,” the source of life (streams of living water cf. Jer 2:13; 17:13) and, as a result, would be flooded.<sup>516</sup>

The conclusion above that “this people” refers to Judah also seems consistent with the message of Isaiah in chapters 1-7. When the oracle in chapter 8 is read in context with the beginning chapters of Isaiah (chap 1-7), the references to “this people,” “you people,” or “my/his people” are pointedly referring to the judgment of God on Judah (see 1:10; 3:12-15; 5:7, 13, 25). Therefore, the judgment pronounced in verses 7-8 seems more likely to be directed at Ahaz and his people (cf. 7:2).<sup>517</sup> Since Judah did not trust Yahweh for deliverance and called on Assyria in

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<sup>514</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 150, e-book. Roberts also argues “this people” refers to Israel’s rejection of David and, ultimately Yahweh. Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 133-134.

<sup>515</sup> Smith, *Isaiah*, 207. Grogan agrees with the interpretation that “this people” refers to Judah, and the “waters of Shiloah” refer to the Lord. Grogan, *Isaiah*, Commentary 5-8, e-book.

<sup>516</sup> Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, 185.

<sup>517</sup> Even if the reference of “this people” refers to Israel, because of Judah’s involvement with Assyria, she would be caught up in the flood waters along with Israel.

his place, God would allow Assyria to sweep through them like a flood.<sup>518</sup> Isaiah predicts that the Assyrians would not stop with the overthrow of Israel and would continue south like a river overflowing its banks. Instead of the blessing of peace and gentleness that comes with trusting in God (“the gently flowing waters of Shiloah”), Judah will be all but drowned by the mighty flood waters of Assyria. Assyria would sweep into Judah, reaching all the way to their neck (Jerusalem). Ironically, instead of ushering in peace, which is what Ahaz thought would happen when he turned to the Assyrians, Isaiah forecasts that the opposite would happen, Assyria would completely ravage and plunder the land (cf. the covenant curses in Deut 28:15-68).<sup>519</sup> This is exactly what happened some thirty years later when Sennacherib invaded Judah (Is 36:37; 2 Kgs 18:13).<sup>520</sup>

However, the metaphor changes from judgment to hope at the end of verse 8. Isaiah declares that despite their unfaithfulness and rejection, and despite the fact they will be flooded by Assyria, Yahweh will remain “with” (עִמָּנוּ) his people for it is his land (v. 8b).<sup>521</sup> Verses 9-10 reiterate that God is in control of every nation, including their military and political strategizing. They could make all the plans they wanted, but ultimately, they would fail and would “not stand” because God was still “with” his people (עִמָּנוּ).<sup>522</sup> This warning also applies

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<sup>518</sup> Smith, *Isaiah 1-39*, 206.

<sup>519</sup> Leupold, “Exposition of Isaiah,” 170.

<sup>520</sup> Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 127-128.

<sup>521</sup> Scholars debate the metaphor of the “outstretched wings.” Some contend that Isaiah simply switched metaphors but still refers to the flood of Assyria as a bird of prey spreading out over the land. Smith, *Isaiah 1-39*, 207; Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 15q. Others like Roberts contend that “its outstretched wings” should be understood as Yahweh’s wings instead of the reaching out of the “River.” He argues that “wings” are never used to refer to rivers, but Yahweh is often portrayed metaphorically as a bird with outstretched wings to protect or care for his people (e.g., Deut 32:11; Ps 17:8; 36:8; 57:2; 61:5; 63:8; 91:4). Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 134.

<sup>522</sup> Smith, *Isaiah 1-39*, 208-209.

to Ahaz proving that it is naïve to trust in human armies in place of Yahweh, who controls the thoughts and plans of every army.

The last section (Is 8:11-15) connects to the previous through the particle *כִּי* (“for”) and reflects on all that has preceded from 7:1 onward and the central theme of where and in whom to place one’s trust.<sup>523</sup> These verses reiterate the ignorance of the king and the people, chastising them for fearing the wrong thing (vv. 12-13). Their fear of the military threat of other nations, which Isaiah stated was under the control of God (vv. 9-10), caused them to remove their trust in the Lord and falsely place it in another. H. G. M. Williamson indicates that the words “fear” (*מוֹרָא*) and “dread” (*פֶּרֶץ*) include a sense of awe and respect. He argues the specific forms of each term used here are mostly used elsewhere in reference to God and the impact of his deeds, making them inappropriate reactions to human threats (cf. Deut 4:34; 26:8; Is 29:23; Jer 32:21; Mal 1:6; Ps 76:12).<sup>524</sup> Isaiah stresses that it is God, “the Lord of Hosts” (*יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת*), Israel’s Divine Warrior, who should be feared, for he alone is holy (v. 13). To regard God as holy requires one to recognize him as the high and exalted King and to place their trust in him.<sup>525</sup>

The repeated use of “Immanuel” (7:14, 8, 10) and “Lord of Hosts” (8:13, 18) in this crisis of war contributes to the larger framework of chapters 6-8, showing that God, the Holy King, and Divine Warrior could be trusted to be “with” his people, especially in the context of battle. However, Yahweh could either be with them as a rock and a sanctuary to run to for safety and

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<sup>523</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 15s.

<sup>524</sup> H. G. M. Williamson, *Isaiah 6-12: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2018), 294.

<sup>525</sup> Smith, *Isaiah 1-39*, 209.

deliverance or a stumbling stone that leads to ruin (8:14).<sup>526</sup> Therefore, the type of rock he is depends on the human response to him, either in trust and submission or rejection (vv. 14-15).<sup>527</sup> For Jerusalem, who has chosen rejection, Yahweh would become a trap and a snare (v. 14b). Because of their lack of faith and their choice to trust in another king and suzerain, many among them would “stumble,” “fall,” “be broken,” “snared,” and “taken” (v. 15).

### **Political Loyalty Leads to Religious Loyalty (2 Kgs 16:10-18)**

In 2 Kings 16:10-18, the Dtr relates the important connection between political and religious apostasy and the ramifications associated with aligning with a foreign nation. Beal writes, “behind the alliance with Assyria lies a rejection of YHWH’s commitment to care for and protect his people.”<sup>528</sup> In placing his trust in Assyria, Ahaz shows his fundamental disbelief in Yahweh as the Divine Warrior, despite the evidence that he has been faithful in this area in the past (see chapter three above). Ahaz disregards and rejects the God of the covenant and alienates himself from that God by replacing him with another. That same attitude of alienation and rejection of the covenant relationship in favor of a new lord and suzerain continues in the next section, underlying the actions of Ahaz in the temple.<sup>529</sup>

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<sup>526</sup> Smith, *Isaiah 1-39*, 209.

<sup>527</sup> Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 137.

<sup>528</sup> Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, 442.

<sup>529</sup> Ibid.

*The New Altar (2 Kgs 16:10-16)*

After the fall of Samaria and Damascus, Ahaz travels to Damascus to meet with Tiglath-Pileser to seal his agreement and affirm his status as a vassal of Assyria.<sup>530</sup> While there, he “sees” an altar and demands its replication at the Jerusalem temple (2 Kgs 16:10). This altar, symbolizes three things, as will be argued below. It subtly reinforces Ahaz’s “likeness” to the surrounding nations, indicates the subservience of Yahweh to Assur the Assyrian god, and is associated with the cultic innovations of Jeroboam I. In addition to creating the new altar, because of his new relationship with Assyria, he goes even further by stripping the temple of its precious metals and removing several items, including the covered portico and outer entrance reserved for the king. The text states he does all of this “because of the king of Assyria” (v. 18).

The section begins by informing the reader that while meeting with Tiglath-Pileser, Ahaz “saw” the altar in Damascus.<sup>531</sup> Whether Tiglath-Pileser brought the altar to Damascus to worship the Assyrian gods for giving him victory (e.g., Brueggemann), or it was a Damascene altar (e.g., Beal, Watts et al.; Cogan and Tadmor) is debated.<sup>532</sup> However, the origin of the altar is of little importance, for what is stressed by the Dtr is the foreign nature of the altar, not whether it was Assyrian or Damascene. As Beal asserts, the narrator highlights the foreign nature of the altar by naming “Damascus” four times in verses 10-11 to emphasize its external origin. She argues Ahaz’s voluntary adjustment to the foreign form is a great fault under the

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<sup>530</sup> Beal, *1 and 2 kings*, 439.

<sup>531</sup> Watts et al. comment that the OT relates that the act of “seeing” connects with “acting” which carries with it the sense of misdeed or sin (Gen 3:6; 6:2; 12:15; 34:2; 38:2; 2 Sam 11:2). Watts et al., *2 Kings*, 215.

<sup>532</sup> Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Kings*, 469; Watts et al., *2 Kings*, 215; Beal, *1 and 2 kings*, 439; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 192.

Deuteronomistic code.<sup>533</sup> Cogan and Tadmor believe that the Dtr recorded this incident to bolster his indictment of Ahaz and to describe the nature of the altar as the enthusiasm of Ahaz to assimilate to the current international fashions. They suggest his voluntary construction of a foreign alter was the “first wave in the larger movement of acculturation to the practices of the Assyrian empire.”<sup>534</sup> This is in line with the context of the chapter up to this point (2 Kgs 16:1-9) and the overriding message of the Dtr, which focuses on the specific acts associated with Ahaz’s religious and political apostasy. The Dtr highlights that part of Ahaz’s sin was his “likeness” to the Israelite kings and his “likeness” to the surrounding nations through his participation in their abominable practices (2 Kgs 16:3-4). He also records that (like the practices of the surrounding nations) Ahaz bribes a foreign king to come to his aid instead of trusting in Yahweh (v. 7). All of these actions, in addition to the foreign nature of this alter “like” the one in Damascus, indicate the Dtr’s disapproval of Ahaz’s disregard for the ways of Yahweh in his desire to be “like the nations” (cf. Deut 17:14; 1 Sam 8:19-21).

It is important to note that the Dtr announces the construction of this altar immediately after the political apostasy of Ahaz with Assyria. By linking the submission to Assyria (vv. 7-9) with the cultic innovation, which immediately follows, the writer suggests that the altar is the result of the king’s capitulation.<sup>535</sup> Thus, as Sweeney proposes, the altar was not simply an act of acculturation (although that was part of it), but Ahaz likely constructed the new altar in the Jerusalem temple to assure his solidarity and loyalty to the Assyrian king. Part of that solidarity

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<sup>533</sup> Beal, *1 and 2 kings*, 439.

<sup>534</sup> Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 192-193.

<sup>535</sup> Park, *2 Kings*, 221.

probably included sidelining the bronze altar “that was before the Lord” (v. 14) to demonstrate Yahweh’s subservience to the Assyrian gods.<sup>536</sup> Even though it was not the practice of Assyria to demand its vassals worship their gods,<sup>537</sup> they would still insist that Yahweh be subservient to Assur. The movement and replacement of the old altar with a new one of foreign design would symbolize this subjugation and display his new loyalty.<sup>538</sup> Thus, Ahaz went beyond what was required, and, in his zeal to impress his new overlord, sealed his political loyalty (and apostasy) with religious loyalty (and apostasy).<sup>539</sup>

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<sup>536</sup> Sweeney, *1 and 2 Kings*, 384-385.

<sup>537</sup> Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 192.

<sup>538</sup> Sweeney, *1 and 2 Kings*, 384-385. Cogan and Tadmor point out that the altar was not imposed solely for the imperial worship of Ashur, the chief god of the Assyrians, because Assyrian policy did not demand the worship of its gods by vassal states. They also stress that “Mesopotamian ritual, including Assyria, did not admit whole burnt offerings and blood sprinkling.” Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 192-193.

<sup>539</sup> Watts et al. disagree with this assessment of Ahaz and argue against the altar as a form of apostasy. They state that the altar “would have been used for a reorganized Yahwistic cult in Jerusalem, [...] from this account the motivation of Ahaz was clearly not apostasy since the organization of the sacrifice that follows is consistent with the other legislation on sacrifice in the OT.” Watts et al., *2 Kings*, 215, 217. I would argue that this interpretation is out of sync with the context of the whole chapter and the message of the Dtr, which focuses on Ahaz’s religious and political apostasy. John McKay notes it is apparent that the Dtr intends to portray Ahaz as an apostate (2 Kgs 16:1-4); therefore, this incident is recorded in the history as another example of his religious evils. John McKay, *Religion in Judah Under the Assyrians*, SBL 26 (London: SCM Press LTD, 1973), 7. Nadav Na’aman adds that only two kings carried out extensive reforms in the temple, Ahaz and Manasseh, and both were apostate kings. It is the righteous king Josiah who purges the temple and restores its purity. Nadav Na’aman, “The Deuteronomist and Voluntary Servitude to Foreign Powers,” 46. Also, offering the right sacrifices does not mean that Yahweh condoned the altar. Jeroboam made an altar at Bethel to offer sacrifices to Yahweh, and his actions were condemned (2 Kgs 12:25-13:6). As Smelik states, the Dtr is condemning Ahaz for this altar which alludes to the detestable altar and cult reform of Jeroboam at Bethel proving the statement that he “walked in the ways of the kings of Israel” (v.3). Klaas A D Smelik, “Intertextuality in Ugarit and Israel,” in *The Representation of King Ahaz in 2 Kings 16 and 2 Chronicles 28*, ed. J. C. De Moor (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 159. Beal confirms that the altar of Ahaz is fashioned in a way not approved by Yahweh. She argues that the specifications for the temple structure and furnishings originated with Yahweh (Ex 25:9, 40), including the altar specifications given in Ex 27. She further points out that the word used for “pattern” (תְּכֵנִית) in verse 10 was used by the Chronicler when referencing the plans of the temple structure of David (1 Chr 28:11-12, 18-19). It was also used in Joshua 22, where the people affirm that to make a “copy” (תְּכֵנִית) of the altar to use for burnt offerings is a rebellion against Yahweh. This passage in Joshua “reveals assumptions that no other altar of burnt offering is to be made lest it be used for false worship that supplants the tabernacle altar.” Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, 440.

The text states in verses 12-14 that after the construction of the altar and immediately upon his return, Ahaz utilizes the altar for Yahwistic sacrifices. However, even though he seems to be worshipping Yahweh by instituting the right sacrifices (cf. Lev 1-3; Num 15), the text repeatedly uses the third person possessive pronoun “his” to accentuate the fact that it was “his offering” on “his altar.” Verse 14 states, “and the bronze altar that was *before the Lord* he *removed from the front* of the house, from the place between *his altar* and the house of the Lord and put it on the north side of *his altar*” (italics mine). The new altar is not addressed as being “before the Lord” and the removal of the old one is expressed as a grave injustice, reflected in the unusual word order of the noun (הַמִּזְבֵּחַ הַבְּרָזֶה “the bronze altar”) before the verb (וַיִּקְרֹב “and he brought near/moved”).<sup>540</sup> McKenzie makes a good observation. He proposes, that when coupled with the statement that Ahaz walked in the ways of the Israelite kings (2 Kgs 16:3a), it is natural to see this new altar, now called the “great altar” (v. 15), likened to the cultic innovation of Jeroboam’s altar at Bethel (2 Kgs 12:25-13:6).<sup>541</sup> It is therefore viewed as a perversion of Yahweh’s altar, which was made in conformity with his wishes (Ex 25:9).<sup>542</sup> Like Jeroboam, the new altar is a concession, a compromise that tries to appease both the old and the new. The altar of Ahaz may allude to the worship of Yahweh, but not the way Yahweh has specified, and such worship is conducted in subservience to a foreign suzerain and a foreign god.

Beal asserts the Dtr does not specify the new altar, the sacrifices, or Ahaz’s priestly role at the altar’s inauguration are negative per se, rather he insinuates these alterations are negative

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<sup>540</sup> Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, 440.

<sup>541</sup> McKenzie, *1 Kings 16-2 Kings 16*, 528.

<sup>542</sup> Ibid.



in the context of the covenant relationship Ahaz made with Assyria. This relationship formed a bond in which Ahaz placed his trust in a foreign nation rather than Yahweh for the salvation of Judah.<sup>543</sup> Cogan and Tadmor sum it up this way, “it is hard to deny that the tenor of the story implies that the appeal of Ahaz to Tiglath-Pileser marked the start of Judah’s servitude to Assyria, a servitude which was initiated by Ahaz. [...] Ahaz did not trust God, but rather bought the help of the Assyrian king by ‘bribes.’ This in turn led him to a more serious defection, the construction of an Aramean altar in the Solomonic temple.”<sup>544</sup> As witnessed by the immediate installation of the new altar, this covenantal bond would be the new governing force that would control not only the political affairs of Judah but the religious affairs as well.

*The Changes in the Temple (2 Kgs 16:17-18)*

The following section (2 Kgs 16:17-18) documents additional religious ramifications and consequences associated with Ahaz’s subjugation and political apostasy with Assyria. The text records that after the installation of the new altar and subsequent sacrifices, Ahaz dismantles, removes, and rearranges aspects of the temple. He also changes the structure of the portico and the king’s private entrance from the palace to the temple. The Dtr simply states he does all of this “because/on account of the king of Assyria” (מִפְּנֵי מֶלֶךְ אַשּׁוּר). Removal of the passageway was likely symbolic of the new relationship of Judah to Assyria as her suzerain and protector. The passageway symbolized the close relationship between the Davidic house and Yahweh in which Yahweh regarded the kings as sons with royal privileges and protection (Ps. 2; cf. Ps 46-48; 89;

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<sup>543</sup> Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, 436.

<sup>544</sup> Tadmor and Cogan, “Ahaz and Tiglath-Pileser,” 505-506.

132).<sup>545</sup> This protection was disregarded in favor of another, showing the new political commitment to Assyria was now intertwined with theological loyalty.

Regarding the changes to the temple, there are several theories as to why Ahaz removed and rearranged these items in relation to the king of Assyria. As Brueggemann and Cohn suggest, it is possible that the bronze was needed to pay more tribute since the text indicates in the initial bribe, he took the silver and gold from the temple, but no mention is made of the bronze (v. 8).<sup>546</sup> Another possibility, given by McKenzie and Leithart, is that Assyria could have imposed the removal of specific items to diminish the splendor of the temple and downgrade Yahweh to a minor deity. McKenzie also suggests it is just as possible that Ahaz, in his zeal for his new overlord, sent these objects as luxury items or gifts to the Assyrian king to stay in his good graces.<sup>547</sup> Watts et al. suggest it was merely part of a more extensive reorganization for a smoother running of the temple. However, they do agree that something about these items must have offended the Assyrians because the expression indicates an attitude of subservience.<sup>548</sup> Despite which theory one holds, all point to the purpose of the Dtr in recording these actions. The temple was plundered and desecrated, and the passageway was removed “*because of the king of Assyria.*” This phrase makes clear the pervasive impact the Assyrians had, not only on Ahaz but, as a byproduct, Judah as well. It hints at the devastating impact that Judah’s vassal hood will have on its economic and political future, an impact that both the Dtr and the prophet

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<sup>545</sup> Sweeney, *1 and 2 Kings*, 385.

<sup>546</sup> Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Kings*, 470; Cohn, *2 Kings*, 115.

<sup>547</sup> McKenzie, *1 Kings 16-2 Kings 16*, 528; Leithart, *1 and 2 Kings*, 247.

<sup>548</sup> Watts et al., *2 Kings*, 218.

Isaiah blame on Ahaz.<sup>549</sup> This time the covenantal curses included the loss of peace and rest and all of their land, which was now under the control of the Assyrians.

### **A Future Faithful Monarch**

Even, amid the grave apostasy of Ahaz, or maybe because of it, God proves faithful to his covenantal promises to David and his dynasty (see 2 Sam 7). Ahaz may be a foolish, stubborn king, but Isaiah looks beyond Ahaz to give Yahweh's people messianic hope of another future Davidic monarch, one who is faithful. Childs proposes an eschatological trajectory of Isaiah 7-9:6 that gives hope to the immediate future and suggests a divine future ruler that will replace the unfaithful monarch once and for all.<sup>550</sup> In this way, Yahweh as the Divine King demonstrates that his plans for his kingdom will endure despite the faithlessness and rejection of the monarchy and the people.

Yahweh promises the birth of another Davidic ruler who will exhibit God's salvation and presence with his people in a unique way (Is 7:14; 9:7). Unlike Ahaz, who has led the nation into darkness and judgment, this ruler would lead his people from darkness to light, from death to joy, and from oppression to freedom (Is 9:2-4; cf. Matt 4:15-16; Jn 8:12). He will be an executor of justice and righteousness (see Is 1:21; 9:7), and his name will be Wonderful Counselor (bearer of divine wisdom), Mighty God (a champion in battle), Everlasting Father (to the Davidic line cf.

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<sup>549</sup> McKenzie, *1 Kings 16-2 Kings 16*, 528.

<sup>550</sup> Brevard Childs, *Isaiah* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 81.

Ps 89:25, 29), and ultimately, he will be the Prince of Peace (Is 9:6; cf. Luke 1:79).<sup>551</sup> Of the phrase Prince of Peace, Goldingay et al. state,

In the phrase Prince of Peace, the first word suggests an army commander (cf. Gen 21:22; describing God, Dan 8:11, 25). It thus links well with Mighty, and with Isaiah's emphasis on Israel's God being "Yahweh Armies," as well as confronting by anticipation the boast of Assyria in 10:8. Unlike that of the Assyrians, this commander's warmaking is destined to bring shalom. That suggests both an end to warmaking (cf. v. 5) and the broader wellbeing in all aspects of life suggested by the words—growth, blessing, joy, and fairness. (see vv. 3, 7)<sup>552</sup>

This eschatological oracle foresees a theocratic final kingdom with Yahweh as king and his Son as the Prince of Peace.<sup>553</sup> Thus, God shows through this promised messianic Davidic king that he is committed to restoring hope and the blessing of peace. The advent of the Messiah and the blessing associated with his reign is guaranteed by "the zeal of the Lord of hosts" (קִנְיַת יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת Isaiah 9:7). The zeal of the Lord is an assurance that God will jealously watch over his own possession with all his strength (cf. 2 Kgs 19:31; Is 31:31); and the guarantee that the promise will be fulfilled rests in the power of the Lord of Hosts, which has no bounds.<sup>554</sup> Ahaz did not trust in the Lord of Hosts for salvation, but God promises that he will restore and bring salvation and guarantees it through the very name Ahaz rejected.

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<sup>551</sup> John Goldingay, Robert Hubbard, and Robert Johnston, *Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 115-116. Oswalt comments that the titles given in 9:6 argue forcefully against this child being a human, such as Hezekiah; clearly the person being referred to is the promised Messiah. Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 136. Many NT writers, such as Matthew, reread these familiar texts in light of their historical encounters with Christ and the illumination of the Holy Spirit. When Matthew read the text of Isaiah of a coming Davidic ruler who would begin as an infant (7:14) to set things right by ruling wisely and justly forever (9:6-7), the Holy Spirit revealed that that Immanuel passages had their ultimate fulfillment in Christ. Witherington, *Isaiah Old and New*, 87, 110.

<sup>552</sup> Goldingay et al., *Isaiah*, 116.

<sup>553</sup> Witherington, *Isaiah Old and New*, 97.

<sup>554</sup> Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, 215.

## Hezekiah

The reign of King Hezekiah is well documented in the Old Testament, actually moving beyond that recorded of Ahaz, encompassing three chapters in Kings (2 Kgs 18-20), four chapters in Chronicles (2 Chr 29-32), and four chapters in Isaiah (Is 36-39). Also, like his father, the prophetic books of Hosea and Micah correlate to Hezekiah's reign and present the prophetic response to the sins of both the leadership and people. Additionally, he is mentioned in numerous extra-biblical sources both politically and personally, possibly more than any other king of Israel or Judah.<sup>555</sup> Hezekiah's monarchy is presented as one of the most critical reigns in the narrative of Kings, as his rule comes directly after the fall of Israel (2 Kgs 17), presenting a stark contrast between his actions and the actions of Israel, that resulted in their exile (2 Kgs 18:9-12). In the narrator's estimation, unlike Ahaz, who was one of the worst kings of Judah, Hezekiah is one of the greatest kings of Judah (or Israel, for that matter) and is regarded as one of the most godly. The Dtr presents him as one of only two kings fully "approved" by Yahweh (the other being Josiah).<sup>556</sup>

The Dtr attests that Hezekiah was a great king who "did what was right in the sight of the Lord" he removed the cultic worship centers (high places and pillars) and brought Judah back to a place of worshipping God alone (2 Kgs. 18:3-4). He is also recorded as the king who trusted like no other (2 Kgs. 18:5). However, as will be argued below, even Hezekiah had moments where he faltered in his complete trust in Yahweh as his divine protector, and this lapse in

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<sup>555</sup> Bill T. Arnold, "Hezekiah," ed. Bill T. Arnold and H.G.M. Williamson, DOTHB (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), Intro, e-book.

<sup>556</sup> Walter Brueggemann and Tod Linafelt, *An Introduction to the Old Testament, the Canon and Christian Imagination*, 2nd Ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 186.

judgment led to severe consequences. As with other kings, political conflict brought the true loyalty of the king to the forefront, and, as with other kings, this conflict represented a turning point in the king's life where he must choose where to place his trust for deliverance. Hezekiah faltered in his complete faith in God during these crisis points, aligned himself with foreign nations politically, and relied on them for salvation (18:21, 20:12-19). However, these alliances proved futile, God was displeased, and Hezekiah suffered severe consequences.

Even though Hezekiah was not idolatrous by worshipping other gods, in these instances, he was adulterous by turning from complete trust in Yahweh to reliance on other nations for salvation (similar to King Asa). As stated above, God had proven time and time again that he is the ultimate source of protection, and he is expectant that each king, not only worship him alone, but as his vice-regent, they are to depend solely on him as the nation's Divine Warrior. Obedience in these areas leads to the blessings of peace, rest, and the continued gift of the land. Misplaced trust results in the removal of protection and blessing and the covenant curses of war, strife, and loss of land.

Hezekiah's unfaithfulness came to the forefront in his encounter with Sennacherib (2 Kgs 18-19), which takes center stage as the pivotal point in his life and reign, focusing on who Hezekiah will ultimately choose to trust/rely (בָּטַח) on for deliverance (נָצַל) and who he will choose to listen to (שָׁמַע). The focus of the Dtr accentuates these points in his repetitive use of the verbs בָּטַח, נָצַל (each is used eight times in 18:13-36), and שָׁמַע (used 11 times in chapter 19). When Hezekiah realizes he has made a mistake, he has a change of heart and chooses to listen to the Lord and place his trust entirely in Yahweh for Judah's salvation. Yahweh, in turn, forgives him, Jerusalem is saved, his legacy is renewed, and his final epitaph is given as one of incomparable trust (18:5).

This section will focus on the pivotal events in Hezekiah's life in Kings 18-19: his political apostasy, his encounter with Sennacherib, and his response of repentance. Chapter 18 begins with Hezekiah's introduction in the usual fashion in the book of Kings, and his reign is summarized (2 Kgs 18:1-12). In the next section (18:9-12), the Dtr reiterates the fall of Israel, which he covered extensively in chapter 17, pointing to the significance of this event as the turning point in the history of both nations (this will be addressed minimally). The rest of the account (18:13-19:37), centers on the attack of Sennacherib (18:13-14), the speeches and letter from his envoys (18:17-25, 26-35; 19:8-13), Hezekiah's response to each (18:15-16; 18:36-19:5, 14-19), and finally the prophet Isaiah's response to the situation (19:6-7, 20-34). Isaiah chapters 20, 22, 30, 31, and 36-39, which convey the situation from the prophetic point of view, will be referred to as necessary to present a complete picture from the prophetic perspective. 2 Kings 20 and 2 Chronicles 29-32, which add detail to his reign, will be addressed marginally as they relate to the argument of this paper.

### **Opening Regnal Formula and Theological Verdict (2 Kgs 18:1-8)**

The author begins by identifying Hezekiah's age, his succession year as it relates to the northern king (Hoshea), his length of reign, and the name of the queen mother. (The chronological difficulties of his reign will be discussed below.) As with other kings, following this opening statement, the most essential detail given to any king is the verdict rendered based on his theological commitment to Yahweh, his commands, and his temple, to which Hezekiah is thoroughly approved.<sup>557</sup> Hezekiah "did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, according to all

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<sup>557</sup> Brueggemann and Linfelt, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 183.

David his father had done” (v. 3).<sup>558</sup> He instituted massive religious reform, including removing the *הַמִּזְבֵּחַ* “high places” (which every other monarch up to this point had failed to do), breaking the pillars, and cutting down the Asherah poles. He also was responsible for the destruction of the bronze serpent (Nehushtan) that Moses had made (see Num 21:9), which had become an object of false worship (v. 4).<sup>559</sup>

The Chronicler adds a few more essential details here related to his rule. First, Hezekiah’s massive reform happened early in his reign (2 Chr 29:3).<sup>560</sup> Second, he reunited the kingdom in worship for the first time since the division of the two nations (2 Chr 30:5-6). Third, he renewed the covenant with the Lord that his father had blatantly disregarded (v. 10). Like Asa before him, Hezekiah started his reign strong, and when he did what was good and right and was faithful before the Lord to seek him with all his heart, he prospered (2 Chr 31:20-21). The Dtr relates this in his statement that Hezekiah, like David, “held fast” (*הִתְחַזַּק*) to the Lord and kept the Lord’s commandment (2 Kgs 18:6; cf. Deut 6:5; 10:12; 11:22; 30:20), in contrast to Solomon who “held fast” (*הִתְחַזַּק*) to foreign wives (2 Kgs 11:2, see chapter four above). Because of his obedience, Hezekiah experienced the blessing of the Lord. The Lord was “with” him wherever he went, and he experienced prosperity, including political achievements (2 Kgs 18:7-8).

Following Hezekiah’s list of reforms, the historian goes a step further in his praise of Hezekiah by employing a verb to describe him that he has never before used of a king, “trust”

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<sup>558</sup> For an explanation of his comparison with David, see chapter three above.

<sup>559</sup> For supplemental information on Hezekiah’s extensive religious reform, see 2 Chronicles 29-31.

<sup>560</sup> Cogan and Tadmor suggest though the exact date of the reform remains uncertain, “it is reasonable to place in in the first decade of Hezekiah’s reign, after 722.” Cogan and Tadmor, “2 Kings,” 220.



(תִּהְיֶה).<sup>561</sup> The Dtr states, “he trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel, so that there was none like him among all the kings of Judah after him, nor among those who were before him” (v. 5). Since this incomparability formula is also expressed of other kings (Solomon and Josiah), this statement seems to be contradictory with the other accounts and various theories abound. For example, Beal asserts if it is not simply hyperbolic rhetoric, the tradition could have arisen before the history written of Josiah.<sup>562</sup> Hubbard et al. explain something similar in their discussion that some commentators detect more than one editorial hand at work, although they admit this argument has serious weaknesses.<sup>563</sup>

Although these theories are valid and separate sources may have existed, the concern of this thesis is the synchronic reading and interpretation of the existing text and the literary relationships evident in the current narrative. Thus, Gary Knoppers offers a suggestion that allows for the unity of the text rather than the disunity associated with conflicting messages. He proposes approaching these superlative Deuteronomistic evaluations by viewing them in “association to a specific feature of a monarch’s reign, [rather than as an overall evaluation] in which that king is deemed unique or incomparable.”<sup>564</sup> If we follow Knoppers’ interpretation, this statement is directly related to Hezekiah’s incomparability in his trust in Yahweh. He argues that the same statement, when made of Solomon, is lauding his unparalleled wisdom and wealth (1 Kgs 3:12), and when used of Josiah, it is about his incomparable religious reform (2 Kgs 23:5;

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<sup>561</sup> Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, 465.

<sup>562</sup> Ibid., 464.

<sup>563</sup> Hubbard et al., *2 Kings*, 252.

<sup>564</sup> Gary N Knoppers, “‘There Was None like Him’: Incomparability in the Books of Kings,” *CBQ* 54, no. 3 (July 1992): 413. Provan et al. agree with Knoppers’ assessment that there was no one like him regarding his trust in the Lord. Provan et al., *1 and 2 Kings*, 192.

cf. 22:2).<sup>565</sup> Therefore, the translation in the NET seems to fit this explanation well. It states of Hezekiah, “he trusted in the Lord God of Israel; *in this regard* there was none like him among the kings of Judah either before or after” (2 Kgs 18:5 NET italics mine). Even though this seems contradictory to Hezekiah’s mistrust that will be argued in this paper, I will contend that after his political apostasy, Hezekiah repented, changed his heart, and began to trust completely in Yahweh. Because of this redirection of his heart and loyalty, God changed his epitaph to be the paradigm of complete trust in the Lord.

### **The Fall of Israel Recounted (2 Kgs 18:9-12)**

This section recaps the events recorded in chapter 17 and the judgment and fall of Israel. Hubbard et al. suggest that the siege and fall of Samaria are reiterated here to provide a “synchronization of the fall of Samaria with the reign of Hezekiah” and to set the “historical stage” for the events that follow, where it appears at first glance that the same fate awaits Judah.<sup>566</sup> Israel is accused of disobedience both in transgressing the covenant—the laws of Moses and failure to listen to the voice of the Lord (v. 12). In chapter 17, Israel is also accused of relying on Egypt for aid (v. 4). In the same chapter, Judah is charged with the same sins, they were disobedient and were walking in the ways of Israel (17:19). As will be discussed below, Isaiah further accuses Judah of the same misdeeds as Israel, they are charged with relying on Egypt for aid and Hezekiah is guilty of not listening to the Lord. The message is clear if they do

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<sup>565</sup> Knoppers, “There Was None like Him,” 413.

<sup>566</sup> Hubbard et al., *2 Kings*, 247.

not change, they are headed for the same fate. This small narrative also “warns the reader of the futility of attempted revolt against Assyria without divine support.”<sup>567</sup>

### **The Issues of Chronology**

Understanding the historical background and key figures from this period (740-700 BC) is essential to understanding the political apostasy of Hezekiah that led to the Assyrian attack on Judah. One vital component to grasp is the chronology of the events that happened during Hezekiah’s reign in the years leading up to the invasion of Sennacherib (2 Kgs 18:13). However, the chronology of Hezekiah’s reign is much debated and very complicated because there is some discrepancy between the dates given in Kings and the dates given in extra-biblical accounts from the same time.<sup>568</sup> For example, the Assyrian *Annals of Sennacherib*, dated 704-681 BC,<sup>569</sup> have proven to be very helpful in solidifying specific dates during this period with relative accuracy, but have also caused debate about how they accord with the biblical account.

Part of the problem in chronology is the claim in 2 Kings 18:1 that Hezekiah began his reign in Hoshea’s third year (presumably 729/28 BC).<sup>570</sup> The account further explains that the Assyrian siege of the Northern kingdom happened in the fourth year of Hezekiah’s reign culminating in the fall of Israel three years later, 722/21 BC (which would be approximately the

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<sup>567</sup> Sweeney, *I and II Kings*, 410.

<sup>568</sup> Walton et al., *The IVPBBC*, 451. Chang-Dae Kim, “Sennacherib’s Invasion of Judah in 2 Kings 18-19,” 한국기독교신학논총, no. 78 (December 2011): 21.

<sup>569</sup> Prichard, *ANET*, 287-288.

<sup>570</sup> Patterson and Austel, *I & 2 Kings*, Commentary 18:1-2, e-book; Beal, *I and 2 Kings*, 464.

sixth year of Hezekiah, vv. 9-10).<sup>571</sup> 2 Kings 18:13 then records the attack of Sennacherib as occurring in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah's reign which does not align with Assyrian records which firmly place this invasion in 701 BC.<sup>572</sup> Thus, according to the Assyrian records, the reign of Hezekiah would have begun around 715/14 BC, which implies that the biblical narrative in 2 Kings 18:1 places the beginning of Hezekiah's reign about 12 years too early.<sup>573</sup> There has been much debate to resolve this issue, but no clear answer satisfies all interpreters.<sup>574</sup> To explain this discrepancy, some scholars reject the synchronism in verses 9-10 or downplay the historicity of the version in Kings, especially the account of the fall of Samaria, calling it "a legend created during the exile or later."<sup>575</sup> Cogan and Tadmor find the date in verse 13 to be secondary, from the hand of the Dtr or later.<sup>576</sup> The dominant theory and the one used by those who hold to the historicity of the biblical account (e.g., Provan, McFall, Beal, Patterson and Austel, Horn, and Kim), suggests that Hezekiah was a co-regent with his father Ahaz from 727-714 BC, gaining sole accession in 714 BC and then beginning his 29-year reign.<sup>577</sup> This theory is not entirely

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<sup>571</sup> Cogan and Tadmor postulate that "Hezekiah's first year was in reality Hoshea's sixth year. The three-year difference derives from the calculation made by the Judahite choreographer of Kings, who did not know that Hoshea's reign ended before the siege began, and that during these three years, Samaria had no king." Cogan and Tadmor, *2 Kings*, 216.

<sup>572</sup> Prichard, *ANET*, 287-288; Patterson and Austel, *I & 2 Kings*, Commentary 18:1-2, e-book.

<sup>573</sup> Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, 464.

<sup>574</sup> The full scope of this debate is beyond the context of this paper. On the complexities of the chronology, see E. R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings: A Reconstruction of the Chronology of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965).

<sup>575</sup> Antii Laato, "Hezekiah and the Assyrian Crisis in 701 B.C.," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 2, 1987, 49. See also Cogan and Tadmor, "II Kings," 228.

<sup>576</sup> Cogan and Tadmor, "II Kings," 228.

<sup>577</sup> Iain Provan, *II Kings*, ed. John Walton, ZIBBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 18:1-12, e-book; Patterson and Austel, *I & 2 Kings*, Commentary 18:1-2, e-book; Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, 464; Siegfried H. Horn, "The

without difficulties, but since this explanation fits well with the account in Kings and the extra-biblical sources, it will be the position held here.<sup>578</sup>

With this chronology in mind, a tentative account of Hezekiah's reign can be pieced together. After Hezekiah began his sole reign (714 BC) his religious reformation commenced (2 Kgs 18:4).<sup>579</sup> The purpose of this reformation was probably twofold. First, it might have been instituted due to the fall of Israel. Hezekiah witnessed firsthand the destruction and deportation of Israel and did not want to make the same covenantal mistakes they had made.<sup>580</sup> Second, due to the Assyrian conquest of Israel, an enormous influx of northern refugees flooded into Judah, doubling the population. In addition, the northerners brought their abominable cult religious practices with them. In an attempt to unify the nation, Hezekiah removed the high places and shrines and centralized the worship of Yahweh in Jerusalem.<sup>581</sup> This reform was substantial, for it not only bolstered spiritual commitment to Yahweh but also strengthened the central government and the authority of the king. In addition, the population increase affected them economically and politically, completely changing Judah from a small tribal state to a fully

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Chronology of King Hezekiah's Reign," *AUSS* 2 (1964): 49, 51; Leslie McFall, "Some Missing Coregencies in Thiele's Chronology," *AUSS* 30, no. 1 (1992): 48. Kim, "Sennacherib's Invasion," 25-26.

<sup>578</sup> The account of Hezekiah is one of the most difficult to explain chronologically. Thus, it is important to note that the material presented here is humbly that of this author as a plausible way to account for his reign.

<sup>579</sup> Cogan and Tadmor suggest though the exact date of the reform remains uncertain, they state, "it is reasonable to place in in the first decade of Hezekiah's reign, after 722 and the fall of Samaria." Cogan and Tadmor, "2 Kings," 220.

<sup>580</sup> C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 127.

<sup>581</sup> Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, "Temple and Dynasty: Hezekiah, the Remaking of Judah and the Rise of the Pan-Israelite Ideology," *JSOT* 30, no. 3 (March 1, 2006): 264, 269.

developed nation in the Assyrian global economy.<sup>582</sup> This political development and change in Judah's status led to a shift in the relationship between Judah and the surrounding nations, Assyria, Egypt, Babylon, and the smaller states (e.g., Tyre and Philistia). Over the next fourteen years (714-701 BC), Hezekiah gained power and was active politically, fortifying his cities, and allying with the surrounding nations in rebellion against Assyria, which included calling on Egypt for aid.

### **Isaiah's Warnings Against Trusting in Another (Is 20, 22, 30, 31)**

The prophet Isaiah was very engaged in the political milieu of Hezekiah (much like his involvement with Ahaz), and his pronouncements and oracles shed light on Yahweh's view of those years leading up to the invasion of Sennacherib in 701 BC.<sup>583</sup> Once again, much like his word to Ahaz in chapter 7, Isaiah declares the foolishness of trusting in other nations instead of trusting in the Lord.<sup>584</sup> As discussed above, Judah's relationship with Assyria began when Hezekiah's father Ahaz (against the advice of Isaiah) solicited the help of Tiglath-Pileser III to fight against Aram and Israel in the Syro-Ephraimite war in the late 730's BC (2 Kgs 16:5-6).<sup>585</sup> Ahaz pledged his loyalty to Assyria as his suzerain and overlord. From that point on (into the

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<sup>582</sup> Finkelstein and Silberman, "Temple and Dynasty," 265.

<sup>583</sup> Antti Laato discusses that although not a simple matter to determine, there are references in Isaiah that seem directed to Hezekiah before the Assyrian invasion. Laato, "Hezekiah and the Assyrian Crisis in 701 B.C.," 49. Telfer confirms that there are texts in Isaiah related to chapters 36-39 that signal the consequences of Hezekiah's rebellion (e.g., Is 22:1-14) and the warning against relying on Egypt (Is 30:1-7; 31:1-3). Telfer, "Toward a Historical Reconstruction," 11.

<sup>584</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 35h, e-book.

<sup>585</sup> Kelle and Strawn, *History of Israel 5*, e-book.

reign of Hezekiah), Judah became a vassal of Assyria, which required them to pay tribute.<sup>586</sup> In 713/12 BC, Hezekiah may have considered joining forces with Egypt and the Ashdod coalition to rebel against the Assyria king, Sargon II, but was stopped by the prophet Isaiah who warned him of their disastrous fate (Is 20).<sup>587</sup> Isaiah pronounces the absurdity of trusting in Egypt for deliverance and reveals that Egypt will be led away, unable to help Ashdod. Hezekiah, unlike Ahaz, took Isaiah's advice and did not join the coalition, choosing to continue as an Assyrian vassal until the death of Sargon II in 705 BC.<sup>588</sup>

When Sargon II died in 705 BC, his son, Sennacherib, took the throne, and again, many vassal states (e.g., Babylon, Philistia, and Tyre) began to rebel, including Hezekiah. Provan stresses that this is the first securely recorded event related to the statement in 18:7 that Hezekiah "rebelled against the king of Assyria."<sup>589</sup> Some scholars think Hezekiah might actually be the one who commandeered this anti-Assyrian rebellion to such an extent that Jerusalem became one of its centers.<sup>590</sup> Charles Telfer states, "among western leaders, Hezekiah seems to have been a

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<sup>586</sup> Finkelstein and Silberman, "Temple and Dynasty," 259–85. Roberts notes that Yamani, the ruler of Ashdod, wrote letters to the rulers of surrounding states, including Judah, urging them to join his coalition. He also avers that the Philistines and the Nubians made an appearance in Jerusalem to persuade Hezekiah to join the revolt. However, Isaiah mounted a significant campaign to dissuade Hezekiah from making any such agreement. Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 267.

<sup>587</sup> Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 86. Oswalt confirms that "most commentators agree that at least part of the passage authentically relates to 713-711." Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 21i, e-book. Chang-Dae Kim supports that Judah was not involved and argues there is no evidence of Judah's involvement in the Ashdod campaign of 712. Sargon does not include it in his records, and Isaiah 20 is further evidence that Judah was not involved. Kim, "Sennacherib's Invasion," 25. For more information concerning the specifics of this war, see Oswalt, "The Book of Isaiah," 21i, e-book.

<sup>588</sup> Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 267.

<sup>589</sup> Provan, *2 Kings*, Commentary 18:7, e-book.

<sup>590</sup> Walton, et al., *IVPBBC*, 449; Norman Gelb, *Kings of the Jews: The Origins of the Jewish Nation* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2010), 126; Cogan and Tadmor, *2 Kings*, 221.

principal player in the rebellion against Assyrian rule that erupted after the death of Sargon II.”<sup>591</sup> In addition to securing allies, Hezekiah refused to continue paying tribute and started fortifying his cities and strengthening his weaponry to defend his independence.<sup>592</sup> This is also most likely the time he attacked the Assyrian/Philistine territory and removed Padi, the pro-Assyrian king of Ekron, from the throne (2 Kgs 18:7-8).<sup>593</sup>

Judah also turned toward Pharaoh Shabako of Egypt during this assertion of independence for aid and support. However, according to Isaiah, this was foolish and in defiance of God’s will (Is 30:1-3; 31:1; cf. 2 Kgs 18:21).<sup>594</sup> Oswalt explains that in Isaiah chapters 30-31, Isaiah moves from the more general denunciation of previous chapters to specific condemnations against Judah’s alliance with Egypt.<sup>595</sup> Roberts confirms in Isaiah 30:1-2 that “the plan that was not from God and the covenant unapproved by God’s spirit are clearly a reference to the treaty the Judean court of Hezekiah concluded with Nubian Egypt for help in the proposed revolt against Assyria after the death of Sargon II in 705 BC.”<sup>596</sup> Sennacherib also reports that “the

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<sup>591</sup> Charles K Telfer, “Toward a Historical Reconstruction of Sennacherib’s Invasion of Judah in 701 B.C.: With Special Attention to the Hezekiah-Narratives of Isaiah 36-39,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 22 (2011): 10. See also Horn, “The chronology of King Hezekiah's reign,” 49.

<sup>592</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, 86; Telfer, “Toward a Historical Reconstruction,” 11. Second Chronicles 32 explains in more detail the actions of Hezekiah to prepare for the Assyrian invasion.

<sup>593</sup> Cogan and Tadmor, 2 Kings, 221; Prichard, *ANET*, 287b.

<sup>594</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 35i, e-book; Gelb, *Kings of the Jews*, 126.

<sup>595</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 31a, e-book.

<sup>596</sup> Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 382. Goldingay confirms that the events in 705-701 BC are the background for this reference in Isaiah. Goldingay, *Isaiah*, 252. Contra Watts et al. who prefer to view these oracles as occurring in the latter half of the seventh century. Watts et al., *Isaiah 1-33*, 420.



kings of Egypt, troops, archers, chariots and the calvary of the kings of Nubia, an army beyond counting, they had called, and they (actually) came to their assistance.”<sup>597</sup>

Isaiah warned Hezekiah that the Lord was not pleased with his reliance on Egypt, but this time he did not heed the advice of Isaiah. Because Hezekiah did not place his complete trust in the Lord, Isaiah pronounced destruction, “when the overwhelming scourge passes through, you will be beaten down by it” (28:18). Oswalt aptly describes it will be “like a grainfield over which a flood has run” (28:14-22).<sup>598</sup> This analogy is very similar to Isaiah’s warning to Ahaz in chapter 8 (v. 8) when he predicts that Assyria will sweep into Judah like a flood. Thus, Hezekiah committed his biggest mistake; he did not consult Yahweh regarding foreign policy and, in apostasy, turned to another. Isaiah states,

Ah, stubborn children,” declares the Lord, “who carry out a plan, but not mine, and who make an alliance, but not of my Spirit, that they may add sin to sin; who set out to go down to Egypt, without asking for my direction, to take refuge in the protection of Pharaoh and to seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt! Therefore, shall the protection of Pharaoh turn to your shame, and the shelter in the in the shadow of Egypt to your humiliation. (30:1-3)

Isaiah condemns Hezekiah and Judah declaring, “because you despise this word and trust in oppression and perverseness and rely on them, therefore this iniquity shall be to you like a breach in a high wall, bulging out about to collapse, whose breaking comes suddenly, in an instant” (Is 30:12-13). The Lord is angry because they have looked to everything and everyone else as the source of their strength instead of him, and, for that, Judah would be punished. Isaiah describes it as “adding sin to sin” (תַּטְּאֵת עַל־תַּטְּאֵת v. 1b), perhaps insinuating the first sin as

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<sup>597</sup> Provan, *2 Kings*, 18:8 Hezekiah of Judah and Sennacherib, *e-book*.

<sup>598</sup> Oswalt “The Book of Isaiah,” 35r, *e-book*. Telfer confirms that there are texts in Isaiah related to chapters 36-39 that signal the consequences of Hezekiah’s rebellion (e.g., Is 22:1-14) and the warning against relying on Egypt (Is 30:1-7; 31:1-3). Telfer, “Toward a Historical Reconstruction,” 11.

ignoring the Lord's will and the second as looking to Egypt when they should be trusting in Yahweh to provide (cf. Deut 17:16).<sup>599</sup>

Hezekiah had employed the same tactics as his father; he turned to Egypt just as Ahaz had turned to Assyria. He trusted in a foreign nation, disregarding God as his Divine Warrior. Isaiah made it very clear that reliance on foreign powers was a denial of God's power over history and was a sin (Is 30:1).<sup>600</sup> Isaiah uses pointed metaphors to describe Judah's actions. They are guilty of taking "refuge in the protection of Pharaoh" and "seeking shelter in the shadow of Egypt" (v. 2b). In Psalms 91 and 121, these are the very words used to express the assurance the king can have of God's protection.<sup>601</sup> Goldingay explains that Isaiah assumes that Yahweh is the source of political protection as he is the source of personal protection. Thus, to Isaiah, the transfer of these metaphors to Egypt is near blasphemy.<sup>602</sup>

However, Hezekiah did not listen to Isaiah and disregarding his words; he continued to rely on himself and other nations for political security. In 703 BC, Babylon also rebelled against Assyria and Merodach-Baladan regained the throne. Merodach-Baladan was Marduk-apla-iddinna II, the Chaldean king of Babylon whose reign is broken into two sections: 721-710 BC and then for six months in 703/2 BC.<sup>603</sup> He too sent an envoy to Hezekiah looking for an ally

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<sup>599</sup> Goldingay, *Isaiah*, 252.

<sup>600</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, 88.

<sup>601</sup> Goldingay, *Isaiah*, 253.

<sup>602</sup> Ibid.

<sup>603</sup> Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, 407.

against Assyria (Is 39; 2 Kgs 20:12).<sup>604</sup> The Chronicler relates concerning the envoy from Babylon that “God left him [Hezekiah] to himself, in order to test him and to know all that was in his heart,” (32:31). Wiseman comments that, “the timing of the embassy may have been right before or during Merodach-balan’s second period on the throne.”<sup>605</sup> Leithart further indicates that the Babylonian visit must have come before the Assyrians surrounded Jerusalem since it is unlikely that they would have permitted a Babylonian delegation to enter Jerusalem.<sup>606</sup>

Once again, Hezekiah is found looking to another and apparently rejoicing at the prospect of aligning with Babylon. To prove he could hold up his end of the alliance, he showed the envoy “everything in his treasure house, the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious oil, his whole armory, all that was found in his storehouses. There was nothing [...] that Hezekiah did not show them” (Is 39:2; 2 Kgs 18:17). Isaiah once again condemns this coalition for he was “consistently against alliances with any world-powers of the day” and prophesied the eventual exile of Judah to Babylon (Is 39:6; 2 Kgs 20:7-18).<sup>607</sup> Leithart comments that Hezekiah’s actions were a sign of subordination to the rising Gentile empire. Unlike Solomon, who shows his wealth as related to the blessing of God, Hezekiah offers his wealth to garner an ally in battle (contra the Law of the King Deut 17). He is also described as “hearing” (שָׁמַע) the Babylonians

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<sup>604</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, 86. Telfer deals with the issue of chronology, commenting that this event comes after the attack of Sennacherib in the biblical account, and he asserts that “thematic concerns trumped strict chronology in setting this story of the Babylonian testing here.” He also confirms that extra-biblical evidence confirms that Merodach-Baladan passed off the political scene by 701 BC. Telfer, “Toward a Historical Reconstruction,” 12.

<sup>605</sup> Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, 306-307. Contra Provan who thinks the visit happened during Merodach-Baladan’s first reign, 722-712 BC. Provan, *2 Kings, Deliverance and Exile* 20:12, e-book. However, this does not coincide with the politics surrounding the death of Sargon II and the revolts that were taking place across Mesopotamia.

<sup>606</sup> Leithart, *1 and 2 King*, 259.

<sup>607</sup> Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, 307.

(20:13a), a mistake for a king who should be listening and hearing the voice of Yahweh (cf. 2 Kgs 18:12).<sup>608</sup> It is likely that around this time, just prior to or during the siege, Hezekiah was ill, and the events of 2 Kings 20:1-11 occurred.<sup>609</sup> Perhaps, his refusal to listen to Isaiah and trust in Yahweh in political matters is what Chronicles 32:25 is referring to when it describes that “his heart was proud. Therefore, wrath came upon him [e.g., his illness], Judah [e.g., the Assyrian invasion], and Jerusalem [e.g., the siege].” Beal affirms that “during this visit Hezekiah’s trust is displaced from YHWH to the foreign king. It is this action on Hezekiah’s part that precipitates YHWH’s word of judgment.”<sup>610</sup>

Isaiah relays this judgment right after the defeat of the Babylonians in 701 BC (Is 22). He states that “he has taken away the covering of Judah” (v. 8), possibly referring to the alliance with Babylon in which they looked to this foreign nation for protection and aid.<sup>611</sup> He recounts that after Babylon’s defeat, the first move of Hezekiah was to take stock of his weapons and military fortification. Still, Isaiah stresses that all the measures and defenses of Hezekiah are useless (vv. 8-11) because God was ignored, “you did not look to him who did it or see him who planned it long ago” (v. 11b).<sup>612</sup> Hezekiah made the same mistake as many kings before him; handling political matters like the surrounding nations. He relied on his own strength, his wealth and military, and the strength of allies instead of putting his faith and trust in Yahweh the Divine

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<sup>608</sup> Leithart, *1 and 2 Kings*, 259.

<sup>609</sup> Beal asserts that the temporal marker “in those days/at that time” aligns the events with those of the Assyrian threat. Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, 479. A full assessment of the vignette of Hezekiah’s illness is outside the scope of this paper.

<sup>610</sup> Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, 480.

<sup>611</sup> Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 288.

<sup>612</sup> *Ibid.*, 288-289.

Warrior, the only ally Israel needed (cf. the Law of the Kings Deut 17:20). The Lord of Hosts was calling for repentance (v. 12) but instead he received reveling and for this Judah would be punished (v. 14).<sup>613</sup>

As shown above, Isaiah was a key figure throughout the reign of Hezekiah. Isaiah paints a different picture of this tumultuous period before the invasion of Assyria, one from God's perspective. The Lord was unhappy with Hezekiah's reliance on foreign nations, especially Egypt, for protection and deliverance, and Isaiah was the mouthpiece the Lord used to make his voice heard. Isaiah 31:1-3 highlights this disdain stating,

Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the Lord! And yet he is wise and brings disaster; he does not call back his words, but will arise against the house of the evildoers and against the helpers of those who work iniquity. The Egyptians are man, and not God, and their horses are flesh, and not spirit. When the Lord stretches out his hand, the helper will stumble, and he who is helped will fall, and they will all perish together.

Politically these alliances seemed like the right thing to do, however, Yahweh did not see it that way. What was considered a good political move was actually a low point in the king's life spiritually. In the eyes of the Lord, this adulterous act of reliance on others was viewed as a blatant lack of trust and a flagrant disregard for Yahweh's power to deliver and save. Because of these actions, Hezekiah experienced the covenantal curses of loss of peace, rest, land, and blessing with the invasion of Sennacherib.

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<sup>613</sup> Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 289-290.

### **The Assyrian Attack and Hezekiah's Capitulation (2 Kgs 18:13-16)**

With these historical insights in mind, the next section in 2 Kings (18:13-16) starts to take shape and can be understood. Otherwise, one wonders why the Deuteronomist would highlight the confrontation with Assyria if Hezekiah had always done “what was right in the eyes of the Lord”? This narrative would seem counterintuitive to the purposes the Deuteronomist has been making all along. Yet, the narrator is purposeful in his discontinuity and uses this episode to contrast the difference between obedience and disobedience and the forgiving nature of Yahweh when one turns and completely trusts in him. At the beginning of chapter eighteen, he makes a point to state that Hezekiah started his reign strong, evidenced by the massive cultic reform and even the departure from the Assyrian yolk (2 Kgs 18:1-8).<sup>614</sup> However, with the insertion of the micro-narrative of the fall of Israel in 18:9-12, the Dtr seems to suggest that Hezekiah also made some of the same mistakes as the Israelite kings (they did not listen to the voice of the Lord and relied on the help of Egypt for salvation, 2 Kgs 17:4, 19; 18:12) and might be doomed to the same fate.<sup>615</sup> The rest of chapters 18 and 19 focus on this tension between possibly receiving the same punishment as Israel or coming under the saving grace of Yahweh.

The narrator begins this segment (2 Kgs 18:13-16) with the invasion of Sennacherib king of Assyria, in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah in 701 BC.<sup>616</sup> As highlighted above, Sennacherib's attack was a direct response to the anti-Assyrian campaign that had been taking place since the

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<sup>614</sup> Cogan and Tadmor, *2 Kings*, 218.

<sup>615</sup> Paul S. Evans, *The Invasion of Sennacherib in the Book of Kings: A Source-Critical and Rhetorical Study of 2 Kings 18-19* (Boston: Brill, 2009), 140.

<sup>616</sup> Jeffrey Kah-Jin Kuan, “Hezekiah,” in *NIDB*, ed. Katherine Dobb (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009), *e-book*.

death of his father, Sargon II, in 705 BC, in which Hezekiah played a dominant role. In anticipation of Sennacherib's attack, Hezekiah took steps to fortify the cities along Judah's borders and enlisted the help of Egypt.<sup>617</sup> 2 Chronicles 32 adds details to this section of the narrative that are absent from the account in Kings, giving insight into Hezekiah's actions. The Chronicler adds that after Sennacherib attacked, Hezekiah realized he was outmaneuvered and began to strengthen Jerusalem, readying it for a siege (2 Chr 32:2-8).<sup>618</sup>

Nonetheless, all this effort did little to stop the massive Assyrian army. As recorded in Assyrian accounts, after conquering Babylon and reestablishing rule in the East, Sennacherib turned to the West to reclaim his dominance. He defeated the Phoenicians and all the coastal cities and continued south, invading the territory of Ashkelon.<sup>619</sup> In the meantime, the Egyptians arrived to support the anti-Assyrian forces and were defeated. After the capture of Ekron, Sennacherib turned his attention to Hezekiah.<sup>620</sup> He invaded and captured 46 cities, which 2 Kings 18:13 records as *all* of the fortified cities of Judah (with the exception of Jerusalem).<sup>621</sup> After settling his military camp at the strategic Judean town of Lachish (which effectively cut off

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<sup>617</sup> Cogan and Tadmor, *2 Kings*, 221.

<sup>618</sup> Chronicles relates Hezekiah repaired and extended the wall and added watchtowers. Also, "in a remarkable feat of engineering, a 1,700-foot-long conduit was dug through solid rock from a spring outside the walls to guarantee the maintenance of the capital's water supply," Cogan and Tadmor, *2 Kings*, 221.

<sup>619</sup> Prichard, *ANET*, 287-288.

<sup>620</sup> For the current argument, this thesis holds to the theory of one campaign, which this author believes carries more biblical and extra-biblical support. The theory of one campaign also prevails as the current view in light of new sources indicating that the Tirkhakah of Egypt was at least twenty in 701 BC. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, 294; Telfer, "Toward a Historical Reconstruction," 13-15; A. R. (Alan Ralph) Millard, "Sennacherib's Attack on Hezekiah," *Tyndale Bulletin* 36 (1985): 63-64. The entire debate over one campaign or two is outside the scope of this paper. For the argument favoring two campaigns, see Siegfried H Horn, "Did Sennacherib Campaign Once or Twice against Hezekiah," *AUSS* 4, no. 1 (January 1966): 1-28; Telfer, "Toward a Historical Reconstruction," 13-15.

<sup>621</sup> Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, 466. The dirge of Micah (1:8-16) over the fallen cities in the Shephelah and other populations in that area was probably written in response to this invasion. Konkel, *1 and 2 Kings*, 31g, e-book.

further Egyptian aid), Sennacherib set his sights on Jerusalem, which was now completely vulnerable.<sup>622</sup> Sennacherib boasts, “as to Hezekiah the Jew, he did not submit to my yolk, I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities, walled forts and to the countless small villages in their vicinity and conquered (them) [...] himself [Hezekiah] I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage.”<sup>623</sup> At this point, Hezekiah realized that all of his efforts had been thwarted, and all his political scheming and alliances were futile. In turn, all of the things in which he had placed his trust (namely in Egypt), were dissipated. Jerusalem was thrown into a panic, and all of the hired mercenaries abandoned them.<sup>624</sup> Just as Isaiah predicted:

Therefore, shall the protection of Pharaoh turn to your shame,  
and the shelter in the shadow of Egypt to your humiliation.  
For though his officials are at Zoan  
and his envoys reach Hanes,  
everyone comes to shame  
through a people that cannot profit them,  
that brings neither help nor profit,  
but shame and disgrace. (Is 30:3-5)

In a disheartening and desperate last-ditch attempt to dissuade the advance on Jerusalem, Hezekiah sends a message to Sennacherib admitting his “sin” (חַטָּאתִי) and conceding payment in any amount (2 Kgs 18:14). Sennacherib’s demand for silver and gold was severe, and Hezekiah does something dispiriting but familiar in the DH (cf. 1 Kgs 15:18; 2 Kgs 12:17-18; 16:7), he raids the royal treasuries and the temple to buy his redemption. Like many kings before him, he gives Sennacherib all the silver in the king’s house and all the silver in the temple treasury.<sup>625</sup>

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<sup>622</sup> Hubbard et al., *2 Kings*, 254-255.

<sup>623</sup> Prichard, *ANET*, 288.

<sup>624</sup> Gelb, *Kings of the Jews*, 127.

<sup>625</sup> The Assyrian annals confirm this payment from Hezekiah, although the numbers differ slightly. Prichard, *ANET*, 287-288.



Sadly, he also had to strip the gold, the rich overlay that he had installed on the doorposts of the main temple hall (vv. 15-16; 2 Chr 29:3), and give it to Sennacherib.<sup>626</sup> As has been analyzed above, this despoliation of the temple treasury is consistently viewed by the Dtr as a negative act and a litmus test signaling the disapproval and judgment of Yahweh for lack of trust.<sup>627</sup> This desperate attempt to appease the Assyrian king showed that Hezekiah was now placing his faith in the Assyrians for deliverance and not fully placing his confidence and trust in Yahweh to rescue Jerusalem. He was still in a state of political apostasy, looking anywhere and everywhere else for salvation except to Yahweh. Instead of admitting his sin to Yahweh, his Lord, and repenting and turning to him, he admitted his sin to Sennacherib, his overlord, to garner salvation. Even now, Hezekiah fell back on his own strength, wealth, and political maneuvering, for deliverance, which revealed the complete opposite of trust in God.

Much like Ahaz, Hezekiah jumped to the wrong source for redemption, and much like Ahaz, God will show this act of submission and servitude unnecessary as he can defeat any army without human intervention. When Sennacherib advances, Hezekiah will be confronted with the most critical decision of his reign, in whom will he now trust for deliverance? Will he listen to the voice of Sennacherib or the voice of Yahweh?

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<sup>626</sup> Cogan and Tadmor, *2 Kings*, 229.

<sup>627</sup> Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, 213.

### The Assyrian Delegation (2 Kgs 18:17-35)

Clearly, the payment was not enough, for Sennacherib sent an embassy of high-ranking officials and “a great army” (2 Kgs 18:17) to Jerusalem to demand surrender and deportation.<sup>628</sup> There are two possible explanations for this, either Hezekiah could not fully meet the demand for payment and even though he sent all he had, he still fell short. Or Sennacherib took the tribute and decided to attack anyway. In this development, Evans proposes the narrator may be emphasizing that “the typical solution of human kings, the payment of tribute, must be abandoned for the divine solution of trust in Yahweh which then drives the rest of the narrative (as the keywords *batach* [trust] highlights).”<sup>629</sup> I would agree and argue that God allowed the Assyrian attack to push Hezekiah into fully surrendering, not only his religious loyalty (which he has proven to have already done) but also his political loyalty to Yahweh, placing his complete confidence in him as Judah’s Divine Warrior and Savior.

At the onset of the narrative, the Dtr points out what, in the natural, seems to be a great show of human strength. The text begins with two high-level embassies from each side (vv. 17-18) that are comparable in rank and number.<sup>630</sup> The three officials sent by Sennacherib are the Tartan, who was the highest official after the king, the Rabsaris (“chief eunuch”), who is a high-ranking military officer; and the Rabshakeh (“chief butler”), who’s duties usually involved taking care of the court and the king, or functioning as a diplomatic advisor.<sup>631</sup> The Rabshakeh’s

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<sup>628</sup> Kim, “Sennacherib’s Invasion,” 30.

<sup>629</sup> Evans, *The Invasion of Sennacherib*, 151.

<sup>630</sup> Isaiah 36-37 covers the same material (almost identically) presented here in Kings 18:17-19:36. Thus, unless there are differences of note, the text in Kings will be the focus of this study.

<sup>631</sup> Sweeney, *I and II Kings*, 414.

involvement could simply be one of expedience associated with his fluency in the language of Judah and his knowledge of their religious customs. He might even have been one of the noble families deported during the Israelite exile.<sup>632</sup> These three delegates come and call for the king. Still, the king, in a show of strength, sends his own three officials out to meet the Assyrian delegation (located on the conduit of the upper pool, north-west of the city on high ground, ironically, the exact location of Isaiah's meeting with Ahaz, Is 7:3).<sup>633</sup> He sends the royal steward (Eliakim), the scribe (Shebna), and the recorder (Joah). Both Eliakim and Shebna are also mentioned in Isaiah 22:15-25, where Isaiah prophesied against Shebna for his haughtiness. It seems by this time in the narrative that prediction had come to fruition.

*The Rabshakeh's First Speech: Where Should You Place Your Trust? (2 Kgs 18:19-25)*

The opening speech given by the Rabshakeh is the first of two large narrative units that together characterize the core of this section (18:17-35). The point of the Dtr is to emphasize the futility of trusting anything but Yahweh for deliverance and to get Hezekiah to a place of submission to this ideal. Verse 19 opens with a demeaning tone toward Hezekiah, who is only ever referred to by his personal name, not his title, compared with Sennacherib, who is designated as the "great king." Hubbard et al. comment that "the juxtaposition of the word of "the great king and the word of Yahweh now becomes a deliberate feature of the narrative," and the focus of this passage on whose word to listen to becomes clear.<sup>634</sup> The emphasis and theological thrust of the first speech focus on the question, where should the people place their

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<sup>632</sup> Cogan and Tadmor, *2 Kings*, 230.

<sup>633</sup> Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, 467.

<sup>634</sup> Hubbard et al., *2 Kings*, 256.

trust? The word “trust” (בָּטַח) is used seven times in just seven verses (vv. 19-25) and is a motif that runs through the rest of the narrative. In this first speech, the Rabshakeh will make four arguments to answer where Hezekiah and Judah should *not* place their trust. The Rabshakeh’s address is deceptive as he negates both positive and negative areas in which to put one’s trust, which confuses the people as to the reliable source of trust.

In 2 Kings 18:19-20a the Rabshakeh makes his first appeal from the voice of the “great king of Assyria” that “mere words” (אֲדָבָר־שָׁפְטִים) are not a trustworthy strategy for war. He is demeaning both the authority of the king and ultimately, the authority of the word of Yahweh given through his prophet Isaiah. The irony of this question is that “mere words,” those that are given by Yahweh, his prophets, and his kings, are indeed sufficient counsel and strength for war.<sup>635</sup> The narrative in 2 Chronicles indicates the kind of “words” Hezekiah finally used (once he realized he had nowhere else to turn) to encourage the people to trust in Yahweh. Using the same language as Joshua 1:9, he inspires the people to be strong and courageous because “there is one greater with us than with him [...] to help us and fight our battles” (2 Chr 32:7-8). The paradox of the Rabshakeh’s question is that “mere words,” whether those words are from the prophetic voice, a king’s prayer, or one exclaiming trust in Yahweh, *have* been a successful strategy for war in the past (Ex 14:13-14; cf. Abijah, 2 Chr 13:4-12; Asa, 2 Chr 14:11; Jehoshaphat, 2 Chr 20:5-12).<sup>636</sup> As the history of previous kings attests, mere words, when addressed of and to Yahweh as the Divine Warrior, are the most successful means of defeating an army greater than one’s own.

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<sup>635</sup> Hubbard et al., *2 Kings*, 257.

<sup>636</sup> Ibid., 256.

Next, the Rabshakeh points out that all of Hezekiah's political maneuvering and military alliances are now worthless, as Hezekiah's allies have all failed to counter the Assyrian assault (2 Kgs 18:20b-21).<sup>637</sup> In verse 21, the narrator gives the reader a clue as to where Hezekiah put the majority of his faith and trust (נִשְׁמָרָה) in place of Yahweh. Even though it is a slight implication, the negative tone is apparent. Hezekiah was foolish to trust in Egypt. Isaiah had warned Hezekiah that trusting in Egypt was against the will of God and it was a sin that would end in "shame and disgrace" (Is 30:1-5; 31:1). Isaiah also revealed, "when the Lord stretches out his hand, the helper [Egypt] would stumble, and he who is helped will fall, and they will all perish together" (31:3). Thus, the Rabshakeh in similar language to that of Isaiah, makes his second appeal of who is untrustworthy. He states that Hezekiah's trust in Egypt is futile. Egypt is nothing but a broken and crushed reed. They are merely a broken stick and not the solid supportive cane Hezekiah expected. He further states not only will the alliance with Egypt prove fruitless, but it will also actually harm the one who places his trust in them, "just as a broken cane pierces and injures the hand of the person who leans on it for support" (2 Kgs 18:21).<sup>638</sup>

After demolishing the words of Hezekiah and Yahweh, Judah's military might, and the political alliance with Egypt as a source of trust, the Rabshakeh's third argument seeks to destroy their religious basis for trust (2 Kgs 18:22).<sup>639</sup> The Rabshakeh shrewdly twists the actions of Hezekiah's religious reforms to be negative rather than positive, insinuating that they had offended Yahweh because they tore down "his" high places. This tactic might have been a

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<sup>637</sup> Sweeney, *I and II Kings*, 415.

<sup>638</sup> Park, *2 Kings*, 245.

<sup>639</sup> Hubbard et al., *2 Kings*, 257.

plausible argument that actually reflected the sentiment of many in the country who had doubts about Hezekiah's radical reform. Hezekiah was the first king to tear down the high places, which were the location of cultic worship for more than 200 years.<sup>640</sup> Cohn points out that the destruction of the shrines would have also had considerable economic and religious repercussions on the landholders and the priests.<sup>641</sup> Thus, many Judeans may have thought his reforms went too far, angering Yahweh rather than appeasing him. Now, instead of worshipping where they thought was right, Hezekiah forced them to worship at the altar of his choice in Jerusalem. The Rabshakeh effectively portrays Hezekiah's reforms as an affront to the cult of Yahweh and the motivation behind the Assyrian attack.<sup>642</sup>

In 2 Kings 18:23-25, the Rabshakeh gets to the crux of his argument that there is no one left in whom Judah can place their trust, and there is no other option but to put their faith in the king of Assyria. He taunts them with his knowledge of their military desertions stating even if the Assyrians gave them horses with which to fight, they would not have enough infantry to ride them.<sup>643</sup> In this taunt, he simultaneously mocks Judah's military weakness while bolstering Assyria's vast strength, adding that Egypt's chariots and horsemen were no match for the great Assyria, for this alliance had already proved fatal. The last statement struck at the heart and was meant to instill the most fear. The Rabshakeh states that Yahweh himself sent the Assyrians to destroy them. He declares that Yahweh is so displeased with them that he has personally given

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<sup>640</sup> Rich Lowry, *The Reforming Kings: Cult and Society in First Temple Judah* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2009), 150.

<sup>641</sup> Cohn, *2 Kings*, 130.

<sup>642</sup> Sweeney, *I and II Kings*, 416.

<sup>643</sup> Hubbard et al., *2 Kings*, 257. Sennacherib's account attests to a large number of desertions from Hezekiah's ranks, indicating a severe depletion of their army. Prichard, *ANET*, 288.

Sennacherib permission to attack his (Yahweh's) own land.<sup>644</sup> Here, he appeals to a familiar ancient Near Eastern belief that sometimes during war, the gods of the land would abandon their faithful to join the opposing side.<sup>645</sup> This statement, paired with the knowledge that it was not long ago they had witnessed Yahweh using Assyria to overthrow Israel (2 Kgs 18:11-12), made the Rabshakeh's words a very real and palpable threat!

Hezekiah's officials, who are obviously rattled, respond to the Assyrian delegation asking that they not speak in the Judean language of the people (2 Kgs 18:26-28). Instead, they preferred they use Aramaic, the diplomatic language of the Assyrian empire, so the people on the wall could not understand them.<sup>646</sup> The people "on the wall" probably refer to the few remaining and discouraged soldiers guarding their positions along the Jerusalem wall.<sup>647</sup> Hearing the arguments of the Rabshakeh would cause dissension and panic, which the Judean delegation wanted to avoid. The Assyrians do not oblige this request and continue to speak in the Hebrew dialect describing in detail what happens during a long siege when the will for self-preservation makes one do drastic things, such as drinking your own urine and eating your own dung.<sup>648</sup>

*The Rabshakeh's Second Speech: Who is Capable to Deliver? (2 Kgs 18:28-35)*

After the interlude with the Jerusalem officials, the Rabshakeh begins his second speech. In the first speech, the Rabshakeh argued that placing trust anywhere but in Assyria was futile. Which,

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<sup>644</sup> Park, *2 Kings*, 246.

<sup>645</sup> Cogan and Tadmor, *2 Kings*, 232.

<sup>646</sup> Wiseman, *2 Kings*, 196.

<sup>647</sup> Hubbard et al., *2 Kings*, 258.

<sup>648</sup> Sweeney, *I and II Kings*, 416.

at this point, seemed logical as he even made it appear that Yahweh could not be trusted. The second speech also deals with who they should trust (v. 30) but does so through the theme of deliverance.<sup>649</sup> As he did in the last segment (2 Kgs 18:19-25), where the Dtr repetitively used the word trust (אָמַן 7 times), he now moves in this segment (vv. 28-35) to the theme of deliverance (נָצַל used 8 times) to get his point across that the only adequate form of rescue is by completely trusting in Yahweh. The term נָצַל means to “take away, deliver, or snatch from danger.” Hossfeld-Kalthoff reveals that “at root *nsl* clearly denotes an act of separation [...] in passages where *nsl* takes on the meaning ‘protect,’ a perceptible notion of ‘rescuing’ still hovers in the background.”<sup>650</sup> This segment focuses on the agent of rescue, the one who is capable of protection and the removal of danger.

Once again, the Rabshakeh begins his speech (this time in a loud voice for all to hear) by trying to persuade the people to place their trust in the power of Sennacherib, “the great king” instead of Yahweh (2 Kgs 18:28). This is the second time he uses the title “great king” for Sennacherib, a title elsewhere only used of the Lord (e.g., Ps 47:2; Mal 1:14), attempting to misplace loyalty from one to the other.<sup>651</sup> Also, for the second time, he uses the standard messenger formula “thus says X,” which has been used by the prophets to declare the word of the Lord (most recently that of Isaiah), alluding again to the false similarity between Sennacherib and Yahweh. He continues with another rhetorical tool to place doubt in the listeners’ minds by stressing Hezekiah’s impotence and anticipating the deception he may attempt by promising

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<sup>649</sup> Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, 463.

<sup>650</sup> Hossfeld-Kalthoff, “נָצַל,” in *TDOT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), II Meaning in OT, e-book.

<sup>651</sup> Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, 296.



deliverance by Yahweh. Through a series of three negative commands, the Rabshakeh focuses on what they should not do. First, they should not let Hezekiah *fool* them, for he is incapable of helping them (v. 29). Second, they should not let Hezekiah make them *trust* in Yahweh for deliverance, for that is also futile (v. 30). Third, they should not *listen* to Hezekiah for no other has been saved by their gods (v. 31a). Interestingly, the Assyrian official shifts his focus from the first speech where Yahweh was a participant and even an initiator of the Assyrian invasion, to his role now as a helpless bystander.<sup>652</sup>

Next, the Rabshakeh counters with three positive examples of what the people should do to guarantee their salvation, peace, and prosperity (2 Kgs 18:31b-32a). First, they should make peace with him, come out, and surrender. The exact translation of “peace” is blessing (בְּרָכָה) which, concerning a treaty relationship, may denote a gesture of compromise so that they can enjoy the idyllic life of peace and prosperity.<sup>653</sup> Thus, distorting the fact that compromising their loyalty to Yahweh is what instigated this attack. Next, he contrasts his previous negative message of drinking urine and eating excrement with the positive statement of eating from their own vine and drinking from their own well in safety. In this way, he invokes a stereotypical Israelite image of prosperity that harkens back to the golden age of Solomon, when security was referred to as “everyone under his own vine and under his own fig tree” (v. 31b, cf. 1 Kgs 5:5).<sup>654</sup> Third, using the same description Moses used to describe the land of promise (Deut 8:7-9), he describes the land of exile as one characterized by plenty.<sup>655</sup> He also twists the covenantal

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<sup>652</sup> Hubbard et al., *2 Kings*, 259.

<sup>653</sup> Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, 296.

<sup>654</sup> Cohn, *2 Kings*, 132.

<sup>655</sup> Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, 469.

promise given by Yahweh in Deuteronomy 30:19 instead, replacing Yahweh with Sennacherib as the agent of life, not death.

The Rabshakeh's final argument in this speech sharply poses the issue of faith in Yahweh as a ridiculous form of salvation. Bringing the argument in 2 Kings 18:29-30 full circle, he reiterates that listening to Hezekiah and relying on the Lord is a foolish endeavor that will only lead to death (v. 32b). In verse 33 the Rabshakeh compares Yahweh to the powerless gods of the nations, which reminds the reader of Deuteronomy 4:34 where Yahweh's power is compared to other gods. This mockery of Yahweh would have shocked the original audience and, in the context of the Deuteronomistic History, is the very core of the author's theology.<sup>656</sup> After listing various nations that have fallen to the Assyrians, and the gods who were powerless to deliver them, the Rabshakeh climatically ends by stressing that Samaria was also conquered (v. 34), thus, bringing the recapitulation in 18:9-12 full circle. This would have been the statement that hit closest to home. His point is that Yahweh (Israel's God, too), who was powerless to save then, is also powerless to save now against the hand of the mighty Assyrians. However, this was also a twist on the truth, as the interlude acknowledges that the powerlessness of Yahweh was not the reason for Israel's demise. He ends his speech by reiterating that no god has the power to save any land from the hand of Assyria and trusting in Yahweh will prove fatal just like the rest (v. 35). Thus, it becomes evident that the theme of misplaced trust functions as "a key link, each preceding a different view of YHWH—as the God affronted by Hezekiah, then as the God supportive of Sennacherib's attack, and finally as the God powerless before the Assyrians'

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<sup>656</sup> Hubbard et al., *2 Kings*, 259.

might.”<sup>657</sup> After this drastic statement, this section of the narrative somberly ends, leaving the original participants and the current reader in a state of utter silence (v. 36).

### **Hezekiah’s Response and Change of Heart (2 Kgs 19:1-19)**

#### *Hezekiah Repents and Turns to the Prophet Isaiah (2 Kgs 19:1-7)*

In the previous chapter (2 Kgs 18), the motif of where to place one’s trust (בְּטַח) for deliverance (לְצַל) took center stage. In chapter 19, the focus shifts to hearing (שָׁמַע). Who will Hezekiah listen to, and who will have the final word? It is in chapter 19 that Hezekiah sees the error of his ways and finally turns to trust in Yahweh fully as the only hope for salvation. This display of trust begins to take shape in the first pericope in this chapter (2 Kgs 19:1-7) in two ways. First, after hearing (שָׁמַע) the Rabshakeh’s words, Hezekiah, realizes it was futile to place his trust somewhere else. He tears his clothes and puts on sackcloth (v. 1a), a sign of grief, humility, and repentance (e.g., 1 Kgs 21:27; 2 Kgs 6:30; 22:11).<sup>658</sup> He then goes into the house of the Lord (v. 1b). As Leithart comments,

The remainder of the siege story is one of repentance: like the delegation who hears the Rabshakeh’s speech, Hezekiah, who relies on wealth and treasure to save him, tears his robes at the blasphemy of the Rabshakeh (2 Kgs. 19:1) and turns to Yahweh for deliverance. Instead of plundering the temple treasures, he now uses the temple the way it is designed to be used— as a house of prayer.<sup>659</sup>

Second, knowing he is out of options, he turns to the prophet Isaiah to garner the Lord’s mercy and intervention. He sends a delegation to the prophet Isaiah to reiterate the utter

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<sup>657</sup> Peter Machinist, “The Rab Šāqēh at the Wall of Jerusalem: Israelite Identity in the Face of the Assyrian ‘Other,’” *Hebrew Studies* 41 (2000): 157.

<sup>658</sup> Cohn, *2 Kings*, 133.

<sup>659</sup> Leithart, *1 and 2 Kings*, 258.

hopelessness of their situation as a day of “distress, of rebuke, and of disgrace; children have come to the point of birth, and there is no strength to bring them forth” (v. 3). Brueggemann writes of Hezekiah’s use of this proverb, that he is wholly undone describing it as a day “of utter failure, emptiness, weakness, [and] complete lack of vitality.”<sup>660</sup> The following statement of the delegation is telling, as it fails to bring before the prophet any of the Rabshakeh’s accusations (possibly because Hezekiah sees his own fault) except one, the words that mock the living God. Hezekiah, trying to muster hope and faith, states, “perhaps/may be” (אִילָּי) because the Lord “heard” (שָׁמַעַ) this blatant blasphemy, he will intervene (v. 4).

Isaiah’s response to the delegation is immediate and direct; God has indeed heard (2 Kgs 19:5-7). From this point on, the messenger formula “thus says X” is used only by Yahweh (vv. 6, 20, 32), signifying he has the actual authority and the final word in contrast to the “great king.”<sup>661</sup> Isaiah states, “do not be afraid” because of the mere “words” (v. 6; cf. 18:20) you just “heard” (שָׁמַעַ); they will be thwarted by the sovereign God (v. 6).<sup>662</sup> He next promises that Yahweh will do two things. First, he will put a spirit in the Assyrian king, causing him to “hear” (שָׁמַעַ) a rumor and retreat (v. 7a). Wiseman asserts this could be in response to the approach of Tirhakah and the Egyptian army (vv. 8-9) who may well have come back, or because of the later disturbances in Syria that led to his death.<sup>663</sup> Second, Yahweh promises that Sennacherib’s

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<sup>660</sup> Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Kings*, 505.

<sup>661</sup> Provan, *II Kings*, 196.

<sup>662</sup> Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, 470.

<sup>663</sup> Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, 298. Wiseman attests that “the view that *Tirhakah* (Egypt *Taharqa*; Assyr. *Tarqu*) was too young to lead the combined Nubian (Cush) and Egyptian forces has now been shown to be incorrect, as he was more than twenty years old and later became king of the 25<sup>th</sup> dynasty (c. 690-664 BC).” He further states that “at this time Tirhakah was the army commander in chief of his brother Shebitku, king of Egypt who died c. 691 BC.” Ibid.

blasphemy will be further punished by his death in his own land, which occurred some twenty years later in 681 BC (v. 7b, 36-37).<sup>664</sup>

*Sennacherib's Second Threat and Hezekiah's Prayer (2 Kgs 19:8-19)*

Second Kings 19:8 begins with what seems to be an immediate fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. When the Rabshakeh "heard" (שמע) that the king of Assyria was again fighting, this time at Libnah, he left Jerusalem and returned to Sennacherib. When Sennacherib "heard" (שמע) about the renewed uprising of Egypt under Tirhakah he sent another message to Hezekiah, this time in the form of a letter (v. 9). The echo of the verb שמע ("hear") in this section hints that although the king of Assyria is again asserting his force, Isaiah's predicted rumor has already begun.<sup>665</sup> This time the message from Sennacherib is more pointed, and instead of blaming Hezekiah for deceit and failure, Sennacherib blames Yahweh for deceiving Hezekiah (v. 10).<sup>666</sup> The second address is meant to contradict what Hezekiah has heard from Isaiah, in which Isaiah promised that trust in Yahweh would lead to deliverance (vv. 6-7). Instead, Sennacherib wants him to "hear" (שמע v. 11) what Assyria has done, stressing that Yahweh is a false "reliance" (בטח v. 10) that cannot "deliver" (ציל v. 12).<sup>667</sup>

This time, Hezekiah, who had already repented before his God and mourned his mistake (2 Kgs 19:1), responds by immediately taking the threat to Yahweh (v. 14). Hezekiah has chosen to turn his trust back to Yahweh and rely on him for what seemed like an impossible political

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<sup>664</sup> Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, 298.

<sup>665</sup> Cohn, *2 Kings*, 134.

<sup>666</sup> Provan, *II Kings*, 197.

<sup>667</sup> Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Kings*, 507.

situation. In the eyes of the Dtr, it was this aspect of trust for deliverance that would set Hezekiah apart from all other kings (cf. 18:5). Kim aptly asserts that the concentric structure of 2 King 18-19 is intended to revolve around the prayer and repentance of Hezekiah (which is at the center of the narrative) and Judah's subsequent deliverance. He presents the following literary structure:

- A. Hezekiah's capitulation before Sennacherib (18:13-16)
- B. The issue of trust in Egypt (18:17-21)
- C. The issue of trust in Yahweh (18:22-32)
  - D. The greatness of the Assyrian king over against gods (18:33-37)
  - E. Prayer and repentance of Hezekiah (19:1-7 [14-19])
- B'. Advance of Egyptian army to help Judah (19:8-9)
- C'. The issue of trust in Yahweh (19:10-11)
  - D'. The greatness of the Assyrian king over against gods (19:12-13)
- A'. Prophecy of Sennacherib's capitulation before Yahweh and its fulfillment (19:14-37)<sup>668</sup>

Hezekiah's prayer displays his decisive and complete trust in Yahweh as his Divine Warrior. As Sweeney points out, "this episode highlights once again the theme of Hezekiah's piety and reliance on YHWH as the essential key to YHWH's deliverance of Jerusalem."<sup>669</sup> The Prayer opens and closes in verses 15 and 19 with the parallel statements "you are God, you alone" and "you, O Lord, are God alone." In this assertion, Hezekiah negates the Assyrian claim that Yahweh is lumped together with all other gods (v. 12). He declares that Yahweh is the only real God, the Creator, and Sovereign who governs all nations (v. 15), as opposed to manmade powerless gods (v. 18; cf. Deut 4:28). At the same time the prayer focuses on Yahweh as the particular God of Israel (he is the one enthroned above the cherubim in the Jerusalem temple (v. 15b)).<sup>670</sup> In this way, he addresses Yahweh in his military mode atop the Ark of the Covenant,

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<sup>668</sup> Kim, "Sennacherib's Invasion," 32.

<sup>669</sup> Sweeney, *I and II Kings*, 417.

<sup>670</sup> Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Kings*, 507.

marching into battle with his “hosts” to protect his people.<sup>671</sup> Hezekiah acknowledges that Yahweh is both Sovereign of the universe and King of Israel in a unique way, and because Jerusalem is his city, his glory is at stake. Thus, Hezekiah requests salvation for Jerusalem (v. 19) so that the whole world would know that Yahweh alone is God. This is exactly what God envisioned of an Israelite king and the reasons for the stipulations limiting the king in the Law of the King (Deut 17:14-20). Yahweh wanted the glory and Yahweh wanted Israel to point the world toward him.

*Yahweh’s Response and the Downfall of Sennacherib (2 Kgs 19:20-37)*

Because of Hezekiah’s repentance and renewed trust, God “heard” (שָׁמַע) his prayer and once again responded through the prophet Isaiah. The Lord declares that he will punish Assyria, protect his people, and save Jerusalem (2 Kgs 19:20-34). As elsewhere used of Isaiah, this is guaranteed through a sign that despite the land’s severe devastation from the Assyrian conquest, the Lord would provide in the interim, and within two full years, they would once again sow and reap (v. 29; cf. 1 Kgs 13:3; Is 7:11-12). The promise is further enhanced by the phrase “the zeal of the Lord of hosts” (קִנְיַת יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת, v. 31; Is 37:32). As stated above, this phrase is an assurance that God will jealously watch over his own possession with all his power and might (Is 9:6-7; 37:32; cf. 42:13). This guarantee that the promise will be fulfilled rests in the strength and zeal of the Lord of Hosts, the Divine Warrior, which has no bounds.<sup>672</sup>

The deliverance of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Assyrian army was not long in coming, and the text states, “that night the angel of the Lord went out and struck down 185,000

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<sup>671</sup> Cohn, *2 Kings*, 136.

<sup>672</sup> Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, 215.

in the camp of the Assyrians” (2 Kgs 19:35).<sup>673</sup> Much like the Passover during the Exodus, an angel of the Lord destroys at night, ushering in deliverance for God’s people.<sup>674</sup> The following two verses (vv. 36-37) describe the retreat of Sennacherib back to his own country (fulfilling the prophetic word vv. 7, 28, 33) and his death before his *helpless* god by the hand of his sons (although according to the Babylonian Chronicle, this did not take place for another 20 years, c. 681 BC).<sup>675</sup>

### God Redeems Hezekiah’s Legacy

The narrative of Hezekiah in 2 Kings 18:13-25 seems at first glance to be set in complete contrast with Deuteronomistic theology and out of sync with the description given of Hezekiah as the ultimate example of trust in the opening formula (2 Kgs 18:5). Yet, it is a purposeful addition to the DH to show that past mistakes can be overturned when one acknowledges their failure and chooses to turn back to Yahweh. Setting up the contrast of the preceding subsection (18:9-12) where the fall of Israel is reiterated, with the following subsection (19:1-7, 14-19), Hezekiah’s complete trust in Yahweh, the historian makes his point that apostasy brings devastating consequences, but trust and adherence to Yahweh results in deliverance and security.

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<sup>673</sup> The miraculous nature of this event is disputed by the claim of Herodotus. He wrote that Sennacherib was forced to withdraw from Pelusium at the gates of Egypt because a plague of mice destroyed the weapons by chewing through the leather thongs of military equipment (although he could have been referring to a different incident). Some have also speculated it was the bubonic plague. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, 303. This naturalistic explanation, however, misses the point of the narrative and dismisses the miraculous hand of God for deliverance. Konkel, *1 and 2 Kings*, 31i, e-book.

<sup>674</sup> Leithart, *1 and 2 Kings*, 259.

<sup>675</sup> Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, 303.



The narrative moves back and forth between the arrogant utterance of Sennacherib, through the Rabshakeh (“thus says the great king of Assyria,” 2 Kgs 18:19, 29, 31) and the word of the Lord through the prophet Isaiah (“thus says the Lord,” 2 Kgs 19:6, 20, 32). A choice must be made, will the king surrender and trust in the king of Assyria or listen to Isaiah and trust in the Lord? The point of this exchange reveals that before Hezekiah trusted completely in Yahweh, he faltered and wavered in his trust, instead relying on his own wealth, military strength, and political alliances such as those with Egypt and Babylon (which in the eyes of Yahweh was considered unfaithfulness and political apostasy, cf. The Law of the King Deut 17). The pericope in chapter 18 proves how Hezekiah’s misplaced trust in these other entities had devastating consequences. However, chapter 19 reveals a turning point in Hezekiah’s reign where he finally put all of his trust in the Lord when faced with the decision of who to trust for salvation.

Second Kings 18 and 20 demonstrate that even a king like Hezekiah was blemished and made mistakes. Yet, the rest of the story (chapter 19) reveals Hezekiah’s ultimate decision, how he repented and turned fully to Yahweh for salvation. This decision initiates the power of Yahweh to step in and miraculously bring deliverance (19:35-37). Ultimately, his repentance and wholehearted turning to Yahweh resulted in a sweep of past mistakes and a renewed verdict of Hezekiah’s reign. It is a beautiful example illustrating how past sins are forgiven, salvation granted, and a new designation as a faithful trusting servant of Yahweh is restored.

Hezekiah’s failure is part of the larger picture revealing the failure of the nation of Israel to carry out the purpose of the covenant. The nation as a whole also failed to be faithful to Yahweh regarding both trust and commitment. Thus, the nation failed to be the means by which Yahweh’s salvation was extended to the nations. Their failure was more than just a loss of land and temple that resulted in punishment for covenantal disobedience. “It was a missional failure

to shine YHWH's light so as to make him known among the nations."<sup>676</sup> The story of Hezekiah points to the forgiveness of God and the renewed promise of deliverance. This would have resounded with the original audience and given them strength and hope to rely on the Lord for their salvation.

#### Summary Conclusion of Chapter 5

This chapter outlines the political apostasy of two Judean kings and the ramifications their actions had on the kingdom. Even though Ahaz and Hezekiah were very different in their cultic observance and worship of Yahweh, they were similar in their political dealings and reliance on their wealth and outside aid when it came to protecting the nation. In this regard, they practiced the same tactics as the surrounding nations. They raided the temple treasury and relied on the help of others for political stability and security, forgoing the word of the Lord through the prophet Isaiah that spoke to the contrary. Isaiah promised the protection of Yahweh as their Divine Warrior if they would simply submit and trust in him. Their disobedience in the political arena was a breach of trust. Their turning to others was a form of political apostasy that resulted in the covenant curses of loss of peace, rest, and land.

The Dtr relates the reign of Ahaz in a negative fashion from start to finish. He was the epitome of what a Davidic king should not look like, both religiously and politically. Religiously, Ahaz was regarded as the worst king thus far to rule Judah, and his cultic practices were so abhorrent in the eyes of the Dtr that they were compared to the northern kings of Israel and the surrounding nations. Because of his religious apostasy, the covenant curses of strife, war, and loss of land ensued, creating a very volatile political situation in which Ahaz was forced to

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<sup>676</sup> Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, 454.

make a decision. When confronted, he had to choose whether to join the alliance with the surrounding nations, trust in the prophetic word of the Lord through the prophet Isaiah, or rely on the help of Assyria. Isaiah repeatedly gave Ahaz reassurance after reassurance through signs and prophetic oracles that Yahweh would bring salvation, and there was no need to fear or rely on another. Yet, because of his lack of spiritual fortitude, Ahaz could not trust in Yahweh as his Divine Warrior and Suzerain, instead choosing to sell the kingdom to Assyria by bribing Tiglath-Pileser III to come to his aid. Once again, proving a king's religious infidelity is characteristically linked to his political infidelity. Ahaz pledged his covenant loyalty to another suzerain effectively giving the Lord's kingdom to another. This arrangement might have had the desired results in the immediate crisis, but the negative consequences (curses) would affect Judah for decades. The Dtr describes the beginning consequences of misplaced political loyalty that led to misplaced religious loyalty. Ahaz created a new foreign altar and changed the Lord's temple "because of the king of Assyria," making clear the pervasive impact the Assyrians would have on the kingdom. Ahaz's political apostasy cannot be overstated, as both the Dtr and Isaiah blame him for the complete overturn of the nation to a new overlord.

Because of the severity of Ahaz's decision for the people, God rises above the king to point to another Davidic ruler who would replace the unfaithful monarch once and for all. This ruler would lead the people out of the mire that Ahaz had brought on them and lead them from darkness to light and from oppression to freedom. This promise from Isaiah reiterates that Yahweh is still King and that one day his son would rule as the Prince of Peace. The zeal of the Lord of Host would guarantee that God would again protect, restore, and bring salvation.

The narrative of Hezekiah in 2 Kings 18-19 is similar, yet different from his father. He is characterized as the most cultically loyal king up to this point and one who shows the epitome of

trust in Yahweh. Nevertheless, the bulk of his narrative describes the tumultuous encounter between Sennacherib and Hezekiah in 701 BC. Throughout this narrative, the Dtr subtly weaves another agenda within the text, pointing out Hezekiah's subsequent failure, which started with his reliance on other nations against the will of Yahweh (Is 30:1-3). This highlights the theme of this unit (2 Kgs 18-20) and the entire book of Kings and the theology which the DH interlaces into almost every text. The success or failure of the king, and subsequently the community as a whole, was dependent upon the king as the covenant administrator of Torah obedience laid out in the book of Deuteronomy, especially that of the Law of the King in chapter 17. This obedience was one in which they were to worship Yahweh instead of other gods (Deut 11:16) and one in which they were to rely on Yahweh instead of other nations (Deut 7:1, 17, 22; 11:23; 20:3-4).

Like David before him, Hezekiah did not falter in his worship of Yahweh and was acknowledged for his dedication in this regard and his theological reform (2 Kgs 18:1-7). However, also like David, he made a mistake that had significant consequences. David's mistake was adultery with another man's wife (2 Sam 11), and Hezekiah's mistake was adultery with foreign nations (cf. Ezek 16; 23). He took his eyes off Yahweh as his Divine Warrior and placed his trust in others for political deliverance. The narrative in chapter 18 brings Hezekiah and the entire country of Judah to the brink of annihilation because of this failure and closes with the silence awaiting his decision. Through this encounter, Hezekiah is forced to decide who to trust and rely on for salvation and who to listen to, the false savior or Yahweh. Chapter 19 is the pivotal point of his entire narrative as Hezekiah grieves, repents, prays, and turns his complete trust to God as his Divine Warrior and Savior. He chooses to ignore the voices of those around him and the "great king" of Assyria, instead hearing and obeying only the voice of the Lord.

Because of this unwavering faithfulness and trust in the most challenging time of his reign, Yahweh hears, destroys the enemy, delivers Jerusalem, and saves the nation.

Hezekiah's legacy proves that past mistakes, even those of apostasy can be overturned. After experiencing severe consequences, Hezekiah came to the point where he acknowledged he was the vice-regent and Yahweh the Divine King. After this realization, when confronted with the choice of who to trust and rely on for deliverance, Hezekiah proves that when the king fully depends on Yahweh, he will deliver and save. In return, Hezekiah became known as the king who trusted like no other.

## Chapter 6: Political Apostasy and Reversal of Blessing, The End of the Monarchy

The end of the monarchy and the final destruction of Jerusalem, including the temple, fall on the poor decisions of Judah's last king, Zedekiah. Like many kings before him, he was not faithful to the Lord religiously or politically. The Dtr relates that "he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord [...] like Jehoiakim" (2 Kgs 24:19). The narrator goes a step further with Zedekiah stating, "because of the anger of the Lord it came to the point in Jerusalem and Judah that he cast them out from his presence" (v. 20). Yahweh had threatened through his prophets that Judah would be judged for her sins (e.g., Is 1:21-25; Jer 4:518; 4:19; Mic 6:9-16), and the punishment fell on Zedekiah, whose political apostasy was the final deathblow sending the remaining populace into exile.

Yahweh intended to punish his people through submission and subjugation to Nebuchadnezzar, whom he was using as the instrument of his discipline. Yet, he was willing to let them remain in the land. However, instead of fully trusting in the Lord's plan and complying with his will, Zedekiah became "like the other nations," seeking political stability through alliance and compromise. Once again, instead of relying on the Lord and listening to the council of his prophets, the king sought aid from a foreign nation to rescue the kingdom. Even after repeated warnings from Jeremiah and Ezekiel not to turn to Egypt or trust in the strength of another, Zedekiah did not listen, and the prophetic warning fell on deaf ears. Like Jehoiakim (cf. 2 Kgs 24:2-4), who was unresponsive to God's warning through the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 21:1-10; 34:1-3, 17-22; 37:1-2, 6-10), Zedekiah was also unresponsive and rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. In the eyes of the Lord, Zedekiah's rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar and his adultery with Egypt were considered political apostasy against his divine plan (cf. Ezek 16, 17).

His breach of covenant would constitute the fatal blow for the nation and the ultimate Deuteronomic curse, expulsion from the land.

### Zedekiah

Second Kings 24:18-25:21 records the events of Zedekiah—the last king of Judah, the fall of Jerusalem, the looting and destruction of the temple, and the expulsion and exile of the remaining populous from the land. Despite the importance of these events, the presentation of Zedekiah in Kings is somewhat sparse (encompassing only ten verses). After the opening regnal formula (24:18-20a), the text immediately jumps ahead nine years to Zedekiah's rebellion against Babylon and the subsequent fall of Jerusalem a year and a half later (24:20b-25:7), after which Zedekiah is not mentioned again. However, the prophetic witness in Ezekiel and Jeremiah offers an alternative window into the events leading to the siege. They provide a significant picture of Zedekiah's failed reign and political apostasy. Second Chronicles 36:11-21, the book of Habakkuk,<sup>677</sup> and Babylonian and Egyptian sources also fill in supplemental detail surrounding the religious and political events of the last decade of the Judean monarch. Because of the significance of understanding the political apostasy of Zedekiah in the final years of his reign, the political allegory and narrative explanation in Ezekiel 17 (enhanced by chapters 16, 23, and Jeremiah 27, 37, 38, 39) will be exegeted in detail alongside the text of Kings.

As Ezekiel and Jeremiah will point out, God was inclined to punish Israel by being subjugated as a vassal to Nebuchadnezzar. However, Zedekiah refused to listen and humble

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<sup>677</sup> Even though no definitive date for Habakkuk has been established, most scholars maintain that Habakkuk lived during the rise of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, and his burdensome message for Jerusalem was the imminent arrival of the Babylonians. J.K. Bruckner, "Habakkuk," ed. Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville, DOTP (Downers Grove: IVP Academics, 2012), 1., e-book; Marvin A. Sweeney, "Habakkuk, Book Of," in *ABD: H-J* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1992), 2.

himself under the will of God. He resorted to seeking the help of others in order to break free from the yolk of the Babylonians in the years leading up to the fall of Jerusalem. His political apostasy, which Yahweh makes clear is a violation of the covenant (cf. Ezek 17:16, 19), leads to the final turning of Yahweh from Israel and their destruction and exile (2 Kgs 24:20; 25:1-21). Yet, despite this judgment, Ezekiel will point to the eventual reversal of punishment, redemption for Israel, and the eternal heir to the Davidic throne.

### **Political Background Leading up to Zedekiah's Reign (2 Kgs 23:31-24:16)**

After the death of Josiah at the hand of Pharaoh Neco of Egypt (c. 609-595 BC) in Megiddo in 609 BC, “Judah lost its independence and the swift descent to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple began.”<sup>678</sup> In the intervening period before the fall of Jerusalem in 587/6 BC, Jerusalem was dragged into the political conflict between the two major powers of the day, Egypt and Babylon. This jostling of power is evident in the reigns of three Davidic kings, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, and Jehoiachin, who follow Josiah as each is subjugated by either Egypt or Babylon. The kingdom moves from one power to the other in rapid succession of only eleven or twelve years before Zedekiah, the final king is enthroned by Babylon, reminiscent of the final years of the northern kingdom before their fall (2 Kgs 23:31-24:17; cf. 2 Kgs 15).

The first king, Jehoahaz (Shallum, Jer 22:11), assumes the throne following Josiah's death. After ruling for only three months, he is quickly deposed by Pharaoh Neco, who gained control of the region after the death of Josiah (2 Kgs 23:31-33). Neco replaced Jehoahaz with his

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<sup>678</sup> Josiah Derby, “The Tragic King,” *JBQ* 29, no. 3 (July 2001), 180; Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Kings*, 568.



brother Eliakim changing his name to Jehoiakim to show his vassal status (v. 34).<sup>679</sup> Jehoiakim began his reign as a submissive vassal of Egypt, paying the required tribute of silver and gold (v. 35) and remaining under the hegemony of Egypt for about four years (609-605 BC).<sup>680</sup> Jeremiah relates that in the fourth year of Jehoiakim's reign (c. 605 BC, the accession year of Nebuchadnezzar), the Babylonians defeated the Egyptians at the battle of Carchemish (Jer 25:1; 46:2).<sup>681</sup> Once the Egyptians were defeated, Babylon took control of the entire region of Syria and Palestine as far south as the Egyptian border (2 Kgs 24:7). Due to the Babylonian victory over Egypt, Judah's vassal status transferred to Nebuchadnezzar, and they were now required to pay tribute to Babylon rather than Egypt.<sup>682</sup>

For about three years, Jehoiakim remained the vassal of Babylon, but then rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kgs 24:1). An explanation for his revolt may come from the Babylonian Chronicle. The Chronicle records a confrontation and stalemate between Babylon and Egypt where heavy losses were incurred on both sides during the winter of 601/600 BC, and Nebuchadnezzar returned home.<sup>683</sup> Since Babylon was occupied elsewhere and seemingly reduced in might, Jehoiakim viewed this as a good opportunity to rebel. Because of Babylon's unsuccessful campaign against Egypt, Nebuchadnezzar was prevented from reacting to Jehoiakim's rebellion for the next two years. During those two years, Babylon could only inflict

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<sup>679</sup> Derby, "The Tragic King," 180.

<sup>680</sup> Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Kings*, 570.

<sup>681</sup> Hayim Tadmor, "Chronology of the Last Kings of Judah," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 15, no. 4 (1956): 226–227.

<sup>682</sup> Derby, "The Tragic King," 181.

<sup>683</sup> A. Malamat, "The Last Kings of Judah and the Fall of Jerusalem: An Historical—Chronological Study," *Israel Exploration Journal* 18, no. 3 (1968): 142. See also Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East*, 273–274.

punitive action by the Chaldean garrison and Transjordanian units against Judah (2 Kgs 24:1-2).<sup>684</sup> However, the biblical account declares that Yahweh actually instigated these attacks, using the Babylonians against his own people because of their sin (vv. 2-4). These raids were at Yahweh's ordinance in fulfillment of his prophetic word given through the prophets concerning Manasseh (v. 2-3; cf. 2 Kgs 21:10-15). Thus, the conflict and war were a result of Manasseh's sin. He was the final catalyst to bring about the promised destruction, and a sign of the covenant curses in Deuteronomy (Deut 28; 29:20).

After reorganizing his army, Nebuchadnezzar came against Jerusalem for their rebellion in 598/97 BC, laying siege to the city in his seventh regnal year.<sup>685</sup> Sometime during the siege, or shortly after, King Jehoiakim died, leaving his young son Jehoiachin (also called Jeconiah, Jer 24:1; 28:4; 29:2, or Coniah, Jer 22:24, 28; 37:1) to take the throne (2 Kgs 24:6).<sup>686</sup> After only a three-month reign, Jehoiachin surrendered to the king of Babylon, who took him, his household, the elite of the land, and many other officials, warriors, and artisans as prisoners to Babylon (2 Kgs 24:12, 15, 16). Nebuchadnezzar then proceeded to replace Jehoiachin with his uncle Mattaniah, changing his name to Zedekiah as a demonstration of Babylon's authority over him.<sup>687</sup> The Babylonian Chronicle reports, "year 7, month Kislimu: The king of Akkad moved

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<sup>684</sup> Malamat, "The Last Kings of Judah," 143; Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, 328.

<sup>685</sup> Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East*, 274.

<sup>686</sup> Malamat relates, "as Jehoiachin was deposed on 2 Adar 597 B.C., after having reigned for three months and ten days (2 Chron. 36:9), his father would have died (under suspicious circumstances) around 22 Heshvan 598 B.C." Malamat, "The Last Kings of Judah," 144. Beal asserts that 2 Chronicles 36:6-7 and Daniel 1:1-7 indicate that Jehoiakim lived through the siege and fall in 597 BC. She suggests a co-regency between Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin as a possible solution, with Jehoiakim dying right before Jehoiachin is taken to Babylon, which accords with the account in Jeremiah (22:18-19). Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, 518.

<sup>687</sup> Ibid., 520.

his army into Hatti land, laid siege to the city of Judah (*ia-a-hu-du*) and the kings took the city on the second day of the month Addaru. He appointed in it a (new) king of his liking, took heavy booty from it and brought it into Babylon.”<sup>688</sup>

Consequently, Zedekiah was enthroned by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 BC as a vassal of Babylon during a very tumultuous period of political upheaval. Josephus relates that after Nebuchadnezzar took over ten thousand exiles to Babylon, he made Zedekiah take an oath that he would keep the kingdom for him and make no moves of alliance or friendship with Egypt.<sup>689</sup> Of significance (discussed further below) are the stipulations of this treaty of vassalage made between Nebuchadnezzar and Zedekiah at the time of Zedekiah’s instillation, which was accompanied by an oath of allegiance. Malamat states

this treaty, pledging the vassal king’s fealty and sworn by his own god (on the pattern of the Assyrian vassal-treaties) is hinted at in the biblical text: “And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God” (2 Chron. 36:13), and even more to the point, Ezekiel’s political allegory [chap 17 ...] Ezekiel’s subsequent condemnation of Zedekiah’s breach of fealty, and the frequent diatribes against the king in Jeremiah, who may have been a witness to the concluding of the treaty, agree with the curses and punishments liable to be suffered by the rebel according to the extant vassal-treaties in the ancient Near East.<sup>690</sup>

As Malamat has pointed out, Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar and did not keep his oath, which will be an important factor contributing to his punishment from the Babylonian king and the covenant curses that follow.

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<sup>688</sup> Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East*, 274.

<sup>689</sup> Flavius Josephus, “Antiquities,” in *Josephus the Complete Works* (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2015). Book X, chap 7, 550.

<sup>690</sup> Malamat, “The Last Kings of Judah,” 145-146.

### Opening Regnal Formula and Theological Verdict (2 Kgs 24:18-20)

Zedekiah's regnal formula begins in the usual Deuteronomic fashion with his age, length of reign, and the name of the queen mother. Also, typical in style, the theological verdict is given based on the king's commitment to Yahweh. As with his two brothers and nephew who preceded him, the theological verdict is negative "he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord" (v. 19).<sup>691</sup> However, for Zedekiah, the Dtr adds, "according to all that Jehoiakim had done." This addition to the theological verdict differs from that of other kings; for Zedekiah's judgment includes a comparison between his sin and that of Jehoiakim, his brother, rather than his father. The particular comparison with Jehoiakim suggests that the connection between the two includes their sin of rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar as the agent of Yahweh's will (2 Kgs 24:1, 20).<sup>692</sup> The last line of his theological verdict is also telling עַד־הִשְׁלַכְוּ אֹתָם מֵעַל פָּנָיו "until he cast them from his presence"; for it is during the reign of Zedekiah that the anger of the Lord was so prevalent that he turned his face from his people, expelling them from his presence (v. 20a). Immediately accompanying the statement that Yahweh turned his face in anger is the announcement that Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon suggesting the two go hand-in-hand (v. 20b). As Beal indicates, "the author clearly recognizes that disaster fell upon the nation as a result of the withdrawal of YHWH's favour. By that favour they have experienced covenant

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<sup>691</sup> Second Chronicles 36:10 designates that Zedekiah is the brother of Jehoiachin. However, the statement in verse 18 that his mother's name was Hamital, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah, reveals that he is actually the brother of Jehoahaz and the son of Josiah, thus making him the uncle of Jehoiachin which is what the text of 2 King 24:17 states. Gray, *I and II Kings*, 762.

<sup>692</sup> Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, 525.

blessings; now as that favour is withdrawn nothing prevents the rapid advance of the final covenant curses (Deut 28).”<sup>693</sup>

Zedekiah’s rebellion was the final component initiating Yahweh’s action to expel his people from the land and his presence. Zedekiah’s rebellious actions are explained more fully by the Chronicler. First, he did not humble himself and listen to Jeremiah, who told him to submit to Babylon (2 Chr 36:12; see Jer 27:8-15; 38:17). Second, he broke an oath made in Yahweh’s name to Nebuchadnezzar (2 Chr 36:13; Ezek 17:13, 16, 18, 19); and third, he was unrepentant and failed to maintain the proper worship of Yahweh in the temple (2 Chr 36:14).<sup>694</sup>

As stated above, the account in Kings is sparse as it skips quickly from the regnal formula and Zedekiah’s first year in office directly to his rebellion against Babylon in his ninth year. The intervening years, however, are extremely important to properly understand Zedekiah’s political apostasy, which led to the final outcome of expulsion and exile. For these ensuing years, we must look to Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and the Babylonian Chronicle for supplemental detail. It is also important to note that when Nebuchadnezzar deported most of the aristocracy and leadership with Jehoiakim, he left the country vulnerable to political adventurers and charlatans. Even though there were some who wanted to maintain peace as submissive vassals of Babylon there were others who wanted to throw off the subjugation of Babylon by allying with Egypt and the surrounding nations.<sup>695</sup> This political tension divided not only the country but the exiles into two rival groups; those that supported the overthrow of Babylon, and those who viewed

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<sup>693</sup> Beal, *1 and 2 Kings*, 520.

<sup>694</sup> Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, 331-332.

<sup>695</sup> A. Malamat, “The Last Wars of the Kingdom of Judah,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 9, no. 4 (1950): 224.

submission to Babylon (including Jeremiah and Ezekiel) as the road to national survival.<sup>696</sup> This internal struggle clearly plays out in the political allegory of Ezekiel 17 and the narratives of Jeremiah 27 and 37-39. Ezekiel addresses both the king, Jerusalem, and the exiles, and Jeremiah confronts Zedekiah, the leaders, and the false prophets. Each prophet informing their audience of the impending fate if they do not submit.

### **Zedekiah's Apostasy with the Surrounding Nations (Jer 27:1-15; 51:59)**

For the first four years of his reign, it appears that the pro-Babylonian party had the upper hand. Zedekiah was a loyal vassal of Babylon, maintaining his oath of fealty to Nebuchadnezzar. Unfortunately, Zedekiah was not a strong leader and was weak and irresolute. Within four years, he was persuaded to rebel by those spurred on by false prophets who yearned for independence (Jer 28:1-4).<sup>697</sup> Sometime between the autumn of 594 BC and the summer of 593 BC, Jeremiah relates that Zedekiah hosted a gathering of envoys from Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon in Jerusalem to discuss forming an alliance to rebel against Babylon (Jer 27:1-3; 28:1).<sup>698</sup> This alliance was probably encouraged by disturbances occurring to the east of Babylon in the

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<sup>696</sup> Derby, "The Tragic King," 182.

<sup>697</sup> Ibid., 180–85. There are variations in Jeremiah 27:1 between the MT and the LXX regarding the king's name. The MT has Jehoiakim in this verse, but Zedekiah is referred to in the rest of the chapter. Chapter 28 reiterates that it should be read as Zedekiah and states, "in the same year," which is the fourth year of Zedekiah's reign. Steven Voth, *Jeremiah*, ed. John Walton, ZIBBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 27:1-22, e-book. J. A. Thompson states, "the chronological note given in v. 1 seems to be a copy of 26:1. In vv. 3, 12, and 28:1, the king is not Jehoiakim but Zedekiah. The events of the chapter presuppose the exile of 597 B.C. after which Zedekiah was on the throne. Syriac, Arabic, and a few manuscripts read correctly Zedekiah (NEB, RSV)." J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 262. Keown et al. contend that chapters 27 and 28 must be read together as a unit. Thus, the fourth year of Zedekiah's reign (28:1) is also considered the "beginning" (27:1). For more information regarding the cohesive nature of the two chapters, see Gerald Keown et al., *Jeremiah 26-52, Volume 27*, WBC (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2016), 43-48.

<sup>698</sup> Moshe Greenberg, "Ezekiel 17 and the Policy of Psammetichus II," *JBL* 76, no. 4 (December 1957): 305.

previous year. The Babylonian Chronicles recounts that in 596/5 BC, Nebuchadnezzar was attacked by Elam, and the following year, he had to deal with a revolt within his own borders.<sup>699</sup> As Walton et al. note, “the meeting was probably in response to a domestic rebellion in Babylon against Nebuchadnezzar in December 595 and January 594, which is described in one of the Babylonian Chronicles.”<sup>700</sup> At the same time (595 BC), Pharaoh Neco died, and Psammetichus II (Psamtek II) rose to power in Egypt.<sup>701</sup> A new pharaoh, along with Babylon’s potential vulnerability, led to aspirations for independence among the vassal states in Syria-Palestine.<sup>702</sup> These thoughts of rebellion were a dangerous political adventure likely spurred on by the anti-Babylonian faction, no doubt accentuated by the words of Hananiah (Jer 28), and backed by Egyptian encouragement.<sup>703</sup>

The alliance and potential rebellion were not looked on favorably by Yahweh. The same five kings appear in Jeremiah 25:21-22 where they, along with Judah, stand under God’s judgment.<sup>704</sup> To each leader present, Jeremiah declares that this alliance is outside the will of Yahweh, the Lord of Hosts, the Creator, and Sovereign over every nation (Jer 27:3-5). As Sovereign Creator, Yahweh could do whatever he pleased with the people of the earth, including giving control to whomever he chose. Jeremiah further specifies that Yahweh is the one who has

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<sup>699</sup> Keown et al., *Jeremiah* 26-52, 47.

<sup>700</sup> Walton et al., *IVPBBC*, 660.

<sup>701</sup> Roger Forshaw, *Egypt of the Saite Pharaohs, 664-525 BC* (Manchester, United Kingdom: Manchester University Press, 2019), 134.

<sup>702</sup> Keown et al., *Jeremiah* 26-52, 47.

<sup>703</sup> A. Malamat, “The Last Wars of the Kingdom of Judah,” 224.

<sup>704</sup> Keown et al., *Jeremiah* 26-52, 47.

chosen to appoint Nebuchadnezzar as his servant (placing him squarely under Yahweh's power), and because of this designation, they are to humbly serve him (vv. 6-7).<sup>705</sup> If they comply, they will remain on their land. Hence, to resist Nebuchadnezzar was to resist Yahweh, which would result in destruction.<sup>706</sup> Jeremiah states,

thus says the Lord of Host, the God of Israel [...] It is I who by my great power and my outstretched arm have made the earth...and I give it to whomever it seems right to me. Now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, my servant [...] all the nations shall serve him [...] and if any nation or kingdom will not serve this Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and put its neck under the yoke of the king [...] I will punish that nation with the sword, with famine, and with pestilence, declares the Lord [...] but any nation that will bring its neck under the yolk of the king of Babylon and serve him, I will leave on its own land, to work it and dwell there, says the Lord. (27:4-8, 11)

The text further declares that Jeremiah reiterated the same message two more times. First, to King Zedekiah, then to the priests and the people (Jer 27:12, 16). The Lord's directive is clear; God was using Nebuchadnezzar, his servant (עֶבֶד), as the instrument of punishment as a consequence of Judah's refusal to "serve" (עֶבֶד) the Lord (Jer 2:20).<sup>707</sup> Now, they must submit to Nebuchadnezzar and serve him (עֶבֶד, here used as a diplomatic term meaning "vassal").<sup>708</sup> If they do, they will avoid the covenantal curses of sword, famine, and pestilence (Jer 27:8, 13; cf. Deut 28), they will live, and they will remain in the land (Jer 27:12, 17). In other words, the people will not have to face exile if they submit to the Babylonian yolk and serve Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>709</sup>

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<sup>705</sup> Michael Brown, *Jeremiah*, vol. 7, EBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), Commentary 27:3-7, e-book.

<sup>706</sup> Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 364.

<sup>707</sup> Brown, *Jeremiah*, Commentary 27:9-11, e-book.

<sup>708</sup> Keown et al., *Jeremiah* 26-52, 50.

<sup>709</sup> F. B. Huey Jr., *Jeremiah, Lamentations: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, NAC (Maidenhead, United Kingdom: B&H Publishing Group, 1993), 248.



Michael Brown points out that the twofold use of עָבַד rendered “serve” and “till” both times with a pronominal suffix, insinuates that servitude will bring with it a level of freedom (v. 11).<sup>710</sup>

Apparently, after hearing of the potential rebellion, the Babylonian Chronicle reports that in the winter of 594 BC, Nebuchadnezzar called out his army against Syria. Even though not explicitly stated in the Chronicle, this was most likely in response to the coalition and an effort to squash the rebellion.<sup>711</sup> It must have worked because the plot of the coalition never reached fruition. In turn, Zedekiah was summoned to reappear before Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon, most likely to give an account of his treasonous behavior and to reaffirm his previous oath.<sup>712</sup> Jeremiah 51:59 informs the reader that this meeting occurred in Zedekiah’s fourth year, 594/3 BC, aligning with the Babylonian account.<sup>713</sup> Since Zedekiah returned and remained king, Nebuchadnezzar seemed satisfied with his explanation, obeisance, and reaffirmation of servitude.

### **Zedekiah’s Apostasy with Egypt (Ezek 16; 23; 17)**

After reaffirming his vow, Zedekiah was again submissive for a few years until Psammetichus II of Egypt began to assert his dominance. When Zedekiah realized he might have another redeemer, he began to court the Egyptian king for alliance and assistance. The courtship seemed to go both ways, as Psammetichus also had an interest in Asiatic affairs. Psammetichus

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<sup>710</sup> Brown, *Jeremiah*, Commentary 27:9-11, e-book.

<sup>711</sup> Moshe Greenberg, “Ezekiel 17 and the Policy of Psammetichus II,” 305-306.

<sup>712</sup> Ibid., 306.

<sup>713</sup> Keown et al. point out that the MT and the LXX differ on the translation of נָסַח in Jeremiah 51:59, with the LXX translating it as נֶסַח “from Zedekiah.” Thus, referring to Seraiah going to Babylon on Zedekiah’s behalf. Keown et al., *Jeremiah* 26-52, 372-373.

is recorded in a papyrus from El Hibeh as visiting Syria-Palestine in 591 BC. Greenberg assesses that this type of royal expedition by an Egyptian king would have large political implications.<sup>714</sup> Roger Forshaw proposes that Psamtek II (Psammetichus II) was “endeavoring to persuade the Levantine states to change sides once again and come under Egyptian protection.”<sup>715</sup> He further contends that the Pharaoh may have visited Zedekiah personally and entered into a treaty with him, evidenced by the discovery of scarabs of Psamtek II at Tell el-Safi, Tell el-Far’ah, and Tell Keisan.<sup>716</sup>

In addition, the letter of Aristeeas records that, in a mutual way, Jews had been sent to fight in the army of Psammetichus in their war with the Ethiopians.<sup>717</sup> Greenburg records, “the sending of Jewish soldiers to Egypt during the reign of Zedekiah can hardly be explained as other than part of a reciprocal military agreement.”<sup>718</sup> As before, Zedekiah saw in Egypt a powerful ally and savior; and disregarding the warning of Jeremiah (again!), he chose to trust in Egypt. Thus, once more rebelling against God’s word to remain the vassal of Nebuchadnezzar. Josephus reiterates that Zedekiah’s friends perverted and dissuaded him from listening to the voice of the Lord. After eight years, he again broke his covenant with the Babylonians and revolted, allying with the Egyptians in hopes of overcoming the Babylonians.<sup>719</sup>

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<sup>714</sup> Greenberg, “Ezekiel 17 and the Policy of Psammetichus II,” 306.

<sup>715</sup> Forshaw, *Egypt of the Saite Pharaohs*, 139.

<sup>716</sup> Ibid.

<sup>717</sup> Benjamin G. Wright III and Benjamin G. Wright, *The Letter of Aristeeas: “Aristeeas to Philocrates” or “on the Translation of the Law of the Jews”* (Berlin/Boston, Germany: De Gruyter, Inc., 2015), 121.

<sup>718</sup> Greenberg, “Ezekiel 17 and the Policy of Psammetichus II,” 307.

<sup>719</sup> Josephus, “Antiquities,” Book X, Chap 7, 551.

The Lord's view of this act of rebellion and political apostasy against Nebuchadnezzar is plainly visible in the oracles of Ezekiel 16 and 17 (chapter 23 is also closely related). Ezekiel's oracles seem to occur in this historical setting as they come between the last preceding date in Ezekiel (8:1), which was 592 BC, and the following date (20:1), listed as eleven months later. That places the oracles of chapters 16 and 17 at about 591 BC, correlating perfectly with this historical account.<sup>720</sup> Ezekiel 16 addresses the whole nation of Judah, condemning them for their harlotry with the surrounding nations (chapter 23 also focuses specifically on the political adultery of Israel and Judah). Ezekiel 17, however, narrows the focus, accusing Zedekiah personally of political apostasy and placing the judgment of exile for the nation squarely on his shoulders.

*God's Faithless Bride (Ezek 16, 23)*

Ezekiel 16 is a harsh accusation against Judah as a faithless bride. After all that Yahweh had done for them, they had turned their back on him (vv. 1-14). The Lord accuses Judah of not only committing adultery (הִזְנָה) against him with other gods (vv. 15-22) but also fornicating (הִזְנָה) behind his back with other nations (vv. 23-34). Instead of relying on the security of Yahweh, their husband, Jerusalem repeatedly sought out political relations with foreign nations.<sup>721</sup> One cannot read the account in chapter 16 without acknowledging the repetitive refrain of harlotry/fornication (הִזְנָה), which is used eleven times in twelve verses (vv. 23-25). Ezekiel explicitly refers to their political apostasy as “prostitution” and “whoring” with the Egyptians (vv. 25-26; e.g., Solomon, Zedekiah), the Assyrians (v. 28, e.g., Ahaz), and the Chaldeans (v. 29;

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<sup>720</sup> John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 143.

<sup>721</sup> Ralph Alexander, *Ezekiel*, ed. Tremper III Longman and David Garland, vol. 2, EBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), Commentary 16:26-30, e-book.

e.g., Hezekiah). To make matters worse, instead of receiving payment for their indiscretion, Judah “bribed” (רָחַץ, v. 33; cf. Asa 1 Kgs 15:18-19 and Ahaz 2 Kgs 16:8) and paid the nations to come to her. As highlighted above, this type of bribe was only associated in Kings with depleting the temple treasury, resulting in taking money from Yahweh for the purpose of giving it to another for protection and aid. The prophet declares that by giving themselves to other nations and trusting in political alliances for security and assistance instead of Yahweh, they were accused of abandoning their oath and the covenant they made with God (Ezek 16:59; cf. Ex 24; Deut 29:10-21). By not trusting that God would uphold his part of the covenant and be their provider and Divine Warrior, they were condemned for their political apostasy against him, and were now subject to the covenantal curses of war, strife, and exile (Ezek 16:35-41; Deut 28).

Ezekiel chapter 23 is strikingly similar to chapter 16, as both “highlight the passion of Yahweh in the face of Israel’s unfaithfulness to his covenant, expressed in the insatiable lust after other lovers.”<sup>722</sup> Both chapters compare the ravenous pursuit of others through political allegiances to an adulterer’s sexual cravings. Chapter 23, which accuses both the nation of Israel and Judah of harlotry, emphasizes more fully Judah’s adulterous political alliances through her ogling of others (specifically Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt vv. 12, 13, 19-21).<sup>723</sup> Alexander adds Jerusalem’s first major lover was Assyria, then she extended her prostitution to the Babylonians. After becoming disgusted with that lover, she turned to the Egyptians for aid, failing to learn that security did not lie in human strength but in the Lord.<sup>724</sup> Ezekiel summarizes that the essence of

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<sup>722</sup> Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 357.

<sup>723</sup> Ibid., 357-359.

<sup>724</sup> Alexander, *Ezekiel*, Commentary 23:11-21, e-book.

Judah's offense is forgetting Yahweh and supplanting him as her husband, and for that, Judah will have to bear the consequences.<sup>725</sup> Verse 35 states, "because you have forgotten me and cast me behind your back, you yourself must bear the consequences of your lewdness and whoring." God especially condemns them for their prostitution and longing for Egypt (v. 27), which directly relates to the command in the Law of the King to "never return that way [to Egypt] again" (Deut 17:16). Sandwiched between the political inditement in these two chapters, is Ezekiel 17, explaining in detail the fault of not only the nation but the actions of the king for the peril that will befall the city.

*Ezekiel's Oracle of Two Eagles, a Cedar, and a Vine (Ezek 17:1-10)*

Addressing the exiles in Babylon, King Zedekiah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Ezekiel 17:1-24 condemns not only the nation of Israel/Judah but especially the king for his unfaithfulness to Yahweh in the political arena. The primary focus of Ezekiel 17 is judgement for apostasy and hope for the future. Through the first two oracles (a riddle and an interpretation), Ezekiel deals with the infidelity of royal leadership;<sup>726</sup> specifically that of Zedekiah and God's judgment against his misplaced trust in Egypt for help (vv. 1-21). There is a duality in this passage that makes it clear that Yahweh was the one using Nebuchadnezzar to humble Israel (17:16), and Zedekiah's breach of covenant with Nebuchadnezzar was actually considered rebellion and political apostasy against God. Ezekiel aims is to expose Zedekiah's rebellion as

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<sup>725</sup> Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 357-359.

<sup>726</sup> Nancy R. Bowen, *Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries: Ezekiel* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 115.

treachery against God and make those who support him aware that they too are in rebellion against Yahweh.<sup>727</sup>

The second emphasis on the providence of God and his salvation of the Davidic dynasty is hinted at in the first oracle and explained in the last (vv. 22-24). Ezekiel concludes the chapter with a messianic oracle promising that Yahweh will plant a new leader from the house of David in Israel that will become a “noble cedar.” He will bring prosperity and offer shelter to all people. All the nations will realize that Yahweh is in control and that what he declares will come to pass.

In the first section of this passage, God tells Ezekiel to address the people of Israel through a poetic judgment oracle in the form of a “riddle” and an “allegory” cast as a fable about two eagles, a cedar, and a vine.<sup>728</sup> This section is divided into four parts: a call to attention (vv. 1-3a), the great eagle’s dominance over the Davidic house (vv. 3b-6), the vine’s attraction to and reliance on another eagle (vv. 7-8), and judgment against the vine for misplaced allegiance (vv. 9-10).<sup>729</sup> The placement of the riddle, which follows Israel’s condemnation of unfaithfulness in chapter 16, is purposeful as it is a direct indictment against the present generation and particularly the king of the apostasy outlined in chapter 16. There are also several catchwords that link the two chapters, such as the eagle’s “rich plumage” (רֶקֶמָה 17:3), which is the same word that describes the clothing of the bride (16:10, 13, 18); and the repetition of “oath” (אָלָה) and “covenant” (בְּרִית) 16:59-62; 17:13-19). Also, the theme of infidelity and divine consequences

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<sup>727</sup> Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 248.

<sup>728</sup> Leslie C. Allen et al., *Ezekiel 1-19, Volume 28*, WBC (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2015), 291.

<sup>729</sup> Smith, *Interpreting the Prophetic Books*, 29.

connect the two chapters. Whereas chapter 16 focused on the infidelity of the covenant community, chapter 17 calls attention to the infidelity of its royal leadership.<sup>730</sup> Ezekiel responds that both will be judged for their lack of trust in the Lord and their tendency to look to others for security.<sup>731</sup>

Ezekiel begins his message with a call to attention (v. 2) that addresses the “house of Israel,” grabbing the attention of the audience with the divine saying formula, “thus says the Lord” (v. 3). He begins by proposing a riddle (חִידָה) and speaking an allegory (מִשְׁלָל), immediately indicating to his readers that this is a story in which the meaning is hidden and will require special interpretation.<sup>732</sup> Through the use of the term חִידָה (“riddle”), God is directly challenging the king of Judah. Riddles were often used as a political caricature to challenge or affirm leadership (Judg 9:8-15; 2 Kgs 14:9).<sup>733</sup> Alexander proposes that riddles were commonly used in international politics between kings, and in this context, the two kings are Yahweh and Zedekiah.<sup>734</sup> By also commanding Ezekiel to speak an allegory (מִשְׁלָל) or a “parable/proverb” (an extended metaphor), the hearers would render the meaning as significant. The solution to the riddle, given in the prose section (vv. 11-21), will answer the question of covenant infidelity, the problem with the royal leader, and the reason for Israel’s punishment.<sup>735</sup>

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<sup>730</sup> Bowen, *Ezekiel*, 115.

<sup>731</sup> Alexander, *Ezekiel*, Commentary 17:1-0, e-book.

<sup>732</sup> Steven Tuell, *Ezekiel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 98.

<sup>733</sup> Allen et al., *Ezekiel 1-19*, 291.

<sup>734</sup> Alexander, *Ezekiel*, Commentary 17:1-0, e-book.

<sup>735</sup> Bowen, *Ezekiel*, 114.

The duality evident in the announcement of both a riddle and an allegory pervades the entire prophecy: there are two eagles, two plants (a cedar and a vine), two forms of judgment, two planes of judgment (earthly and divine), and a message of doom regarding the “shoot” and a coda of hope regarding the “sprig.”<sup>736</sup> There are also twinning patterns evident in a series of semantic pairs, such as “house of Israel” (v. 2) and “rebellious house” (v. 12), “will he prosper” (v. 9), and “will he succeed” (v. 15), and “the top of the cedar” (vv. 3, 22). Block asserts, “like the rich plumage of the eagle itself, the entire text has the appearance of finely embroidered fabric...held together by colorful threads.”<sup>737</sup> This powerful imagery in the text would have been very familiar to Ezekiel’s audience, and the symbolism would have quickly grabbed their attention.<sup>738</sup>

The first character introduced in the riddle is the *הַנְּשֹׂר הַגָּדוֹל הַגָּדוֹל* “the great, great eagle” (lit., ‘an eagle of eagles’) with great wings, long feathers, and full multicolored plumage (v. 3b).<sup>739</sup> In the ancient world, eagles served as symbols of strength (Is 40:31) and royal splendor and were often used as a common military symbol on ensigns.<sup>740</sup> They were portrayed as fearsome creatures most often symbolizing a foreign army “swooping down upon its prey” (Deut 28:49; Job 9:26; Jer 48:40).<sup>741</sup> For example, the Assyrian king, Esarhaddon, boasted about

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<sup>736</sup> Moshe Greenberg, “Ezekiel 17: A Holistic Interpretation,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103, no. 1 (1983): 150.

<sup>737</sup> Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 240.

<sup>738</sup> Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 98.

<sup>739</sup> Bowen, *Ezekiel*, 115.

<sup>740</sup> Daniel Bodi, “Ezekiel,” ed. John Walton, ZIBBC of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 17:3, e-book.

<sup>741</sup> Bowen, *Ezekiel*, 115.



spreading his pinions like a furious eagle to destroy his enemies.<sup>742</sup> Also, Habakkuk, a near contemporary of Ezekiel, describes the Babylonians as “an eagle swooping down to devour” (1:8). Yet, despite this usual depiction of a fearsome eagle, Ezekiel paints the picture of the eagle as a benevolent creature who comes to Lebanon plucks off the topmost sprig (קצה) from a cedar (v. 3) and takes it for safe keeping to the “land of trade” in the “city of merchants” (v. 4, identified in 16:29 as Chaldea or Babylon).<sup>743</sup> Transplanting cedars was a well-known feature of Mesopotamian kings who tended to their royal gardens. This act of snipping and transplanting depicts care and concern for the welfare of the sprig.<sup>744</sup>

The words “Lebanon” and “cedar” (v. 3) associate this shoot with royal construction in Jerusalem and, by association, the Davidic dynasty.<sup>745</sup> The Lebanon mountains were wooded with cedars that were sent to Solomon to build the Jerusalem temple and his palace (1 Kgs 5). The palace latter came to be known as “The Palace of the Forest of Lebanon” (1 Kgs 7:2).<sup>746</sup> This association locates “Lebanon” as Jerusalem and identifies the cedar as royalty, but still begs the question, who does the “shoot/sprig” from the Davidic cedar represent? Block asserts that this part of the riddle refers to the young Jehoiachin, the son of Jehoiakim, who surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar in 597 BC and was taken away to Babylon (2 Kgs 24:8-16). He also asserts that the coda in verses 22-24 gives a clue to the answer. These verses declare that Yahweh was

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<sup>742</sup> Bodi, *Ezekiel*, 17:3, e-book.

<sup>743</sup> Daniel I. Block, *Beyond the River Chebar: Studies in Kingship and Eschatology in the Book of Ezekiel* (Havertown: James Clarke Company, Limited, 2014), 22.

<sup>744</sup> Daniel Bodi, *Ezekiel*, Ezek 17:4, e-book.

<sup>745</sup> Block, *Beyond the River Chebar*, 22.

<sup>746</sup> Bodi, *Ezekiel*, Ezek 17:4, e-book.

behind the actions of the great eagle (Nebuchadnezzar), and he is the one who will decide when to retrieve the  $\text{נִי־קָנָה}$  “sprig” (v. 22) and plant it.<sup>747</sup> There are clear messianic overtones in both the cedar and the “shoot” (cf. Is 10:33-11:1) that represent the Davidic line that will culminate in the Messiah (discussed below).<sup>748</sup>

The next part of the riddle switches from the image of a tree to a vine. The eagle provides a replacement for the “shoot” from the royal “seed” ( $\text{זֶרַע}$ ) which is viewed as beneficial for Judah as it will allow her to remain planted and grow (vv. 5, 13).<sup>749</sup> Being planted in fertile soil by abundant water gives the image of perfect growing conditions. The “seed” becomes a “vine,” which, despite contrasting sharply with the lofty cedar, is still allowed to grow and bear foliage. The vine, however, is not to be more than low spreading, limited in power and influence. The vine is allowed to thrive, but with no mention of fruit (a sign of successful horticulture).<sup>750</sup> As long as its branches were turned toward the great eagle in subordination and loyalty, its “roots remained where it stood” (v. 6).<sup>751</sup>

There are several possibilities as to whom the vine is referring. The vine is an image associated with Israel that recurs throughout scripture. It is used as a symbol of her abundance (Num 13:17-27; Deut 8:8; 1 Kgs 4:25), judgment (Ps 105:33; Is 5:5-7; Jer 8:13), and is also given as a sign of hope and restoration (Hos 10:1; 14:7; Mic 4:4).<sup>752</sup> Isaiah adds to the imagery

<sup>747</sup> Block, *Beyond the River Chebar*, 23.

<sup>748</sup> Alexander, *Ezekiel*, Ezek 17:1-10, e-book.

<sup>749</sup> Allen et al., *Ezekiel 1-19*, 294.

<sup>750</sup> Bowen, *Ezekiel*, 116.

<sup>751</sup> Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 144.

<sup>752</sup> Block, *Beyond the River Chebar*, 27.

by showing Yahweh's special care for Israel as his vineyard, but in response, it yielded wild grapes for which it would be punished (Is 5).<sup>753</sup> In a similar fashion, Psalms 80:8-20 describes Yahweh as taking a vine (Israel) from Egypt and planting it. In turn, it grew and prospered, but then, because of disobedience, God tore it down. Jeremiah 2:21 parallels these metaphors describing Israel as a choice vine that turned degenerate and became wild. Most relevant to this oracle is Ezekiel's comparison in chapter 15 of the city of Jerusalem to a useless vine fit only as fuel for a fire. Because of the rich history behind this metaphor, the hearer of the riddle would probably interpret the vine as the nation of Israel. However, the metaphor takes a shocking turn when the interpretation is given in the following oracle (vv. 11-21). The vinedresser is not Yahweh, and the vine is not the nation of Israel. Instead, the vine is her nobility, and, more precisely, it is the regent Zedekiah as a representation of the nation.<sup>754</sup> He is the "seed" (2 Kgs 24:17; Jer 37:1) that sprouted and became the vine (vv. 5-6), and in this oracle, Nebuchadnezzar is the vinedresser.

In verse 7, another eagle is introduced, but not quite as magnificent as the first, it does not have long feathers, and its plumage is not multicolored. This bird seems passive and takes no action; he is simply there.<sup>755</sup> The vine then shoots out his branches toward the second eagle for "water," and the text alludes to a "transplanted" allegiance from the first eagle to the second.<sup>756</sup> There is a textual problem with 17:7d-8 in the Masoretic Text, and these verses seem corrupt.<sup>757</sup>

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<sup>753</sup> Deborah Appler, "Vine," in *NIDB*, ed. Katherine Dobb (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009), e-book.

<sup>754</sup> Block, *Beyond the River Chebar*, 27.

<sup>755</sup> Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 242.

<sup>756</sup> Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 144.

<sup>757</sup> Robert W. Jenson, *Ezekiel* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 137.

Some (Bowen) translate this as “from the bed where it was planted it was transplanted” (NRSV) to prime conditions; it was moved to good soil by abundant waters. However, most (e.g., Allen et al., Jenson, Taylor, Block) agree that it was not a transplanting that occurred but a stretching out in another direction from its original planting, looking for better water.<sup>758</sup> Taylor asserts if the vine were transplanted, it would confuse the picture of Zedekiah’s being planted in Israel at the behest of Babylon. Zedekiah was originally planted in Israel, but his branches stretched first to Babylon, then to Egypt. Jenson offers this translation for verse 7, “the vine stretched out its roots to [Egypt], for [Egypt] to provide better water than did the garden plot in which it was planted. [It did this despite] being planted in good soil with plentiful water.”<sup>759</sup> This corresponds well with verse five and portrays that a transplant of allegiance was taking place rather than a literal transplant to Egypt.<sup>760</sup>

The vine, which has been under the care of the first great eagle up to this point, develops a mind of its own and looks to another eagle for emancipation and exaltation beyond the “lowliness” (v. 6) that it has been allowed. It is characterized as being chafed at its enforced submissiveness and wants more; it wants to be a “high vine on high stakes” (v. 8). Because of this aim, the vine renounced the benevolence and safety of the first eagle for the future prospect of becoming a “noble vine” and exalting itself and its independence once again.<sup>761</sup> With the absence of an explanation, the hearer of the riddle would be left to reflect on the vine’s

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<sup>758</sup> Most translations concur and render the text as a stretching out of branches (e.g., NIV, ESV, NASB). See Allen et al., *Ezekiel 1-19*, 257; Jenson, *Ezekiel*, 137; Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 144; Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 242.

<sup>759</sup> Jenson, *Ezekiel*, 137.

<sup>760</sup> Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 144.

<sup>761</sup> Allen et al., *Ezekiel 1-19*, 257.

ingratitude and the foolishness associated with switching allegiance in rebellion against the first eagle.<sup>762</sup>

There is a break in verse 9 before the fable continues with a repeat of the divine saying formula, “thus says the Lord.” Since the hearers are left reflecting on the ingratitude of the vine, Ezekiel takes their pondering a step further by asking a series of rhetorical questions directly from the Lord (vv. 9-10). These questions challenge the audience to grapple with the fate of the vine for its misplaced allegiance. The questions are divided into two parts, separated by a declarative comment in 9b. The first group contains four questions arranged in a chiastic pattern, with the first and last questions centering on the vine and the two middle questions focusing on the eagle’s reaction.<sup>763</sup>

- A Will it thrive/prosper?
- B Will he not pull up its roots?
- B’ And cut of its fruit, so that it withers?
- A’ So that all its fresh sprouting leaves wither?

The first question is raised, will the vine thrive (תִּלְוָה v. 9)? According to verse six, it had already begun to grow and prosper under the great eagle. Now, can it prosper, flourish, or be successful when it has turned away from the great eagle? Its fate now lies in the claws of the offended eagle.<sup>764</sup> The answer is given in the next two statements by asking a series of negative counter-questions that anticipate a positive response. Block comments, “by the time Ezekiel is finished telling the fable, the sympathies of his hearers would undoubtedly have been on the side

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<sup>762</sup> Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 242.

<sup>763</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>764</sup> Allen et al., *Ezekiel 1-19*, 257.

of the first eagle.”<sup>765</sup> They cannot help but side with the actions the eagle will take against the vine and answer a resounding “yes” to the next set of questions. Will he not pull up its roots, cut off the fruit, and cause the leaves to dry up and wither (an idiom for total destruction)?<sup>766</sup> Yes, and he has every right to do so. In fact, the parenthetical comment in 9b that no strong arm or army is needed reflects that it will take little effort for the eagle to destroy the vine.

The second grouping of questions resumes in verse ten with another call to attention, “look/ behold,” and a restatement of the first question, “will it thrive?”. Even though the vine was planted in ideal conditions, will that be enough for survival after it has stretched its roots to another? This time the metaphor of the destructive eagle is replaced with the metaphor of the east wind. The east wind was the searing sirocco winds from the desert that poured over Palestine, leaving all vegetation scorched and wilted in its wake.<sup>767</sup> Because the vine redirected its branches and roots toward the second eagle, instead of being spread low and having its roots deep in the ground (the well-watered soil), the plant is now susceptible to the hot scorching wind that will leave the vulnerable plant withered.<sup>768</sup> Ezekiel finishes the riddle leaving his audience to ponder the fate of the withering plant.

*The Interpretation, God Confronts Zedekiah’s Political Apostasy (Ezek 17:11-21)*

Ezekiel wastes no time in giving the interpretation of the allegory, knowing full well the “rebellious house” which neither hears (Ezek 2:2-5, 7) nor sees (12:2) cannot interpret the

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<sup>765</sup> Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 243.

<sup>766</sup> Allen et al., *Ezekiel 1-19*, 257.

<sup>767</sup> Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 243.

<sup>768</sup> Ibid.

meaning of the fable.<sup>769</sup> The second oracle (17:11-21) reverts to prose and connects closely with the first through consecutive parallelism as follows: vv. 3a-4/12b, 5/13, 6/14, 7-8/15a, 9/15b-17, and 10/18-21a,<sup>770</sup> giving an explanation and interpretation of the “riddle” and “allegory” in the preceding verses. The historical situation (discussed above) now takes center stage as Ezekiel zeros in on his judgment of the “royal offspring” and explains the riddle on two planes. First, the historical fulfillment is revealed (v. 12b-18), then Ezekiel looks at Zedekiah’s breach of covenant and political apostasy from the divine perspective (v. 19-21).<sup>771</sup>

The first statement (v. 11) makes it clear that the interpretation to follow is also the word of the Lord. Only this time, the recipients are addressed not as “the house of Israel” (בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל) but as the “rebellious house” (בֵּית מְרִי) a familiar phrase that Ezekiel has used in previous oracles (e.g., 2:5; 3:9; 12:2). This alludes to the community’s rebellious stance in siding with Zedekiah to overthrow the Babylonian yolk. Ezekiel’s goal is to expose Zedekiah’s political betrayal and those that support it as rebellion against Yahweh.<sup>772</sup> At the end of the riddle, the people most likely would have sided with the first eagle against the vine’s rebellion. Ezekiel begins the explanation with a rhetorical question that assumes they must not know what the riddle really means.

Ezekiel 17:12-13 explain the historical situation elucidating the riddle. The first great eagle represents Nebuchadnezzar, who, after the rebellion of Jehoiakim (explained above), marched against Jerusalem in 597 BC. After a quick surrender, the text states Nebuchadnezzar

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<sup>769</sup> Bowen, *Ezekiel*, 117.

<sup>770</sup> Allen et al., *Ezekiel 1-19*, 255.

<sup>771</sup> Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 248.

<sup>772</sup> Ibid.

“took” the young Jehoiachin (“the shoot” from the top of the cedar vv. 3-4) and his officials, the royal family, the army, craftsmen, and nobility, including Ezekiel to Babylon (v. 12; 2 Kgs 24:8-12).<sup>773</sup> In verse 13, Ezekiel further explains that Nebuchadnezzar then took “one of the royal offspring” (מִן־רֵעַ הַמְּלֻכָּה lit. “from the seed of kingship”) and placed him as a puppet king on the throne.<sup>774</sup> Thus, referring to Nebuchadnezzar’s appointment of Josiah’s son Zedekiah (Jehoiachin’s uncle), as the Judean monarch (2 Kgs 24:17).

What is important to note, and what Ezekiel highlights, is that Nebuchadnezzar took steps to guarantee the new king’s loyalty by making a covenant (בְּרִית) with him and putting him under oath (אָלָה).<sup>775</sup> This took two forms in the ancient Near Eastern context of suzerain-vassal treaties. First, the treaty as a whole was made, regulating the behavior of the vassal and defining his limits (this would correspond to Zedekiah’s only being allowed to “spread low” v. 6). Second, according to Babylonian covenant-making, a religious oath of fealty was sworn appealing to the vassal’s god as a witness confirming the treaty (this is also implied in 2 Chr 36:13). If the vassal reneged on the treaty, he exposed himself to curses from his god.<sup>776</sup> In this regard, Nebuchadnezzar’s act of changing Zedekiah’s name is significant, he changed it from Mattaniah (“gift of Yahweh”) to Zedekiah (“righteousness of Yahweh”). Nebuchadnezzar made the new king swear by the “righteousness” of the Lord that he would keep his oath.<sup>777</sup> Thus, the word “oath” (אָלָה), which appears again in verses 16, 18, and 19 (discussed below), becomes an

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<sup>773</sup> Bakon, “Zedekiah: Last King of Judah,” *JBQ* 36, no. 2 (April 2008): 94.

<sup>774</sup> Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 249.

<sup>775</sup> Ibid.

<sup>776</sup> Ibid.; Bodi, *Ezekiel*, Ezek 17:19, e-book.

<sup>777</sup> Ibid.



important part of the treaty in relation to Yahweh. The people have already been accused of despising their oath (אָלָה) and breaking their covenant (בְּרִית) with Yahweh (Ezek 16:59); now Ezekiel calls attention to the new covenant and oath the king has sworn to Nebuchadnezzar in the name of Yahweh, which he has also broken (v. 13).

The purpose of the covenant is given in the next verse, the oath would keep the vassal “humble” (שָׁפָל), and if the covenant were kept, it would allow him to “stand/survive” (עָמַד v. 14). The word עָמַד carries the sense of abiding and enduring, but it also can mean to stand still.<sup>778</sup> Ezekiel presents this treaty in a positive light in verses 5-6, the king (Zedekiah) was given favorable conditions for growth. If he remained humble (the same word שָׁפָל is used but translated as “low” in v. 6) and submissive, Judah would not only survive but would also prosper like a well-planted seed that turned into a low-growing vine. Verse 14 insinuates that the treaty between Zedekiah and Nebuchadnezzar was God’s vehicle to humble the kingdom for their infidelity. By keeping the covenant with Babylon, which was Yahweh’s will, they would not be completely destroyed and would “stand/survive.” However, their survival depended on their submission to simply *stand still* (עָמַד), indicating the king could not take political matters into his own hands. Levenson confirms that “the purpose of the punishment was to train the vassal in the ways of covenant fidelity.”<sup>779</sup> Jeremiah reiterates this sentiment in his dealing with Zedekiah; God was the one who gave Babylon control of the land, and if Zedekiah did not submit, the nation would fall (Jer 27:5-7, 12, 17; 38:17).

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<sup>778</sup> Olive Tree Bible Software, ed., “עָמַד,” in *Olive Tree Enhanced Strong’s Dictionary* (Olive Tree, 2020).

<sup>779</sup> Jon D. Levenson, “The Last Four Verses in Kings,” *JBL* 103, no. 3 (September 1984): 359.

Ezekiel 17:15 records that Zedekiah did not heed the prophetic warning and rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar by sending “ambassadors” to Egypt (relating to his courtship with Psammetichus II). The “stretching out” (סָלַף v. 7) is parallel to the “sending” (שָׁלַח) of envoys to Egypt (v. 15a), and the “water” sought in verse 7 is that of “horses and a large army” (v. 15b).<sup>780</sup> This phrase has an astonishing correlation to the Law of the King, which states the king must not “cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the Lord has said to you, ‘you shall never return that way again’” (Deut 17:16b). Once again, as other kings before him, Zedekiah committed political apostasy by turning to Egypt; hence, violating the command of the Lord. Allen et al. add, “Ezekiel is here the heir of Isaiah, who in God’s name condemned the anti-Assyrian party at Hezekiah’s court who futilely put their faith in Egypt’s horses and chariots galore (Isa 31:1-3).”<sup>781</sup> As in verse 9, Ezekiel again asks a series of rhetorical questions about the success of this venture. Beginning with the same question, Ezekiel uses the same wording, “will he prosper/succeed (יִצְלַח)?” (v. 9a, 15c). Could Zedekiah possibly expect to escape from breaking the covenant? Bowen states, “the exiles who had already felt Nebuchadnezzar’s wrath in 597 BC could tell Zedekiah he could no more stand against Nebuchadnezzar than a plucked-up vine against an east wind.”<sup>782</sup>

Up to this point, Yahweh’s role has been passive, relaying information through Ezekiel. Now in verse 16, Yahweh speaks, answering with an oath formula of his own: “As I live” (כִּי־חַיִּי), followed by the signature formula “declares the Lord Yahweh” (אֲנִי־יְהוָה), and the strong

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<sup>780</sup> Allen et al., *Ezekiel 1-19*, 257.

<sup>781</sup> Ibid.

<sup>782</sup> Bowen, *Ezekiel*, 117-118.

affirmation “if not, surely” (אִם-לֹא). Yahweh declares because Zedekiah “despised the oath” and “broke the covenant,” calamity would come. Yahweh now pronounces two disasters that will befall the Judean king, who regarded the fealty oath with contempt and breached the covenant made in *his* (Yahweh’s) name.<sup>783</sup> The first disaster is proclaimed; the king will die in Babylon. 2 Kings 25:7 records that this takes place after the fall of Jerusalem in 587/6 BC. Zedekiah was forced to watch the slaughter of his sons and then was blinded and dragged into exile where he died. This fate lay squarely on the shoulders of Zedekiah, who Jeremiah had repeatedly warned that God was the one directing the affairs of Babylon, and it was God’s will that he surrenders to their rule (Jer 27:5-7; 38:17-18). Once judgment of the nation was inevitable, God’s desire was for Judah to submit to his punishment through foreign domination as a sign of obedience to him (Jer 38:17-23). Despising his oath and breaking his covenant with Nebuchadnezzar was, in effect, rebellion, and apostasy against Yahweh.<sup>784</sup>

The second pronouncement of Yahweh was that Pharaoh would not come to Zedekiah’s aid when Nebuchadnezzar inevitably laid siege against Jerusalem for this rebellion (v. 17). This prophecy correlates to the Judean revolt that broke out sometime in 589 BC when the rebels looked to Egypt for support.<sup>785</sup> However, Psammetichus II, the pharaoh with whom Zedekiah made the alliance, died sometime in 588 BC.<sup>786</sup> His successor, Apries/Hophra (589-570 BC),

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<sup>783</sup> Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 250; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2012), 84.

<sup>784</sup> LaMar Eugene Cooper, *Ezekiel: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, NAC (Bielefeld, Germany: B&H Publishing Group, 1994). 151.

<sup>785</sup> Greenburg, “Ezekiel 17 and the Policy of Psammetichus II,” 307.

<sup>786</sup> Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 250. Forshaw notes that Psamtek became ill and died early in 589 BC, and his death is attested by Petiese and recorded on the Ankhnesneferibre adoption stela. Forshaw, *Egypt of the Saite Pharaohs*, 140.

with whom Judah now looked for help, seemed to support Zedekiah initially. Jeremiah 37:5 states that the Egyptian army did come out moving toward Jerusalem, and the presence of the Egyptian army caused the Babylonians to withdraw and move out to meet the Egyptians temporarily.<sup>787</sup> An ostrakon found at the site of Tell ed-Duweir (ancient Lachish) confirms the involvement of the Egyptians and mentions that a commander of the Judean army was sent to Egypt.<sup>788</sup> However, in the end, this alliance did not prove successful, the Egyptians returned to their own land, and the Babylonians came back (Jer 37:6-7; cf. Ezek 30:20-26).<sup>789</sup> Because Zedekiah “despised the oath,” “broke the covenant,” and “gave his hand” (which might reference a handshake as a formal part of the treaty)<sup>790</sup> in Yahweh’s name (v. 18; cf. 1 Chr 36:13), he could not escape the coming judgment.

Ezekiel 17:19-21 correlate with and are similar to verses 9-10, where a dual judgment is given. There is a discrepancy in verse nine, which appears to contradict the effort with which Nebuchadnezzar defeats Zedekiah. Verse nine declares the eagle uproots the vine with little effort, “no strong arm or mighty army will be needed.” Yet, Nebuchadnezzar did have a great army, and the siege took one and a half to two years before the city fell. This incongruity begs the question, how does one correlate the riddle with the historical events? Block comments that the grammatical construction “leaves the identity of the subject [of verse 9] open to question [...]

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<sup>787</sup> Keown et al., *Jeremiah* 26-52, 217.

<sup>788</sup> P.A. Beaulieu, “History of Israel 6 Babylonian Period,” in *DOTHB*, ed. Tremper III Longman (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2008), 3. Nebuchadnezzar II’s conquest, e-book.

<sup>789</sup> Ibid.

<sup>790</sup> Bowen, *Ezekiel*, 118.

and may be a veiled reference to Yahweh.”<sup>791</sup> In verse ten, the riddle again pronounces judgment, and “the east wind” is given as the instrument of Yahweh’s punishment. The “east wind” is another veiled reference to Yahweh. Similarly, in Hosea 13:15, the east wind is called “the wind of Yahweh,” and in Psalms 104:4, the wind is declared to be the agent of Yahweh’s will.<sup>792</sup> The riddle and interpretation both present a duality in which verses 16-18 look to Nebuchadnezzar to punish Zedekiah on an earthly plane and verses 19-21 posit that it is not Nebuchadnezzar that uproots Zedekiah but Yahweh himself who sends the king into exile on a divine plane.<sup>793</sup> Bodi comments, “here the prophecies have been ‘radicalized’ in a unique way by presenting the offense against the king of Babylon as an offense against the Lord.”<sup>794</sup> This explanation of both Nebuchadnezzar and Yahweh as the dual agents of judgment connects with an earlier vision in Ezekiel 9 in which Ezekiel declares it is not the Babylonians who will lay Jerusalem waste, but the Lord, and Babylon is only the means used for God’s purposes.<sup>795</sup>

The duality of earthy and divine is presented in the opening statement of verse 19. It begins like verse 16, adding the conjunction “therefore” (לְכֵן), followed by a repetition of the divine formula “thus says the Lord Yahweh” (כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה), the oath formula “as I live” (חַי־אֲנִי), and the strong affirmation “surely” (אִם־לֹא). The verdict is again rendered because of the accusations given in the previous verse (v. 18, cf. v. 15); Yahweh is now pronouncing a second judgment, this time for religious unfaithfulness. The charges are again laid out, but now the

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<sup>791</sup> Bowen, *Ezekiel*, 251-252.

<sup>792</sup> Allen et al., *Ezekiel 1-19*, 297.

<sup>793</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>794</sup> Bodi, *Ezekiel*, 17:19, e-book.

<sup>795</sup> Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 99.

reference shifts from “his” (Nebuchadnezzar’s) to “my” (Yahweh’s) oath and covenant, clearly transferring the referent from Nebuchadnezzar to Yahweh.<sup>796</sup> Zedekiah is charged with despising Yahweh’s oath and breaking Yahweh’s covenant. Zedekiah had been warned by Jeremiah (Jer 27:5-8) that submission to Nebuchadnezzar was God’s will, and he had sworn allegiance to the king of Babylon in God’s name (2 Chr 36:13). Thus, his rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar was considered rebellion against God. Now, Yahweh concludes that the breach with Nebuchadnezzar and the condemnation of the alliance with Egypt was on religious rather than political grounds. The breach of oath and covenant (not once but twice!) was actually rebellion against God, who considered foreign alliances political adultery in the same sense that idolatry was regarded as religious adultery (Ezek 16; 23).<sup>797</sup>

Verses 20-21 describe in vivid metaphoric detail how Yahweh will come for Zedekiah like a hunter capturing his prey. The section is framed by an inclusio using the same verb *וּפְרֹשְׁתִּי* “I will spread out” and *וְפָרְשָׁהּ* “will be scattered” at the beginning and end of the judgment linking both events to Yahweh.<sup>798</sup> Ezekiel describes God’s intervention in three phases: 1) Yahweh will spread his net and snare his prey, scattering the survivors; 2) Yahweh will bring Zedekiah to Babylon; 3) Yahweh is the one who will pronounce judgment for his treason.<sup>799</sup> The first two phases are reminiscent of Ezekiel’s earlier words in chapter 12, where he describes the captivity of Judah and its “prince” (v. 10) as a hunter who spreads his net over him and catches him in his snare and scatters to every wind all who are around him (vv. 13-15). The mention of a divine net

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<sup>796</sup> Bowen, *Ezekiel*, 118.

<sup>797</sup> Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 99.

<sup>798</sup> Allen et al., *Ezekiel 1-19*, 260.

<sup>799</sup> Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 252.

echoes a major ancient Near Eastern iconographic and literary motif where the gods would use a net to punish those who committed political perjury.<sup>800</sup> Allen et. al. describe the net in the context of Ezekiel 19:8, where the net is placed on the ground or placed over a pit in the ground. An ambush is set, and the frightened victim is driven to and entangled in the net. In this case, Jerusalem was Yahweh's trap, and Zedekiah was caught like an animal in a net surrounded by the Babylonian siege.<sup>801</sup>

The third phase is different than what has been described before. Historically, Nebuchadnezzar passed judgment against Zedekiah at Riblah (2 Kgs 25:6), but again, there is a duality between human and divine judgment, and verse 20 has Yahweh pronouncing a second judgment in Babylon. This judgment includes the falling of his troops in battle, and the scattering in every direction of those who remained (v. 21). The intent of the riddle and the interpretation (vv. 1-21) was to lay out a sketch of Zedekiah's fate on an earthy plane. Then an allegorical cast is thrown on both, likening (לְפָנָיו) them to the divine plane.<sup>802</sup> In chapter 12, Ezekiel performed a sign act to the "rebellious community" who was loath to listen, this time he paints a picture. He succinctly lays out the interpretation in both a riddle *and* an allegory so the exiles, the king, and the people of Jerusalem would recognize that it was Yahweh who controlled history and Yahweh's word would be fulfilled.<sup>803</sup>

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<sup>800</sup> The use of a net as a divine weapon is found in the Stele of the Vultures, and it also occurs in the Northwest Semitic domain and the Mari "prophetic" letters. The Babylonian poem of Erra mentions the net as a weapon used by the god Erra. Bodi, *Ezekiel*, Ezek 17:20, e-book.

<sup>801</sup> Allen et al., *Ezekiel*, 181-182.

<sup>802</sup> Moshe Greenberg, "Ezekiel 17: A Holistic Interpretation," 153.

<sup>803</sup> Allen et. al., *Ezekiel*, 260.

### **The Final Curse, Expulsion from the Land (2 Kgs 25:1-21; Jer 39:1-10; 52)**

As stated in chapter two, the land of Canaan plays a significant role in the DH as it is associated with the covenantal promises God made with Abraham (Gen 12:7; 15:18; 17:8) and reestablished with Israel (Ex 6:8; 13:11; Deut 1:8, 21; 19:8-9; 29:12-13). Central to the promises associated with the land is the pronouncement that it is a gift of God. However, it is important to note, the land was not given to Israel; they were simply gifted with occupying it (Lev 25:23-24; Deut 9:4-6; 11:8-9; Josh 22:19; Jer 2:7; Ezek 36:5; Hos 9:3). The land did not belong to Israel, the land always belonged to Yahweh, and their occupation of the land was conditional upon their obedience to the covenant (Deut 28:1-14). If they were disobedient, they would face the curses associated with transgressing the covenant, including the ultimate curse, being “plucked off” (קָטָף) and “uprooted” (שָׁחַט) from the land (Deut 28:63; 29:28). Throughout the DH, the king’s role in the nation’s continued existence on the land was extremely important. The Dtr clearly views the king, as Yahweh’s chosen leader, at the center of national fidelity and puts the responsibility for ensuring covenantal faithfulness through obedience squarely on his shoulders. He was tasked as the covenant administrator (cf. 2 Kgs 17:7-8).

Related to the gift of land was the promise that Yahweh would be the Divine Protector of the land, and, in this regard, the king was instructed to trust and rely solely on Yahweh in the political realm (per the Law of the King in Deut 17:14-20). The king was not to be afraid and resort to those outside of Israel for help because Yahweh promised to protect them with the same “mighty hand and outstretched arm” he used when he brought them out of Egypt (Deut 4:34; 7:18-19). This promise meant the king was not to usurp Yahweh’s role in the area of military security. Because of the failure of the king and the people to comply religiously and politically, over time, God enacted the covenant curses on the land. 2 Chronicles 36:15-16 highlights the



fact that God had persistently sent messengers to warn them. Still, they mocked the messengers, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets until the wrath of God rose without remedy. Thus, God, as the Sovereign of the universe, chose to subjugate Judah under Nebuchadnezzar as his servant as punishment for their sins (e.g., Jer 27:6-7).

Zedekiah was told repeatedly by the prophet Jeremiah that because of Judah's sin, it was God's intended will that she submits to Babylon, and Ezekiel reiterated this mantra (e.g., Jer 27:6, 11; 38:17; Ezek 17). God told the king he was the one using Nebuchadnezzar to humble the monarchy and the people for their infidelity, and if they would accept and submit to Babylon, they would remain on the land (Jer 27:11; Ezek 17:6, 14). However, the warnings fell on deaf ears, for Zedekiah and his officials yearned for independence and greatness (cf. Ezek 17:8). Instead of compliance and trust in Yahweh's plan, he first looked to the surrounding nations and then to Egypt for protection and aid. In the eyes of Yahweh, Zedekiah's political apostasy was the last straw, signaling the end of Judah and the ultimate curse, expulsion from the land. 2 Chronicles 36:12-13 relates that Zedekiah, "did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke from the mouth of the Lord. He also rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God. He stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the Lord, the God of Israel." In turn, Yahweh was so angered that he "expelled them from his presence" (2 Kgs 24:20). There was now no turning back, the fall and exile were imminent.

*The Siege and Capture of Jerusalem and Zedekiah (2 Kgs 25:1-7; Jer 39:1-7; 52:4-11)*

Both the Dtr and Jeremiah are very specific because Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar (and Yahweh), on the tenth day of the tenth month in Zedekiah's ninth year

(588/587 BC); Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem (2 Kgs 24:20-25:1; Jer 39:1-1; 52:3-4).<sup>804</sup>

The significance of this event in the biblical narrative is evident in its near-exact repetition of the fall of Jerusalem in three passages of scripture, 2 Kings 25:1-21, Jeremiah 39:1-10, and Jeremiah 52. When Zedekiah realized that all of his political conniving was in vain and the city was now under siege, he turned to Jeremiah and sent an envoy requesting that he pray for the city (Jer 21:1-3; 37:3). Zedekiah relays through his embassy that perhaps the Lord will perform a “wonderful deed” for his people, as he had often done in the past (Jer 21:2).<sup>805</sup> This delegation and request bears a striking resemblance to the actions of Hezekiah a century earlier, who sent an envoy to the prophet Isaiah, and this may be the very event to which Zedekiah is referring as occurring “in the past” (2 Kgs 19:1-4, see chapter 5 above). Zedekiah was probably hoping that God would once again intervene and protect his city, like the miraculous intervention bestowed on Hezekiah who was under siege by the mighty Sennacherib of Assyria.<sup>806</sup> However, unlike Hezekiah (cf. 2 Kgs 19), Zedekiah did not want to humble himself in repentance before the Lord. He did not want to listen to the prophet and be submissive to Yahweh’s will, which in this case, was through surrender to the Babylonians (cf. Jer 21:8-9; 37:2; 38:17).

Due to his lack of submission, the siege lasted a year and a half to two years. 2 Kings 25:8 (cf. Jer 52:6) relays that because of the siege, the famine became severe, and the people were without food. By Zedekiah’s eleventh year, the city was so weak that the walls were

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<sup>804</sup> Sweeney avers this was 10 Tevet = December-January in 587 BC. Sweeney, *1 and 2 Kings*, 466. Thiele argues it was January 15<sup>th</sup>, 588 BC. Edwin R. Thiele, “The Chronology of the Kings of Judah and Israel,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 3, no. 3 (1944): 182. This discrepancy can be explained by the unanswered question of whether the text was reckoned by the Tishri or Nisan calendars. For more regarding the date, see, Malamat, “The Last Kings of Judah and the Fall of Jerusalem,” 137–56.

<sup>805</sup> Mark Roncace, *Jeremiah, Zedekiah, and the Fall of Jerusalem* (New York: t&t clark, 2005), 43.

<sup>806</sup> Ibid.

breached (most conclude probably from the north), and the city fell (2 Kgs 25:3-4; Jer 39:2; 52:5-6).<sup>807</sup> The enemy attack, the famine, and the destruction of the wall were all a fulfillment of the covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28:49-52 which state,

The Lord will bring a nation against you from far away, from the end of the earth, swooping down like an eagle [cf. Ezek 17!], a nation whose language you do not understand [...] it shall eat the offspring of your cattle and the fruit of your ground, until you are destroyed; it also shall not leave you grain, wine, or oil, the increase of your herds or the young of your flock, until they have caused you to perish. they shall besiege you in all your towns until you high and fortified walls, in which you trusted [מִצֻּרֶיךָ], come down throughout all your land.

The following events are related in rapid succession. Jeremiah adds that the Babylonian officials sat in the middle gate after the city was taken, indicating their authority (Jer 39:3-4). When Zedekiah and all the soldiers saw them, they fled by night through the southern gate between the two walls by the king's garden toward the Arabah (Jer 39:3-4; 52:7; 2 Kgs 25:4).<sup>808</sup> Mark Roncace observes the play on the two different meanings of יָצָא in the text of Jeremiah. Jeremiah had urged the king to surrender “go out” (יָצָא) to Babylon (Jer 38:17); instead, the king fled “went out” (יָצָא) away from the Babylonians (Jer 39:4).<sup>809</sup> This flight was in vain for Babylonians swiftly pursued them. Zedekiah's troops deserted him, the king was overtaken in the plains of Jericho and was captured and taken to Nebuchadnezzar in Riblah (2 Kgs 25:5-6; Jer 39:5; 52:8-9). Sweeney reveals that the final acts of Zedekiah take place at Jericho, where Joshua began the conquest of the land. Therefore, the last king is plucked from the land at the very spot where Israel was first gifted with inhabitation, thus bringing the whole history of Israel's time on

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<sup>807</sup> Malamat, “The Last Kings of Judah,” 154-155.

<sup>808</sup> Keown et al., *Jeremiah 26-52*, 230; Sweeney, *1 and 2 Kings*, 466.

<sup>809</sup> Roncace, *Jeremiah, Zedekiah, and the Fall of Jerusalem*, 118.

the land full circle from beginning to end (cf. Josh 6).<sup>810</sup> The final acts of Nebuchadnezzar are swift and severe as he passes judgment on his rebellious vassal. In keeping with the typical treaty curses of the day for failure to comply with the treaty, Zedekiah's sons were slaughtered, his nobles were killed, he was blinded, and taken into exile (2 Kgs 25:7; Jer 39:6-7).<sup>811</sup>

*The Final Act, Destruction and Expulsion (2 Kgs 25:8-21; Jer 39:8-10; 52:12-30)*

A month after the city fell, Nebuchadnezzar ordered the destruction of the temple, the palace, and all the great houses of Jerusalem, which were burned with fire. Thus, fulfilling the prophecy of Jeremiah in which "burn it with fire" is repeated verbatim no fewer than five times (Jer 21:10; 43:2; 34:22; 37:8, 10).<sup>812</sup> The army also broke down the walls of Jerusalem and carried seventy-two more leaders, including the chief priest, those that served in the temple, officers, and those from the court, to Riblah, where they were put to death (2 Kgs 25:10, 18-21). Lastly, they carried into exile the rest of the people left in the city, leaving only the poorest of the land (2 Kgs 25:11-12).

This section also reviews the destruction and looting of various items in the temple in detail. Of note is the mention of these items in relation to Solomon, who was the temple builder. Sweeney points out,

the detailed account of the temple fixtures and vessels dismantled and carried off by the Babylonians offers a striking contrast with the detailed account of Solomon's efforts to build the temple in 1 Kgs 6-8. By harkening back to the temple building account, the

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<sup>810</sup> Sweeney, *1 and 2 Kings*, 467.

<sup>811</sup> Ibid.

<sup>812</sup> Keown et al., *Jeremiah* 26-52, 216.

narrative emphasizes the sense of reversal from the glory days of Solomon to the present reality of a devastated city and a population now exiled from the land.<sup>813</sup>

All of the things that symbolized the magnificence, power, and protection of Yahweh are looted and destroyed, and the blessings associated with the presence of Yahweh are no more.<sup>814</sup> Judah's end is sadly characterized, like Israel's, by violence, death, and expulsion (cf. 2 Kgs 17).<sup>815</sup> The final sentence in this unit, "so Judah went was taken into exile out of its land," repeats the fate of Israel and is one of degradation and hopelessness (2 Kgs 25:21; cf. 17:23).<sup>816</sup> Yet, at the end of the chapter, there is a glimmer of hope, as the text relates that Jehoiachin was released from prison and seated at the king's table (vv. 27-30). The last oracle in Ezekiel 17 relays this message of hope in a tangible messianic way.

### **God's Promise of Restoration to the Davidic House (Ezek 17:22-24)**

The final coda in Ezekiel 17:22-24 is the crescendo to the entire chapter as the prophet looks beyond the riddle, allegory, history, and judgment of Zedekiah, to Yahweh as the provider of hope and messianic salvation for the dynasty. Some interpreters (e.g., Barr) see this poetic oracle as a later addition (after the fall of Jerusalem), citing that the reversal from shame, doom, and judgment are too sharp and optimistic to fall on the heels of the previous allegory and interpretation.<sup>817</sup> However, others (e.g., Block, Allen, Bowen) see this as a continuation of the

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<sup>813</sup> Sweeney, *1 and 2 Kings*, 464.

<sup>814</sup> Park, *2 Kings*, 312.

<sup>815</sup> *Ibid.*, 310.

<sup>816</sup> Johanna W. H. Van Wijk-Bos, *The Land and Its Kings: 1-2 Kings* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 297.

<sup>817</sup> Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 100.

previous section, without which the beginning allegory of the vine and the sprig are left unexplained.<sup>818</sup> Block states, “without this coda the presentation has a critical gap.”<sup>819</sup> The opening of the riddle focused on a sprig of a cedar taken to a merchant city. Then the fable abruptly switches to focus entirely on the vine in an unrelated series of events. The hearers are then left to question what happened to the cedar sprig.<sup>820</sup> The present oracle of salvation returns to the imagery associated with the beginning verses of the allegory explaining the fate of the sprig in a positive futuristic way, forming an inclusio of the entire chapter, linking each part to the other.<sup>821</sup> Moshe Greenberg contends the coda suits the body of the oracle and completes it, serving to bind together all the chief elements; therefore “there is no reason for doubting its Ezekielian provenience.”<sup>822</sup>

*God Will Pick a New Leader from the Davidic House – The Messianic Hope (Ezek 17:22)*

Continuing on the heels of the previous verses (Ezek 17:19-21), verse 22 again uses the divine saying formula and sets Yahweh as ultimately in control. This time the focus switches from the agent of Yahweh (Nebuchadnezzar) to Yahweh himself. Now, the Lord is the great eagle highlighted by the emphatic אֲנִי (“I myself”) following the verbs וְלִקְחֶהָּ (“and I will take”) and וְשִׁתְּלֶהָּ (“and I will plant”). Even though Yahweh predicted the demise of Zedekiah (vv. 19-

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<sup>818</sup> Tuell further asserts that the language and imagery occur elsewhere in Ezekiel, such as the “dry tree” (21:3) and high and lofty mountain (40:2), linking it with the writing of the prophet himself. Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 100.

<sup>819</sup> Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 253.

<sup>820</sup> Ibid., 253.

<sup>821</sup> Allen et al., *Ezekiel 1-19*, 292.

<sup>822</sup> Moshe Greenberg, “Ezekiel 17: A Holistic Interpretation,” 151, 154.

21), he promised to provide a new Davidic king and transplant Israel again to the mountain heights of Israel. Steven Tuell states, “the contrast between the vine in verses 1-21, which is destined to be uprooted and left to die, and the sprig in verses 22-24, which the Lord plants and nurtures (see v. 24) shows that the promise of the new beginning was emphatically not seen as applying to the family of those ruling in the land after 597 BCE, but through the family of those deported in 597 BCE.”<sup>823</sup> This text suggests that by plucking up the shoot, Nebuchadnezzar once again acted as Yahweh’s agent of preservation to provide refuge and assurance that a remnant from the house of David would survive. The remnant in Babylon represented the future hope of the nation, and Jehoiachin represented the future hope of the Davidic dynasty.<sup>824</sup> This hope is reflected in the postscripts of both 2 Kings and Jeremiah, where they record that Jehoiachin was not only still alive but released from prison and seated among the kings (2 Kgs 25:27-30; Jer 52:31-34).<sup>825</sup>

Who, then is the sprig in verse 22? Would Ezekiel’s audience assume that Ezekiel proclaimed that God himself would transplant Jehoiachin, the original “shoot,” back to Israel? Several clues in the text dissuade this assumption alluding instead to a future Davidic messianic king. First, even though the same verb לָקַח (“take”) is used as in verse 3, here, there is no expressed object, verse 22a literally reads וְלִקְחֹתִי אֶגֶר מִצִּמְרַת הָעֵרְזָה הַרְמָה “I will take from the high top of a cedar.” The addition of the adjective “high” with the narrower “from the topmost shoot” indicates an individual more prominent than Jehoiachin. Jehoiachin was identified as the

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<sup>823</sup> Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 100.

<sup>824</sup> Block, *Beyond the River Chebar*, 68.

<sup>825</sup> Ibid., 70. These expectations are linked to the fact that Zerubbabel, Jehoiachin’s grandson, was sent back to the land as governor at the beginning of the Persian hegemony (Hag. 1).

“topmost shoot” (v. 4), but the focus of verse 22a is on a sprig taken *from* the “topmost shoot.”<sup>826</sup>

The new planting still comes from the symbolic “top of the cedar,” insinuating that the new planting would be an extension of the line of Jehoiachin and a descendant of the Davidic dynasty (cf. Matt 1:12).<sup>827</sup>

Second, the prophet highlights the particular prominence of the shoot through the unique wording *מֵרֹאשׁ יִנְקוּתָיו רֶחֶק* “from the top of its tender shoots” (v. 22b), again leaving the verb without an explicit object. This “tender shoot” suggests a “special shoot that will provide a fresh new beginning.”<sup>828</sup> This *רֶחֶק* (“tender”) shoot is unique to Ezekiel, yet serves as a forerunner of the messianic figure who will be presented in more detail in later oracles.<sup>829</sup> Other prophets employed similar botanical expressions to the messianic figure who would emanate from the Davidic line. Isaiah utilizes the term “shoot” and “branch” (11:1), and Jeremiah (23:5; 33:15) and Zechariah (3:8; 6:12) refer to a “sprout” that would come.<sup>830</sup>

Third, another messianic marker was that God himself would plant the shoot on a “high and lofty mountain” (*הַר גָּבוֹהַ וְתָלֵוּל* v. 22c). Not a high mountain in an unknown land, but the mountain height of Israel, Yahweh’s planting will take place back on the promised land.<sup>831</sup> This alludes to Ezekiel’s vision in chapter 40, where he is brought to “Israel’s high mountain” to receive the vision of the new temple (40:2). After the failure of both previous eagles, God

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<sup>826</sup> Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 151.

<sup>827</sup> Block, *Beyond the River Chebar*, 63, 65.

<sup>828</sup> Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 151.

<sup>829</sup> Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 254.

<sup>830</sup> Ibid.

<sup>831</sup> Bowen, *Ezekiel*, 119.



himself would plant the new shoot on a high and lofty mountain so that the cedar would once again flourish and grow.

*The Noble Cedar will Bear Fruit and be a Refuge for All (Ezek 17:23)*

In verse 23, more details of the shoot are provided as the location of the mountain where it is planted is specified, the reason for the planting is given, and the recipients that will benefit from the great tree are indicated. First, the promise is given that Yahweh will once again bring back the Davidic house and plant the shoot “on the mountain height of Israel.” The prophet reminds the exiles that God’s intention was not to forget Israel or the covenant he made with David (2 Sam 7) but to redeem her back to the land he promised and again renew his purpose for her (Ezek 36:24-32). Yahweh would be the one to take the shoot out of the stock of the secular cedar to serve his redemptive purposes.<sup>832</sup>

Once planted on the mountain of Israel, the tender shoot will grow into a noble cedar for the express purpose of “creating/making” (נָצַח) boughs and bearing fruit. The fruit that was hoped for in verse 8 finds its fulfillment in verse 23. With the picture of the great cedar, Ezekiel alludes to the well-known extra-biblical motif of the cosmic tree. This tree (not to be confused with the Tree of Life) is portrayed as magnificent and enormous, with its top reaching the heavens and its roots growing down to the subterranean streams from which it draws sustenance.<sup>833</sup> In the ancient Near East, there was an intimate symbolic relationship between the king and the “cosmic tree,” the king was not only the keeper and owner of the tree, but he was

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<sup>832</sup> Robert W. (Robert Walter) Funk, “Looking-Glass Tree Is for the Birds: Ezekiel 17:22-24; Mark 4:30-32,” *Interpretation* 27, no. 1 (January 1973): 4.

<sup>833</sup> Block, *Beyond the River Chebar*, 65.

also the tree.<sup>834</sup> The tree symbolized the divine world order and was considered the central pillar of the universe. Osborne points out that “the tree metaphor was a politically charged symbol of kingship associated with natural and national restoration.”<sup>835</sup> Therefore, the great cosmic tree represented the eschatological Davidic ruler himself, along with the dominion of divine order he would establish in his kingdom.<sup>836</sup>

The tree will be so grand that it will provide shelter for every kind of bird, and every sort of winged creature will be able to nest in the shade of its branches. These birds are not the nations, which are represented by the trees in the next verse, nor are they enemies of Israel. Instead, they represent the earth’s population (those abused by the nations) who will come as refugees to find shelter and sustenance under the shade of the great tree (Ezek 31:6).<sup>837</sup>

*All The Nations Will Recognize God as the Sovereign Lord (Ezek 17:24)*

The last verse in the passage takes the form of a complex recognition formula highlighting the universal impact of the great tree. When all the trees (nations of the earth) see the splendor, protection, and productivity offered by the great tree, they will know that Yahweh is the Lord. This verse turns from Davidic imperialism to the sovereignty of Yahweh.<sup>838</sup> The security and grandeur of the tree come about not by political alliances but by God’s directive,

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<sup>834</sup> William R Osborne, “The Early Messianic ‘afterlife’ of the Tree Metaphor in Ezekiel 17:22-24,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 64, no. 2 (2013): 173.

<sup>835</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>836</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>837</sup> Block, *Beyond the River Chebar*, 66.

<sup>838</sup> Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 255.

evidenced in the language of reversal in four parallel lines. There is a chiastic structure (ABBA) in the first pair with the roots גָּבַהַ ("high") and שָׁפַל ("low").<sup>839</sup>

(A) I bring down  
       (B) the high tree  
       (B') I make high  
       (A') the low tree

The second pair utilizes an inclusio with the word יָבֵשׁ ("dry") as the first word of line three and the last word of line four.<sup>840</sup>

I will cause to *dry* up (הוֹבִישׁתִּי) the tree that is green,  
 And I will cause to bloom the tree that is *dry* (יָבֵשׁ)

These declarations of bringing down the high and raising the low are similarly stated in other passages of the Old Testament (1 Sam 2:7; 2 Sam 22:28; Ps 75:7; 147:6; Is 26:5). God as the "Great Reverser" would have been familiar to Ezekiel's audience. Ezekiel's use of these phrases in this passage directly affirms that in all situations, Yahweh is Sovereign and in control and can reverse high and low as he sees fit.<sup>841</sup> The concrete illustration would be the lowering of the powerful nations such as Babylon and Egypt and the raising once again of Jehoiachin, whose messianic descendant would be lifted to the status of a universal king.

If the hearers had any doubt, the final three lines of the poem reassure them that Yahweh has spoken, and he will act! The foundation of this oracle is found in God's covenant with David (2 Sam 7) and his eternal title to the throne.<sup>842</sup> Just as the exiles represented the future nation,

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<sup>839</sup> Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 255.

<sup>840</sup> Ibid., 355.

<sup>841</sup> Bowen, *Ezekiel*, 119.

<sup>842</sup> Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 255.

Jehoiachin represented the new Davidic house. The king, who had gone into exile at the age of 18, would once again find rehabilitation and honor through one of his descendants.<sup>843</sup> Yahweh promises that he had not forgotten his covenant with David, the Davidic dynasty would survive the exile, and the promise would find fulfillment through a new “David” who would rule forever (Ezek 37:25).<sup>844</sup>

### Summary Conclusion of Chapter 6

Zedekiah, the final Davidic king of Judah, followed in the footsteps of many kings before him, not only in his apostasy and failure to adhere to cultic obedience and Torah administration but also in his apostasy and unfaithfulness to the Lord in the political arena. Throughout our study of the Judean kings in the Dtr and the prophetic corpus, the theological thrust is clear, “the holy God of Israel cannot tolerate sin and demands the sole devotion of his people.”<sup>845</sup> That demand includes not only religious loyalty, but political loyalty as stipulated in the Law of the King (Deut 17). The kings of Israel, like the people, were to be set apart (cf. Ex 19:5-6; Lev 19:2). They were not to be “like the nations” (1 Sam 8:4) and resort to the tactics of those around them, especially regarding security and protection. In fact, the king’s job was to be the leader and administrator of Torah obedience and submission to Yahweh as the Divine King and Suzerain of Israel. The kings were to trust and rely solely on the Lord as their Divine Warrior. Yet, this rarely happened, and because of the failure of so many kings, both religiously and politically, the nation was thrust into disobedience, and Yahweh had begun to enact the covenantal curses listed

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<sup>843</sup> Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 255.

<sup>844</sup> Alen et. al., *Ezekiel*, 262.

<sup>845</sup> L.S. Tiemeyer, “Ezekiel: Book Of,” in *DOTP*, ed. Tremper III Longman (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2008).

in Deuteronomy 28 (cf. Ezek 5:7-8). However, he was inclined to punish without total banishment, instead choosing to discipline through subjugation and submission to a foreign ruler. His chosen instrument was Nebuchadnezzar, who would humble the king and the people without complete destruction.

The prophetic witness of Jeremiah and Ezekiel declared the sin of the people and the king as well as the reason for their punishment. They informed Zedekiah that subjugation was Yahweh's will and warned him of his fate if he chose to disobey. Jeremiah records Zedekiah's first rebellious act through an alliance with the surrounding nations in an attempt to throw off the Babylonian yolk (Jer 27:1-15). To this, Jeremiah declared Yahweh's displeasure at not only Israel's disobedience but the other nations as well, promising that this rebellion would result in demise (Jer 27:8). This attempt was quickly thwarted, and Zedekiah renewed his vow of loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 51:59).

However, this submission did not last long as Zedekiah once again stretched out his hand, looking for salvation through another; this time, he sought deliverance through Egypt. Ezekiel 16 likens these acts of alliance with the surrounding nations to adultery against Yahweh, Israel's husband, and a display of their lack of faith in him. In Ezekiel 17, the focus narrows to Ezekiel's description of the sin and judgment of Zedekiah and is a direct indictment against the king's unfaithfulness in the political arena. Ezekiel declares that because Zedekiah despised the covenant and oath he swore in Yahweh's name with Nebuchadnezzar (cf. 2 Chr 36:13), by seeking the help of the Egyptians, God would despise him. He and the nation would experience God's judgment (Ezek 17:13-16, 18-21).<sup>846</sup> Since it was God using Babylon, Zedekiah's adultery

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<sup>846</sup> Alexander, *Ezekiel, e-book*.

with Egypt amounted to political apostasy against God himself. Zedekiah's rebellion was the last straw, and Yahweh was so angered he removed his people from his presence (2 Kgs 24:20), enacting the final and ultimate curse, expulsion from the land. The city came under siege, was captured, and destroyed. The temple was looted and burned, the officials were killed, and the king and remaining people were taken into exile, fulfilling the last of the curses described in Deuteronomy 28.

Despite the anger and punishment of Yahweh, he never leaves his people without hope of redemption. The theological message found in the last oracle of Ezekiel 17 is that of restoration, rehabilitation, and salvation through the messianic hope of a new Davidic king. Having first foretold of the fall of the Davidic house through the regent Zedekiah in the first two oracles (17:1-21), Ezekiel presents a fresh eschatological messianic hope in the final oracle. A new Davidic shoot will be taken from the top of the cedar (King Jehoiachin) and planted on the lofty mountain of Israel (Ezek 17:22-23; Is 11:1; Jer 23:5-6; 33:15). Even though God's people violated the covenant and commitment they had made, God will remain true to his word.<sup>847</sup> Yahweh's affirmation of the everlasting covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7 gave the nation prophetic hope that he had not forgotten his word and he would fulfill his irrevocable promise. The last oracle of messianic promise in Ezekiel 17 reverses the past judgment. It promises a future hope for the Davidic dynasty, alluding to the coming messianic kingdom where God would bring back his people, once again surround them with his glorious presence, and make all things right.

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<sup>847</sup> Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 256.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to articulate the neglected facet of how political apostasy in the Judean monarchy, contributed to the covenant curses listed in Deuteronomy 28, and, more importantly, the final curse expulsion from the land. First, we aimed to point out five specific instances in the Judean monarchy where the king violated the covenant by committing political apostasy with the surrounding nations. More precisely, the covenant violations included usurping Yahweh's role as Israel's Divine Suzerain and King by giving it to another. The king was to be Yahweh's vice-regent and covenant administrator per the Law of the King (Deut 17:14-20). As a vice-regent of Yahweh, the Law of the King stipulated that Israel's king was especially limited in his ability to defend the nation. These limitations made Israelite kings distinct from other monarchies in the ANE and were purposefully given to elicit trust and encourage faith in Yahweh as their Divine Warrior. Thus, Israel's monarchy was not to be "like the other nations" (cf. Deut 17:14; 1 Sam 8:4) and rely on the tactics of alliance and bribery for national security. Yet often the king failed in this area despite being warned by a prophetic voice that to trust in another for political security and aid would be disastrous. When the kings chose to disobey and go against Yahweh's directive, they were in violation of their oath and were condemned for their infidelity.

Second, this research has demonstrated that the king's disobedience and disregard for the commands of Yahweh in the political arena resulted in the nation experiencing a reversal from God's blessings to God's curses listed in Deuteronomy 28. We showed that when the king was faithful to the covenant and reliant on God as Israel's Divine Warrior for security, even in overwhelming circumstances, Yahweh would fight for them. Yahweh proved there was no need to rely on another. He was sufficient to protect his people, and when the king trusted in him, he

and the nation experienced the blessings of peace, rest, and prosperity. When the king faltered regarding his complete trust in God for Israel's military needs, God inflicted the covenant curses of loss of peace, rest, blessing, and, ultimately, land. A significant contribution of this study has been to show that Zedekiah's apostasy with Egypt was a substantial factor contributing to the final covenant curse of expulsion and exile because it directly defied Yahweh's will.

The third aim of this study was to show that even though apostasy had been committed politically and/or religiously, as the two are ultimately intertwined, Yahweh still proved himself faithful to his covenant. He displayed mercy and loyalty to David by being lenient to his son Solomon. He restored and redeemed when the king was repentant, as in the case of Hezekiah. He also promised hope through another future Davidic King that would be the bearer of peace and prosperity to Israel and all nations.

#### Covenant Infidelity and Political Apostasy in the Judean Monarchy

The Bible conveys central truths about God's sovereignty as Ruler and Lord over the cosmos (e.g., Deut 4:35-39; 1 Kgs 8:60; Ps 33; 47). He alone, as Creator God, is the source of all authority over every nation, and all peoples are subject to him (e.g., Ex 19:5; Ps 24:1-2). As Sovereign over the universe, Yahweh is in control of the affairs of every kingdom and empire, and he can move and manipulate them as he sees fit (e.g., Ex 15:1-18; Is 7:18; Dan 4:17). The scriptures teach that Yahweh is not one of the gods, he is in a class by himself and there is none like him (e.g., Ex 9:14; Deut 33:26; 2 Sam 7:22; Ps 86:8; Jer 10:6). He is the only true God, and no nation can shape its own destiny without him.<sup>848</sup>

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<sup>848</sup> Oswalt, "God," Lord of History, e-book.



Yahweh is also Israel's Divine King and Suzerain in a special way through divine election embodied within the covenant. The covenant bound Israel to the will and purposes of Yahweh as their Suzerain. They were to obey him as their Great King, and in return, he offered protection for their faithfulness and loyalty. The covenant secured the faith of Israel as Yahweh's vassal, and they were obligated to trust in the benevolence of Yahweh as their Overlord. Israel's allegiance and loyal service included the sole worship of and reliance on Yahweh and a rejection of all foreign entanglements where trust was placed elsewhere. Their covenant with Yahweh precluded help from foreign nations as Yahweh promised blessing and aid as their Divine Suzerain. God's covenant with Israel went beyond the ordinary suzerain-vassal treaties and was unique in that it was expressed in the more intimate terms of a marriage contract (e.g., Prov 2:17; Is 54:5; Jer 2:2; Mal 2:14). When the covenant was violated, God was not only betrayed as Israel's suzerain, but he was betrayed on a personal level as her husband, provider, and protector (cf. Ezek 16; 23). When Israel went outside the covenantal bonds religiously, by worshipping other gods, or politically, by relying on other nations, it was considered adultery and apostasy against Yahweh.

As Israel's suzerain and husband, Yahweh established himself as her sole protector and Divine Warrior. He was the God of the armies of Israel (יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת) who goes before his people as a mighty conquering warrior in battle (e.g., Ps 18, Ps 24:8; Ex 14:13-14, 25; Num 10:33-36; Is 30:31-32; Zeph 3:17).<sup>849</sup> As Suzerain over the entire earth, no one can pose a threat to him, nor is anything beyond his control.<sup>850</sup> The cry of the prophets clarifies that Yahweh alone, as Israel's

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<sup>849</sup> Zuck et al., *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, 21b.

<sup>850</sup> Walton, *Old Testament Theology*, 56.

Divine Warrior, was sufficient to protect and guard his people (e.g., Is 31:3-5; Jer 50:25), and any violation of trust in this area was considered covenantal unfaithfulness and was condemned (e.g., Ezek 16; Hos 5; 7:4-16; 8:9). Yahweh's directive was distinct from other nations in this regard, for instead of using military strength on the part of the king, Yahweh promised protection and salvation through obedience as stipulated in the Law of the King (Deut 17:14-20). The king was to be Yahweh's vice-regent and subordinate to Yahweh's role as Israel's Divine King. An essential area of subordination was the limitations set against securing military, diplomatic, and monetary strength.

As Gerbrandt surmised, according to the Law of the King, Yahweh condoned and even supported the monarchy. However, Israel's king was to adapt the culture of the king to fit into the covenant relationship between Yahweh and his people. In other words, the monarchy was to be instituted on Yahweh's terms and conditions, and Yahweh stipulated the kind of king Israel was to have (Deut 17:14-20).<sup>851</sup> An important aspect of the Law of the King was Yahweh's role in national defense, specifying that this was not the responsibility of the king. The burden of the king was to be the covenant administrator by leading the people in Torah obedience. When the king went outside his designated task and usurped the role of Yahweh as Israel's deliverer, he was judged.<sup>852</sup> This mandate was unlike any other nation in the ANE, where national defense was directly related to the duties of the king and considered one of their greatest responsibilities. It was this aspect of the law that made Israel's king unique and counter-cultural. The relationship

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<sup>851</sup> Gerbrandt, "Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History," 178.

<sup>852</sup> Ibid., 156, 272-273.

between Israel and her God required military weakness, not strength, on the part of the king.<sup>853</sup>

The intended result was faith in Yahweh and glory for his name.

Early in the monarchy, Solomon and Asa are good examples of the right kind of king and vice-regent of Yahweh. Their covenant faithfulness resulted in the blessings of peace, rest, and prosperity. Both kings begin their reigns by obeying the Torah and relying on God for wisdom and strength. However, both also show how foreign alliances and political entanglements weaken the king's dependence on Yahweh and lead to political apostasy.

Solomon was presented as the ideal Davidic ruler who, when obedient, was granted wisdom, wealth, and admiration. The Dtr presents him as fulfilling God's covenant promises to Abraham as the nation became the people God had intended when the covenant was instituted. They were numerous, possessed the land of promise, had dominion, and blessed other nations (e.g., Gen 12:2; 15:18-21; Deut 11:24; 28:13; 1 Kgs 4:21). Despite being blessed with the covenant promises, over time, Solomon parted from his role as covenant administrator choosing instead to rely on his own ideals of how the kingdom should be run. He went against the stipulations and limitations presented in the Law of the King and usurped Yahweh's role as Suzerain and Divine Warrior. Even though the Lord spoke directly to him twice, warning him to change his ways and guard his heart and his walk (1 Kgs 11:9; 3:5-14; 9:1-9), Solomon ignored the voice of the Lord and resorted to a form of political apostasy "like the other nations."

He became the wrong kind of king predicted in 1 Samuel 8. Beginning with his marriage to Pharaoh's daughter, Solomon started to accrue many foreign wives for diplomatic security (contra Deut 17:17 and 7:3-4, which strictly forbid intermarriage with foreigners). He also

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<sup>853</sup> Sanchez, "Royal Limitation," 46.

multiplied horses and chariots (1 Kgs 4:26; cf., Deut 17:16) and wealth “for himself,” elevating himself above his fellow Israelites (cf. Deut 17:14-19). Solomon’s compromise indicated he did not trust Yahweh as the only ally he needed. Above all other kings in Israel, he leaned on international marriage alliances as the cornerstone of his foreign policy.

Due to his political apostasy, Solomon’s heart became divided and was no longer entirely devoted to the Lord, and his wives became the catalyst that led to his religious infidelity. Solomon could no longer lead the nation in covenant faithfulness because he had become unfaithful through disobedience (1 Kgs 11:10-11, cf., 2:4; 8:25; 9:4-5). He had ceased to be like David, his heart was not wholly committed (11:4), and he “did evil in the sight of the Lord” (11:6). He relinquished his role as the right kind of king, the covenant administrator, to promote the worship of gods from other nations. Solomon’s political apostasy and lack of faith in the Lord to guard the nation turned into religious apostasy that proved disastrous for the kingdom.

Like Solomon, Asa began his reign as the right kind of king. He was loyal both religiously and politically to Yahweh and experienced the Deuteronomic blessings of peace, rest, and land (2 Chr 14). Yet, also like Solomon, over time, Asa fell victim to political apostasy. When threatened by King Baasha of Israel with the confiscation of the city of Ramah, Asa reacted by taking all of the gold and silver from the temple treasury and the palace and bribing the king of Aram to come to his aid. The result was the formation of an alliance/covenant with Ben-Hadad of Aram (1 Kgs 15:16-19). This was precisely one of the reasons the Law of the King forbade the king to amass too much wealth, to eliminate the temptation to buy the help of others rather than relying on Yahweh.

Asa’s first mistake was to react to the loss of land as if it were his and not Yahweh’s to defend (cf. Lev 25:23; Deut 20:1-4). Second, he is guilty of depleting the temple treasures,

essentially stealing from the Lord to secure the aid he believed was necessary for protection (1 Kgs 16:18). Depleting the treasuries of the temple was consistently viewed by God as a violation of the king's role and always viewed as a negative act by the Dtr. Third, even though warned by the prophet Azariah to remain with the Lord, Asa replaced his covenant to seek the Lord with a covenant with Ben-Hadad of Aram (2 Chr 15:2, 12; 16:3). The seer Hanani rebuked Asa for this misguided act of political dependence on the king of Aram especially after Yahweh had proven faithful as the Divine Warrior in the battle with Zerah (2 Chr 16:7-9). Asa lost sight of his responsibility as covenant administrator and took on a role not designed for the king. In turn, the nation experienced the loss of blessing and the covenant curse of war and strife (2 Chr 16:9).

Chapter five focused on two additional kings in the eighth century who were guilty of political apostasy, Ahaz and Hezekiah. Even though these kings are very different from one another religiously, they are both faulted for looking to other nations for protection and aid instead of relying on Yahweh. Because of their unfaithfulness in the political arena, both monarchs experience the resulting consequences of loss of peace, rest, and land.

Ahaz's religious and political apostasy was the most severe of any monarch of Judah up to that point, and his unfaithfulness had significant and lasting consequences for the nation. Cultically, Ahaz was condemned by the Dtr for his resemblance to the northern nation of Israel and the pre-Israelite inhabitants of the land in his abominable worship practices (2 Kgs 16:1-4). The text also subtly paints a dire picture of the consequences of Ahaz's political apostasy on the religious affairs of the nation, as worship and loyalty to Yahweh are cast aside in the form of temple modifications "because of the king of Assyria" (2 Kgs 16:18). This list of offenses immediately reveals from the start that Ahaz is the wrong kind of king per the Law of the King. He was the antithesis of David, he had no regard for the Yahweh or the Torah, and in every way,

he had become “like the other nations” (Deut 17:14; 1 Sam 8:4-9). Much like Solomon, Ahaz proves that political and religious apostasy are often intertwined, resulting in the rejection of the word of God and the covenant curses associated with disobedience.

The infidelity of Ahaz in the religious arena set the stage for the political weakness and betrayal that followed, which compromised Judah’s independence and distinctiveness as a nation that relied on Yahweh as their suzerain and protector. In what is known as the Syro-Ephraimite War, Judah was attacked by two political foes, Israel and Aram. They aimed to conquer Jerusalem and put a compliant non-Davidic king on the throne. At the same time, Judah experienced additional attacks in the south and the west (2 Kgs 16:5-6; 2 Chr 28:17). The prophet Isaiah supplies that it was a dire time for both the king and the people (Is 7:2). Yet, Isaiah brings a word of hope from the Lord declaring his sovereignty over the entire situation and his control over every nation. Through several oracles, Isaiah focuses on the importance of the king placing all his faith and trust in Yahweh as Judah’s hope and salvation in the face of this overwhelming threat (Is 7, 8). Isaiah reassures the king that Yahweh would be faithful to his covenant with David (cf. 2 Sam 7). He also reaffirms with holy war language that the Lord was in control. Yahweh was with his people as their Divine Warrior, and the king need not fear; Yahweh would fight for them (Is 7:4; cf. Deut 20:3).

However, even after a direct promise from the Lord through the prophet Isaiah and the offer of two signs, Ahaz refused to listen, instead turning to another for redemption. Like Asa before him, Ahaz pilfered money from the temple and palace to bribe Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria to come to his aid. Thus, placing his faith and trust elsewhere for salvation instead of on Yahweh. 2 Kings 16:7 reiterates through the words “servant” and “son” that the political apostasy of Ahaz was also worse than any king thus far as he ultimately pledged covenant

loyalty to Tiglath-Pileser as his new overlord. This changed the course of the nation and committed Judah as a vassal of Assyria. His actions were a deliberate rejection of Yahweh as the Divine Suzerain as he handed control of the country to another. Trusting in another through a bribe and giving the kingdom to another suzerain, coupled with his religious apostasy, showed that Ahaz was the epitome of a king “like the other nations” and the wrong kind of king stipulated in the Law of the King.

In contrast to his father, Hezekiah is presented as one of the most godly kings of Judah. The Dtr attests that he “did what was right” religiously, and he is recorded as the king who trusted like no other (2 Kgs 18:3, 5). Nevertheless, even though he was steadfast in his worship of Yahweh, he, too, succumbed to the lure of political adultery. It was not enough that Hezekiah was faithful religiously; Yahweh demanded sole allegiance in every aspect of the monarchy, including political dependence. Hezekiah faltered in his complete trust in Yahweh as his Divine Warrior and protector and was found guilty of seeking the help of others.

Like many before him, international conflict brought the true loyalty of the king to the forefront. As with other kings, this conflict represented a turning point in the king’s life where he must choose where to place his trust for deliverance. Instead of putting his complete confidence in Yahweh to defend the nation, Hezekiah tried to rely on his own strength and fell into the sin of political disloyalty. He joined a coalition of surrounding nations, which included Egypt, hoping to secure their aid and bolster his position against Assyria (2 Kgs 18:21, 20:12-19). Isaiah condemned this union, especially the alliance with Egypt, as unapproved by God and in violation of his will (Is 30:1-2). Unfortunately, Hezekiah did not listen to the prophet’s voice concerning foreign policy. Thinking he knew best, he chose to disobey the Lord and continued to seek the help of others. When Babylon rebelled against Assyria, Hezekiah rejoiced over the prospect of

another ally, offering his wealth (contra the Law of the King) to also garner their support (2 Kgs 20:7-18). Hezekiah made the same mistake as those before him, handling political matters like the surrounding nations. He relied on his own strength, wealth, military, and alliances instead of putting his faith and trust in Yahweh as the Divine Warrior. In Yahweh's eyes, this lack of trust was viewed as a blatant disregard for his power to deliver and save (Is 31:1). Isaiah chastised Hezekiah for his consistent unfaithfulness and pronounced the covenant curse of destruction (Is 39:6-7).

The last monarch of this study and the final king of Judah, Zedekiah, was neither faithful religiously nor politically, and as was revealed, his sin led to the final curse of expulsion and exile. Because of the repeated and overwhelming sin of the kings of Judah and the people, the covenant curses were already initiated. Yahweh had chosen to punish the nation through subjugation to the Babylonians. Even though Yahweh intended to discipline through submission to Nebuchadnezzar, in his mercy, he was willing to let the people remain in the land. However, as shown repeatedly in the reigns of others before him, Zedekiah failed to adhere to his role in the Law of the King as the covenant administrator and vice-regent. He did not fully trust in the Lord and comply with his will as the Divine King, choosing instead to resort to the same strategies as the surrounding nations by seeking political stability through alliance and compromise.

Once again, as with each of the other kings, Yahweh spoke through his prophets to dissuade the king from seeking aid from another. Zedekiah received repeated warnings from Jeremiah to simply remain still and trust in Yahweh and his plan (e.g., Jer 21:1-10; 34:1-3), but he was unresponsive to the prophet's plea and chose to be unfaithful not once, but twice. First, Zedekiah showed infidelity by allying with the surrounding nation-states to rebel against



Babylon. This coalition was condemned by Yahweh, who had stipulated he was the sovereign of every nation and could give control to whomever he wished, which at present was Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 27:3-8). Jeremiah declared that if the coalition resisted Yahweh's directive, they would experience destruction and curses (v. 8, 11).

Second, Zedekiah looked to Egypt as his savior seeing Pharaoh as a powerful ally, once again committing political adultery by not trusting in Yahweh and rejecting the word of the Lord (cf. Ezek 16, 23). As Ezekiel metaphorically states, Zedekiah wanted more than a humble existence; he wanted to become a "noble vine" through exaltation and independence (Ezek 17:8; 14). To accomplish his objective and break free from under the thumb of Nebuchadnezzar, against God's wishes, he turned to Egypt, violating the oath and covenant he made in Yahweh's name with Nebuchadnezzar (vv. 13-15). In turn, he is guilty of also violating his oath and covenant with Yahweh by "playing the whore with Egypt" (v. 19; 23:19). Zedekiah proved unfaithful to the Lord (twice), and his final act of adultery was the catalyst that sent the nation into exile.

#### From Blessings to Curses

The second aim of this research has been to demonstrate that the king's disobedience and disregard for the commands of Yahweh in the political arena led to the reversal from God's blessings to the initiation of the covenant curses listed in Deuteronomy 28. The blessings and curses include peace and rest versus conflict and war, agricultural and monetary blessings versus plague and need, and ultimately the gift of land versus expulsion and exile. We demonstrated that if Israel was loyal, they were exceedingly blessed; however, if they were unfaithful, they were subject to curses.

The most substantial blessing given by Yahweh was the land of Canaan. The land was always considered a gift from Yahweh, but possession of it and life in it were conditioned upon faithfulness and obedience to the covenant. In this regard, the king's role was extremely important. As Yahweh's chosen leader, the king was responsible for ensuring the continued existence of the people in the land. The king was accountable for covenant faithfulness through modeling Torah obedience and reliance on Yahweh. If the king proved faithful, Israel was granted security and rest (נוח) from their enemies. The king's role was not to trust in himself or his military strength to guarantee the possession of the land or rest from enemies; instead, he was to trust Yahweh as his Divine Warrior. Thus, the land and the rest were promised based on obedience, not might. The king was not to be afraid and resort to those outside for help but instead to trust and have faith because Yahweh vowed to protect them with the same "mighty hand and outstretched arm" he used when he brought them out of Egypt (Deut 4:34; 7:18-19).

The Dtr places the sole responsibility for national obedience or apostasy firmly on the king's shoulders and evaluates each king based on his "rightness" in adhering to the Torah and loyalty to Yahweh. When the king was obedient in his role, the nation was blessed; if he failed, the curses followed, culminating in the extreme curse of expulsion from the land. Chapter three showed that when the king exercised complete trust and faithfulness in Yahweh in the political arena, despite the severe limitations placed on the monarchy in the Law of the King, they were rewarded with protection, rest, blessing, and land. This chapter proved that political obedience was the *Sitz im Leben* of the text and political unfaithfulness was unnecessary as God showed himself faithful as the Divine Warrior early in the Judean monarchy.

Using David as a prototype, the Dtr set the standard for not only what a cultically devoted king looks like but also what a politically devoted king looks like. Because of his faithfulness to

the covenant, David became the model of the right kind of king against which all others are measured. David was loyal internally and did what was “right” in God’s eyes by loving and serving him wholeheartedly. David was also faithful externally by walking in obedience and trusting in Yahweh as Israel’s Divine Warrior in his political entanglements. Three other kings, Abijah, Asa, and Jehoshaphat, were highlighted to prove that political reliance and trust in Yahweh, amid even the most overwhelming political encounters, proved that Yahweh never failed to come to their aid. When each king exercised trust and commitment to Yahweh as their Divine Warrior, they experienced a substantial victory. The kingdom was blessed with peace and rest, the accumulation of plunder after the victory, and the land was secured (or territory was gained). Most importantly, Yahweh gained glory for the victory, which was precisely the objective behind the Law of the King.

Solomon experienced the same prosperity when he was faithful to the Lord, and the land had peace, security, and rest. However, the blessings were revoked, and he suffered the covenant curses when he displayed unfaithfulness. His downfall came as the result of his political apostasy through his foreign marriages to secure international alliances, which the Lord viewed as unfaithfulness. The consequence of his sin, the loss of peace, rest, and land, came in the form of three adversaries who, ironically, were political opponents sent by God (1 Kgs 11:14, 23, 25). The judgment from the Lord began with two adversaries who fought against Israel and took from them the territories of Edom and Damascus. The final adversary came from within Israel as God raised up Jeroboam to divide the kingdom, taking all but two tribes from Solomon’s son. Thus, instead of securing his kingdom with his many foreign alliances, his numerous diplomatic

marriages paved the way for the nation's division and decline.<sup>854</sup> From the curse of the division of the land, the nation would never recover.

Asa, in a similar way, lost sight of his loyalty to Yahweh in the political arena. At the beginning of his reign, he trusted completely in the protection of Yahweh against the vast army of Zerah the Ethiopian (2 Chr 14:9-15) and was rewarded and blessed with peace and rest. However, during his long reign, he lost sight of his trust in Yahweh as the nation's Divine Warrior and used his resources to place his faith in an alliance with Ben-Hadad of Aram for security and aid. Because of this infidelity, the prophet Hanani specified two consequences. First, Hanani states that Asa missed an opportunity to defeat the Syrian army and claim victory over what would later become a longstanding enemy (2 Chr 16:7; cf. 2 Chr 18:30; 2 Kgs 15:5). Through his disobedience, he missed out on an opportunity to defeat both Baasha and Ben-Hadad. Second, his political apostasy reversed God's previous blessing of peace and rest, and now he would experience the covenant curse of continual war without the complete protection of God (2 Chr 15:15; 16:9).

Unfortunately, later in life, Asa neglected his commitment to seeking the Lord and became the wrong kind of king. He did this by building up his own national defense (2 Kgs 15:23-24) and relying on the aid of a foreign nation instead of the protection and security provided by Yahweh. His sin reversed God's blessing and led to more curses. The negative consequences are continued in both Kings and Chronicles with the notice of Asa's conscription of forced labor, much like the surrounding nations and in violation of the Law of the King, and

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<sup>854</sup> Yosef Green, "The Reign of King Solomon," 156.

the disease he acquired in his feet late in his reign (1 Kgs 15:22-23; 2 Chr 16:10, 12; cf. Deut 17:20).

Unlike Solomon or Asa, Ahaz was never faithful to the Lord. Although his actions of bribing another to come to his aid were similar to Asa's, his entire reign was characterized by religious and political apostasy from beginning to end. Isaiah records the grave consequences of Ahaz's disobedience and misplaced trust, which were the worst of the kings thus far. Ahaz thought he was gaining a deliverer and ally; instead, his political apostasy would ensure that the land would be overrun (flooded) and destroyed by the very one in whom he was placing his trust (Is 8:7-8; cf. 2 Kgs 18:13). Ahaz envisioned that Assyria would usher in the blessing associated with peace and rest. The very blessings that were promised by faith in Yahweh! Isaiah predicted that instead of blessing, Judah would experience the curse of fear, plundering, loss of land, and war (Is 7:23-25). Isaiah reiterates that when Yahweh was discarded and rejected for another, he would turn against his people. Instead of being a rock and sanctuary to run to for safety, he would become a stumbling stone that led to ruin (Is 8:14). Ahaz had chosen the wrong suzerain, and because he refused to trust in Yahweh, Isaiah promised the nation would stumble and fall, be broken, and taken (Is 8:16; cf. Deut 28:15-68).

Some of the curses Isaiah predicted against Ahaz fell on his son Hezekiah because he, too, committed political apostasy. Hezekiah had employed the same tactics as his father, he looked to the surrounding states, Egypt, and Babylon for security, protection, and aid. The prophet Isaiah condemned Hezekiah for this infidelity and announced the Lord's anger for looking to everyone else as the source of strength instead of him (Is 30:1-2). Isaiah then pronounced judgment on both the house of Judah and the surrounding nations who helped her (Is 31:1-3).

The judgment against Hezekiah came to the forefront in his confrontation with Sennacherib, king of Assyria, in 701 BC (2 Kgs 18:13-19:37). Because of his political unfaithfulness and reliance on everyone but Yahweh, Yahweh took his hand of protection off of Judah. In the eyes of the Lord, these alliances were considered political adultery and made the king subject to the curses of war, strife, and loss of land. These curses fell when Sennacherib invaded, taking all the fortified cities of Judah, and threatening to take Jerusalem. Hezekiah, still relying on his own wit and strength, resorts again to the tactics of the surrounding nations. He raids the temple treasury attempting to appease the Assyrian king and buy his redemption. This, too, failed as Sennacherib surrounded Jerusalem, demanded surrender, and threatened deportation. As argued above, any political maneuver employed by Hezekiah would continue to prove futile and initiate more curses on the kingdom until Hezekiah realized that the only trustworthy source of strength came from Yahweh as Judah's Divine Warrior and Savior. The Dtr takes great pains to point out that this political conflict would push Hezekiah to choose where to place his trust for deliverance and to whom he would choose to listen.

Though Hezekiah eventually chose to fully trust in Yahweh, those kings (with the exception of Josiah) that came after him did not, and Yahweh could no longer tolerate the accumulation of sin. The culmination of Judah's infidelity, both religiously and politically, fell on Zedekiah. The covenant curses had been initiated, and he was tasked with adhering to the discipline of Yahweh under the vassalship of Nebuchadnezzar. Yet, he rebelled, breaking his oath, and despising his covenant. The final curses to befall the king and nation were now enacted. First, the king's sons were killed, and he was taken to Babylon (2 Kgs 25:7). Second, Jerusalem was put under siege and captured, the temple was looted, and the city was burned.

Third, the gift of God, the promise of land, was revoked as the people were “plucked off” and “uprooted” from the land and taken into exile (Deut 28:63; 29:28; 2 Kgs 25:1-21).

### Covenant Fidelity and the Promise of Redemption

The last aspect of this study showed that despite infidelity, apostasy, and punishment, Yahweh is forgiving and merciful. He remembers his people and his covenant and promises hope and redemption for the future. In the case of Solomon, God showed mercy because of the covenantal promises he made to David (2 Sam 7), revealing that Solomon’s failure did not undo God’s promises. In his mercy, Yahweh did not take the entire nation away from Solomon’s son, displaying an act of grace that mitigates the full measure of the law. God does punish, but because of his covenantal faithfulness to David, he promised that the punishment will not last forever (1 Kgs 11:39). Judgment will eventually turn into blessing through God’s promise of an everlasting dynasty.

Again, God showed his faithfulness to his covenant, this time amidst the grave apostasy of Ahaz. Isaiah looked beyond the wayward disobedient king to bring hope for another future Davidic monarch who was faithful. Yahweh demonstrated that his plans as the Divine King would endure despite the faithlessness of the human ruler. The future King would bring salvation and God’s presence in a unique way (Is 7:14; 9:7). He would lead the people from darkness to light, death to joy, and oppression to freedom (Is 9:2-4). He would be the Prince of Peace, the Messiah, and the bearer of continual blessing. Isaiah guarantees this promise through the “zeal of the Lord of hosts” (Is 9:7), an assurance that Yahweh would jealously watch over his people with all his strength. Ahaz rejected the Lord of Hosts as his Divine Warrior, but God promised that he would restore and bring salvation through another, and he guaranteed it through the very name Ahaz rejected.

The religious apostasy of Ahaz made it impossible for him to turn to Yahweh and place his complete trust in him as the Divine Warrior in a dire political situation. In contrast, *because of* his religious commitment to Yahweh, Hezekiah was able to see his transgression, amend his ways, repent, and turn his complete confidence to Yahweh for deliverance. This was the key to changing the fate of the nation. Because of Hezekiah's concession, renewed trust, and total dependence on Yahweh, the Lord heard his prayer, lifted the curses, and responded with action. Once again, God promises redemption through the "zeal of the Lord of Hosts" (2 Kgs 19:31; 31; Is 37:32). This promise stipulated that through the miraculous, the Divine Warrior would fight for his people. The narrative of Hezekiah is a purposeful addition to the DH to show that past mistakes can be overturned when one turns back to Yahweh in full submission. Hezekiah reveals apostasy has devastating consequences, but trust and adherence to Yahweh results in deliverance and redemption. Ultimately, his past sins were forgiven, and a renewed verdict was rendered. Hezekiah became known as the king who trusted in Yahweh like no other.

The faithfulness of king Hezekiah did not last as the final kings of Judah led the nation further and further from the Lord, culminating in the enactment of the final curse of expulsion and exile under King Zedekiah. However, exile proves to be not only the definitive act of punishment but an aspect of hope and salvation for God's people. After God's final judgment against his people, Ezekiel suggests that the "shoot" of David (Jehoiachin) was taken to Babylon for safekeeping. He was preserved to provide refuge and assurance that there would be a remnant of the Davidic line (Ezek 17:3-4). Yahweh promised that from this shoot would come another, one who would provide a new beginning and be planted by God himself in the promised land. Yahweh declared he would redeem his covenant and bless every nation through a new Davidic ruler who would reign forever (Ezek 17:22-24; 37:25).





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