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Drought, Famine, Plague and Pestilence

Ancient Israel's Understandings of and Responses to Natural Catastrophes

Warren C. Robertson

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to Cathy, Warren and Samuel.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	*Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York, 1992
AcT	*Acta theologica*
AJA	*American Journal of Archaeology*
ANET	*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. Edited by J. B. Pritchard. 3rd ed. Princeton, 1969
BA	*Biblical Archaeologist*
BAR	*Biblical Archaeology Review*
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
BRev	*Bible Review*
BTB	*Biblical Theology Bulletin*
BZ	*Biblische Zeitschrift*
CAD	*The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*. Chicago, 1956–
CANE	*Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*. Edited by J. Sasson. 4 vols. New York, 1995
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CM	Cuneiform Monographs
COS	*The Context of Scripture*. Edited by W. W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, Jr. 3 vols. Leiden, 1997–2003
CW	*Classical World*

DDD	*Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*. 2nd edition. Edited by K. van der Toorn, B. Becking, and P. W. van der Horst. Leiden, 1995
EA	El-Amarna Tablets
EvQ	*Evangelical Quarterly*
EvT	*Evangelische Theologie*
ExpTim	*Expository Times*
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
HBC	*Harper's Bible Commentary*
HBT	*Horizons in Biblical Theology*
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IEJ	*Israel Exploration Journal*
IJT	*Indian Journal of Theology*
JAA	*Journal of Anthropological Archaeology*
JANESCU	*Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JBQ	*Jewish Bible Quarterly*
JCS	*Journal of Cuneiform Studies*
JEA	*Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
JSOTSupp	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
LÄ	*Lexicon der Ägyptologie*. Edited by W. Helck, E. Otto, and W. Westendorf. Wiesbaden, 1975–
LXX	Septuagint
MHRC	*Mental Health, Religion & Culture*
MT	Masoretic Text
NedTT	*Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift*
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NJPS	*Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text*
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OEANE	*The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*. Edited by Eric M. Meyers. New York, 1997
OTG	Old Testament Guides
OTL	Old Testament Library

PAPS	*Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*
RB	*Revue biblique*
Rel	*Religion*
RelEd	*Religious Education*
RevExp	*Review and Expositor*
RHPR	*Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses*
RlA	*Reallexikon der Assyriologie*. 6 vols. Edited by Erich Ebeling, *et al.* Berlin, 1928–
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLWAW	Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World
Sem	*Semitica*
SJOT	*Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*
SJT	*Scottish Journal of Theology*
SWBA	Social World of Biblical Antiquity
TA	*Tel Aviv*
TDOT	*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Edited by G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, *et.al.* 15 vols. Grand Rapids, 1974–
ThTo	*Theology Today*
TynBul	*Tyndale Bulletin*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTE	Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon
VTSupp	Vetus Testamentum Supplements
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WW	*Word and World*
ZA	*Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

"Culture does not float ethereally above catastrophe."[1]

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

THESIS AND PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

The ancient Israelites' understandings of and responses to natural catastrophes offer an interesting window into the diversity of their views of the divine/human relationship. To understand natural catastrophes as divine punishment for human transgression, which nonetheless could be addressed through a variety of official and popular religious practices, was common to people of the ancient Near East in general and the biblical Israelites in particular. It follows that many biblical Israelites attributed survival from communal catastrophes to personal and communal piety. These understandings were both pervasive and ingrained—*doxa* to use a term related to the sociology of knowledge—and were, therefore, expressed implicitly and explicitly in many texts and artifacts from the ancient Near East, biblical Israel included. Others, however, expressed critical, intellectual reflections on and reformulations of these common assumptions.

In this study, our focus is not on positing naturalistic or scientific explanations for catastrophes referenced by the ancients. Instead, it is on the people's understandings of and responses to catastrophes. We shall, however, differentiate between naturally occurring and anthropogenetic communal catastrophes, e.g., military defeat.[2] While we shall focus primarily

[1]Michael E. Moseley, "Confronting Natural Disasters," in *Environmental Disaster and the Archaeology of Human Response* (ed. Garth Bawden and Richard Martin Reycraft; Albuquerque, N.M.: University of New Mexico, 2000), 219.

[2] We moderns understand *some* natural disasters as *exclusively* natural occurrences, i.e., not a result of any human *or* divine agency. Such is not true, of course, for all people who live in the modern era. Cf. the observations of Evans-

Pritchard on the Nuer of Africa in the mid-1900s. "Nuer generally appear to feel that suffering is due to some fault of theirs"; *Nuer Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 22. Also, the view held by *la Raza*, Mexican Americans of south Texas, that the natural world and the world beyond are not differentiated, has been documented; see William Madsen, *The Mexican-Americans of South Texas* (Case Studies in Cultural Anthropology; New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), 68-69. Even more contemporary, experiencing the fright and destruction of tornadoes in Nebraska, Ronald J. Allen has written of the ensuing cleanup and his experience in giving pastoral care to those affected by the storms. He offers five typical modes of response by the people with whom he dealt, the fourth being "it's God's punishment for human wickedness"; "How We Respond to Natural Disaster," *ThTo* 38 (1982): 459-60. Finally, we hear at times from certain voices that God uses natural and human initiated disaster, such as the attack on the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11, 2001, as punishment for human wickedness (see Jerry Falwell, interview by Pat Robertson, *700 Club*, September 13, 2001). Of further interest, Kari Latvus has studied the response of Finland's mainstream media to the tsunami in southeast Asia of December 2004. In part, he concludes that "For the majority of writers, God is no longer the reason for events. This was mainly an opinion of lay people"; "God-Talk Reflecting Tsunami" (paper presented at the Poster Session of the SBL Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, 20 November 2005), abstract.

Humans can neither cause nor prevent the movement of tectonic plates. And, even though we sometimes label a natural disaster an "act of God," we do not mean that natural occurrences are, in fact, acts of God. Instead, "acts of God" are legally defined as "Any accident due to natural causes directly and exclusively without human intervention, such as could not have been prevented by any amount of foresight, and pains, and care reasonably to have been expected"; William Edward Baldwin, ed., *Bouvier's Law Dictionary* (New York: The Banks Law Publishing Co., 1928), 36.

For some other natural phenomena, however, we might seek to explain the occurrence as a result of a number of variables, human agency included. (For a history of "hazard research," noting the shift in study from physical determinism to anthropogenesis, see Moseley, "Introduction," in *Environmental Disaster*, 1-3.) For example, we might explain the cause of an epidemic in terms of an imbalance between a parasite and its host; William H. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (Garden City, N. Y.: Anchor Press, 1976), 42, 82. We point out the cause and effect relationship of human agricultural practices, soil erosion and drought. For example, Patrick Williams concludes in his study of the fall of the Wari and Tiwanaka empires in the Andean highlands circa 1000 C.E., that ecological disaster alone, in this case drought is not a sufficient, even accurate, explanation. Rather, one must also weigh the political organization and agricultural practices of the people which contributed to the ecological variables which resulted in a prolonged and severe drought; see Patrick Ryan Williams, "Rethinking Disaster-induced Collapse," *World*

on natural disasters as experienced by the ancient Israelites, understandings of and responses to both categories of communal catastrophes on the part of Israel and its neighbors inform our study.[3] The *purpose* of this study, then,

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Archaeology 33 (2002): 361. We explain that famine is a result of socio-cultural variables; Pitirim A. Sorokin, *Man and Society in Calamity: The Effects of War, Revolution, Famine, Pestilence upon Human Mind, Behavior, Social Organization and Cultural Life* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc, 1942), 293. We explain epidemic diseases in part as a result of a dense concentration of population along with poor sanitary conditions, in short, of urbanization; McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples*, 65. We define a plague as a combination of social construction and biophysical reality; John H. Simpson, "The Social Construction of Plagues," in *The Return of the Plague* (ed. Jose Oscar Beozzo and Virgil Elizondo; London: SCM Press, 1997), 18-20. These explanations connect the human and natural realms.

People in the ancient Near East, however, explained many, if not all human experiences–even what we moderns understand as natural phenomena–as a reflection of their relationship with the divine realm. For them, the natural world is not separate from the divine realm. As the Frankforts have stated "The fundamental difference between the attitudes of modern and ancient man as regards the surrounding world is this: for modern, scientific man the phenomenal world is primarily an 'It'; for ancient–and also for primitive–man it is a 'Thou;'" Henri and H. A. Frankfort, "Introduction," in *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man: An Essay of Speculative Thought in the Ancient Near East* (Henri and H. A. Frankfort, *et al.*; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1946), 4. The "It" of modern society is nature; the "Thou" of ancient society is the divine. Hans Kelsen suggests that "Natural phenomena are related to social events, especially to violations of social order, and are interpreted either as punishment for not complying, or, less frequently, as reward for complying with certain important norms"; *Society and Nature: A Sociological Inquiry* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Trubner, 1946), 98.

[3]That is to say, we do not attempt to exhaustively chart understandings of and responses to the exile in particular or suffering in general, for these studies have been done sufficiently. Regarding the exile, see, for example, Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002) and Ralph W. Klein, *Israel in Exile: A Theological Interpretation* (Overtures to Biblical Theology; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979). Regarding suffering more generally, see James L. Crenshaw, *Defending God: Biblical Responses to the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); see also Jim Alvin Sanders, *Suffering as Divine Discipline in the Old Testament and Post-Biblical Judaism* (Colgate Rochester Divinity School Bulletin 28; Rochester, N.Y.: Colgate Rochester Divinity School, 1955). On the topic of theodicy, see Antti Laato and Johannes C. de Moor, eds., *Theodicy in the World of the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

is twofold: 1) to demonstrate the understandings of natural catastrophes as implied and articulated by people of the ancient Near East in general and the ancient Israelites in particular in texts and artifacts, and, 2) to demonstrate likewise the variety of responses—practical, ritualistic (official and popular) and intellectual/theological—to natural catastrophes.

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Anthony Oliver-Smith has said, "Disaster is a contested concept, with 'blurred edges,' more a set of family resemblances among a wide array of physical and social events and processes rather than a set of bounded phenomena to be strictly defined."[4] Nonetheless, he offers the most comprehensive anthropological definition of disaster of which we are aware, stating the following:

> a disaster is a process/event combining a potentially destructive agent/force from the natural, modified, or built environment and a population in a socially and economically produced condition of vulnerability, resulting in a perceived disruption of the customary relative

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On the development of ancient Israelite apocalyptic eschatology as a visionary, other-worldly fulfillment of Yahweh's rule in response to real life political domination in the post-exilic setting, see Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology* (Revised ed.; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 9-10, 23, 26-27. See also a challenge to the assumption that apocalypticism arises from politically deprived groups; Stephen L. Cook, *Prophecy and Apocalypticism: The Postexilic Social Setting* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 2. Note, however, that Hanson and Cook deal with different texts. On fully developed apocalypticism as an other-worldly Jewish response to persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes IV (167-163 B.C.E.) as manifested in Dan 7–12, see John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 38, 61.

[4]Anthony Oliver-Smith, "What Is a Disaster?" in *The Angry Earth: Disaster in Anthropological Perspective* (Anthony Oliver-Smith and Susanna M. Hoffman, eds., New York: Routledge, 1999), 21. See also his discussion of the multi-dimensionality of disaster; "Theorizing Disaster: Nature, Power, and Culture," in *Catastrophe and Culture: The Anthropology of Disaster* (Susanna M. Hoffman and Anthony Oliver-Smith, eds.; Santa Fe, N.M.: School of American Research Press, 2002), 25-26.

> satisfactions of individual and social needs for physical survival, social order, and meaning.[5]

This definition incorporates three elements: environment, society and culture.[6]

More simply, disaster may be defined as the real or perceived loss of human life and/or freedom, and/or loss or damage to that which humans value, as a result of natural and/or human agents.[7] Yet, this latter, more objective definition stems from the intersection of only two of the three elements articulated in the first definition: the environment and the society. One can conceive, however, of the loss of individual human lives and property as a result of a natural occurrence that is *not defined by the affected society as a disaster*, for such processes or events are considered routine, even predictable and, therefore, readily explainable. A disaster would be the termination of a family line or the destruction of a whole community. Conversely, a society may experience in reality a disruption of social and intellectual normalcy, while the degree of destruction and/or even the agent of destruction is more a matter of perception. Defining disaster *according to the affected society,* then, must include culture, the third element in Oliver-Smith's definition, understood as a system of values, norms and religious

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[5]Anthony Oliver-Smith and Susanna M. Hoffman, "Why Anthropologists Should Study Disasters," in *Catastrophe and Culture*, 4.

[6]Oliver-Smith, "What Is a Disaster?" 28-29.

[7]Robin Torrence and John Grattan, "The Archaeology of Disasters: Past and Future Trends," in *Natural Disasters and Cultural Change* (Robin Torrence and John Grattan, eds.; London: Routledge, 2002), 5-6. Oliver-Smith posits that "disasters occur in societies. They do not occur in nature"; "What Is a Disaster?" 28. Stated similarly, "Disasters are social phenomena. . . . There must be direct or indirect damage sustained by humans. When no one suffers a loss, then we are dealing solely with a natural phenomenon"; Satoru Shimoyama, "Basic Characteristics of Disasters," in *Natural Disasters and Cultural Change*, 20. While these comments are certainly anthropocentric, they need not be taken as consciously or unconsciously devaluing the animal and vegetable worlds. For our purposes, there simply are no *human* responses unless disasters result in human loss, real or perceived. That is, the issue here is the definition of disaster, a human perception, and not the relative value of nature as compared to humans. Furthermore, that which is defined as a human loss may in fact be the destruction of a natural habitat, including its flora and fauna.

beliefs.[8] When we approach disasters in the ancient Near East, we will need to keep this aspect of disaster in mind.[9]

The "agents or forces" alluded to by Oliver-Smith, may be natural. Natural forces encompass atmospheric, hydrological, geological, and biological agents such as hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, volcanoes, tsunamis, epidemic diseases and animal pestilence.[10] While disasters may also be either technological (hazardous materials, for example) or social (warfare and terrorism, including biological and chemical), this study focuses on disasters that stem from natural forces.[11] We acknowledge, however, that such categorization is a modern distinction. People of the ancient Near East understood natural disasters and warfare as belonging to the same category of human experience.[12]

We must add that disasters are not always sudden. They may, in fact, be slow in onset, yet equally severe in effect, as evident in the progression from aridization, to drought, to famine.[13]

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[8]I will make no further attempt here to define "culture" or "religion." See Clifford Geertz's definition of religion; "Religion As a Cultural System," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 90. See also a critique of Geertz's definition in Bruce Lincoln, *Thinking About Religion after September 11* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 1-7.

[9]We shall use the terms "catastrophe" and "crisis" interchangeably with the term "disaster."

[10]Oliver-Smith, "Theorizing Disasters," 25.

[11]Oliver-Smith, "Theorizing Disasters," 25. See also Kenneth Hewitt, *Regions at Risk: A Geographical Introduction to Disasters* (London: Addison Wesley Longman, 1997), 26.

[12]See chapter 4. Perhaps they categorized phenomena primarily by their common effect–loss of life and/or property and therefore a threat to the survival of the community–and only secondarily assigned a common cause. Some modern scholars also define disaster from the perspective of effect and therefore group the variety of "forcing mechanisms"–natural, social and technological–equally; Torrence and Grattan, "Archaeology of Disasters," 5-6.

[13]Susanna M. Hoffman and Anthony Oliver-Smith, "Anthropology and the Angry Earth: An Overview," in *Angry Earth*, 1.

In the ancient Near Eastern world, experiences of what we have classified as natural disasters were addressed within both official and popular religion. Distinguishing between *official and popular religion*, however, is notoriously difficult.[14] Jacques Berlinerblau points out that "official" and "popular" religion are not mutually exclusive areas.[15] Neither are orthodoxy and heterodoxy.[16] Neither pole is homogenous; yet, "official" religion "stands as a unity" against other religious practice considered heterodox. As for "popular" religion in ancient Israel, one should more precisely speak of "popular religious groups."[17] Berlinerblau maintains that "official" and "popular" religions are best studied simultaneously as "existing in a nexus or in relation to one another."[18]

Nevertheless, the two converging areas of religious belief and practice may be separately defined. "Official" religion, according to Berlinerblau, is "the religion of an association of male-dominated and interconnected social groups which exercises the greatest power (via coercion and/or consent) in its relations with other religious groups and thus comes to stand as the 'orthodoxy' of a particular society."[19] Essentially, the official religion of ancient Israel was that religion espoused or supported by the monarchic state;[20] however, official religion, Berlinerblau contends, is not to be confused with all religion that is represented in the Hebrew Bible, for many texts are antagonistic to the state and its officials.[21] Berlinerblau

[14]For a recent discussion, see William G. Dever, *Did God Have a Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005), 5-7.

[15]Jacques Berlinerblau, *The Vow and the "Popular Religious Groups" of Ancient Israel* (JSOTSupp 210; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 22-24.

[16]Berlinerblau, *Vow,* 21.

[17]Berlinerblau, *Vow*, 22

[18]Berlinerblau, *Vow*, 23.

[19]Berlinerblau, *Vow*, 29.

[20]Berlinerblau, *Vow*, 30. Or another centrally established group, such as the temple community. For example, the "priestly" orthodox group might oppose the monarchy as under Queen Athaliah (2 Kgs 11:1-21).

[21]Berlinerblau, *Vow*, 31-32.

prefers to label "popular" religions as "heterodoxies," which he defines as, "any association of individuals living within the border of ancient Israel who by dint of their religious beliefs, rituals, or symbols, are denigrated by the authors of the Old Testament."[22]

State disapproval of particular religious practices, of course, does not result in eradication of them. Popular religious practices are represented within the Hebrew Bible,[23] albeit from the perspective of the official religion.[24] Our awareness of such practices, therefore, is greatly enhanced through archaeology.

Yet, two categories—official and popular—are not sufficient to cover all of the religions and their bases of support represented in the Hebrew Bible. At least three categories can be identified: state supported (king and administration), group supported (e.g., Jerusalem priesthood and the Deuteronomistic circle) and family supported.[25]

Finally, *doxa*, as implied above, is a latent, pervasive assumption about the world that is articulated especially when catalyzed by external forces. We will explicate this social theory of knowledge in chapter three.

METHODOLOGY AND PRESUPPOSITIONS

This is a phenomenological, synchronic, sociological, comparative and historical study in the Durkheimian tradition. As a phenomenological study, we seek to describe the range of observable, religious phenomena related to natural disasters expressed in the ancient Near East. According to Emile Durkheim, "Religious phenomena fall into two basic categories: beliefs and rites. The first are states of opinion and consist of representations; the

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[22]Berlinerblau, *Vow*, 33.

[23]See especially Susan Ackerman, *Under Every Green Tree: Popular Religion in Sixth-Century Judah* (HSM 46; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 3.

[24]Berlinerblau, *Vow*, 37.

[25]This division roughly follows Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*, vol. 1 (John Bowden, trans.; Louisville: Westminster, 1994), 19.

second are particular modes of action."[26] Furthermore, this study is a synchronic description of religious phenomena—beliefs and rites—related to biblical Israel's understandings of and responses to communal catastrophes.[27] It is synchronic, because we will *not* attempt to discern a developmental evolution of ideas. James L. Crenshaw, addressing understandings of and responses to evil[28] by a synchronic as opposed to a diachronic approach, states, "In studying biblical literature, the synchronic approach . . . seems more promising than its rival, inasmuch as it maps the many different responses to the problem of theodicy over the years, yet without hazarding an evolutionary time line for their emergence."[29]

This study is sociological in that it employs both social theory as it pertains to ideology (beliefs) and archaeology as it pertains to religious rites, the two aspects of the phenomenology of religion defined by Durkheim above.[30] It is comparative in that we consider texts from both the Hebrew Bible[31] and ancient Israel's ancient Near Eastern neighbors.

In addition, this study is an historical project. Historical inquiry into the world of biblical Israel and the life of its people is necessary if we are to understand what they tell us about themselves. Scholars are right, however, to be skeptical of the sequence and historicity of events as described in the biblical narrative.[32] What is more, we know that the Hebrew Bible has been

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[26]Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life,* trans. Karen Fields; New York: Free Press, 1995); originally published as *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse: Le système totémique en Australie* (Paris, F. Alcan: 1912), 34.

[27]As we shall see, communal catastrophes include both natural and anthropogenetic catastrophes.

[28]Within a more explicitly theological approach, natural disasters are equated with natural evil as differentiated from moral and religious evil; Crenshaw, *Defending God*, 15.

[29]Crenshaw, *Defending God*, 18.

[30]Pp. 8-9.

[31]English translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

[32]"Historical" here does not mean that all biblical narratives are taken as historical reality; instead, it means that our goal is to articulate the range of implicit and explicit realities of their time and place as at least reflected in the Hebrew Bible, archaeology and parallel ancient Near Eastern materials. For a recent articulation of

transmitted—not to mention altered—over a long period of time, passing through many hands in the process. This process is what Berlinerblau calls "composition by aggregate."[33] Texts, whether originally oral or written, have been refashioned on more than one occasion so as to be in accord with, even to promote, specific political, social and/or religious agendas.

Nonetheless, we ascribe to what are now considered to be "traditional assumptions," that is, conclusions of critical scholarship about the biblical and ancient Near Eastern texts.[34] In particular, the biblical texts carry with them historical data regarding the world-view, the mentality—perception, ideology and/or theology—of real people in the midst of real human experiences. Put another way, the texts are, according to Durkheim, collective representations, i.e., bearers of social mentality. He says:

> It is beyond doubt, that speech and hence the system of concepts it translates, is the product of a collective elaboration. What it expresses is the manner in which society as a whole conceives the objects of experience. The notions corresponding to the various elements of language are therefore collective representations. The very content of these notions testifies in the same way. Indeed, there are scarcely any words, even among those we most commonly use, whose meaning does not to some degree go beyond the limits of our personal experience.[35]

We will develop the concept of collective representation, especially its modification by Pierre Bourdieu, in chapter three. For now, let us note

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a skeptical but non-postmodern approach to ancient Near Eastern texts, see Gary Beckman, "The Limits of Credulity (Presidential Address)," *JAOS* 125 (2003): 343-52.

[33]Jacques Berlinerblau, *The Secular Bible: Why Nonbelievers Must Take the Bible Seriously* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 45. This reality is another reason for a synchronic versus a diachronic approach with this study. For Berlinerblau's discussion of assumptions and claims made about biblical authorship by both the Hebrew Bible itself and those who comment on the Hebrew Bible, see pp. 17-53.

[34]See William G. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It?: What Archaeology Can Tell Us about the Reality of Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), 16-17.

[35]Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 436.

that, as far as the historicity of the biblical stories is concerned, it is, as Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager say, "enough to know that the ancient Israelites believed them to be ['true']."[36] Along with the stories and their intended foci, which may or may not be reliable as reports about specific historical events, we get reliable information about the culture and thought of ancient Israel.[37] Very close to Durkheim on this issue, classicist Oswyn Murray makes a claim with which we concur, saying:

> It does not matter whether the stories which it uses are true, as long as they are believed to be true. And even a forgery is an important piece of evidence for the period that perpetrated it, since it reveals more clearly than a genuine article the conceptions and beliefs about the past of the age that created it. This principle of *unconscious revelation through representation* . . . is one of the most powerful tools in the modern historian's study of mentalities[38] (italics added).

Artifacts, like texts, must be interpreted.[39] They are, however, witnesses to the everyday life of the ancient Israelites, independent from the Hebrew Bible.[40] While texts "reflect principal ideology," argues noted Syro-Palestinian archaeologist William G. Dever, artifacts "reflect common practice."[41] We shall attempt a dialogue between the two sources,[42] for, following in the Durkheimian tradition, we are interested in both ideology and practice—i.e., ancient Israel's understandings of and practical,

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[36]Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 7.

[37]See Ronald E. Clements on the plague narratives of Exodus, "History and Theology in Biblical Narrative," *HBT* 4, 5 (1982-1983): 47-50.

[38]Oswyn Murray, in the introduction to Jacob Burckhardt, *The Greeks and Greek Civilization* (trans. Sheila Stern; ed. with an introduction by Oswyn Murray; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), xxxi; quoted in King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 8.

[39]Dever, *What Did the Biblical Authors Know*, 71.

[40]Dever, *What Did the Biblical Authors Know*, 89.

[41]Dever, *What Did the Biblical Authors Know*, 82.

[42]Dever, *What Did the Biblical Authors Know*, 79.

ritualistic, intellectual and theological responses to communal catastrophes. Furthermore, unlike texts, artifacts come directly from the people, common or elite, and give us more of an open window than do texts for viewing the actual practice of the whole body of the people.

Finally, as this study inclines towards theology, it is the theology or theologies of the communities which produced the texts and artifacts that we seek. What is more, we seek to *de*scribe them, rather than to *pre*scribe them. Of greatest importance, we are interested in knowing, to the best of our ability, the understandings and responses, both official and popular, of ancient Israelites—writers, redactors, etc.—in their own times, and in their own terms.

WHY STUDY UNDERSTANDINGS OF AND RESPONSES TO NATURAL CATASTROPHES?

A study of understandings of and responses to natural catastrophes is important for several reasons. First of all, catastrophes are simply a part of life, a force that all long-living individuals and communities at some point in time will surely face.[43] Yet, it seems that the human tendency is to treat natural catastrophes as local events[44]—why did this happen to *us?*—and because catastrophes are socially defined,[45] a study of the understandings of and responses to natural catastrophe of a select culture offers a window into appreciating that particular culture on its own terms.

Second, natural catastrophes are external agents of change that shape history and culture. "For good or ill," states Pitirim Sorokin in his sociological study of the effects of natural catastrophe, "calamities are unquestionably the supreme disrupters and transformers of social organization and institutions."[46]

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[43]Oliver-Smith, "'What Is a Disaster?" 25-26.

[44]Oliver-Smith and Hoffman, "Why Anthropologists Should Study Disasters," 13.

[45]See Introduction, 4-6. See also Moseley, "Confronting Natural Disasters," 223. He states, "Natural processes of environmental change are older than humanity and no more disastrous than people make them."

[46]Sorokin, *Man and Society in Calamity*, 121.

As for infectious diseases, says William H. McNeill, they are "one of the fundamental parameters and determinants of human history."[47] In the words of Gregory Button, "Disasters offer the social science researcher a fine opportunity to study the nature of the social and cultural construction of reality."[48] Gunnar Heinsohn makes the somewhat far-reaching claim that the perceived need to reenact communal catastrophes accounts for the origin in the ancient world of the professional arts, including music, drama, dance, athletic competition and the plastic arts.[49]

More particularly, catastrophes influence religion. For example, Ian and Jenifer Glynn claim that smallpox helped to establish Buddhism in Japan.[50] Catastrophes may account for the development of religious roles as well. Heinsohn connects the experience of natural catastrophes with the ritual act of sacrifice and, hence, the origin of the priesthood in ancient Mesopotamia.[51] In addition, and more certainly, catastrophes may prompt a re-assessment of the affected society's religious order. Sorokin claims that "the most important steps in the refinement of all the outstanding world religions have invariably occurred in periods of social catastrophe."[52]

Some of these assessments may be exaggerated, but the formative influence of natural catastrophes is undeniable. As Anthony Oliver-Smith and Susanna M. Hoffman state, "In the face or threat of disruption, as people attempt to prepare, construct, recover, or reconstruct, how they

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[47]McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples*, 291.

[48]Gregory V. Button, "The Negation of Disaster: The Media Response to Oil Spills in Great Britain," in *Angry Earth*, 113.

[49]Gunnar Heinsohn, "The Rise of Blood Sacrifice and Priest-Kingship in Mesopotamia: A 'Cosmic Decree'?" *Rel* 22 (1992): 124. See also the more sober assessment of Sorokin that artists do indeed respond to catastrophes. He does not, however, argue that catastrophes account for the origin of the arts; *Man and Society in Calamity*, 253-62.

[50]Ian and Jenifer Glynn, *The Life and Death of Smallpox* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 19-20.

[51]Heinsohn, "The Rise of Blood Sacrifice," 120-21.

[52]Sorokin, *Man and Society in Calamity*, 179; cf. 226.

adjust to the actual or potential calamity either recants or reinvents their cultural system."[53]

Third, natural catastrophes are indiscriminate, even if, especially in our modern technological world, damage caused by them might vary according to class.[54] Nonetheless, natural catastrophes affect and call for a response from entire societies and/or their smaller communities.[55] That is to say, especially for the ancient communities, kings as well as commoners were adversely affected by plagues, for example, both personally and politically. As Robert R. Stieglitz observed, "Plagues and pestilence [are] no respecters of persons."[56] Everyone, male and female, rich and poor, elite and common, etc., were and are affected by communal catastrophes.[57]

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[53]Oliver-Smith and Hoffman, "Why Anthropologists Should Study Disasters," 6.

[54]D. K. Chester, "The Theodicy of Natural Disasters," *SJT* 51/4 (1998): 491. Destruction from Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, 2005, certainly varied according to social and economic status. What is more, responses to natural disaster can differ among social groups; see Arlene Miller Rosen, *Civilizing Climate: Social Responses to Climate Change in the Ancient Near East* (Lanham, Md.: AltaMira Press, 2007), 9.

[55]See Isa 24:1-2.

[56]Robert R. Stieglitz, "Ancient Records and the Exodus Plagues," *BAR* 13/6 (1987): 47. See also the comments of John Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse: Confronting Famine, War, Plague, and Death in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 16.

[57]Sorokin points out that as a rule the healthiest, usually upper and professional classes, fare better in epidemic than the lower classes who are less likely to be as healthy to begin with. Nonetheless, there are exceptions, for contagion crosses all social boundaries; *Man and Society in Calamity*, 101. The same could be argued for the relative destruction of property and risk of death in catastrophic storms according to class. We must not, however, assume a contemporary model of social stratification for ancient Israel. The common folk were by far the majority, and class division was permeable. King and Stager claim, "social stratification along class lines and class consciousness did not exist"; *Life in Biblical Israel*, 5. Cf. Niels Peter Lemche, "The Relevance of Working with the Concept of Class in the Study of Israelite Society in the Iron Age," in *Concepts of Class in Ancient Israel* (ed., Mark R. Sneed; South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 201; Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1999), 95.

Fourth, natural catastrophes, especially the process by which a community addresses them, reveal much about that community. Virginia García-Acosta states, "Hazards [i.e., agents] and disaster processes also reveal the conceptions, alliances, relationships, social order and disorder, structure, and organization of a certain community, region, or society in a more focused way."[58]

Finally, natural catastrophes come suddenly and without specific causal explanation. Because of their destruction and disruption, they cannot be ignored. In order for communities to cope with the effects of natural catastrophes and move forward to recoup and rebuild, those affected must account for these destructive forces.[59]

But then, why specifically study *ancient Israel's* understandings of and responses to natural catastrophes? One reason is the obvious but seldom appreciated fact that the Hebrew Bible and many other ancient Near Eastern texts are replete with stories that make reference to, if not more actively address, the wide variety of natural catastrophes. Most obviously, myths that involve a "great flood" are known from Mesopotamia—*Atrahasis*, the *Eridu Genesis*, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, *Erra and Ishum* and the tradition gathered by Berossus as well as king lists—and, of course, from Israel's own flood narrative in Gen 6–9.[60]

Other catastrophes are prominent as well. In *Atrahasis*, for example, the gods attempted to destroy humans through disease and famine. In Gen 12:10; 26:1, and 41:54, famine prompts the movement of Israel's ancestral family from Canaan to Gerar or Egypt. For that matter, numerous famine

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[58]Virginia García-Acosta, "Historical Disaster Research," in *Catastrophe and Culture*, 58.

[59]Another reason to focus on communal catastrophes, albeit a by-product of historical research, is that such research helps us to better face at present our own contribution to environmental risks and the cause and effects of catastrophes; Moseley, "Confronting Natural Disasters," 219, 223. This line of argument follows the shift in the study of the causes of communal catastrophes (hazard research) from physical determinism to anthropogenesis and from the prevailing assumption of social collapse in response to disaster to a focus on the endurance of society in response to communal catastrophes; Moseley, "Introduction," 1-3.

[60]For an overview of flood texts from the ancient Near East, see Brian B. Schmidt, "Flood Narratives of Ancient Western Asia," *CANE* 4:2337-51. For flood texts from many other cultures, see Theodore H. Gaster, *Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 82-131.

texts are known from ancient Egypt.[61] In the Hittite myth "The Disappearance of Telipinu,"[62] "Famine broke out in the land. Humans and gods are dying of hunger."

Drought is the backdrop to the legendary showdown between Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel in 1 Kgs 17–18. From Ugarit, the story of *Aqhat* acknowledges drought: "Seven years Baal is absent,/ Eight, the Rider of Clouds:/ No dew, no downpour,/ No swirling of the deeps,/ No welcome voice of Baal."[63] From the Hittites, we have "The Plague Prayers of Mursilis" and the "Ritual Against Pestilence." Amos 1:1 places the prophet's words "two years before the earthquake." Joel 1:2–7 describes the thorough devastation that locusts render to vegetation. The plague narratives of Exod 7–11 present a range of "plagues." And these are just some of many texts in which natural catastrophes play a central role.[64]

The plethora of pertinent ancient Near Eastern texts that make reference to and/or address natural catastrophes should come as no surprise, for they were a definite threat to the very survival of the people, especially those who lived at or very near a subsistence level of existence.[65] Survival was a fundamental task.[66] Robert M. Martinez claims that "Ancient

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[61]William H. Shea, "Famine," *ABD* 2:771. See for example "The Famine Stela," translated by Miriam Lichtheim (*COS* 1.53:130-34); Hans Goedicke, *Comments on the "Famine Stela"* (San Antonio, TX: Van Siclen Books, 1994); and Jacques Vandier, *La famine dans l'Égypte Ancienne* (Cairo: L'Institute Franais d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire, 1936; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1979), 99-149.

[62]"The Disappearance of Telipinu" §4 (A i 16-20) (Harry A. Hoffner, Jr., *Hittite Myths* [ed. Gary M. Beckman; SBLWAW 2; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990], 15).

[63]*Aqhat*, Tablet 3, column I, lines 42-46 (Simon B. Parker, *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry* [SBLWAW 9; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997], 69).

[64]See also *inter alia* Amos 4:7-9; 7:1-3, 4-6; Nah 1:6; Ps 97.

[65]See David C. Hopkins, "Life on the Land: The Subsistence Struggle of Early Israel," *BA* 50 (1987): 178-91; and Baruch Rosen, "Subsistence Economy in Iron Age I," in *From Nomadism to Monarchy: Archaeological and Historical Aspects of Early Israel* (ed. Israel Finkelstein and Nadav Na'aman; Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1994), 350-51.

[66]Dever, *Did God Have a Wife?*, 31.

Near Eastern populations were often precariously balanced on the edge of disaster."[67]

Most importantly, this study is useful because an intentional study of ancient Israel's understandings of and responses to natural catastrophes is lacking. Nevertheless, some scholars have given attention to specific questions that are related to the topic of this project, and we turn now to a brief survey of their work.[68]

A BRIEF SURVEY OF RELATED STUDIES

In addition to the important sources cited throughout this study, a variety of scholarship fits generally and more specifically within the history of research related to our topic. First, anthropologists have shown great interest in disaster research in the last few decades. Anthony Oliver-Smith and Susanna M. Hoffman, for example, have edited two volumes on the anthropology of disaster.[69] Their work spans many topics, including defining catastrophes, world-wide ancient and modern case studies of responses, the evaluation of modern response systems, media coverage of catastrophes, etc.[70]

Second, historians have studied the understandings of and

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[67]Robert M. Martinez, "Epidemic Disease, Ecology, and Culture in the Ancient Near East," in *The Bible in the Light of Cuneiform Literature* (ed. William W. Hallo, Bruce William Jones and Gerald L. Mattingly; Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellon, 1990), 417.

[68]For example, some scholars have noted, even if in passing, the effect of specific natural disasters. See for example, Pablo R. Andinach, "The Locusts in the Message of Joel," *VT* 42 (1992): 433-41; H. Brodsky, "Locusts in the Book of Joel," *Bible Review* 6 (1990): 33-39; D. J. McCarthy, "Plagues and the Sea of Reeds: Exodus 5-14," *JBL* 85 (1966): 137-58; D. Kelly Ogden, "The Earthquake Motif in the Book of Amos," in *Goldene Apfel in silbernen Schalen: Collected Communications to the XIIIth Congress of the International Organization of the Study of the Old Testament, Leuven 1989*. (Bieträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des antiken Judentums 20; ed. Klaus-Dietrich Schunk and Matthias Augusin; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1992), 69-80; Aron Pinker, "Reconstruction of the Destruction in Amos 6, 10," *ZAW* 115 (2003): 423-27.

[69]Oliver-Smith and Hoffman, eds., *Angry Earth*, and *Catastrophe and Culture*.

[70]Torrence and Grattan, *Natural Disasters and Cultural Change*..

responses to natural catastrophes by people who experienced them in places and times other than ancient Israel.[71] These studies offer examples for us and exemplify an interest in the topic. John Aberth's work in medieval history is a good example, for he treats the communities' perspectives on famine, war, plague and death.[72]

Other scholars have focused on the history of medicine and/or disease and their place in the historical development of people and ideas.[73] Some of the more general works among these give some attention to disease in the ancient world.[74] More specific studies consider sickness and healing in the ancient Near East.[75] In particular, Hector Avalos has

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[71]E.g., Carlo M. Cipolla, *Faith, Reason, and the Plague in Seventeenth-Century Tuscany* (trans., Muriel Kittel; Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977); A. Lynn Martin, *Plague? Jesuit Accounts of Epidemic Disease in the 16th Century* (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, Inc., 1996); Jeffrey A. Lockwood, *Locust: The Devastating Rise and Mysterious Disappearance of the Insect That Shaped the American Frontier* (New York: Basic Books, 2004); Glynn and Glynn, *Life and Death of Smallpox*; Brian Fagan, *Floods, Famines, and Emperors: El Niño and the Fate of Civilizations* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), and Kathryn Edgerton-Tarpley, *Tears from Iron: Cultural Responses to Famine in Nineteenth-Century China* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2008), just to name a few.

[72]Aberth, *Brink of the Apocalypse*.

[73]E.g., McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples*; J. N. Hays, *The Burdens of Disease: Epidemics and Human Response in Western History* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Terence Ranger and Paul Slack, eds, *Epidemics and Ideas: Essays on the Historical Perception of Pestilence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[74]E.g., Frederick F. Cartwright, *Disease and History* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1972), 5-28.

[75]E.g., Hans Goedicke, "The 'Canaanite Illness,'" *Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur* ll (1984): 91-105; P. Humbert "Maladie et médicine dans l'Ancien Testament," *RHPR* 44 (1964): 1-29; Guido Majno, *The Healing Hand: Man and Wound in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975); Martinez, "Epidemic Disease," 413-57; Daniel C. Snell, "Plagues and Peoples in Mesopotamia," *JANESCU* 14 (1982): 89-96; and Klaus Seybold and Ulrich B. Mueller, *Sickness and Healing* (trans. Douglas W. Stott; Nashville: Abingdon, 1981); Irving L. Finkel and Markham J. Geller, eds. *Disease in Babylonia* (CM 36; Leiden: Brill, 2007).

published a very thorough study of the healthcare systems of Greece, Mesopotamia and Israel, focusing on the treatment of individual maladies.[76]

Others have focused on the origins and/or diagnoses of specific diseases in their ancient contexts. For example, Eva Panagiotakopulu surmises from a variety of evidence that "Coexistence of the Nile rat, humans and ectoparasites in urban centres in combination with trade with Asia, Africa and the Mediterranean, together with the Nile floods and the introduction of the black rat, circle Egypt as the most probable place of origin of bubonic plague as an epidemic disease."[77] John Wilkinson argues that we can diagnose symptoms and conditions as described in the ark narrative of 1 Sam 5–6 as bubonic plague,[78] and the quail epidemic in Num 11:31–34 in terms of bacterial food poisoning.[79]

These works do not attempt, however, to analyze ancient Israel's understandings of disease. Furthermore, while we can be certain that epidemic diseases existed, we cannot identify specific diseases in antiquity with certainty.[80] As Avalos concludes, "One must accept that many, if not most, of the illnesses mentioned in the Bible will never be diagnosed or translated into a modern medical classification."[81]

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[76]Hector Avalos, *Illness and Health Care in the Ancient Near East: The Role of the Temple in Greece, Mesopotamia, and Israel* (HSM 54; Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1995).

[77]Eva Panagiotakopulu, "Pharaonic Egypt and the Origins of Plague," *Journal of Biogeography* 31 (2004): 273.

[78]John Wilkinson, "Philistine Epidemic of 1 Samuel 5 and 6," *ExpTim* 88 (1977): 140. See also William MacArthur, *Transactions of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene* 46 (1952): 209-12, 464; John B. Geyer, "Mice and Rites in 1 Samuel 5-6," *VT* 31 (1981): 293-304; and Lawrence I. Conrad, "The Biblical Tradition of the Plague of the Philistines," *JAOS* 104 (1984), 281-87.

[79]John Wilkinson, "The Quail Epidemic of Numbers 11:31-34," *EvQ* 71 (1999): 203-8. See also, larger more general works such as D. Brothwell and A. S. Sandison, eds. *Diseases in Antiquity* (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas,1967).

[80]Martinez, "Epidemic Disease," 426.

[81]Avalos, *Illness and Healthcare*, 21.

Other scholars have attempted to explain biblical plagues, especially those against Egypt in Exod 7:14ff, from a naturalistic perspective.[82] Some scholars have done comparative studies between specific natural disasters as described in the Hebrew Bible and other ancient Near Eastern texts.[83] Still others have studied closely the phraseology associated with the divine origin of plagues.[84] Finally, some historians of the Bible and the biblical world have taken seriously the historical importance of natural disasters for the people, their history and culture.[85]

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[82]E.g., Joel Block, "Ten Plagues of Egypt," *RelEd* 71 (1976): 519-26; A. P. B. Breytenbach, "The Connection Between the Concepts of Darkness and Drought as well as Light and Vegetation," in *De Fructu oris sui: Essays in Honour of Adrianus van Selms* (ed. I. H. Eybers, F. C. Fensham and C. J. Labuschagne. Leiden: Brill, 1971), 1-5. Also, note the preview by Steven L. Miller of a forthcoming book by Jeff Lockwood entitled *Swarm Wars*. Lockwood devotes attention to an ecological explanation of the sequence of the plagues; "UW Professor Examines Biological Setting of Egyptian Plagues," n.p. [cited 7 December 2005]. Online: http://www.uwyo.edu/AgAdmin/news/Lockwood. On such naturalistic explanations of the plagues against Egypt, we agree with Dianne Bergant, who disclaims this approach as missing the point of the narratives, saying, "Besides, the narrative clearly states that these phenomena, scientifically understandable or not, were the direct result of divine intervention"; *The Role of Nature in Natural Disasters* (Romeoville, Ill.: Lewis University Press, 1998), 3.

[83]E.g., Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, "Joel's Locust Plague in Light of Sargon II's Hymn to Nanaya," *JBL* 112 (1993): 597-603; John A. Thompson, "Joel's Locusts in Light of Near Eastern Parallels," *JNES* 14 (1955): 52-55.

[84]See especially J. J. M. Roberts, "Erra-Scorched Earth" *JCS* 24 (1971): 11-16, and "The Hand of Yahweh," *VT* 21 (1971): 244-51; Karen Martens, "'With a Strong Hand and an Outstretched Bow': The Meaning of the Expression ביד חזקה בזרוע נטויה," *SJOT* 15 (2001): 123-41; Nils P. Heessel, "The Hands of the Gods: Disease Names and Divine Anger" in *Disease in Babylonia* (ed. Irving L. Finkel and Markham J. Geller; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 120-30.

[85]See, for example, Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); M. Astour, "New Evidence on the Last Days of Ugarit," *AJA* 69 (1965): 253-58; Karl W. Butzer, "Environmental Change in the Near East and Human Impact on the Land," *CANE* 3:123-52; David Noel Freedman and A. Welch, "Amos's Earthquake and Israelite Prophecy," in *Scripture and Other Artifacts: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Honor of Philip J. King* (ed. Michael D. Coogan, J. Cheryl Exum and Lawrence E. Stager; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994),188-98; William R.

Contemporary events have prompted studies of ancient responses to catastrophes. The terrorist attack on the United States on September 11, 2001, has sparked interest in how ancient societies have responded to destruction. In particular, *Classical World* devoted a volume to the rebuilding of cities in the ancient world, featuring articles on Ur, Memphis and Thebes, and Jerusalem.[86] The International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature held a special section in Singapore in the summer of 2006, entitled "Reading Texts in the Shadow of the Wave: Theodicy and Natural Disasters."[87] This section was in response to the catastrophic tsunami that struck southeast Asia in December of 2004.

Still, no Hebrew Bible scholars and/or historians of ancient Israel have intentionally approached ancient Israel with a specific focus on understandings of and responses to natural catastrophes. Yet some, to which we now turn, have pointed us in the right direction, while failing to take us to the ultimate destination.

SPECIFIC STUDIES

Robert L. Cohn's "Biblical Responses to Catastrophe" is a relevant piece, but, as a brief article, his work is necessarily selective and not as comprehensive as this study. Several specific limitations mark his work. He focuses almost exclusively on responses to catastrophes preserved in the Hebrew Bible. We shall study extra-biblical responses as well, fitting ancient Israel within its broader ancient Near Eastern context. In addition, he

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Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah* (Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East 18; ed. Baruch Halpern and M. H. E. Weippert; Leiden: Brill, 1999); Ronald Hendel, "The Exodus in Biblical Memory," *JBL* 120 (2001): 601-22; M. E. L. Mallowan, "Noah's Flood Reconsidered," *Iraq* 26 (1964): 81-82; Rosen, *Civilizing Climate*.

[86]Matthew S. Santirocco, ed., "Saving the City: Destruction, Loss, and Recovery in the Ancient World, A Commemoration on the Anniversary of 9/11," *CW* 97 (2003). In this same volume, see especially Daniel E. Fleming, "Ur: After the Gods Abandoned Us," 5-18; Ogden Goelet, "Memphis and Thebes: Disaster and Renewal in Ancient Egyptian Consciousness," 19-30; and Lawrence H. Schiffman, "Jerusalem: Twice Destroyed, Twice Rebuilt," 31-40.

[87]My paper in this session, entitled "Coping with Catastrophe: Questions and Protests from the Ancient Near East and Biblical Israel," is incorporated in chapter four of the present study.

claims that ancient Israel knew "but one catastrophe: the destruction of the state of Judah in 586 B.C.E. by the Babylonian empire."[88] This position is too restricted. While there is no denying that 587/6 was a major catastrophe, the final fall of the northern kingdom to the Assyrians in 722 B.C.E., for example, would also have been a fundamental catastrophe to those who experienced it directly.[89]

Furthermore, Cohn tends toward a theological coherence of the variety of responses from ancient Israel, saying, "All the biblical authors share the aim of promoting perdurable faith in Yahweh and *solidarity* with the Jewish (Judahite) community despite the total upheaval of their world,"[90] and "Catastrophe did not fragment the nation into priestly, prophetic, royal, and other groups each pressing its own claims and denigrating the rest. The community's 'we' obscures whatever particular 'we's' may lie behind the biblical text."[91] While one cannot deny that the responses found in the Hebrew Bible are all a part of ancient Israel's religious tradition, it is important, from a sociological perspective, to give greater emphasis to the particular voices within ancient Israel and their competing claims. What is more, Cohn states, "Not exclusivity, but inclusiveness, characterizes the hopes for restored Judah,"[92] which seems to overlook the socially exclusive perspective of Ezra-Nehemiah.[93] Finally, Cohn seems to have an interest in the "perdurable faith" of subsequent Jewish communities in crisis. We, on the other hand, are focusing on the communities within ancient Israel.[94]

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[88]Robert L. Cohn, "Biblical Responses to Catastrophe," *Judaism* 35 (1986): 263.

[89]See Appendix A.

[90]Cohn, "Catastrophe," 264; italics added.

[91]Cohn, "Catastrophe," 275.

[92]Cohn, "Catastrophe," 275.

[93]E.g., the ban on marriage to foreign women; Ezra 9:1-4, 10;6-44; Neh 13:1-3, 23-30.

[94]For a sharply discerning study of the history–continuity and discontinuity–of Hebrew literature on Jewish responses to national catastrophes, see Alan Mintz, *urban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

In his article, "Crisis-evoked, Crisis-resolving Speech," Walter Brueggemann takes crises seriously as "those occasions in Israel's life and faith when Israel's communal existence as a socio-political community was at risk, and when Israel's life with Yahweh was placed in jeopardy."[95] Thus, crises for the ancient Israelites threaten both socio-political and theological status. According to Brueggemann, crisis prompts characteristic speech. Crisis "brings to out-loud articulation certain expressions that may be long latent in the community, but seem neither possible nor necessary for utterance until the time of concrete risk."[96] At the same time, that which is articulated helps the community to endure the crisis and survive beyond it.[97]

Brueggemann focuses on three crises: the "Golden Calf" episode at Mt. Sinai according to Exod 32–34,[98] the fall of Israel to Assyria as reflected upon, in his opinion, in Hos 2:2–23, and the fall of Judah/Jerusalem to the Babylonians and the ensuing exile in Babylon as reflected upon in (Second) Isa 54. The verses that for Brueggemann contain the crisis-resolving speeches are Exod 34:6–7, 10; Hos 2:19–20 and Isa 54:7–10 respectively. Each speech is a speech of Yahweh responding to crisis, each affirming divine benevolence in terms of relational loyalty and compassion, each assuring Yahweh's fidelity to terms of covenant, each articulating something unarticulated before the crisis and each resolving the theological crisis experienced by the people.[99] This is a helpful article, especially in this latter respect; however, Brueggemann is on a quest for the "focus and beginning point for First Testament theology,"[100] not to exploring the wider historical and experiential context.

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[95]Walter Brueggemann, "Crisis-evoked, Crisis-resolving Speech," *BTB* 24 (1994): 95.

[96]Brueggemann, "Crisis," 95.

[97]Brueggemann, "Crisis," 95.

[98]The crisis is the broken Sinai covenant. This episode is less an historical event than the fall of Israel and Judah. See his related comments; Brueggemann, "Crisis," 96-97.

[99]See Brueggemann's comments on this latter point; "Crisis," 102.

[100]Brueggemann, "Crisis," 95. See also, Walter Brueggemann, "A Shattered Transcendence? Exile and Restoration" in *Biblical Theology: Problems and Perspectives* (Steven J. Kraftchick, *et al.* eds; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 179.

Daniel L. Smith-Christopher has contributed another important work: *A Biblical Theology of Exile*. Smith-Christopher focuses social-scientific theory in his study, and acknowledges the realities of human responses to historical trauma. He argues that the key biblical texts that he uses in his study arose out of the human trauma of exile;[101] however, he does not claim that 587 B.C.E., the fall of Judah, is the only relevant, traumatic event in the life of those responsible for the texts. Instead, he acknowledges the parallel trauma of the fall of Israel in 722 B.C.E.,[102] and trauma from the time of King Josiah through the period of Babylonian and Egyptian domination of Judah before 587.[103]

Our study is similar to Smith-Christopher's on the one hand, yet different on the other. Smith-Christopher, as we, focuses primarily on texts in the Hebrew Bible;[104] yet, we cast a broader net, taking in a wider range of ancient Near Eastern material culture and texts. With reference to disaster studies, Smith-Christopher specifically employs refugee studies. He is particularly concerned with the social dynamics of a people removed from their home context. His perspective on the theology of the ancient Israelites in response to the catastrophe comes *vis-à-vis* the neo-Babylonian and Persian empires. While this angle is very important, we approach Israelite theology of these periods *vis-à-vis* commonly held notions within the Israelite community. Smith-Christopher emphasizes Israelite theological coherence;[105] we emphasize tensions. Finally, Smith-Christopher has a particular theological agenda. "In this work," he says,

> I am not exclusively focused on the exilic events of the ancient Judeans. I argue that ancient Israelite responses to exile and diaspora, as reflected in the biblical texts, can provide the building blocks for rethinking the role

[101]Smith-Christopher, *Theology of Exile*, 73.

[102]Smith-Christopher, *Theology of Exile*, 55-56.

[103]Smith-Christopher, *Theology of Exile*, 108-9.

[104]For example, Smith-Christopher focuses on passages from Ezek, Lam, Deut, Ezra, Neh, etc. As for other ancient Near Eastern texts, he incorporates *Wisdom of Solomon*, from the Apocrypha, and *Wisdom of Ptahhotep* and *Instruction of Ankhsheshonq*, both Egyptian wisdom texts.

[105]Smith-Christopher, *Theology of Exile*, 7-8.

> of the Hebrew Bible in informing the modern Christian theological enterprise.[106]

While sympathetic to this purpose, we will keep the theology descriptive, seeking a foundation for all enterprises historically rooted in ancient Israel.[107]

Finally, Cohn, Brueggemann and Smith-Christopher focus primarily upon catastrophes representing military defeat. A specific study that attempts to understand *natural* catastrophes as experienced by the ancient Israelites and their neighbors from their point of view is, at present, lacking.[108] This project, therefore, attempts to fill this gap.[109]

OUTLINE OF THIS STUDY

Following this introduction, we shall survey some of the textual and archaeological evidence for natural catastrophes in the ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean world in chapter two. In chapter three, we shall clarify the sociological theory pertinent to this study in order to better understand the presence of *doxa*, crisis as a challenge to *doxa* and responses to such a challenge. In chapter four, we shall establish the common understandings of natural catastrophes among people of the ancient Near East, biblical

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[106]Smith-Christopher, *Theology of Exile*, 6.

[107]It may be true that no scholar approaches his or her historical task without some contemporary agenda, but it is beneficial, I think, to have an understanding of the varieties of ancient Israelite theologies in their contexts as well as the variety of later religious developments for which ancient Israel is foundational.

[108]See also K. C. Hanson, "When the King Crosses the Line: Royal Deviance and Restitution in Levantine Ideologies," *BTB* 26 (1996): 11-25.

[109]In addition, there seems to be at present a burgeoning field of trauma studies among Hebrew Bible scholars; inter alia Kathleen M. O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002); and "Surviving Disaster in the Book of Jeremiah" *WW* 22.4 (2002): 369-77. See also Aiton Birnbaum, "Collective Trauma and Post-traumatic Symptoms in the Biblical Narrative of Ancient Israel" *MHRC* 11 (2008): 533-48.

Israel included.[110] In addition, we shall emphasize intellectual/theological challenges and reformulations that emerge in light of conflicting *doxa*. Then, in chapter five, we shall chart the common responses to communal catastrophes, practical and religious. Finally, we shall close in chapter six with summary statements and conclusions.

[110]For a general discussion of common understandings throughout the ancient Near Eastern world, see Morton Smith, "The Common Theology of the Ancient Near East," *JBL* 71 (1952): 135-47, esp. 138 n.9, 144-45. Smith argues that such commonalities are best explained by "relatively uniform causes, that is, social, psychological and rhetorical patterns, rather than accidents of historical transmission. . . . Consequently, parallels between theological material in the OT and in 'Ancient Near Eastern Texts' cannot be taken off hand as indicating any literary dependence, common source, or cultural borrowing"; "Common Theology," 146.

CHAPTER 2: NATURAL CATASTROPHES IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN AND MEDITERRANEAN WORLDS

One might claim that we do not need hard evidence that natural catastrophes occurred in the ancient Near East in order to proceed with this project.[1] Apart from assuming experiences common to modern and ancient people, the fact that texts and artifacts directly relate to dealing with natural catastrophes, as we shall see, is supportive proof enough for our purposes. Nonetheless, archaeological and geological evidence of natural catastrophes in the ancient Near East as well as textual evidence deserves some attention. We shall only briefly survey elements of that evidence and interpretations thereof, saving the bulk of the textual evidence for later in our study.

As already noted,[2] catastrophic conditions can occur gradually or suddenly.[3] Aridization and the resulting drought conditions, for example, usually occur gradually, requiring long periods of time. The climate of the ancient Near East, then, is one area of archaeological study relevant to our interest. The presence of relatively warmer or colder temperatures and relatively more moist or more arid conditions, is observable through examination of the oxygen isotope curve in sea cores, the presence of and

[1]As Mark Twain once said, "[One] could foretell wars and famines, though that was not so hard, for there was always a war and generally a famine somewhere." Quoted in Doris Benardete, ed., *Mark Twain: Wit and Wisecracks* (Mount Vernon, N.Y.: The Peter Pauper Press, 1961), 26.

[2]Introduction, 6.

[3]Hoffman and Oliver-Smith, "Anthropology and the Angry Earth," 1.

types of pollen in soil samples and the stratification of sediments in specific localities.[4]

More specifically, there is sufficient evidence to indicate that serious local flooding occurred in the ancient Near East.[5] This is especially true in Mesopotamia because, as P. R. S. Moorey describes it, the land is flat and low-lying, allowing for little natural drainage. Also, the Tigris and Euphrates rivers overflow their banks at times because of silting, not to mention because of heavy flooding, runoff or rainfall.[6] Alluvium, a layer or layers of flood-born sediment, has been found at various urban sites of ancient Mesopotamia. Although some scholars would have it do so, such data do not validate a particular historical understanding of the biblical or ancient Near Eastern traditions of an extensive or universal flood. Alluvium deposits at Ur (ca. 3500 B.C.E.) caused a sensation in the early twentieth century C.E.[7]

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[4]Arlene Miller Rosen, "Paleoenvironments of the Levant," in *Near Eastern Archaeology: A Reader* (Suzanne Richard, ed.; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 10-15. For a more detailed discussion of tools for reconstructing paleoenvironments, see Rosen, *Civilizing Climate*, 17-31.

[5]For a discussion of flood research as of 1992, see Heinsohn, "The Rise of Blood Sacrifice," 116-17. See also the research of William Ryan and Walter Pitman on a possible catastrophic flood in the area of the Black Sea, presented in a popular style in *Noah's Flood: The New Scientific Discoveries About the Event That Changed History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998).

[6]P. R. S. Moorey, *Ur "of the Chaldees": A Revised and Updated Edition of Sir Leonard Woolley's Excavations at Ur* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982), 32.

[7]In the 1920's, Sir Leonard Wooley and his crew of excavators sank shafts through many layers of Sumerian debris at Ur in southern Mesopotamia. At a level higher than the marshes of the vicinity at that time, they discovered a level of clay measuring over eight feet in depth. Culturally contrasting debris resumed below this layer of clay. "The bed of water-laid clay," says Wooley, "which extended from the town to the stream or canal at the north-east end, could only have been the result of a flood . . . of a magnitude unparalleled in local history." While he goes on to make the unconvincing claim that "there could be no doubt that the flood . . . was the Flood of Sumerian history and legend, the Flood on which is based the story of Noah," he qualified this flood as local, and not universal; *Ur of the Chaldees: A Record of Seven Years of Excavation* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930; repr., W. W. Norton and Company, 1965), 28-29, 31. Subsequently, Moorey, states "it is now

Whether this layer of clay was deposited by water (salt, brackish or fresh[8]) or wind,[9] M. E. L. Mallowan concluded that it was evidence of catastrophic flooding, albeit local.[10] Alluvium deposits are known from Kish, Nineveh, Shuruppak (Fara), Uruk, and Lagash as well.[11] In regard to a section of the city of Kish, M. Gibson allows that a 30cm level of alluvium "may have put an end to domestic occupation on this part of the site."[12] Alluvial sequences at Tel Lachish in Israel also suggest both periods of local flooding and periods of aridization.[13]

Scholars have noted a change in settlement patterns in the ancient Near East in the early Bronze Age, specifically EB II–III (ca. 3050–2300 B.C.E.). Timothy Harrison notes that "environmental degradation" has received "increasing credibility in the face of mounting physical evidence of climatic change."[14] Specifically, Harvey Weiss notes the environmental

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generally agreed that the 'Flood-deposit' at Ur in the 'Ubaid period is too remote in time to be the one enshrined in local memory"; *Ur of the Chaldees*, 35.

[8]Mallowan, "Noah's Flood Reconsidered," 74.

[9]Susan Pollock, "Ur," *OEANE* 5:288.

[10]Mallowan, "Noah's Flood Reconsidered," 81.

[11]Jack P. Lewis, "Flood," *ABD* 2:798. See also brief discussions of these and other sites as they relate to archaeological evidence of alluvium in Mallowan, "Noah's Flood Reconsidered," especially plate xx. For references to floods from ancient Near Eastern texts, see Mallowan, 65-66. See also Lloyd R. Bailey, *Noah: The Person and the Story in History and Tradition* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 29-31.

[12]M. Gibson, "Kish. B. Archäologisch," *RlA* 5:616.

[13]Arlene Miller Rosen, "Environmental Change and Settlement at Tel Lachish, Israel," *BASOR* 263 (1986): 56-57.

[14]Timothy P. Harrison, "Shifting Patterns of Settlement in the Highlands of Central Jordan during the Early Bronze Age," *BASOR* 306 (1997): 25. See also Arlene Rosen, "The Social Response to Environmental Change in Early Bronze Age Canaan" *JAA* 14 (1995): 26-44. Other explanations include invasions and gradual, internal adaptations. For a summary and rebuttal of the invasion theory, see Suzanne Richard, "The Early Bronze Age: The Rise and Collapse of Urbanism," *BA* 50 (1987): 34-35. Instead, Richard concludes that growth and decline is "a necessary dynamic in cultural evolution"; "Early Bronze Age," 40.

changes in Palestine during this time.[15] Several physical factors suggest an abrupt climate change in the region of Armenia's western steppe late in the third millennium B.C.E. For example, soil and pollen cores reveal dust and ammonium spikes, suggesting an extended period of aridization from 2200–1700 B.C.E.[16]

Barbara Bell, pointing to a severe failure of the annual flood of the Nile, maintains that drought and famine, as a single cause, precipitated the "First Dark Age" of Egypt, ca. 2200–2000.[17] Bell appeals to the inscriptions of the tomb of Ankhtifi at Mo'alla for supporting evidence: "I fed/kept alive Hefat (Mo'alla), Hormer and (?) . . . at a time when the sky was (in) clouds / storm (*igp*) (was a tumult?) and the land was in the wind, . . . (and when everyone was dying) of hunger (*r* . . .) on this sandbank of Hell (*tzw* of Apophis."[18]

Located in northeastern Syria, Tell Leilan is one settlement that was abandoned during 2200–1900 B.C.E. Weiss describes a period of "desertification" in the Khabur plains, the region of Tell Leilan, during this period. He states,

> Soil micromorphology studies (thin sections of datable pedostratigraphic units) undertaken at Tell Leilan and sites within the surrounding countryside have revealed a rapid alteration of climatic conditions for this period: a sudden intensification of wind circulation; an increase in atmospheric dust; and the establishment of arid conditions. The wind erosion and dust deposition are also documented in southern Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf.[19]

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[15]Harvey Weiss, "Beyond the Younger Dryas: Collapse as Adaptation to Abrupt Climate Change in Ancient West Asia and the Eastern Mediterranean," in *Environmental Disaster*, 89.

[16]Fredrick T. Hiebert, "Bronze Age Central Eurasian Cultures in Their Steppe and Desert Environments," in *Environmental Disaster*, 60.

[17]Barbara Bell, "The Dark Ages in Ancient History: 1. The First Dark Age in Egypt," *AJA* 75 (1971): 2-3.

[18]Inscription from the tomb of Ankhtifi, translated by Barbara Bell from Vandier's French translation in *Mo'alla* (Cairo, 1950); "Dark Ages," 8.

[19]Harvey Weiss, "Tell Leilan," *OEANE* 3:345.

Also, population and settlement changes in Mesopotamia at the end of the 2nd millennium have been attributed to changes in climate with the accompanying crop failure, famine, disease and migrations.[20]

It has been suggested that the avalanche of volcanic rock from Mt. Etna in Italy ca. 5000 B.C.E sent a tremendous tsunami that reached the shores of Neolithic Canaan and might account for the abandonment of Atlit-Yam on the coast of Israel.[21] Also, much discussion surrounds the eruption of the volcano on the Cylcadic island of Thera, burying and thereby preserving towns on the island in the path of its ash and pumice. Dating the eruption remains a debate, as does its lasting cultural effects.[22] Sturt W. Manning *et al.* date the eruption to 1650–1620 B.C.E.[23] Among others, Karen Polinger Foster and Robert Ritner argue for a later date, either 1539/35–28 or 1529/24–17.[24] They maintain that the eruption of Thera was known and its effects felt as far away as Egypt.[25] Furthermore, Foster and Ritner argue that the Tempest Stele of Ahmose "may very well

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[20]Martinez, "Epidemic Disease," 415. Martinez attributes population decline not only to death, but to female infertility resulting from famine, i.e., insufficient caloric intake.

[21]Ker Than, "Towering Ancient Tsunami Devestated the Mediterranean," n.p. [cited 30 November 2006]. Online: http://www.livescience.com /forcesofnature/061130_ancient_tsunami.html.

See also www/therafoundation.org/articles/volcanology/. Ehud Galili, *et al.*, while acknowledging that "the rise in sea level could have played a role in the abandonment of the settlement," do not link that rise with a tsunami; "Atlit-Yam: A Prehistoric Site on the Sea Floor off the Israeli Coast," *Journal of Field Archaeology* 20 (1993), 154.

[22]Sturt W. Manning and David A. Sewell, "Volcanoes and History: A Significant Relationship? The Case of Santorini," in *Natural Disasters and Cultural Change*, 282.

[23]Sturt W. Manning, *et al.*, "New Evidence for an Early Date for the Aegean Late Bronze Age and Thera Eruption," *Antiquity* 76 (2002):742.

[24]Karen Polinger Foster and Robert K. Ritner, "Texts, Storms, and the Thera Eruption," *JNES* 55 (1996):10.

[25]Foster and Ritner, "Texts, Storms," 10. See also Hans Goedicke, "The Chronology of the Thera/Santorini Explosion," *Ägypten und Levante* 3 (1992): 60-61.

stand as an eyewitness account of the Thera eruption."[26] A pertinent text in which Foster and Ritner see meteorological phenomena and destruction typical of volcanic eruption follows:

> The gods [caused] the sky to come in a tempest of r[ain], with darkness in the western region and the sky being unleashed without [cessation, louder than] the cries of the masses, more powerful than [. . .], [while the rain raged (?)] on the mountains louder than the noise of the cataract which is at Elephantine. Every house, every quarter that they reached [. . .] floating on the water like skiffs of papyrus opposite the royal residence for a period of [. . .] days, while a torch could not be lit in the Two Lands. . . . Then His Majesty was informed that the mortuary concessions had been entered (by water), with the tomb chambers collapsed, the funerary mansions undermined, and the pyramids fallen, having been made into that which was never made.[27]

As for the wide-spread collapse of societies throughout the ancient Near East, Greece and other sites of the eastern Mediterranean in the twelfth century B.C.E.—evident by the ruins of cities and palaces—some scholars have attributed this to natural disasters.[28] Both earthquakes and drought have been proposed as the primary agents of collapse.[29] According to Claude Schaeffer, for example, both earthquakes and drought account

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[26]Foster and Ritner, "Texts, Storms," 10.

[27]"The Tempest Stele of Ahmose," lines 8-12, 17-18 (Robert K. Ritner, Appendix A to Foster and Ritner, "Thera Eruption," 11-12). For more on the Tempest Stele and the suggestion that the Sumerian poem *Lugal-e* also contains meteorological descriptions that best fit volcanic phenomena, see Karen Polinger Foster, "Volcanic Echoes in Ancient Near Eastern Texts," in *Cultural Responses to the Volcanic Landscape: The Mediterranean and Beyond* (Miriam S. Balmuth, David K. Chester and Patricia A. Johnston, eds.; Boston: Archaeological Institute of America, 2005), 279-96.

[28]For a survey of this great catastrophe, see Robert Drews, *The End of the Bronze Age: Changes in Warfare and the Catastrophe ca. 1200 B.C.* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 8-30. See also, Willam H. Stiebing, "The End of the Mycenean Age," *BA* 43 (1980): 7-21; and "Climate and Collapse: Did the Weather Make Israel's Emergence Possible?" *Bible Review* 10/4 (1994): 18-27.

[29]See Drews, *End of Bronze Age*, 33-47, 77-84 respectively.

for the collapse of Ugarit.[30] On the decline of Assyria and Babylonia in this time period, J. Neumann and Simo Parpola, careful not to attribute direct cause to natural catastrophes, conclude:

> The political, military, and economic decline of Assyria and Babylonia in the twelfth through the tenth centuries appears to coincide with the period of notable warming and aridity which set in about 1200 and lasted till about 900 [B.C.E.]. Although the relevant evidence still needs to be substantiated, we feel justified in concluding that this type of climatic change very likely took place in the Near East.[31]

While migrations, invasions and military advances have been proposed as primary agents of change during this era as well, it is likely that no one explanation is sufficient. Marc Van De Mieroop concludes, "Since all these explanations have some foundation in the historical record . . . a variety of causes was probably at the root of the changes we observe."[32]

While little direct evidence beyond the literary resources is available, it stands to reason that epidemic diseases existed and took their toll in the ancient Near East.[33] The Amarna Letters acknowledge epidemics. EA 35, for example, refers to disease by stating, "the hand of Nergal is in my country and in my own house. There was a young wife of mine that now . . . is dead."[34] EA 96 reads in part, "As to your saying, 'I will not permit men from Sumer to enter my city. There is a pestilence in

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[30]Claude F. A. Schaeffer, "Commentaires sur les lettres et documents trouvés dans les bibliothèques privées d'Ugarit," *Ugaritica V* (ed. by Jean Nougayrol *et al.*; Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1968), 762, 768. George E. Mendenhall attributes the ashes to internal, human violence as a result of social disintegration; *The Tenth Generation: The Origins of the Biblical Tradition* (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 218-19.

[31]J. Neumann and Simo Parpola, "Climatic Change and the Eleventh-Tenth-Century Eclipse of Assyria and Babylonia," *JNES* 46 (1987): 177.

[32]Marc Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East ca. 3000-323 BC* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 188.

[33]Martinez, "Epidemic Disease," 429.

[34]"The Hand of Nergal," EA 35.35-39 (William L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters* [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992], 108).

Sumer,' is it a pestilence affect[ing] men or one affect[ing] asses?"[35] Plague is acknowledged in Larsa in the Old Babylonian period as well:

> This is what Sin-iddinam, king of Larsa, your servant, says: In your city Larsa, your heart's choice, a plague has broken out, The broad streets where they passed the days in play are filled with silence. . . . Since (or: in) the seventh year, in my city one has not been released from strife and battle, pestilence does not stay its arm.[36]

Finally, in a letter from Ras Shamra regarding a military situation, it is said, "Pestilence is (at work) here, for death is very strong."[37]

While the textual evidence for such diseases is strong, paleopathology, an increasingly sophisticated sub-discipline of archaeology sparked by advances in technology, has inherent limitations when it comes to establishing a full understanding of epidemics in the ancient Near East. First, such data are a "sample of a sample" at best. That is, it is difficult to establish data for all of a particular population. Second, bones do not contribute to positive identification of epidemic diseases, because rapid death from an epidemic disease leaves no manifestation in either skeletal or dental remains, as do some chronic diseases. What is more, even when pathogens are found in human remains, it is difficult to conclude that the person's death was a direct result of those pathogens.[38]

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[35]"The King's Asses," EA 96 (Moran, *Amarna Letters*, 170).

[36]"The Appeal to Utu," II.11-13, III.30 (William W. Hallo, "The Royal Correspondence of Larsa: II. The Appeal to Utu," in *Zikir Šumim: Assyriological Studies Presented to F. R. Kraus on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* [Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1982], 99-101).

[37]"A Military Situation," translated by Dennis Pardee (*COS* 3.45BB:108). The first phrase may be translated more literally as "the hand of the gods." See *COS* 3:108n152; see also Johannes C. de Moor, "Theodicy in the Texts of Ugarit," in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible*, 113-14.

[38]Donald J. Ortner and W. Putschar, *Identification of Pathological Conditions in Human Skeletal Remains* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1985), 9. For an indication of current interest in paleopathology and more specifics on what archaeology can and cannot contribute to the study of epidemic diseases, see Peter Mitchell, "Archaeology of Epidemic and Infectious Disease," *World Archaeology* 35 (2003): 171-318.

Nonetheless, James Harris and Kent Weeks suggest that Thutmosis II, whose mummy is marked by emaciation, likely died from disease, that Siptah may have had polio, and that Ramasses V apparently died of smallpox.[39] Furthermore, there is ample evidence of parasites from mummy body tissue. In particular, the hydatid cyst can cause death and was probably a common disease in ancient Egypt.[40] Parasites attested in ancient Israel include lice, hydatid cysts and tapeworms; infectious diseases attested include syphilis, tuberculosis and leprosy.[41]

Having surveyed only some of the evidence for natural catastrophes in the ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean world, we conclude that there is, in fact, abundant evidence, both textual and archaeological, in support of our study. Next, we shall explicate social theory pertinent to our study.

[39]James E. Harris and Kent Weeks, *X-raying the Pharaohs* (London: Macdonald and Co., 1973), 133.

[40]A. Rosalee David and E. Tapp, eds., *The Mummy's Tale* (London: Michael O'Mara Books, 1992), 139, 141. See also Joyce Filer, *Disease* (Egyptian Bookshelf; Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1996), 11.

[41]Joseph Zias, "Death and Disease in Ancient Israel," *BA* 54 (1991): 146-59. For evidence of tape and whip worms in Israel, see Jane Cahill, *et al.* "It Had to Happen: Scientists Examine Remains of Ancient Bathrooms," *BAR* 17/3 (1991): 68-69.

CHAPTER 3: SOCIAL THEORY: *DOXA*, CRISIS AND COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

In the decade since the publication of *Community, Identity, and Ideology: Social Science Approaches to the Hebrew Bible*, biblical studies has remained "a discipline in transition," to borrow Charles E. Carter's phrase.[1] While no new methodological consensus has emerged, a number of biblical scholars have maintained an interest in social scientific approaches to the Hebrew Bible and the culture and people who produced it.[2] Our study works within the social, theoretical perspective of cultural idealism, for we are focused first on ideology.[3]

As described by Berlinerblau, sociological theory regarding ideology falls into two categories: voluntaristic and involuntaristic. He contends that most biblical scholars who have sought to highlight the ideology at work in

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[1]Charles E. Carter, "A Discipline in Transition: The Contributions of the Social Sciences to the Study of the Hebrew Bible," in *Community, Identity, and Ideology: Social Science Approaches to the Hebrew Bible* (ed. Charles E. Carter and Carol L. Meyers; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 3.

[2]Carter provides a concise history of the social sciences as employed in the study of the Hebrew Bible, and he is very helpful in delineating sociological and anthropological approaches, objectives and criteria for social models; "Discipline in Transition," 3-36. Philip F. Esler and Anselm C. Hagedorn add little to Carter's essay in a more recent survey; "Social-Scientific Analysis of the Old Testament: A Brief History and Overview," in *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in its Social Context* (ed. Philip F. Esler; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2006), 3-32.

[3]Versus cultural materialism; see Carter, "Discipline in Transition," 9.

biblical texts have assumed that ideology is voluntaristic. That is to say, "the ideologue is conscious of his or her ideological production," and that ideology "'belongs' to a particular group or social class."[4] An alternate understanding of ideology is that it is *in*voluntaristic and shared by all subgroups within a society.[5] In this chapter, we shall explicate the concept of involuntaristic or endoxic ideology via Durkheim and Pierre Bourdieu, and emphasize its pertinence to this study.[6] Then, we shall see how this theory leads us to the notion of "cognitive dissonance."

THE DURKHEIMIAN TRADITION

"Religion is an eminently social thing," said Durkheim.[7] Whereas others may locate religion in ideas—be they rational, transcendental or material—Durkheim locates religion in the social, experiential realities of the people;[8] therefore, a Durkheimian approach to religion first describes the social

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[4]Jacques Berlinerblau, "Ideology, Pierre Bourdieu's *Doxa*, and the Hebrew Bible," *Semeia* 87 (1999): 200.

[5]Berlinerblau, "*Doxa*," 202.

[6]Scholars who have emphasized involuntaristic ideology and the Hebrew Bible range from at least as early as Hermann Gunkel and include such important methodological figures as Edmund Leach. On the variety of literary forms in the Hebrew Bible, Gunkel comments, "To the people of Israel, the laws of literary form were as familiar as the rules of Hebrew grammar. They obeyed them unconsciously and lived in them"; "Fundamental Problems of Hebrew Literary History," in *What Remains of the Old Testament and Other Essays* (trans. A. K. Dallas; London: George Allen and Unwin, 1928), 60-61; trans. of *Die Wirkungen des heiligen Geistes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1888). Observing inconsistencies in Hebrew Bible narrative, Leach implies non-voluntaristic forces when he says, "What the myth then 'says' is not what the editors consciously intended to say but rather something which lies deeply embedded in Jewish traditional culture as a whole"; "Genesis as Myth," *Discovery* 23 (1972): 7-24; repr. in Leach, *Genesis as Myth and Other Essays* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), 53.

[7]Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 9; On Durkheim in scholarship on the Hebrew Bible and recent sociology, see Appendix B.

[8]Not the same as the production and acquisition of material goods *à la* Karl Marx.

religious phenomena, then grounds those religious phenomena in the social, experiential realities of the people, assigning a function for the religious phenomena within that social group.[9]

As noted earlier,[10] there are two categories of religious phenomena for Durkheim: beliefs and rites. "Beliefs," says Durkheim, "are states of opinion and consist of representations," whereas rites "are particular modes of action."[11] "Only after having defined the belief," Durkheim adds, "can we define the rite."[12] This is one way in which our study is indebted to Durkheim, for we shall describe the beliefs and rites of ancient Israel regarding communal catastrophes in the chapters that follow.

First, however, we need to elaborate upon two of Durkheim's fundamental notions regarding belief: collective consciousness and the related notion of collective representations.[13] Then, we shall highlight Bourdieu's elaboration of these Durkheimian themes as *doxa*. If understood as social facts,[14] *doxa* precedes the various autonomous—i.e., conscious—opinions of a society and its sub-groups, and is, therefore, involuntary. These themes of social knowledge are important to our study, because we will identify pervasive, taken-for-granted understandings within ancient Israel and the wider cultural world of the ancient Near East.[15]

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[9]William E. Paden, "Before 'the Sacred' Became Theological: Rereading the Durkheimian Legacy," *Theory in the Study of Religion* 3 (1991), 21.

[10]Introduction, 10.

[11]Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 34.

[12]Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 34.

[13]Susan Stedman Jones has observed that, "Durkheim is well known, but not known well." Hence, elaboration of pertinent notions is in order; *Durkheim Reconsidered* (Malden, Mass.: Polity, 2001), x.

[14]Durkheim defines a social fact as "any way of acting [thinking or feeling], whether fixed or not, capable of exerting over the individual an external constraint," and any way of acting, thinking or feeling "which is general over the whole of a given society whilst having an existence of its own, independent of its individual manifestations"; *Rules of Sociological Method*, 52-59.

[15]What follows is my own synthesis of scattered comments on collective consciousness and collective representations in Durkheim's work, footnoted throughout.

Even though they are closely related, Durkheim's notions of collective consciousness and collective representations can be differentiated. A group's collective consciousness consists of its most fundamental values and beliefs regarding what Durkheim considers as universal categories of thought that have been shaped through time and the experience of a society.[16] People born into a particular society are born into its particular consciousness, i.e., mentality or world-view, which determines their thought and compels their action.[17] The social facts that comprise a group's collective consciousness begin external to people born into a society, but come to form the internal consciousness of those individuals.[18]

On the other hand, a collective representation, says Durkheim, is an external projection of the internal collective consciousness.[19] It is where

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[16]Durkheim states, "All that constitutes reason, its principles and categories, has been made in the course of history"; *Pragmatism and Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955, repr. 1983), 67, quoted in Serge Muscovici, "Social Consciousness and Its History," *Culture and Psychology* 4 (1998): 415; see also Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 15. Thus, they are not static; see Warren Schmaus, "Durkheim on the Causes and Functions of the Categories," in *On Durkheim's Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (ed. N. J. Allen, W. S. F. Pickering and W. Watts Miller; London: Routledge, 1998), 185; see also Jones, *Durkheim Reconsidered*, 86. One of the most thorough definitions of collective consciousness directly based on Durkheim's work is articulated by Jones: "[collective consciousness] is a plural totality at the mental level, established through the communication of consciences. [It] indicates the collective thinking which develops forms of meaning . . . and thus a conception of shared reality which enters into all social and cultural activity, and is reinforced by being acted on"; *Durkheim Reconsidered*, 87.

[17]Action is expressed in rites (see comments below). Also, Durkheim claims that representations have the power to compel conduct for good or ill; *Elementary Forms*, 209.

[18]See Durkheim's definition of social facts in note 14 above.

[19]Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 229. This differentiation is corroborated by Jones: "ideas and beliefs exist internally [i.e., collective consciousness], but are externalized in symbols and objects of veneration [i.e., collective representations]"; *Durkheim Reconsidered*, 210; see also Durkheim's comments on religious force objectified, or "superimposed upon nature" (*Elementary Forms*, 230); and totems as "the visible reality of the god," i.e., collective thought; *Elementary Forms*, 223. Karen Fields, on the other hand, defines collective representations the way I have defined collective consciousness, as "shared mental constructs with the help of which . . .

collective thoughts and values are focused and articulated by the group. In short, a collective representation is a symbol—a totem in Durkheim's terms—or according to Gilberto Perez-Campos, an external product.[20] It is an expression of the particular collective consciousness of a group.[21] To summarize thus far, external collective consciousness is first internalized by individuals of a group, and then that which has become internal is again externalized as a collective representation.

Furthermore, a collective representation is, as Durkheim says, "a force that stirs up around us a whole whirlwind of organic and psychological phenomena,"[22] making it not only the objectification of collective thought, but the catalyst of collective conduct. In turn, collective conduct, says Karen Fields, reifies collective consciousness through the representation.[23]

As an external object imbued with cultural consciousness, nearly any object can serve as a collective representation: a totem, an idol, a flag, an amulet, a ritual, or a text—mythic, historical, literary or liturgical.[24]

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human beings collectively view themselves, each other, and the natural world"; Introduction to *Elementary Forms*, xviii.

[20]Gilberto Perez-Campos, "Social Representation and the Ontology of the Social World: Bringing Another Signification into the Dialogue," *Culture and Psychology* 4 (1998): 331-47.

[21]Schmaus, "Durkheim on the Causes," 177-78. He maintains that collective representations are the socially variable expressions of universal categories of thought.

[22]Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor*, 53, quoted in William Ramp, "Effervescence, Differentiation and Representation in *The Elementary Forms,*" in *On Durkheim's Elementary Forms*, 139.

[23]Fields, introduction to *Elementary Forms*, xix; Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 209-10. Clifford Geertz's definition of symbols is comparable. Symbols, he says, are "extrinsic sources of information in terms of which human life can be patterned"; "Ideology As a Cultural System," in *Interpretation of Cultures*, 216.

[24]See Durkheim's definition and statement of the "totemic principle"; *Elementary Forms*, 191-92; see also, 201-2, 208, 327-28. Farr lists language usage, religion, customs, rituals, myths, magic and cognate phenomena–in short, culture; "From Collective to Social," 280, 286. For Durkheim on amulets, see *Elementary Forms*, 35; on rituals, 202; on speech and language as vehicles of corporate

Regarding texts in particular, Hervé Varenne argues, "Cultural specificity is a social event . . . including the intellectual practices of text production"[25] and, we might add, their use. A written text is a way that a society represents itself to itself, as Berlinerblau has argued.[26] Inasmuch as texts are collective representations, their ideology belongs in part to the entire community. While the social elite produced the texts of the Hebrew Bible, they are not the sole owners of the ideology therein.[27] Viewing texts this way, we suggest that involuntary, pervasive, taken-for-granted understandings are part and parcel of those texts.

We can, however, identify several limitations to Durkheim's theories as they pertain to this study. First, to the frustration of those who try to understand him, Durkheim does not adequately define what exactly he means by "society." Second, Durkheim seems to treat society primarily

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conceptions of experience, 436. On myth as a collective representation, see Leach, "Genesis as Myth," 7-24. Also, Farr puts the study of myth under the study of collective representations; "From Collective to Social," 281.

[25]Hervé Varenne, "Collective Representation in American Anthropological Conversations: Individual and Culture," *Current Anthropology* 25 (1984): 281-99.

[26]Berlinerblau, "The Book of Genesis as a 'Collective Representation': Possibilities and Problems in Durkheimian Readings of the Bible," (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature. Denver, Colo., 19 November, 2001).

[27]Contra Philip R. Davies, *In Search of "Ancient Israel"* (JSOTSupp 148; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 19. He claims, "It is obvious that literature in the ancient world is not the product of a whole society. It is a scribal activity, and thus confined to less than five per cent of any ancient agrarian society." Literature is neither by, nor for the whole society (p. 104). Popular traditions, according to Davies, do not "naturally percolate" into literature through the elite scribes, who are "insulated from the majority of the population" (p. 103). Furthermore, Davies seems to assume that a community requires ideological assent from all parts (p. 93). For convergence and divergence with Davies on the Hebrew Bible as an "educational-enculturational" text for and by the elites, see David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 303. Davies seems to allow the scribes more contact with the rest of their society in *Scribes and Schools: The Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures* (Library of Ancient Israel; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 19.

in homeostasis, avoiding the problem of social change. He concentrates, therefore, on religious practice related to people's ordinary experiences.[28] Yet, social change is as much a reality as social homeostasis. As we have noted, communal catastrophes result in social change. Third, Durkheim emphasizes the need of society for unity and consensus in order to survive.[29] He at least allows for sub-divisions within society,[30] but he does not give us the theoretical tools to work with the inevitable competition that arises between and within these groups.[31]

PIERRE BOURDIEU AND *DOXA*

We get help in these areas by turning to another French social theorist, Pierre Bourdieu, who extends Durkheimian theory[32] while integrating conflict theory and acknowledging social change as well. Such integration is manifest when he explains:

> If one takes seriously both the Durkheimian hypothesis of the social origins of schemes of thought, perception, appreciation, and action and the fact of class divisions, one is necessarily driven to the hypothesis that a correspondence exists between social structures (strictly speaking, power

[28]The totemic principle, he states, maintains *ordinary* life; *Elementary Forms*, 206. Durkheim does, however, describe piacular rites associated with natural catastrophes; *Elementary Forms*, 407.

[29]Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 16, 156-57, 210. For a concise explanation of conflictive versus structural-functional traditions in social theory, see Carter, "Discipline in Transition," 9-10.

[30]See his discussion on "sub-totems"; *Elementary Forms*, 152.

[31]The competitive model of sociology is articulated by Max Weber, among others; see Max Weber, *Ancient Judaism* (trans. and ed. Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale, New York: The Free Press, 1952), 61, 65, 68. See also a discussion of Weber by Andrew D. H. Mayes, "Idealism and Materialism in Weber and Gottwald," in *Community, Identity, and Ideology*, 260-61.

[32]"To discover the social at the very heart of the most subjective experience is a central aim of Bourdieu, just as it was for Durkheim"; David Schwartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 46.

> structures) and mental structures. This correspondence obtains through the structure of symbolic symbols, language, religion, art and so forth.[33]

For Bourdieu, society—Durkheim's macro culture—is comprised of various fields.[34] Richard Jenkins argues,

> A field, in Bourdieu's sense, is a social arena within which struggles or maneuvers take place over specific resources or stakes and access to them. Fields are defined by the stakes which are at stake. Each field, by virtue of its defining content, has a logic and taken-for-granted structure of necessity and relevance which is both the product and producer of the habitus which is specific and appropriate to the field.[35]

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[33]Pierre Bourdieu, "Genesis and the Structure of the Religious Field," in *Religious Institutions* (ed. Craig Calhoun; *Comparative Social Research A Research Annual* 13; Greenwich, Conn.: Jai Press, 1991), 5.

[34]In as much as Bourdieu understands social fields as "competitive arenas," he synthesizes Durkheim and Max Weber. Competition among fields stems from their relative position in the society at large, according to their social hierarchy (a hint of class division à *la* Marx), and is often manifest by religious leaders of a society; Schwartz, *Culture and Power*, 9, 44, 48. Nonetheless, various fields of a society share common practices, what Bourdieu calls habitus, "the unifying principle of practices in different domains"; *Outline*, 83.

Conflict among fields arises in times of crises, according to Bourdieu, because of a struggle for dominance; Schwartz, *Culture and Power*, 124-25. On conservation and succession strategies, Bourdieu says, "the drawing of the line between the field of opinion . . . and the field of *doxa* . . . is itself a fundamental objective at stake in the form of class struggle which is the struggle for the imposition of the dominant systems of classification. The dominated classes have an interest in pushing back the limits of *doxa* and exposing the arbitrariness of the taken for granted; the dominant classes have an interest in defending the integrity of *doxa*, or, short of this, of establishing in its place the necessarily imperfect substitute, orthodoxy." The response of the dominant is "the work of conscious systematization and express rationalization which marks the passages from *doxa* to orthodoxy;" *Outline*, 169.

[35]Richard Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu* (London: Routledge, 1992), 84.

Each field within a society, while internally expressing conflicting opinions and "discrepant logics,"[36] operates according to prevailing, common, but tacit understandings[37] of the world, what Bourdieu labels *doxa*.[38] In Bourdieu's own words, *doxa* refers to the taken-for-granted assumptions of a field when "(as in ancient societies) the natural and social world appears as self-evident."[39] This "unstated and unrecognized domain of agreement" or unconscious consent is the realm of *doxa*, i.e., that which, according to Bourdieu, "goes without saying because it comes without saying."[40] It is what agents across a sociological field "immediately know, but do not know that they know."[41]

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[36]The logic of the political field and the scientific field, at least as observed by the sociologist; Bourdieu, "Epilogue," 376.

[37]*Doxa* is the singular form of the Greek word δοξα (meaning notion, expectation, opinion), and, therefore the apparent plural would be *doxai* (δοξαι); however, I am not aware that Bourdieu uses the term in its plural form. Instead, the notion of *doxa*, like the notion of collective consciousness, seems to be, as Jones has said, a "plural totality"; *Durkheim Reconsidered*, 87. See also p. 40, note 16 above. In other words, a field's *doxa* may contain multiple assumptions.

[38]Schwartz, *Culture and Power*, 232. "The idea of *doxa* resonates with Durkheim's concept of 'collective consciousness.' A crucial difference is that *doxa* is field specific [i.e., sub-groups within society] rather than the representation of a tacit system of understandings for the entire society"; Schwartz, *Culture and Power*, 125n19. See also Berlinerblau, "Toward a Sociology of Heresy, Orthodoxy, and *Doxa*," *History of Religions* 40 (2001): 346. Another word for the "collective consciousness" of a society might be "mentality"; Berlinerblau, "*Doxa*," 202n19.

[39]Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (trans., Richard Nice; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 164.

[40]Bourdieu, *Outline*, 167; quoted in Berlinerblau, "*Doxa*," 202. Cf. Durkheim, for whom categories of thought, as externals, are "invested with an authority that we cannot escape at will," and that "impose themselves upon us"; *Elementary Forms*, 13.

[41]Berlinerblau, "*Doxa*," 202. For a compilation of Bourdieu's "asides on the topic," see Berlinerblau, "Toward a Sociology of Heresy," 346. Endoxic assumptions, of course, need not be logically consistent. As *doxa*, the logical inconsistency of notions does not surface. All levels of society can hold logically inconsistent assumptions: individuals, fields, and societies. Because *doxa* is that which people "know but do not know that they know," it is, then unconscious. I

Whereas Durkheim assumed social stability, Bourdieu acknowledges that significant crises can disrupt social and cognitive homeostasis. In other words, crisis calls for the articulation of ideology that had been taken for granted, i.e., *doxa*, bringing *doxa* to consciousness.[42] Once articulated, conflicting *doxa* may be exposed, not to mention a resulting conflict between *doxa* and experience. Bourdieu says, "It is when the social world loses its character as a natural phenomenon that the question of the natural and conventional character . . . of social facts can be raised." Bourdieu explains further: "The relationship between language and experience never appears more clearly than in crisis situations in which the everyday order . . . is challenged, and with it the language of order."[43] In the effort to re-establish ideological and social order, competition ensues, dividing articulated *doxa*, i.e., opinion or argument, into orthodoxy and heterodoxy.[44]

Our concern with natural disasters highlights crises that disrupt the stability of the entire community. These events can potentially bring *doxa* to the level of opinion and argument (proposition and opposition[45]) within the affected society. Nonetheless, *doxa* is stubborn. As Bourdieu says, "Endoxic propositions [*doxa*] tend to impose themselves upon us even when they are in total or partial contradiction with experience and logic, because they have

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am not prepared, however, to pursue unconsciousness as understood by psychologists. As a notion of the sociology of knowledge, however, *doxa* remains those propositions that go unacknowledged. As I understand it, however, this does not mean that some of those propositions never surface to consciousness. Jenkins contends that *doxa* is "that which is taken for granted *most of the time*"; *Pierre Bourdieu*, 71; italics added.

[42]Cf. the quote from Brueggemann cited above (Chapter 1), p. 27.

[43]Bourdieu, *Outline*, 170.

[44]According to Bourdieu's terms, when current *doxa* is articulated, it becomes orthodoxy and challenges to it become heterodoxy; *Outline*, 164. In other words, just as *doxa* is identified only by the articulation of opinion, orthodoxy exists only in the presence of heterodoxy; *Outline*, 168-69.

[45]Pierre Bourdieu, "Epilogue: On the Possibility of a Field of World Sociology," in *Social Theory for a Changing Society* (ed. Pierre Bourdieu and James S. Coleman; Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1991), 376.

behind them the power of a group."[46] Even so, there seem to be some experiences that exceed that which *doxa* can satisfactorily explain. Natural disasters can be just such an experience. When *doxa* is challenged by experience, cognitive dissonance may result.

LEON FESTINGER AND COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

A model helpful in mapping responses to the clash between *doxa* and experience is the theory of cognitive dissonance. In his book *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*, Leon Festinger posits that humans desire social and psychological homeostasis. "Cognition," according to Festinger, is "any knowledge, opinion, or belief about the environment, about oneself, or about one's behavior." People hold multiple cognitions.[47] "Dissonance," according to Festinger, is "the existence of nonfitting relations among cognitions." Regarding responses to dissonance, Festinger's hypothesis is twofold: "The existence of dissonance, being psychologically uncomfortable, will motivate the person to try to reduce the dissonance and achieve consonance," or "the person will actively avoid situations and information which would likely increase the dissonance."[48] When possible, the ways in which one might reduce dissonance include behavior modification, environmental modification and cognitive modification.[49] Ways in which one might avoid the increase of dissonance include the active selection of information and/or social support that increases consonance (the consistency between cognitive elements), and behavioral non-commitment.[50] Assuming all manners of modification meet with some degree of resistance, people who are experiencing cognitive dissonance will

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[46]Bourdieu, "Epilogue," 376. Bourdieu also remarks, "To say of a proposition or an opposition that it is endoxic is to say that it partakes of the *doxa*, that it belongs to common sense, to the ordinary vision of the world."

[47]Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1957), 10. Only two contrasting elements are required for the experience of dissonance; *Theory*, 12-13.

[48]Festinger, *Theory*, 3.

[49]Festinger, *Theory*, 19-22.

[50]Festinger, *Theory*, 29-31.

modify, avers Festinger, the dissonant element which they are least resistant toward modifying.[51]

The theory of cognitive dissonance has been appealed to and applied to texts of the Hebrew Bible by Robert P. Carroll.[52] In his book *When Prophecy Failed: Cognitive Dissonance in the Prophetic Traditions of the Old Testament*, Carroll articulates his opinion of the relevance of dissonance theory to biblical studies. Its relevance, he says,

> is its handling of ways in which people respond to disconfirming information. Where there are expectations of a specific nature and where such expectations remain unfulfilled or are refuted by experience there dissonance is said to exist. Here dissonance means the gap between expectation (belief) and reality.[53]

As we noted in our discussion of Bourdieu, natural catastrophes can disrupt social homeostasis and challenge *doxa*. *Doxa* is a type of knowledge; it is a cognitive element, or cognitive elements,[54] albeit dormant until articulated in crisis. We find Festinger helpful because he identifies a range of responses to dissonance. In the next chapter, we shall identify the *doxa* operative among people of the ancient Near East, including the ancient Israelites, potentially disrupted by, or involved in cognitive dissonance, because of the crises induced by natural disasters.

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[51]Festinger, *Theory*, 28.

[52]See also Norman K. Gottwald, "Domain Assumptions and Societal Models in the Study of Pre-Monarchic Israel," in *Congress Volume, 1974* (VTSupp 28; Leiden: Brill, 1975), 89-100. While Gottwald models the use of the social theory of domain assumptions, his focus is the domain of scholars and their assumptions about the society of early Israel.

[53]Robert P.Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed: Cognitive Dissonance in the Prophetic Traditions of the Old Testament* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 109.

[54]See Festinger on "knowledges"; *Theory*, 10.

CHAPTER 4: UNDERSTANDINGS OF AND RESPONSES TO NATURAL CATASTROPHES AMONG PEOPLES OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST AND ANCIENT ISRAEL

Natural disasters are not simply natural occurrences. They are also social phenomena, because they are phenomena interpreted and responded to by those people affected.[1] In this chapter, we shall demonstrate *doxa*, i.e., common, taken-for-granted understandings in Bourdieu's terms, which were held by biblical Israelites and ancient Near Easterners generally regarding, or related to, natural disasters. In addition, we shall demonstrate in this chapter and the following chapter the variety of responses to natural catastrophes known to us through texts and artifacts. In order to avoid needless repetition in reference to the biblical and related texts, for they each demonstrate both understandings and responses, we shall first examine select texts that make specific reference to natural catastrophes before separating out understandings and responses.

Texts, we believe, carry with them cultural ideology. Even fictional stories that make reference to natural disasters carry with them cultural ideology pertaining to understandings of and responses to natural disasters. Our primary source is the Hebrew Bible, but we shall reference pertinent texts and artifacts from ancient Israel's neighbors as well. We shall see that, in particular, curses offer a wide-ranging overview of natural disasters with which the ancient communities were familiar.

[1]Shimoyama, "Basic Characteristics of Disasters," 20.

TREATY CURSE TRADITION

Curses invoking the natural elements and the wide range of natural disasters abound in the Hebrew Bible.[2] Douglas Stuart offers a concise definition of biblical cursing, which incorporates a variety of Hebrew terms: "to curse is to predict, wish, pray for, or cause trouble or disaster on a person [persons, nation states, etc.] or thing."[3] Curses invoke divine power and enforcement, and in treaties or covenants, curses become operative when an oath-taking party violates the agreement. Six catastrophes are commonly described in these curses: defeat of a people at the hands of their enemies, disease, desolation of a people's habitation, deprivation of basic needs, deportation, and death.[4]

The two main collections of curses in the Hebrew Bible are found in Deut 28 and Lev 26.[5] The book of Deuteronomy, as often observed, is

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[2]See the scripture indices to Delbert Hillers, *Treaty-Curses and the Old Testament Prophets* (Rome, Ponifical Biblical Institute, 1964), 91-95, and to Hans Ulrich Steymans, *Deuteronomium 28 und die* adê *zur Thronfolgeregelung Asarhaddons: Segen und Fluch im Alten Orient und in Israel* (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 145; Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz: Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1995), 422-24.

[3]Douglass Stuart, "Curse," *ABD* 1:1218-19.

[4]Stuart, "Curse," 1218. For a thorough treatment of the Hebrew terms rendered "curse," see Herbert C. Brichto, *The Problem of "Curse" in the Hebrew Bible* (JBL Monograph Series 13; Philadelphia: JBL and Exegesis, 1963). As a parallel, blessings that involve the natural elements emphasize such topics as ample rainfall and the productivity of the land.

[5]For a comparison of Lev 26 and Deut 28, see Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27* (AB 3B; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 2346-48. A recent, extensive study of Deut 28 was presented by Steymans. For Steymans, an important issue regarding the text is the dependance of the curses in Deut 28 upon either a common ancient Near Eastern curse tradition or a specific source of ancient Near Eastern parallels, in particular the tradition reflected in VTE. The similarities between the two works are striking. For example, compare Deut 28:23-24 and the VTE §§ 63-64 (Simo Parpola and Kazuko Watanabe, eds., *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths* [SAA 2; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1988], 51), Deut 28:25-33 and VTE §§ 38A-42 (Parpola and Kazuko, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties*, 45-46). Hillers clarifies the first position as the possibility that "both the treaty-curses and their Old Testament parallels simply reflect idioms in popular speech" rendering parallels "due . . . to descent from a common ancestor"; *Treaty-Curses*, 87. Steymans, on the other hand, argues

itself similar to the form of a covenant.[6] With an introduction (1:1–5) and epilogue or epilogues (31:1–34:12), the rest of Deuteronomy is commonly divided into three collections of speeches by Moses. Chapter 28 concludes the second collection, Deut 4:44–28:69, with a series of blessings and curses. The blessings of obedience to the covenant are listed first (28:1–14). A rather lengthy section of curses follows (28:15–68).[7]

Leviticus 26 is a part of the so-called Holiness Code (17:1–26:46).[8] The Holiness Code itself falls into several divisions, with chapter 26 dividing into blessings (vv. 3–13), and curses (vv. 14–46).[9] The critical position holds that Lev 17–26 is shaped by a group particularly affiliated with document source P, from priests of the exilic period—or earlier or later.[10]

Both Deut 28 and Lev 26 lay out curses as consequences of human action as judged by the deity's covenant with them. "If you do not obey me and you do not do according to all of these commandments" (Lev 26:14), then curses result.[11] Drawing upon the analysis of Stuart,[12] we shall highlight

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the much more difficult proposition that Deut 28 is directly dependent upon VTE; *Deuteronomium 28*, 17. Presumably, however, VTE was not the only such text that shared these commonalities with Deut (see the Sefire text in Appendix C, p. 170); rather, we have the VTE with which to compare Deut only through the accident of discovery. At any rate, it is clear that, whatever the relationship of Deut 28 and VTE, both express the rich ancient Near Eastern tradition of curses.

[6]Perhaps more akin to a loyalty oath between a superior and his subjects, like VTE; see the discussion in Moshe Weinfeld, "Deuteronomy, Book of," *ABD* 2:169-70.

[7]There are curses in Deut 27:11-26 as well, but they are in a different form than those in chapter 28. They do not identify the agents or effects of the curses.

[8]For a succinct discussion of the structure of Lev, see John E. Hartley, *Leviticus* (WBC 4; Dallas: Word Books, 1992), xxxii-xxxv.

[9]It seems that Lev 26:1-2 fits best with chapter 25.

[10]Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 325.

[11]Cf. Deut 28:1-2, 15; Isa 24:5-6.

two areas, natural disasters and warfare with its destruction, as itemized in the curses.

First of all, crop failure and other destruction of agriculture are common in curses. These may be brought about by drought, insect infestation or crop disease. Drought is invoked in Deut 28:22, and occurs with a vivid description in Deut 28:24: "Yahweh will make the rain of your earth powder and dust, and it will come down upon you from the heavens until you are destroyed." Drought is also invoked in Lev 26:19b, which states, "I will make your heavens like iron and your land like bronze." The picture conjured up here is of impenetrable skies above and equally impenetrable soil below. In other words, a drought will seize the land, as the parallel in the Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon §§63–64 makes explicit.[13]

As for insect infestation, Deut 28:38 invokes the dreaded locust and its destruction: "You will take much seed out to the field, but you will harvest little, for locusts will consume it." Locusts, however, are not the only ravenous pests. Worms wreak havoc in the vineyards, as mentioned in Deut 28:39. Also, צלצל—evidently an insect that makes a whirring sound, variously translated as "cicada" (NRSV), "cricket" (NJPS) or "locust" (RSV)—brings destruction to trees and their fruit (Deut 28:42).

Famine is another curse. Thorkild Jacobsen has stated that the fear of starvation by famine ranked first among human experiences that shaped ancient Mesopotamian religion.[14] One wonders if it might not be the same for ancient Israel. At least we can say that death from starvation could certainly result from the destruction of agriculture by the forces listed above, and there is no lack of reference to such a catastrophe in the curses. Both Deut 28 and Lev 26 describe starvation from famine. Deuteronomy 28:47–57 describes the conditions of famine under siege warfare.

The grim circumstances of starvation during siege warfare were familiar to the audience of the curses. In 2 Kgs 6:24–32, Samaria was under siege by King Ben-hadad of Aram, resulting in famine. The famine was perceived as so bad that a woman asked for the son of the King of Israel to

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[12]Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* (WBC 31; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987), xxxiii-xlii.

[13]See Appendix C. Cf. Deut 28:23 with the sky as bronze and the earth as iron.

[14]Thorkild Jacobsen, "Ancient Mesopotamian Religion: The Central Concerns," *PAPS* 107 (1963): 474.

eat, offering her own son as the next meal (2 Kgs 6:28).[15] Deuteronomy 28:53–57, however, offers the bleakest evocation of famine:

> Under (the) siege and stress that your enemies press upon you, you will eat the fruit of your womb, the flesh of your sons and daughters which Yahweh your God gave to you. The most fastidious gentleman among you, [even] his eye will be evil upon his brother, and upon his beloved wife and his children who are still living. Under the siege and stress that your enemy presses upon all of you who remain, he will keep for himself all that is left over from the flesh of his children that he is eating, so that he will not give any to one of them. Under the siege and stress that your enemy in the your gates presses upon you, the most tender and dainty woman of the tender and dainty among you, the one who does not attempt to set the sole of her foot upon the ground, [even] her eye will be evil against her beloved husband, against her sons and her daughters, against her afterbirth that goes out from between her legs and against her children whom she bears, for from lack of all else, she will eat them all in secrecy.

The curse of famine turns from bleak to gruesome in Lev 26. A series of curses, Lev 26:23–26, begins with the divine saying, "And if by these things you do not turn back to me, but go against me, then my anger will go against you, and I, yes I, will strike you sevenfold for your sins" (Lev 26:23–24). Threats of the sword, pestilence and famine follow. The onset of famine is described as a time when "ten women will bake your bread in one oven, and they will exchange your bread by weight. You will eat, but you will not be satisfied" (Lev 26:26). The vision of famine turns even worse in the next section (vv.27–39): "You will eat the flesh of your sons. You will eat the flesh of your daughters also" (Lev 26:29).

Plagues—including human, plant and animal diseases—are yet another kind of curse invoked as a result of human breach of covenant.[16] These diseases cannot be specifically diagnosed with modern parasitological or other medical terms, but the biblical texts use both general and specific language for them. According to Deut 28:59–60, the next generations will be subject to "severe and lasting illnesses," even the "illness of Egypt." In general, the divine declares, "I will send plague (דבר) among you" (Lev

[15]See also Lam 2:20 and 4:10.

[16]I subdivide here what Stuart lumps into one category, albeit with a multiple heading; *Hosea-Jonah*, xxxv.

26:25), and the people are warned, "Yahweh will make the plague cling to you" (Deut 28:21).

Some human maladies are named and/or described more specifically. Deuteronomy 28:22 mentions "inflammation" and "burning fever." In Deut 28:27, we read of "the Egyptian boil, tumors (or hemorrhoids), the itch and an eruptive disease." Another illness is mentioned in Deut 28:35: "Yahweh will strike you upon your knees and legs, from the soles of your feet to the top of your head, with 'the evil boil' for which there is no cure." According to Lev 26:16, the divine will send "consumption and fever, diseases that completely debilitate vision and deplete desire."[17]

Finally, the curses include a miscellaneous group of apparent crop and animal diseases. In Deut 28:18 we find that both the "fruit of the arable land"[18] and the "offspring of your cattle and the ewes of your flock" are cursed. Along with other maladies, blight and mildew are among those that will "pursue you until you perish" (Deut 28:20). In Deut 28:40, the olive crop will not come to maturity, for by some disease "they will fall." Finally, Lev 26:20b reads, "your land will not yield its produce and the tree of the land will not yield its fruit."

Defeat by the enemy is yet another communal catastrophe included in the covenant curses. "Yahweh will cause you to be stricken before your enemies; you will go out against them one way, but flee from them seven ways" (Deut 28:25). Also, "you will serve your enemies whom Yahweh has sent among you, in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and lacking all." Leviticus 26:17 includes, "you will be defeated by your enemies"; Lev 26:25

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[17]Milgrom translates the last phrase, ומדיבת נפש, as "and drying out the throat" pointing out that נפש originally meant "throat" and arguing that "throat" fits well with "eyes" that precedes it, i.e., both are body parts; Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2306. Hartley renders the phrase with "throat" in mind, but in a less literal way as "loss of appetite"; *Leviticus*, 454 n.16e. Others translate the phrase in more general terms. Gordon Wenham renders it "making . . . your heart ache"; *The Book of Leviticus* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1979), 325. Cf. other examples in Milgrom. The reference is to generalized fatigue that can accompany mental and physical illness. The precise identification of the diseases, e.g., "consumption and fever," are not and need not be known.

[18]Theodore Hiebert argues that אדמה is a specific term for "arable land" in the context of the J narratives; *The Yahwist's Landscape: Nature and Religion in Early Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 34-35.

declares, "I will bring the sword upon you," and Lev 26:37, "you will not be able to stand before your enemies." Deuteronomy 28:49 states, "Yahweh will bring a nation against you from far away, from the ends of the earth, like an eagle swooping down." Dire consequences result from defeat, including siege and its attending afflictions resulting in death to many and oppression and/or exile for survivors.

In summary, we see in the covenant curse tradition that both natural disasters and defeat in warfare are understood to be brought on because of covenant transgression by the community. The natural disasters itemized include drought, insect infestation, famine, and a variety of plant, animal and human diseases.

THE FLOOD TRADITION

Flood traditions from across the ancient Near East give us another set of texts that exemplify the common understanding that natural disasters are sent by the gods as arbitrary or moral disapproval of human behavior. "The story of the Flood," says Stephanie Dalley, "was one of the most popular tales of ancient times,"[19] often signifying a new beginning, or as Brian B. Schmidt says, "a new world order" from the destruction.[20] We are not concerned with the historical question of whether or not there was such a universal flood as presented in the texts; instead, the point is that these stories (and others like them) offer a window into the ancients' explanations of, commentary upon and intellectual/theological reflections on natural disasters that inevitably occur in the lives of people throughout time and space, whatever the physical scope and degree of severity of them.

The Mesopotamian version of the flood story features the hero Atrahasis, a figure of wisdom[21] who appears in other Mesopotamian texts under various names.[22] Various versions exist. According to Dalley, copies

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[19]Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 1.

[20]Schmidt, "Flood Narratives," *CANE* 4:2337. See the helpful table which compares flood stories, pp. 2346-47.

[21]The name in fact means literally "exceedingly wise."

[22]Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 1-2.

of the Old Babylonian version date from ca. 1700 B.C.E.[23] At the beginning of Tablet I, the gods complain to their chief god, Ellil, about being overworked. Ea, a god equal to those who have complained, suggests that the gods let Belet-ili, the womb goddess, create humans. "Let man bear the load of the gods," he says (I.iv). In time, humans multiplied until the gods grew impatient with their noise. A series of catastrophes ensue: the *šuruppu*-disease, drought and famine, headaches and the *ašakku*.[24]

The devastation is depicted in stark images:

> They cut off food for the people,
> Vegetation . . . became too scant for their stomachs.
> Adad on high made his rain scarce,
> Blocked below, and did not raise flood-water from the springs.
> The field decreased its yield,
> Nissaba turned away her breast,
> The dark fields became white,
> The broad countryside bred alkali.
> Earth clamped down her womb:
> No vegetation sprouted, no grain grew.
> *Ašakku* was inflicted on the people.
> The womb was too tight to let a baby out (II.iv).[25]

These attempts to wipe out humanity because of their noise failed; therefore, the deity Ellil (Enlil) decrees that a flood be sent. The story says, "The [flood] went against the people like an army./ No one could see anyone else,/ They could not be recognized in the catastrophe./ The Flood roared like a bull,/ Like a wild ass screaming"[26] (III.iii). Meanwhile,

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[23]Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 3. Dalley combines the Old Babylonian Version (OBV) with the Standard Babylonian Version (SBV). On the matter of date, note the comments by W. B. Lambert and A. Millard who indicate that "the earliest surviving copies are from the seventeenth century B.C.[E.]" and that "the text can hardly have been written down more than one, or at the most, two centuries earlier"; *Atra-hasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 23-24.

[24]A group of seven demons; Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 319.

[25]*Atrahasis* (Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 25).

[26]Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 31.

Atrahasis has built a boat by which he is delivered from the flood. He has been tipped off about the flood by Enki. Why? It seems that Ellil and Enki "[were furious with each other]" (III.vi restored).[27] Enki latter confesses to Ellil that he saved someone, saying, "I did it, in defiance of you" (III.vi).[28]

Probably the most familiar myth of natural disaster in the Hebrew Bible is the universal flood narrative of Gen 6–9. At this point, we are most concerned with the cause of the flood as understood by the biblical writers. While not explicitly cited as a punishment, it seems fair to say that the flood was, in the words of John S. Kselman, "provoked by human evil."[29] As he points out, both sources for the flood narrative, J and P, agree on this assessment.[30] The J passage, Gen 6:5–7, declares that "Yahweh saw that the evil of humanity was great in the earth, and that every day, every inkling of a plan that [they] willed was nothing but evil."[31] Because of this, Yahweh regretted making humankind, and said, "I will wipe out humanity whom I have created from the face of the ground—humans, cattle, creeping animals, and the birds of the air too—because I am sorry that I made them" (Gen 6:7). In other words, whereas Yahweh had formed האדם from האדמה in Gen 2:7, God now wipes away האדם from האדמה in Gen 6:7 (J).

In much the same way, P sets up the flood by declaring in Gen 6:11–12 that "the earth was filled with lawlessness (ותמלא הארץ חמס)"[32] and that God saw that the earth "was corrupt, that all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth."[33] As P's account continues in Gen 6:13, God tells

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[27]Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 28.

[28]Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 34.

[29]John S. Kselman, "Genesis," in *HBC* (ed. James L. Mays; San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), 90.

[30]Kselman, "Genesis," 90.

[31]See also Gen 8:21, also part of the J narrative.

[32]See E. A. Speiser's comment on חמס in *Genesis* (AB 1; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964), 51, 117.

[33]David L. Petersen makes the point that it is not humans only that are corrupt, but the entire cosmos; "The Yahwist on the Flood," *VT* 26 (1976): 440.

Noah, "an end of all flesh is coming, as far as I am concerned. Because of them, the earth is full of lawlessness (חמס). You watch me; I will bring them to ruin, and the earth too." And indeed, "all flesh perished: that which creeps upon the earth, birds, cattle, wild animals, all swarming things that swarm upon the earth, and every person. Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died" (Gen 7:21–22, P, J)—except, of course, for Noah "and those that were with him in the ark" (Gen 7:23b, J).

While it is not overtly described as a judgment, the flood narrative exemplifies the common understanding in biblical Israel that the flood occurred because of divine disapproval of human thought and action. These flood myths—in *Atrahasis* and Genesis—clearly indicate that floods and other natural disasters they describe may be understood as weapons of the gods, unleashed in response to human behavior.

More significantly, it seems that, in Genesis, P and J use the flood tradition in order to promote piety as a way out of catastrophe. To our knowledge, while many scholars have compared and contrasted the ancient Near Eastern flood stories, they have given little attention to comparing the virtue, if any, by which the survivors in the stories survive. Concerning such catastrophe, Lloyd R. Bailey, in his book *Noah: The Person and the Story in History and Tradition*, puts many questions to flood stories from around the world: "What is the cause of the flood? Who escaped from the flood? How did humans escape the waters of the flood?"[34] etc. But, he does not ask, "Why did the survivors survive?" or, "By what virtue did the survivors survive?" In addition, he points out that a similarity among the ancient Near Eastern flood stories is that "A deity intervenes in order to save a family of humans,"[35] but he does not ask about the rationale of the deity for sparing those who survive.

Also, Schmidt compares many aspects of these stories: the cause of the flood, the hero of the flood, the duration of the flood, and the reward for the hero of the story.[36] In addition, he concludes:

> The similarities and differences evident among Mesopotamian, Israelite, and classical flood traditions on balance indicate that, despite their divergences, they share a common tradition and function as a mode of

[34]Bailey, *Noah*, 7.

[35]Bailey, *Noah*, 17.

[36]Schmidt, "Flood Narratives," *CANE* 4:2346-47.

> discourse for exploring the prospects of divine justice and human existence in the face of those calamities brought on by rampant human violence and the inevitability of death.[37]

But he does not address our question, "By what virtue, if any, do the survivors survive?"

Let us then turn again to the flood stories, those already mentioned and others, with that question in mind. First, let us consider the Sumerian flood story embedded within the *Eridu Genesis*. It only slightly seems to have our question in mind, if at all, in its description of the flood survivor, Ziusudra: "At that time Ziusudra was king and lustration priest. He fashioned, being a seer, the god of giddiness and [stood] in awe beside it, wording his wishes humbly."[38] While he is occupied with this task, he overhears the gods' plan to destroy humankind by flood and, because he knows it is coming, is able to survive the flood. It seems that Ziusudra simply happened to be in the right place at the right time.[39]

As for Atrahasis, he survives, in part, because of a dispute among the gods. But to push the question further, we ask, why was Atrahasis singled out from among humanity as the survivor? To answer this question, we can point to several hints. To begin, Atrahasis is described as "The thoughtful man Atrahasis," as one who "Kept his ear open to his master Ea" (II.v).[40] Also, as Dalley tells us, Atrahasis means "extra-wise."[41] It is not

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[37]Schmidt, "Flood Narratives," *CANE* 4:2349.

[38]"The Eridu Genesis," translated by Thorkild Jacobsen (*COS* 1.58:514).

[39]In his earlier translation of this same text under the title "The Deluge," S. N. Kramer is far more optimistic about Ziusudra's virtue. He renders these lines as, "Then did Ziusudra, the king, the pasisu [of] . . ., Build giant . . .; Humbly obedient, reverent*ly* [he] . . ."; "The Deluge," translated by Samuel Noah Kramer (*ANET* 44). Kramer sees Ziusudra as, "a pious . . . god-fearing king, constantly on the lookout for divine revelations in dreams or incantations" (*ANET* 42). Kramer and Jacobsen translate the same text here. I am not in a position to evaluate the different translations, but one can observe that though piety is implied by the terms "awe" and "humbly," it is not explicitly cited as a reason for Ziusudra becoming a survivor.

[40]Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 26.

[41]Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 2.

clearly indicated, however, that wisdom is to be considered a personal virtue by reason of which Atrahasis is spared from the flood.

In the Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, it is equally unclear why the flood survivor Utnapishtim is spared death by the flood. It is even less clear why the flood itself occurs. As Andrew R. George points out, "No justification is given in the [Gilgamesh] epic for the drastic course of action (the great Flood)."[42] Utnapishtim, alias Atra-hasis, is spared death by the deluge through the intervention of Ea. Again we ask, Why? By what virtue, if any, is Utnapishtim spared?

George points out that Utnapishtim was a "favorite" of Ea, a god who "cared for man and his ways."[43] Ea circumvented Ellil's decree of destruction of humanity by informing Utnapishtim by means of a dream that a flood will come and that he is to build a boat for safety. It is not clear, however, that his piety is the reason that Utnapishtim is spared, as it seems more like divine caprice. Ea says, "I just showed Atrahasis a dream, and thus he heard the secret of the gods" (XI.iv).[44]

Therefore, while we can identify the flood survivors in these Mesopotamian flood narratives as wise or favored individuals, it is not clear that it is this personal virtue that saves them from the flood. David L. Petersen concludes, "mankind survives by dint of one god's (Enki's) contravening the order of another (Enlil)."[45] Obviously, a universal flood tradition requires some survivors, but the "selection" of survivors seems capricious. In Gilgamesh, the question of the source of immortatity is answered by the challenge to remain awake and overcome the need for sleep (Gilg XI.209), or to draw upon the rejuvenating power of a special plant (Gilg XI.285); however, there is no mention of piety as an option.

In the later version of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which seems to have

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[42]Andrew R. George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 509. Petersen, however, suggests that Enki's protest in XI 179-81 "implies that the flood was designed to punish man for his errant ways"; "Yahwist on the Flood," 440.

[43]George, *Gilgamesh*, 509-10.

[44]Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 115.

[45]Petersen, "Yahwist on the Flood," 440.

directly incorporated the flood tradition from *Atrahasis*,[46] however, the door on piety and innocense as a salvific virtue creaks open. We see this notion emerge in several ways. First of all, George suggests that Utnapishtim presents the building of the boat in the style of a pious temple-building deed.[47] What is more, Ea defends his decision to interfere with Ellil's plan to destroy all of humankind, saying to Ellil, "You, the sage of the gods, the hero, how could you lack counsel and cause the deluge? On him who commits a sin, inflict his crime! On him who does wrong, inflict [his] wrong-doing!" XI.iv.[48] By implication, then, one could suggest that in the later *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Utnapishtim is pious and that he is, therefore, justifiably spared by virtue of his piety.

Later still, in the Hellenistic era rendition of the flood by Borossus, the hero of the flood, Xisouthros, is more directly noted for piety. When he and some others exit the boat, he builds an altar and makes a sacrifice to the gods. After this, the story goes on to say,

> he disappeared together with those who had left the ship with him. . . . Those who remained on the ship and had not gone out with Xisouthros . . . searched for him. But Xisouthros from then on was seen no more, and the sound of a voice that came from the air gave the instruction that it was their duty to honor the gods and that Xisouthros, *because of the great honor he had shown the gods*, had gone to the dwelling place of the gods[49] (italics added).

Samuel Noah Kramer and John Maier render this last line of Borossus, saying, "Because of his *piety*, [Xisouthros] had gone to live with the gods" (italics added). They hasten to explain, however, that "'Piety' here does not mean simply a humble submission to the will of the gods."[50] Nonetheless,

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[46]Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic* (Philadephia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 216.

[47]George, *Gilgamesh*, 512-13.

[48]Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 115.

[49]Gerald P. Verbrugghe and John M. Wickersham, *Berossos and Manetho, Introduced and Translated: Native Traditions in Ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), 50.

[50]Samuel Noah Kramer and John Maier, *Myths of Enki, The Crafty God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 161.

we have seen some hints in these various versions of the flood tradition that the hero's personal virtue of piety plays a role in his preservation.

By comparison, however, the ancient Israelite story of the flood *forthrightly extols* Noah's piety. Genesis 6:9 states: היה בדרתיו את־האלהים התהלך־נח נח איש צדיק תמים: "Noah was a righteous man, perfect was he in his generations; Noah walked with God."[51] This description of Noah is from the Priestly tradition, but, as Jose Krašovec has pointed out, the assessment of Noah's righteousness is clear in both J and P.[52] In Gen 7:1, J declares, "Then Yahweh said to Noah, 'Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous (צדיק) before me in this generation.'" As Krašovec says, "Both sources assert Noah's complete obedience in responding to the divine command"[53]: P in Gen 6:22, which reads, "Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him"; and J in Gen 7:5, which reads, "And Noah did all that Yahweh had commanded him."

To summarize, the ancient Near Eastern flood tradition varies in the reasons given for the flood. In *Atrahasis*, humans annoy the gods, because they are noisy. The gods destroy them, save Atrahasis, by flood. No explanation is given in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*; however, the Israelite flood story, both J and P sources, attributes the flood to human wickedness. In addition, we have seen some hints of the hero's piety in the Sumerian and Mesopotamian flood stories. What is less explicit, however, is whether or not the hero's piety is to be understood as an explanation for his survival. This equation is clear, however, in Gen 6–9. We are inclined to agree with Nahum Sarna when he concluded that "It is quite clear [in these parallel texts] that were it not for the deception of the particular god whose favorite the hero was, Enlil would have ignored any consideration of personal integrity."[54] That is to say, the selection of a survivor is capricious. By

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[51]Petersen asserts that Noah's righteousness is *not* the reason he survived. Instead, the narrative points to God's covenant in Gen 9 that required both a flood and a survivor; Petersen, "Yahwist on the Flood," 441. However, if that is the intended emphasis, then why bother to extol Noah's piety?

[52]Jose Krašovec, *Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness: The Thinking and Beliefs of Ancient Israel in the Light of Greek and Modern Views* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 37.

[53]Krašovec, *Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness*, 37.

[54]Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1966), 51.

contrast, Sarna states, "The choice of Noah is inspired solely by his righteousness; caprice or partiality play no role in the divine resolution."[55] Personal piety, then, is one strategy offered by the ancient Israelites (P and J) as a way to move beyond catastrophe, and perhaps to avoid future catastrophe.

EXODUS 32:1–35

Through a mix of traditions, Exod 32:1–35 narrates the golden calf incident by the Israelites immediately following Moses' reception of the covenant on Mt. Sinai (Exod 31:18) and the resulting plague on the people (Exod 32:35, ויגף יהוה אתּ־העם).[56] In source designations (for the Pentateuch) as given by Otto Eissfeldt, Exod 32:17–18, 25–29 are L,[57] and Exod 32:1–16, 19–24 and 30–35 are E.[58] Along with chapter 33, chapter 32 occurs between the divine instructions to Moses for building and adorning the temple (Exod 22:1–31:18), and the implementation of the same (Exod 35:1–40:38).[59]

Following Cassuto, we may divide Exod 32 into four units: vv.1–6; vv.7–14; vv.15–29 and vv.30–35. While waiting for Moses to return from the top of the mountain, the restless people asked Aaron to "make gods for us, who shall go (pl.) before us" (Exod 32:1), perhaps to take Moses' place.[60] In any case, Aaron concedes to the people, melts the gold that they gave

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[55]Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, 51.

[56]John I. Durham sketches the variety of source designations by scholars; *Exodus* (WBC 3; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 427. See also Hiebert's designation of most of the chapter to the E source; *The Yahwist's Landscape*, 169.

[57]Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (trans. Peter R. Ackroyd; New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 195. L, for *Laienquelle*, is his designation for a component of J which usually is not differentiated from J by other scholars.

[58]Eissfeldt, *Introduction*, 201.

[59]Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (trans. Israel Abrahams; Jerusalem, 1967), 410.

[60]Durham, *Exodus*, 419. אלהים is taken as plural because of the plural verbs.

him, and produces an image of a calf.[61] The people declare, "These are your gods (אלה אלהיך) O Israel, who brought (pl.) you (Israel) up from the land of Egypt" (Exod 32:4), and they offer sacrifices.

In Exod 32:7–14, Yahweh alerts Moses to the proceedings. Regardless of Aaron's intentions, Yahweh, not to mention the source, clearly takes the people's actions as infidelity saying, "they have bowed down to (i.e., worshiped) and sacrificed to" the calf (Exod 32:8). To say the least, Yahweh is angry about the matter and declares that he will consume them with his burning wrath. According to the text, Moses interceded on behalf of the people, reminding Yahweh of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. As a result, Yahweh did not consume the people (Exod 32:11–14); however, a measure of punishment eventually was meted out, viz., a plague (Exod 32:35).

In Exod 32:15–29, with the covenant tablets in hand, Moses descends the mountain and views what is taking place. Like Yahweh, Moses becomes angry enough to dash the covenant tablets against the mountainside, breaking them even as the people have broken the stipulations of the covenant against idolatry (Exod 20:3–6). Ultimately, the closing verse of Exod 32:30–35 demonstrates the connection of human behavior and punishment through a natural catastrophe most directly: "Yahweh struck the people [with a plague], because they had made the calf" (Exod 32:35).

In Exod 32, we again see the common understanding of the cause of natural catastrophes. In addition, Exod 32 emphasizes the strategy of prophetic intercession in responding to them.[62]

NUMBERS 16

Earthquakes play a minor role among the natural disasters cited in the Hebrew Bible,[63] but Num 16 is one text that is clear in its understanding of

[61]Cassuto strives to exonerate Aaron from any charge of idolatry, in spite of Aaron's rather suspicious alibi. Aaron responds to Moses' inquiry about the matter saying, "I said to them, 'Whoever has gold, take it off and give it to me, so that I may put it in the fire.' And (poof!), out pops this calf!" Exod 32:24.; *Commentary on Exodus*, 408, 420.

[62]We shall make additional comment on intercession in chapter 5.

[63]See also Amos 1:1, Zech 14:5.

an earthquake as a divinely determined punishment. Through a conflation of pentateuchal sources, J and P, Num 16 narrates the challenge of Korah, Dathan and Abiram to the priestly authority of Moses and Aaron. In the end, two hundred fifty men chosen by Korah from the congregation of the Israelites during their wilderness journey are consumed by fire (Num 16:35, J).

Punishment for Korah's challenge, however, was first announced to the entire congregation. "Remove yourselves from the midst of this congregation," Yahweh instructs Moses and Aaron, "so that I may instantly consume them" (Num 16:20–21, P). Moses and Aaron, however, appeal for punishment of the guilty only, saying, "shall one person sin and you become angry with the whole congregation?" (Num 16:22, P). Often seen as a legitimation of the Aaronide priesthood over against the Levitical priesthood in a proof by ordeal,[64] God condemns Korah and his cohorts with an earthquake in which the earth "opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households" (Num 16:32, J).

In this pericope, we see prophetic intercession as in Exod 32. In addition, we see acknowledgment of cognitive dissonance stemming from Yahweh's proposal to consume the entire congregation.[65] While the people understood natural catastrophes as the result of human (mis)conduct, they also assumed that Yahweh would punish only the guilty. In other words, they assumed that Yahweh was a just deity, meting out punishment to the guilty while sparing the innocent. (This *doxa* will be discussed below on pages 88–96.)

1 SAMUEL 4:1B–7:1

First Samuel 4:1b–7:1 comprises what many scholars have interpreted to be a story previously independent of the rest of 1 Sam. Calling this section "one of the oldest and most profound theological narratives of the Old Testament," Patrick D. Miller and J. J. M. Roberts argue that it should

[64]Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 1-20* (AB 4A; New York: Doubleday, 1993), 405-6.

[65]David Daube points to this text as one among others that present a challenge to communal suffering, emphasizing punishment of the guilty only; *Studies in Biblical Law* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1969), 154.

rightly be called the "Yahweh narrative."[66] The designation "the ark narrative," however, has been the consensual appellative, at least since Leonard Rost's treatment of it.[67]

In spite of general agreement on the existence of the ark narrative, scholars have differed widely about exactly which verses comprise it.[68] We agree with R. P. Gordon that 1 Sam 4–6 is "by any reasonable criterion, a coherent unit of tradition,"[69] though we choose to follow the more specific beginning and ending delimitations of the passage as 1 Sam 4:1b–7:1.[70]

Being a "coherent unit of tradition" does not mean that the ark narrative has "no direct connection" with its present literary context.[71] As Gordon describes the situation, the idea that 1 Sam 4–6 is from a different source than its preceding texts arises because the figure of Samuel, who is central to 1 Sam 1–3, is absent.[72] It seems that those who argue for an

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[66]Patrick D. Miller and J. J. M. Roberts, *The Hand of the Lord: A Reassessment of the "Ark Narrative" of I Samuel* (The Johns Hopkins Near Eastern Studies; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 60.

[67]Leonard Rost, *The Succession to the Throne of David* (Historic Texts and Interpreters in Biblical Scholarship 1; trans. Michael D. Rutter and David M. Gunn with and introduction by Edward Ball; Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1982), 6-34. See especially pp. 6-7 for his treatment of previous scholarship.

[68]For a review of the state of the question, see Israel Finkelstein, "The Philistines in the Bible: A Late-Monarchic Perspective," *JSOT* 27 (2002): 154; and A. Stirrup, "'Why Has Yahweh Defeated Us Today before the Philistines?' The Question of the Ark Narrative," *TynBul* 51 (2000): 81-83.

[69]R. P. Gordon, *1 and 2 Samuel* (OTG; R. N. Whybray, ed.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1984, 1987, 1993), 34.

[70]Stirrup, "Why Has Yahweh Defeated Us," 100; Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel* (WBC 10; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), xxx. Rost adds 2 Sam 6; Anthony F. Campbell follows; *The Ark Narrative (1 Sam 4–6; 2 Sam 6): A Form-Critical and Traditio-Historical Study* (SBLDS 16; Missoula, MA: Scholar's Press, 1975). P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., follows Miller and Roberts; *I Samuel* (AB 8; Garden City, N.Y., 1980), 26.

[71]Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, *I and II Samuel: A Commentary* (OTL; trans. J. S. Bowden; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), 46.

[72]Gordon, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 30.

independent source assume that any related parts of its literary context must be an original part of the narrative. For example, Miller and Roberts add 1 Sam 2:12–17, 22–25 and 27–36 to 4:1b–7:1 because, they say, "the events of the later chapters [i.e., 4:1b–7:1] can only be understood as growing out of the significant sin of the priests described in ch. 2."[73] They make an important point here, but it does not follow that the material from chapter two was necessarily a part of an independent ark narrative. On the other hand, those who claim a narrative continuity through these chapters seem to reject the notion that segments could have previously existed independently. For example, Yehoshua Gitay and K. A. D. Smelik argue that 1 Sam 4–6 is not independent, but rather an "integral part" of the book of Samuel and its plot.[74] Like A. Stirrup, we suggest that the ark narrative could be both previously independent and currently integral.[75]

The internal units of 1 Sam 4:1b–7:1 are more easily delimited. Although scholars differ on smaller units, consensus identifies three major ones: 4:1b–22, 5:1–12 and 6:1–7:1. The first unit may be further divided into two subunits: 4:1b–11 and 4:12–22. According to Stirrup, 1 Sam 4:1b is a sufficient beginning to set up the narrative, the purpose of which is "to explain Israel's defeat at Ebenezer."[76]

Indeed, the elders of Israel ask in verse 3, "Why has Yahweh stricken us today before the Philistines?" Stirrup argues that "Israel breaches their covenant with the divine," by not maintaining the requirement of holiness. As support for this view, he refers to 1 Sam 6:20 ("The inhabitants of Beth-shemesh said, 'Who is able to stand in the presence of Yahweh, this holy God?'"), which he considers the climax of

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[73]Miller and Roberts, *Hand of the Lord*, 70. Likewise, John T. Willis argues, "The sins of the House of Eli (2:12-17, 22-25), the announcement of Yahweh's punishment for these sins (2:27-36) . . . are necessary prerequisites to 4:1b–7:1"; "An Anti-Elide Narrative Tradition from the Prophetic Circle at the Ramah Sanctuary," *JBL* 90 (1971): 300.

[74]Yehoshua Gitay, "Reflections on the Poetics of the Samuel Narrative: The Question of the Ark Narrative," *CBQ* 54 (1992): 230; K. A. D. Smelik, "The Ark Narrative Reconsidered," in *New Avenues in the Study of the Old Testament* (ed. A. S. van der Woude; Leiden: Brill, 1989), 133.

[75]Stirrup, "Why Has Yahweh Defeated Us," 85.

[76]Stirrup, "Why Has Yahweh Defeated Us," 86, 100.

the ark narrative.[77] To conclude that the deity punishes Israel with defeat for a breach of covenant, however, is simply to state the *doxa* of ancient Israel, i.e., what they already take for granted. The question is, who, i.e., which leader of the community, is guilty of breaching covenant? Unfortunately, Stirrup can give us no specifics about Israel's unholiness. Smelik claims that Israel sins and thereby brings divine punishment by attacking the Philistines before the divine word to do so.[78] With little evidence to point to, however, his argument seems insufficient as well.[79]

This issue, then, deserves our consideration. We learned from our examination of the covenant curse tradition that defeat by one's enemies is invoked as a curse for breaking a covenant. Miller and Roberts' assertion of a connection with 1 Sam 2 now becomes important. While we do not find it necessary to claim that 1 Sam 2:12–17, 22–25 and 27–36 are part of the ark narrative proper, these verses help explain why the ark narrative is situated where it is. From a theological perspective,[80] these verses explain Israel's defeat by the Philistines.[81]

Hophni and Phinehas, sons of Eli, were priests at Shiloh. First Samuel 2:12a gives us the biblical writer's frank opinion of them. "Now the sons of Eli were worthless," it says. Why? "They had no regard for either Yahweh or for the priest's due portions"[82] (1 Sam 2:12b–13a). First Samuel 2:17 summarizes the issue: "The men treated the Lord's offerings impiously" (NJPS).

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[77]Stirrup, "Why Has Yahweh Defeated Us," 99-100.

[78]Smelik, "Ark Narrative Reconsidered," 135; cf. MT and LXX.

[79]Hanson, in his first narrative example of "royal deviance," does not indicate a king to blame for a breach of the sacred! On the other hand, he focuses on the punishment of the Philistines, presumably for capturing the ark; "When the King Crosses the Line," 12. Instead, I am focusing on the defeat of Israel as punishment for the sins of the priests.

[80]See Willis, "Anti-Elide Narrative Tradition," 298. Also, Miller and Roberts emphasize the role of Yahweh's "hand" in working out both the judgment of the sins of Eli and his house and the defeat of Israel's enemies; *Hand of the Lord,* 72.

[81]Miller and Roberts, *Hand of the Lord,* 62.

[82]On "due portions," see McCarter, *I Samuel*, 82-83.

McCarter's translation of 1 Sam 2:13b–16 highlights their offense.

> Whenever someone was sacrificing, the priest's servant was supposed to come while the meat was boiling. In his hand would be a three-pronged fork, which he would thrust into the pot or kettle. Whatever the fork brought up the priest was to keep for himself. But this is the way they dealt with all the Israelites who came to sacrifice to Yahweh at Shiloh. Before they had even burned the fat, the priest's servant would come to the man who was sacrificing and say, "Hand over some meat to be roasted for the priest, for he will not accept boiled meat from you!" If the man should say, "Let [the fat] be burned as usual; then take as much as you want!" he would reply, "No! Hand it over now! Otherwise I shall take it by force."[83]

Mosaic law concerning sacrifices of well-being stipulates that the fat of a sacrifice is to be burned on the altar by the priest (Lev 7:31). Furthermore, Lev 3:16b clearly states, "All fat belongs to Yahweh." While it is clear that the sons of Eli are condemned for violating the regulations for sacrifice at Shiloh, it seems that, according to the Mosaic tradition, they also violated their roles as priests.

So, especially in a text that is part of the Deuteronomistic history,[84] we can expect something bad to happen as a result, i.e., a disaster. Indeed, we are reminded in a divine oracle directed to Eli in 1 Sam 2:27–36 that "I [Yahweh] will honor whoever honors me, and whoever despises me will be slighted" (1 Sam 2:30). The oracle continues, "This, what becomes of your two sons Hophni and Phinehas, will be the sign to you [Eli]: both of them will die on the same day" (1 Sam 2:34). According to the ark narrative, Hophni and Phinehas were killed by the Philistines along with 30,000 soldiers when the Philistines captured the ark, the symbol of Yahweh's presence (1 Sam 4:10–11).

To summarize the key connection between the previously independent ark narrative and its present literary context, we can connect the question "Why has Yahweh stricken us today before the Philistines?" (1 Sam 4:3) with the answer, because Hophni and Phinehas "treated the Lord's offerings impiously" (1 Sam 2:17). They broke the Mosaic covenant.

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[83]McCarter, *I Samuel*, 77.

[84]As Willis comments, "The general view of the Books of Judges, Samuel, and Kings is that punishment is the result of sin"; "Anti-Elide Narrative Tradition," 301.

The ark narrative, in part, elaborates on the consequences of their action. Namely, communal Israel suffered defeat, loss of life and loss of their most sacred object because of the sins of these two priests.

The second subsection of the ark narrative, 1 Sam 4:12–22, may be quickly summarized. Eli is informed of the Philistines' victory, the death of many Israelites, including his two sons, and the capture of the ark. He then dies and his expectant daughter-in-law goes into labor upon hearing the news and gives birth to a son. According to verses 21–22, "She named the youngster Ichabod, saying, 'glory has departed from Israel,' because the ark of God had been captured, and because of her father-in-law and her husband [Phinehas]. Then she said, 'glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured.'"

These verses are important for two reasons. First, they affirm the relation between the ark narrative and Eli and his sons. Second, they associate the ark with "glory." The ark is the symbol of divine glory, i.e., the divine presence, and is considered an essential element among the trappings of warfare.[85] As McCarter puts its, "It was the source of security in conflict."[86] Upon Israel's initial defeat by the Philistines, they brought the ark from Shiloh (1 Sam 4:2). Sight of it boosted the morale of the Israelites, while inciting fear among the Philistines, who are said to cry, "God has come into the camp!" (1 Sam 4:5–7). Because the ark was present, the Philistines' victory is especially puzzling. Indeed, this theological question and the need for an affirmation of Yahweh's power in spite of defeat, probably is at the heart of the narrative, and it is a reflection of the writer's concern as well as of the concern for the first audience of the ark narrative.[87] We can, therefore, expect the narrative to include a positive word about the status of Israel's deity.

First Samuel 5:1–7:1 of the ark narrative focuses on the ark, the display of Yahweh's power in Philistine territory (5:1–12) and the return of the ark to Israel (6:1–18) to its temporary resting place, Kiriath-jearim (6:19–7:1). First Samuel 5:1–12 displays Yahweh's power in the presence of the ark in two ways. Firstly, the Philistines had taken the ark to Ashdod, to

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[85]McCarter, *II Samuel* (AB 9; Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday and Company, 1984), 108-9.

[86]McCarter, *II Samuel*, 109.

[87]Miller and Roberts, *Hand of the Lord,* 75.

"the house of Dagon,[88] and stationed it beside Dagon" (1 Sam 5:2). Miller and Roberts point out that treating the ark in this way serves to suggest that the Philistines viewed the ark as valuable booty, as "a divine image and an object of worship."[89] What is more, they argue that placing the ark next to Dagon, the Philistine deity, was intended to demonstrate the role of the ark as "a captured god honoring the might of Dagon."[90]

The next day, as the Israelite author describes it, the Ashdodites find that Dagon had toppled over "with its face to the ground" (1 Sam 5:3). They set him back up, but he falls again. This time, "the head of Dagon and both of his hands had been severed [and lay] upon the threshold" (1 Sam 5:4). Yahweh's power is illustrated here by the god of the winning army falling prostrate in a "position of adoration" before the ark.[91] If that were not enough to signal that Yahweh was superior to Dagon[92] even though the ark had been captured, the loss of Dagon's head and hands only adds insult to injury (or vice-versa in this case!). An etiological comment completes this first section of chapter 5.

A fallen Dagon, however, is not the only blow in store for the Philistines, for "the hand of Yahweh" is soon upon them (1 Sam 5:6–12). Miller and Roberts find the hand of Yahweh to be the central theme of the entire ark narrative.[93] The "hand of Yahweh" refers to the power of

[88]Dagon was considered by the biblical sources, it seems, as the chief god of the Philistines, whom biblical traditions deem polytheistic. Dagan, a deity well attested in ancient Mesopotamia, may have originated in Syria and been incorporated by the Philistines through the Phoenicians into Palestine as Dagon; Peter Machinist, "Biblical Traditions: The Philistines and Israelite History," in *The Sea Peoples and Their Worlds: A Reassessment* (University Museum Monograph 108; University Museum Symposium Series 11; ed. Eliezer D. Oren; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum, 2000), 59. See also Itamar Singer "The Beginning of Philistine Settlement in Canaan and the Northern Boundary of Philistia," *TA* 12 (1985): 109-22; and John F. Healey, "Dagon," *DDD,* 216-19.

[89]Miller and Roberts, *Hand of the Lord*, 43. Cf. 1 Sam 4:7.

[90]Miller and Roberts, *Hand of the Lord,* 43.

[91]McCarter, *I Samuel*, 124.

[92]Or perhaps, as a polemic against idols, to all (false) gods; Machinist, "Biblical Traditions," 61.

[93]Miller and Roberts, *Hand of the Lord,* 48.

Yahweh. Yahweh's power is also often demonstrated through the association of Yahweh's hand with sickness and plague.[94]

Indeed, in this passage, Yahweh strikes the Philistines with עפלים, translated either as "tumors" or "hemorrhoids."[95] Some scholars identify this malady as the bubonic plague,[96] but the specific medical diagnosis is not crucial to our treatment of the text.[97] What is crucial is the understanding in ancient Israel (and among the Philistines, according to the text) that this illness was sent by Yahweh (1 Sam 5:7). The Philistines acknowledged this understanding. First, they move the ark from Ashdod to Gath, but there too the inhabitants are struck with "tumors." Then, they move it to Ekron, with the same results implied (1 Sam 5:8–10). Finally, amidst a "deathly panic," the Philistines decide to return the ark to Israel (1 Sam 5:11–12). As to the actual history behind the obviously legendary narrative we are ignorant, but Israel's telling of the story makes a clear point as to Israel's understanding.

Yahweh's power, then, is demonstrated through his defeat of Dagon and through the affliction of the Philistines, and the captured ark is authenticated as still powerful. One wonders if a curse, such as illness, was not assumed to strike anyone—especially one not authorized to do so—who tampered with the ark, and that this endoxic assumption helped to shape this aspect of Israel's understanding of the ark's history. Second Samuel 6:6–8 is especially relevant to this point. These verses narrate

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[94]Miller and Roberts, *Hand of the Lord,* 48. They note the allusions to the plague narratives in Exod. See also Gordon, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 35.

[95]See McCarter's discussion; *I Samuel*, 123.

[96]See especially Wilkinson, "Philistine Epidemic," 137.

[97]On this matter, Avalos comments: "Although one must continue efforts to diagnose ancient diseases, such endeavors are too limited to produce significant advances in the study of illness and health care in ancient Israel. One must accept that many, if not most, of the illnesses mentioned in the Bible will never be diagnosed or translated into a modern medical classification"; *Illness and Health Care*, 21. See also the discussion of and proposal that עפלים corresponds to the mouse god Apollo Smintheus, perhaps indicating that mice were thought to be related with sickness or plague: Othniel Margalith, *The Sea Peoples in the Bible* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1994), 35-37.

Uzzah's death that comes from Yahweh as a response to Uzzah touching the ark.[98]

Another section of the ark narrative is 1 Sam 6:1–18. The main focus of this section is the return of the ark to Israel after an absence of seven months in the land of the Philistines (1 Sam 6:1). The Philistines, who at this point have suffered the loss of many lives, want to rid themselves of the plague (1 Sam 5:11). In the narrative, they understand the ark, to them in effect Yahweh, to be the source of the plague.[99] Simply returning the ark to Israel, however, is not enough. They want to know what reparation is necessary.

According to 1 Sam 6:2, the Philistines summon their priests and diviners to determine how to make amends with this angry god of pestilence.[100] They say, "If you are sending the ark of the god of Israel away,

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[98]If Uzzah was not a member of a priestly group authorized to handle the ark, touching the ark would be sufficient cause for his death. On Uzzah's identity as Eleazar, one consecrated to care for the ark according to 1 Sam 7:1, see McCarter, *II Samuel*, 169. On the possibility that Uzzah's father, Abinidab, was a priest, see Mark J. Fretz, "Abinadab," *ABD* 1: 22. For a discussion of the cultic function of the story, see McCarter, *II Samuel*, 178-82. McCarter concludes "II Sam 6:1-19 is an account of the introduction of Yahweh, present in his holy ark, to the City of David. It can be compared, therefore, to other ancient Near Eastern accounts of the introduction of a national god to a new royal city"; McCarter, *II Samuel*, 180-81. Doubtless, the story was also used to authenticate the ark following its capture, a requirement for being introduced into the Jerusalem cultus.

[99]One should be cautious about making much of the alternative explanation of this incident as "chance" (1 Sam 6:9). Machinist argues that, while the Hebrew word מקרה indicates that those involved do not readily perceive a connection between the incident and a reason for it, "chance" does not exclude the possibility of assumed divine operation. Even if it did, this may be a way of stereotyping the Philistines; "Fate, *miqreh*, and Reason: Some Reflections on Qohelet and Biblical Thought," in *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots: Biblical, Epigraphic, and Semitic Studies in Honor of Jonas C. Greenfield* (ed. by Ziony Zevit, Seymour Gitin and Michael Sokoloff; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 169.

[100]Machinist comments, "The juxtaposition of priests and diviners here is probably not accidental or casual, on the Bible's part, but deliberate, corresponding to the issue at stake: on the one hand, how to inquire of the gods as to what was the problem posed by the ark, such as diviners would know; on the other, how to perform the proper expiatory offerings to remove this problem and restore well-being, such as the priests could do"; "Biblical Traditions," 61.

do not send it away empty. Instead, be sure to return to him a guilt offering.[101] Then you will be healed, or else it will be revealed to you why his hand does not turn aside from you" (1 Sam 6:3).

The ark returns to Israel with the images in a ritual process described in 1 Sam 6:10–12. The people of Beth-shemesh receive the ark by sacrificing the cows used to pull the cart (1 Sam 6:14). Presumably, the plague on the Philistines ends.

Further attention to the images is illuminating according to their role in the conclusion of the ark narrative, and according to Israelite and other parallels. In 1 Sam 6:4a, the Philistine priests and diviners determine that the Philistines are to send "five gold tumors and five mice," that is, images thereof (1 Sam 6:5), along with the ark.[102] On one level, the images are simply an offering to pacify an angry god of another land; yet, that is not the only level on which to understand this ritual.

McCarter points out that the images serve two functions. First, they are likely a payment, hence the need for images of gold. Specifically, they may simply represent a fine for taking the ark,[103] or the payment of a ransom in order to avert plague as in Exod 30:12.[104] Amid a myriad of instructions given to Moses on Mt. Sinai regarding a variety of cultic matters (Exod 24:12–31:17), Exod 30:12 reads, "If the head(s) of the sons of Israel[105] are lifted in order to count them (i.e., if a census is taken), and each man gives a ransom for himself to Yahweh when they are counted, then Yahweh will not [send] a plague on them when they are counted." Each is to give a half shekel (Exod 30:13a).

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[101]See the discussion on guilt offerings as payment of compensation; McCarter, *I Samuel*, 133.

[102]As noted, the combination of tumors and mice leads Wilkinson to conclude that the illness affected by the ark was most likely bubonic plage; "Philistine Epidemic," 140. The number five relates to the Philistine pentapolis of Ashdod, Gaza, Ekron, Gath and Ashkelon (1 Sam 6:17), each with one leader (1 Sam 6:4b).

[103]Machinist, "Biblical Traditions," 62.

[104]McCarter, *I Samuel*, 133.

[105]Only men were counted in the census.

Second, it seems that the images are understood to embody impurity. In McCarter's words, "they provide a compensatory sacrifice, carrying away the contamination from Philistia and with it the suffering."[106] As bearers of contamination away from Philistia and into foreign territory, functioning like the wilderness destination for the goat earmarked for Azazel, the ritual with the golden images could function somewhat like the scapegoat of Lev 16.[107] Leviticus 16:21–22 relates the ritual:

> Then Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat and confess upon it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all of their transgressions according to all their sins; he shall put them upon the head of the goat and dismiss it toward the wilderness by the hand of one ready. The goat will bear upon itself all their iniquities to a designated land, and he shall dismiss the goat in the wilderness.

The goat carries away the contamination, that is, the iniquities of Israel, to a designated place outside of the residential or temple area. Likewise, the Philistines would be interested in expelling impurity for their territory.

Miller and Roberts point to the similar situation of devastating plague faced by the Hittites as reflected in the plague prayers of Mursilis. In one prayer, King Mursilis of the Hittites says, "a plague broke out in Hatti, and Hatti has been beaten down by the plague."[108] The king seeks to make reparation with the gods.

> Now because Hatti has been very much beaten down by the plague, and Hatti continues to experience many deaths, the affair of Tudaliya has begun to trouble the land.[109] It was ascertained for me (through an oracle) by [a god], and I made (further) oracular inquiries [about it]. They will perform before you, [the gods], my lords, the ritual of (transgressing of)

[106]McCarter, *I Samuel*, 133.

[107]Machinist, "Biblical Traditions," 62. Machinist calls this concept "magical transference."

[108]"Plague Prayers of Muršili II," translated by Gary Beckman (*COS* 1.60:156).

[109]King Mursilis' father has sworn an oath to Tudhaliya, but he and others who broke the oath killed Tudhaliya. It was previously determined through an oracle that this matter initially caused the divine anger and, in turn, the plague.

> the oath which was ascertained for you, [the gods], my lords, and for your temples in regard to the plague. . . . And I will make restitution to you, the gods, my lords, with reparation and propitiatory gift on behalf of the land.[110]

As the Philistines are informed by the diviners and priests to send an offering, so Mursilis is advised through oracles (divination) to make reparation through a propitiatory gift or guilt offering.

Mursilis confesses his (their) guilt. "It is true. We have done it," he says. Then, he says, "I shall perform the ritual of [the Euphrates], and I shall perform it fully."[111] He begs the gods to remove the plague from them. If there is any other guilt or any other way he can make restitution, he wants to know and he is willing to make restitution:

> If perhaps people have (indeed) been dying because of this matter . . . or if people have been dying because of some other matter, let me either see it in a dream, or (let) it [be discovered] by means of an oracle, or let a prophet speak of it. Or the priests will sleep long and purely (in an incubation oracle) in regard to that which I convey to all of them.[112]

As Miller and Roberts point out, the Philistines, like King Mursilis, want to know all that they can know about the cause of the plague in order to make the appropriate restitution.[113]

According to a second prayer, Mursilis learns two additional reasons why the gods have sent a plague upon Hatti. "[I sought (the cause of) the anger] of the gods, [and I found] two old tablets," he says.[114] First, he realizes that he has neglected a ritual of the Euphrates River that his father had done. "Earlier kings [performed] the ritual of the Euphrates [. . .], but since my father (Šuppiluliuma I) [people have been dying] in Hatti,

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[110]"Plague Prayers of Muršili II," Beckman, 157.

[111]"Plague Prayers of Muršili II," Beckman, 157.

[112]"Plague Prayers of Muršili II," Beckman,159.

[113]Miller and Roberts, *Hand of the Lord,* 54.

[114]"Plague Prayers of Muršili II," Beckman, 158.

[and] we have never performed [the ritual] of the Euphrates."[115] Mursilis says,

> O Storm-god of Hatti, my lord, and gods, my lords—so it happens: People always sin. My father sinned and transgressed the word of the Storm-god of Hatti, my lord. But I did not sin in any way. But so it happens: The sin of the father devolves upon his son. The sin of my father has devolved upon me, and I have now confessed it to the Storm-god of Hatti, my lord, and to the gods, my lords: It is true. We have done it.[116]

Clearly, Mursilis affirms his own responsibility in confessing the sins of his royal father, but the blame for the plague is pinned on the sin of the father.

Second, he learns that the Hittites broke an oath with the storm god. "The Storm-god of Hatti took the men of Kuruštama to Egyptian territory, and . . . the Storm-god of Hatti made a treaty concerning them with the Hittites."[117] They attacked Egypt and took prisoners. These breaches of covenant oaths are then assumed to be the human transgression responsible for the divine punishment through plague.

Miller and Roberts point us to an analogous Hittite ritual known as "Uamuwa's Ritual Against Plague." The first two paragraphs are as follows:

> Thus says Uamuwa, man of Arzawa. If in the land there is continual dying and if some god of the enemy has caused it, then I do as follows: They bring in one wether and they combine blue wool, red wool, yellow-green wool, black wool and white wool and they make it into a wreath and they wreathe the one wether and they drive the wether forth on the road to the enemy and they say to him (the god) as follows: "What god of the enemy has made this plague, now this wreathed wether we have brought for your pacification, O god! Just as a fortress is strong and (yet) is at peace with this wether, may you, the god who has made this plague, be at peace in the same way with the land of Hatti. Turn again in friendship to the land of Hatti." Then they drive the wreathed sheep into the enemy territory.[118]

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[115]"Plague Prayers of Muršili II," Beckman, 158.

[116]"Plague Prayers of Muršili II," Beckman, 158.

[117]"Plague Prayers of Muršili II," Beckman, 158.

[118]"Uamuwa's Ritual Against Plague," translated by Billie Jean Collins (*COS* 1.63:162).

As Miller and Roberts point out, the plague is attributed to the god of an enemy (as in the Philistines' perspective in the ark narrative).[119] The strategy at work in this ritual is to appease the enemy god.[120]

Because the golden images in the ark narrative carry away the contamination that is plague, several Hittite scapegoat rituals to counteract plague help to illuminate the ritual in 1 Sam. The "Ritual of Puliša" is one. When a plague strikes the Hittites following an attack in enemy territory, the ritual prescribes the following: "As he [the Hittite king] [is marching a]way from the border of the land of the enemy, they take one prisoner and one woman of the (enemy's) land. . . . He [the king] removes the garments from his body. They put them on the man. But on the woman [they p]ut the garments of a woman" (§2). Then, he says,

> If some male god of the enemy land has caused this plague, for him I have just given an adorned man as a substitute. This o[ne is gr]eat with respect to his head, this one is great with respect to his heart, and this [one is gr]eat with respect to his limb. You male god, be pacified with t[his ad]orned man. Turn [agai]n in friendship to the king, the [lords], the ar[my, and] to the land of Hatti. [. . .] but [let] this prisoner be[ar] the plague and transport (it) ba[ck into the land of the enemy] (§2).

Likewise, the king speaks for the woman. The same ritual is repeated using a decorated bull and a ewe. To conclude, "th[ey] send the *ašušant*-bull [and the ewe] to run in front [of the prisoner] and the woman" (§6).[121]

David R. Wright points out that in addition to functioning as substitutes for the king, indeed for the people, the enemy prisoners are even more obviously appeasement gifts to respective male and female deities

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[119]Miller and Roberts, *Hand of the Lord*, 55; titled there and in *ANET* as "Ritual Against Pestilence."

[120]David R. Wright groups this ritual with others that demonstrate the idea of the transference or disposal of impurity, concretized with the colored threads; *The Disposal of Impurity: Elimination Rites in the Bible and in Hittite and Mesopotamian Literature* (SBLDS 101; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1987), 56. Based on this text alone, however, his interpretation is not self-evident. What is more clear in this ritual is the effort to please a foreign god with a gayly decorated meal, especially in the context of the food offering in the rest of the text.

[121]"Puliša's Ritual Against Plague," translated by Billie Jean Collins (*COS* 1.62:161).

who may be angered as well.[122] The male prisoner is "adorned" and strong of body. The ewe and the bull are also decorated with earrings and colored threads to be more appealing to the angered deities,[123] but the colored threads serve another role. They are pulled from the king's mouth, and represent the calamity that the king and the people have suffered. Wright comments, "By being concretized, the evil can be symbolically transferred from the king to the animal."[124] Finally, when the prisoners and the animals are sent in the direction of enemy territory, they are believed to carry the plague back with them.[125] While the scapegoat of Lev 16 is probably not a gift of appeasement, it does carry away evil.[126] The golden images of the ark narrative, however, seem to fill both roles.[127]

To summarize, we have seen several important aspects of Israel's *doxa* related to natural disasters in 1 Sam 4:1b–7:1. We have argued that the deaths of Hophni and Phinehas may be understood, along with the defeat of Israel by the Philistines, as a curse for Hophni's and Phinehas' impious deeds that amounted to covenant transgression. Yet, another *doxa* presents itself in this pericope: the community may suffer for the transgression of its leaders.

In addition, we have seen that the intention of the ritual in 1 Sam 6 is two-fold: to determine if Yahweh is the deity that has enacted the plague, and, if so, to appease Yahweh in order to end the plague. To respond to natural disasters in this ritual manner by first assuming that a responsible person, people and/or deity can be discerned, and then by assuming that the deity—understood to have the ability to not only send, but to withhold the natural disaster—might be appeased, are other endoxic propositions

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[122]Wright, *Disposal*, 47.

[123]Wright, *Disposal*, 48.

[124]Wright, *Disposal*, 48.

[125]Wright, *Disposal*, 49.

[126]Wright, *Disposal*, 49.

[127]It is not certain that the golden images of the ark narrative are understood to return the plague to the enemy. It seems more likely that the gift carries away the plague, releasing plague from the sending territory.

related to natural disasters that are demonstrated by the ancient Israelites and their neighbors.

2 SAMUEL 24:1–24

Second Samuel 24, the last chapter of 2 Samuel and the last of the so-called appendices, narrates David's census of Israel and Judah (2 Sam 24:1–9), a plague (דבר) on Israel that seems to be attributed to the census (2 Sam 24:10–17), and the end of the plague (2 Sam 24:18–25).[128] Though some scholars have interpreted this pericope as a narrative unity,[129] others suggest that it is a composite narrative, because some of its inconsistencies cannot be reconciled.[130] McCarter maintains that the original story contained vv. 1–9, 15, 16b and 20–25, while the remaining verses were added at a later time.[131] If so, the original story is more focused on the plague, its cause and solution, making these verses of particular interest to our study.

Joshua Adler, in two brief articles, asks the typical questions that have been put to this text: "Why did David want a census at this time? Why did Joab object to it? Why did the brunt of the punishment fall on the people? For what sin?"[132] In this pericope, however, we are not given an explicit cause. Instead, there is what Brueggemann calls "a hidden affront against Yahweh."[133] Scholars have attempted to identify this "hidden

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[128]Many scholars have noted the affinity of this pericope with 2 Sam 24:1-14, (e.g., A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel* [WBC 11; Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1989], 282; Hertzberg, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 410), both of which may have been originally located within the ark narrative (2 Sam 4:1b-7:2); McCarter, *II Samuel*, 517. The present placement of these two pericopes aligns 2 Sam 21:1-14 nearest to the narratives of Saul, and 2 Sam 24 (with later additions) nearest to the narrative of Solomon who builds the temple in 1 Kgs; Hertzberg, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 416.

[129]E.g., Adrian Schenker, *Der Machtige im Schmelzofen des Mitleids: Eine Interpretation von 2 Sam 24* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), i.

[130]McCarter, *II Samuel*, 514-15.

[131]The added verses serve as an etiology for the site for Solomon's temple; McCarter, *II Samuel*, 517.

[132]Joshua Adler, "David's Last Sin: Was It the Census?" *JBQ* 23 (1995): 91; "David's Census: Additional Reflection," *JBQ* 24 (1996): 255-57.

affront," but that is not the purpose of this study, and a definitive answer likely will remain elusive.

Be that as it may, 2 Sam 24:15 reports that a plague (דבר) is dealt to Israel by Yahweh. David addresses the plague by building an altar and making sacrifices to Yahweh. The pericope ends, stating, "Yahweh was supplicated concerning the land, and the plague (מגפה) was withheld from Israel." Again, we see the ritual response of expiation in connection with a natural disaster.

PROPHETS

We can readily see that the canonical prophets proclaimed a connection between human transgression and divine punishment through natural disasters. Several prophetic texts illustrate this connection. Amos and Hosea, eighth-century B.C.E. prophets to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, both speak from the Sinai covenant tradition.[134] Amos proclaims a divine oracle, addressing the covenant community of Israel,[135] saying, "You only have I known (ידע) out of all the families of the earth."[136] Immediately following, he proclaims, "therefore, I shall punish you for all of your iniquities" (Amos 3:2). Following this verse, natural catastrophes are included as punishment in a series of judgment speeches against Israel in Amos 3:1–6:14. The punishments match the covenant curses. In Amos 4:9–10a, we read, "'I struck you with blight and mildew, [I struck] your many gardens and vineyards; locusts ravaged your fig and olive trees; but you did not turn to me,' utterance of Yahweh. 'I unleashed a plague (דבר) upon you like the one upon Egypt.'" Like Amos, Hosea (chapter two) assumes retributive divine punishment for human covenant transgression.

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[133]Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 350.

[134]George E. Mendenhall. *Ancient Israel's Faith and History* (ed. Gary A. Herion; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 144.

[135]"An audience that in its own sight is pious and faithful"; Herbert B. Huffmon, "The Social Role of Amos' Message," in *Quest for the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honor of George E. Mendenhall* (ed. H. B. Huffmon, F. A. Spina and A. R. W. Green: Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 110.

[136]On the covenant connotation of "know" (ידע), see Herbert B. Huffmon, "The Treaty Background of Hebrew *yada'*, " *BASOR* 181 (1966): 31-37.

In Isa 24:1–13 we find an impending judgment on the earth, saying in part:

> The earth will be emptied and razed, for Yahweh has spoken this word. The earth mourns, it languishes; the world grows feeble, it languishes. The exalted people of the earth mourn. And the earth is polluted beneath its inhabitants, for they have transgressed torah, they have failed statutory expectation, [and] they have violated [the] everlasting covenant. Therefore, a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants are accountable. The inhabitants of the earth are burned, but a few remain (Isa 24:3–6).

Accountability of the people in covenant curses being established,[137] this oracle and one that follows specify several effects that fit our definition of natural catastrophes. First, Isa 24:7 continues the oracle above, saying, "The new wine mourns, the vine languishes."[138] Second, another oracle of judgment, Isa 24:18b–20a states, "For the windows of the sky will be opened, and the foundations of the earth will quake. The earth is shattered to pieces; the earth is split asunder; the earth is shaken violently. The earth staggers like a drunkard, and sways like an old hut." Then, accountability is again assigned to that which is affected, saying, "[The earth's] transgression is heavy upon it, and it will fall, never to rise again (Isa 24:20b)." In these verses, both flood and earthquake are understood to be a punishment for human transgression.[139]

Jeremiah and Ezekiel, as well as the prophets of the post-exilic period, expressed this retributive assumption.[140] During the restoration of the Judean community in Jerusalem, Haggai, for example, proclaims that the difficulties that they face were directly related to their negligence about rebuilding the temple. One difficulty is the shortage of food. Haggai 1:9

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[137]See Hillers, *Treaty Curses*, 89.

[138]אבל and אמללה as above in Isa 24:4. These terms indicate drought. See Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 181.

[139]As evident in Isa 24:5, the people of the earth are accountable, not the earth itself. Likewise, we understand the transgression of the earth as the transgression of the people. See Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39*, 191.

[140]See Jer 14:1-10 on the "great drought," and Ezek 14:12-20, an oracle against Jerusalem.

states, "'You expected abundance, but see, it turned out to be little.[141] When you brought [it] home, I blew [it] away. Why?' utterance of Yahweh of hosts, 'Because my house is desolate, but you run to your own home.'" Because of this neglect, the oracle continues,

> Therefore, the heavens will withhold dew from [falling] upon you, and the earth will cease producing. What's more, I have declared a drought (חרב) upon the land and the mountains, upon the grain, the new wine and the fresh oil, upon that which emerges from the ground, upon humans and animals and all that they produce by hand. (Hag 1:10–11)

Here, the religious transgression is specific, as well as the retributive divine punishment in terms of natural disaster.

Carroll surmised that the prophecies in Joel (Joel 1:2–3; 2:11, 17) and the questions stated within them, came in response to disaster.[142] We presume the life context of the book of Joel to be a severe locust plague and the accompanying fear of further disaster within the post-exilic community of Israelites.[143] It seems that ravaging by locusts has already taken place, but that the event portends further catastrophe.[144] Following John Barton, we find it plausible to delimit 1:15–20 as a lament in response to this communal catastrophe,[145] although it cannot be interpreted in isolation from the rest of Joel.

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[141]Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 595.

[142]Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed*, 79-80.

[143]See John Barton, *Joel and Obadiah* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 13.

[144]Hans Walter Wolff, *Joel and Amos* (trans. Waldemar Janzen, S. Dean McBride, Jr., and Charles A. Muenchow; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 6.

[145]Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 58. Ronald A. Simkins sees it as "traditional lamentational material"; *Yahweh's Activity in History and Nature in the Book of Joel* (Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Studies 10; Lewiston, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1991), 146. Cf. the opinion that one cannot differentiate 1:15-20 as a communal lament from 1:1-19 as a call to a communal lament; Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah*, 239. For present purposes it makes a big difference.

Verse 15 begins the lament with an ominous tone, "Aha, for the day! For the day of the Lord is near!" In this context,[146] the Day of the Lord is a day of divine destruction against the people of Israel, and it seems to be in progress. The catastrophe is thoroughly comprehensive. Food, resources for sacrifice (1:16), the present grain crop (and therefore food at harvest time[147] and subsequent winter reserves), present grain reserves (1:17), domestic cattle and sheep and their pasturage (1:18), as well as the wild pastures, the "trees of the field," the "beasts of the field" and their water supply (1:19–21) are all to be destroyed. That is to say, all the material needs of a subsistence community are threatened with ruin. The survival of the community itself, therefore, is in question.

We find it plausible to suggest, following Stuart, that this time of destruction, as *they* understand it, is brought about as a result of human transgression of the divine-human covenant. Because of a breach of covenant, the curses are ravaging.[148] When curses ravage, one must make reparation to stop them. Hence, the people fast, gather an assembly (Joel 1:14), and call on the divine. We may take this lamentation as their corporate cry to the divine (Joel 1:14, "gather the elders and all those who dwell in the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord").

Several important elements of *doxa* are at work here. First, there is the explicit reminder that the source of destruction is the divine. They also believe, however, that the divine holds the power to end the destruction. As it is said in Hos 6:1, "it is he who has torn, and he will heal us; he has struck

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[146]Cf. "day of YHWH" in other prophetic books, esp. Isa 13:6-13 and Zeph 1:7-18 where "the day" refers to divine destruction of other nations.

[147]Cf. Hos 8:7: "The standing grain with no head yields no meal (flour)."

[148]Cf. the curses in the context of covenant, e.g., Deut 28:15-69 (28:15–29:1 English); Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah*, 228. Often, in Hebrew Bible and ancient Near Eastern texts, it is determined that ritual neglect and/or a broken covenant constitutes the breach which brought about the curses; see "Plague Prayers of Muršili II," (A obv. 6'-24') in which it is told that the plagues occur because King Mursilis failed to make offerings to the gods at the river Euphrates, and the Hittites broke an oath with Egypt by taking prisoners of war ("Plague Prayers of Muršili II," Beckman, 158); Exod 5:3; Num 14:11-12; 1 Kgs 8:35; Jer 14:12; 15:1-4 (2 Kgs 21:1-18); curses in the *Code of Hammurabi* E19 and following (M. E. J. Richardson. *Hammurabi's Laws: Text, Translation and Glossary* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000], 127ff.), and Deut 28:15ff, to list a few.

down, and he will bind us up." In addition, we emphasize again the implicit notion that the locust plague is only the beginning of destruction, a "precursor" in things to come, as Barton says.[149] In short, without intercession, divine destruction can become total destruction, as in the Day of the Lord.

The community, therefore, makes intercession. They call upon the divine through lamentation and the attending rites. Here, we cannot miss the lament's larger context. The communal lament is only one element of the people's active response, which includes mourning, fasting and gathering as a community (Joel 1:13–14).[150] Hence, the people's response to communal catastrophe is participation in communal religious rites, the explicit purpose of which is to ameliorate the divine and bring the destruction to a halt and, even more, to revive a flourishing environment.[151]

DISCUSSION

At times, catastrophes make sense to the people within the affected group. (When someone smokes three packs of cigarettes a day for thirty years, who is surprised when that person is diagnosed with lung cancer? When a town builds houses on the flood plain, who is surprised when those houses are flooded?) Even when the ill-affects of some event are unusually severe, the assumed cause and effect relationship may go unchallenged because of the power of *doxa*. At times of radical crises, however, the contradiction between *doxa* and experience is too great, thus challenges arise and reformulations of *doxa* are proposed.

On the one hand, understanding natural disasters as fitting within the framework of retributive divine punishment for human behavior is a satisfactory explanation for many. This type of retribution was certainly *doxa* in ancient Israel, and it is relevant to our study of natural disasters. Retribution was a pervasive (in both time and place in the ancient Near East) and ingrained mentality.[152] Crenshaw states, "priest, prophet and wise

[149]Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 60.

[150]See Durkheim on expiatory rites; *Elementary Forms*, 392ff, esp. 406-12.

[151]Cf. 1 Sam 24; see also "The Disappearance of Telepinu" (Hoffner, *Hittite Myths*, 14-17).

[152]Klaus Koch, however, contends that there is no "doctrine of retribution" in the Hebrew Bible. He describes the view that "actions have built-in

man labored under the assumption of a correlation between good conduct and earthly reward."[153] Likewise, Paul D. Hanson, even while delimiting distinct groups in the early post-exilic era, claims that the notion of righteousness and attendant retribution was shared by all of them and "remained intact."[154] Morton Smith makes an even bigger claim that "it was expected everywhere [in the ancient Near East] that god would punish men who offended him and would reward those who did what he wanted."[155]

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consequences" as different from retribution, which for him is a "judicial process" in which "punishment and reward are not part of the person's nature, nor part of the essence of the action" and is enacted by a supreme authority "according to a previously established norm"; "Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?" in *Theodicy in the Old Testament* (ed. James L. Crenshaw; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 59, 66. According to John Gammie, Friedrich modifies Koch's position by positing that "every misdeed of man causes God to set in motion and bring to fulfillment a legal suit against man"; cited by John G. Gammie, "The Theology of Retribution in the Book of Deuteronomy," *CBQ* 32 (1970): 2; Friedrich Horst, "Recht und Religion im Bereich des Alten Testaments," *EvT* 16 (1956): 74. Many scholars, however, disagree with Koch; see Gammie, "Theology of Retribution," 2-4. Contra Koch, Gammie views retribution as "the rewarding and punishing reaction of God to the good and evil deeds of men"; "Theology of Retribution," 6. S. Fischer nicely differentiates five concepts of retribution; "How God Pays Back: Retributive Concepts in the Book of Job," *AcT* 20 (2000): 26-29.

[153]James L. Crenshaw, "Popular Questioning of the Justice of God in Ancient Israel," *ZAW* 82 (1970): 384.

[154]Paul D. Hanson, "Israelite Religion in the Early Postexilic Period," in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* (Patrick D. Miller, Jr., Paul D. Hanson and S. Dean McBride, eds.; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 487, 504.

[155]Smith, "Common Theology," 144. Furthermore, Smith argues that this and other commonalities across ancient Near Eastern cultures arose independently. On the other hand, Tikva Frymer-Kensky agues that at least legal retribution has a origin and trail, that is, west Semitic emigrants took it into Babylon; "Tit for Tat: The Principle of Equal Retribution in Near Eastern and Biblical Law," *BA* (Fall, 1980): 233. See also comments in response to Smith by Brueggemann, who charges Smith with reductionism. Brueggemann's critique is important because he points out challenges to the common theology; "A Shape for Old Testament Theology, I: Structure Legitimation," *CBQ* 47.1 (1985): 32, 43.

For good or ill, in other words, "you reap what you sow" (Job 4:8),[156] to paraphrase Eliphaz in the book of Job.[157]

Curses, as detailed in a variety of texts, are perhaps the most helpful examples to demonstrate that natural disasters were thought of as retributive, divine disapproval for human behavior in the ancient Near Eastern world.[158] Curses occur in both cultic and non-cultic contexts.[159] They were appended to law codes, treaties and covenants, and inscribed, *inter alia*, on boundary stones, tombs and sarcophagi.[160] Most importantly, curses were believed to be operative when subjects violated the terms of agreement. (The same retributive notion is true for observation of the terms

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[156]"According to my observation, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same." Cf. the covenant blessings and curses of Deut 28.

[157]In specific regard to natural catastrophes, K. C. Hanson states the *doxa* well, "It was their [i.e., ancients of the eastern Mediterranean] common assumption that climatological, entomological, and virological patterns were modes of divine action, and often as punishment"; "When the King Crosses the Line," 11.

[158]It is well documented that an appeal to the natural elements is a characteristic of ancient Near Eastern and biblical covenant ceremonies and lawsuits. For example, Isa 1:2 begins a lawsuit with, "Hear, O heavens! Listen up, O earth! For Yahweh has spoken!" (See also Mic 6:2 and Jer 2:12.) According to Deut 30:19, part of a covenant ceremony, Moses summons the natural elements after delineating the curses and the blessings that will result from keeping or breaking the covenant (Deut 28), saying, "I call as witness against you today the heavens and the earth." (See also Deut 4:26, 31:38.) As witnesses both to the covenant at Sinai and to the lawsuits brought against Israel for breaking that covenant, the natural elements are assumed to be participants in the curses and blessings of the covenant; Herbert B. Huffmon, "Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets," *JBL* 78 (1959): 285-95. On the centrality of the Sinai covenant in Israelite religion and in the formation of the people of Israel, see George E. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," *BA* 17 (1954): 51.

[159]Willy Schottroff, *Der altisraelitische Fluchspruch* (WMANT 30; Neukirchener Verlag, 1969), 232-33.

[160]F. Charles Fensham, "Malediction and Benediction in Ancient Near Eastern Vassal-Treaties and the Old Testament," *ZAW* 74 (1962): 2-3.

and the experience of covenant blessings.) Human (mis)behavior was punishable by divine curses of natural disaster and defeat in warfare.[161]

Intellectual Challenges

The experience of communal catastrophes, however, inevitably challenge the understanding of them as retributive, divine punishment because in as much as all in the community suffer, some of the community will be considered undeserving of punishment. The suffering of those perceived as innocent challenges the *doxa* of catastrophes as divine punishment on the one hand, and/or another endoxic assumption, that of a just God, on the other.

Let us first deal with the latter assumption, that of a just God. After surveying several texts from the Hebrew Bible, including Mal 1:2–3, Paul R. Redditt points out that the views expressed "for the most part operate on the assumption (sometimes unacknowledged) that God must act morally."[162] Related to this notion is the idea that the creation constitutes an ordering of chaotic forces, that this order was established by God, and that, God is, therefore, subject to this standard as well.[163] In light of these

[161]For more curses from the ancient Near East that demonstrate this point, see Appendix C.

[162]Paul L. Redditt, "The God Who Loves and Hates," in *Shall Not the Judge of All the Earth Do What Is Just: Studies on the Nature of God in Tribute to James L. Crenshaw* (David Penchansky and Paul L. Redditt, eds.; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 179.

[163]On the ancient Israelite affirmation of divinely created, universal order over against chaos, see Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistance of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 12, 127. On universal order manifested by the Noachic covenant, see, for example, James L. Crenshaw, "Introduction: The Shift from Theodicy to Anthropodicy," in *Theodicy in the Old Testament*, 2. On order related to the cosmos, see also Douglas A. Knight, "Cosmogony and Order in the Hebrew Tradition," in *Cosmogony and Ethical Order* (R. W. Lovin and F. E. Reynolds, eds.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 139-40. For affirmations of God's just nature and righteous acts as judge, see Ps 7:12 (Eng 7:11); 9:8; 97:2; 99:1-4; 119:137; 145:17. Regarding divine judging and justice, see comments especially on משפט in L. J. Mafico Temba, "Judge, Judging," *ABD* 3: 1104-6, and "Just, Justice," *ABD* 3: 1127-29 and by B. Johnson, "משפט," *TDOT* 9:86-98.

The issue of order is especially related to the wisdom literature. On order being central to wisdom literature, see especially James L. Crenshaw, "In Search of

understandings, it is no wonder that innocent suffering on the part of the biblical Israelites prompted intellectual questions and challenges to conflicting endoxic propositions. Not coincidentally, many of these challenges are expressed within texts (narratives) about communal catastrophe.[164] As we emphasized in chapter three, it is just such crises, according to Bourdieu, that brings *doxa* to the point of articulation, challenge and conflict.[165]

The reality of communal catastrophes is that they are arbitrary and indiscriminate when they come. As *communal* catastrophes, natural disasters and warfare affect both the just and the unjust (cf. Matt 5:45 "For he [i.e., your Father in heaven] makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous." NRSV). Such is acknowledged in the myth *Erra and Ishum* when Erra, Mesopotamian god of *war and plague*, says, "Like one who plunders a country, I do not distinguish just from unjust, I fell (them both)" Tablet V.[166] The suffering of the just is sure to be an experience that runs counter to expectation, especially among those in the ancient Near Eastern world who so strongly assumed the notion of *just* retribution, and be a catalyst of cognitive dissonance.

Many protests spring from the conflict between *doxa* regarding catastrophes and the suffering of those experiencing catastrophes. At the heart of these complaints are challenges to divine justice. While laments sometimes offer some confession of guilt,[167] these protests are often

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Divine Presence," *RevExp* 74 (1997): 363 and J. A. Loader, "Speakers Calling for Order," *Old Testament Essays* 10 (1997): 424. For discussions of the relation between cosmic order in Israelite and Egyptian mentality, see especially James L. Crenshaw, *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom* (New York: NTAV, 1976), 23 (a direct relationship); Michael V. Fox, "World Order and Ma'at: A Crooked Parallel," *JANESCU* 23 (1995): 40 (a dubious relationship); and Roland E. Murphy, "Wisdom and Yahwism," in *No Famine in the Land* (J. Flanagan and A. Robinson, eds.; Missoula, Mont.: Scholar's Press, 1975), 120 (a negative relationship).

[164]Gen 18:25 is the classic text regarding this issue; see p. 93 below.

[165]See pp. 46-47.

[166]Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 310.

[167]Walter C. Bouzard, Jr. comments, "That Israel's sin may have precipitated God's disfavor was . . . a consideration all but ignored" in the communal laments of psalms; *We Have Heard with Our Ears, O God: Sources of the Communal Laments in the Psalms* (SBLDS 159; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 133-34.

expressed without any confession of guilt, especially in laments of the Books of Jeremiah, Lamentations and Psalms.[168]

One frequently cited communal lament that claims innocence is Ps 44, taken by Ralph W. Klein as an exilic psalm.[169] Erhard Gerstenberger delineates the structure of the psalm as: I. Superscription, v. 1; II. Hymnic Remembrance, vv. 2–9; III. Complaint, vv. 10–17; IV. Protestation of Innocence, vv. 18–23; and V. Petition, vv. 24–27.[170] After reviewing how God has acted on behalf of the psalmist's ancestors, the psalmist (or the people) complains that God has instead rejected them (v. 10), making them "like sheep for slaughter," and "the taunt of our neighbors" (vv. 11, 13). Yet, the people declare, "All of this has come upon us, but we have not forgotten you; we have not falsified your covenant. . . . We are being killed all day because of you, and counted as sheep for the slaughter!" (vv. 18, 23). "Such a protestation of innocence," says Klein, "stands in remarkable tension to the notion that exile resulted from a broken covenant (Jer 31:32) and to the notion attested elsewhere that exile is the result of sin."[171]

Then, there is the challenge in the mouth of David concerning punishment of the many by plague for David's own personal sin regarding the census. According to 2 Sam 24:17, "When David saw the angel that was

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See, however, Pss 31, 60, 69:6, 79:9 and the comments in Paul Wayne Ferris, *The Genre of Communal Lament in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (SBLDS 127; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1992), 129-30.

[168]Treating laments in each of these books goes beyond the scope of this project. For communal laments in Ps, see especially Pss 44, 60, 74, 79, and 80.

[169]See for example, Bouzard, *We Have Heard*, 134; Farris, *Communal Lament*, 130; and Klein, *Israel in Exile*, 18-19.

[170]Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part I: With an Introduction to Cultic Poetry* (FOTL 14; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988), 182-83.

[171]Klein, *Israel in Exile*, 19. For other protests, see Gen 20:4, "Will you destroy an innocent people?"; Ps 82:2, "How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked?"; Ps 94:3, "How long shall the wicked exult?"; Jeremiah's laments, especially Jer 12:1, "why does the way of the wicked prosper?"; Hab 1:2-4, "How long? . . . justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous"; Lam 2:20-21, "slaughter without mercy"; Job 19:7, "I call aloud, but there is no justice"; Mal 2:17, "Where is the God of justice?"; Mal 3:14, "It is vain to serve God"; and Mal 3:16-22, promise of reward to the faithful.

slaying the people, he said to Yahweh, 'Look, I am the one who has sinned, I am the one who has done wrong, but these sheep, what have they done? Please let your hand be against me and my father's household.'" David Daube comments, "the implication of this clearly was that God was here killing people peaceful and helpless like sheep merely in order to punish their 'owner'."[172] What is more, it is David who confesses, "I have sinned greatly" (2 Sam 24:10), and he alone is given the options of (communal) punishment: three years famine, three years fleeing before his enemies, or three day's plague (2 Sam 24:12–13).

By posing challenging questions about the suffering of the community for the sins of one, emphasis in these texts is given to the notion of punishing only the guilty. Indeed, this is the ordinary legal tradition of biblical Israel and her neighbors: the punishment of each according to his or her own crime. For example, Deut 24:16, states "[Parents] shall not be put to death for their [children], nor shall [children] be put to death for their [parents]; they shall be put to death each for his [or her] own sins."[173]

Several prophetic texts regarding the fall of Judah exemplify this notion very clearly. In part, both Jeremiah and Ezekiel focus the blame for the fall of Judah upon the people of the present generation, i.e., their audience. Blame is not centered on errant kings or other leaders of the people, nor on the ancestors. In Jer 14:1–10, a lament, words concerning a drought in Judah come to Jeremiah.[174] Following a description of the drought in vv. 3–6, a petition for divine intervention with a confession from the people in v. 7, a challenge and a word of confidence about Yahweh's presence in vv. 8–9, comes the verdict. The divine response is not what is

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[172]Daube, *Studies in Biblical Law,* 162. Perhaps "sheep" does imply ownership here, but it seems not a stretch to suggest that "sheep" also implies innocence, *vis-à-vis* the responsibility of David, the king of the people, the shepherd of the sheep. See also G. Waschke, "צאן," *TDOT* 7:205.

[173]Antony F. Campbell and Mark A. O'Brien designate this verse as part of the "main pre-DH" material; *Unfolding the Deuteronomistic History: Origins, Upgrades, Present Text* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2000), 79.

[174]Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 134.

typically expected following a lament.[175] Instead, the word is: "Thus Yahweh says about this people, 'They certainly have loved to waffle; they have not restrained their feet. So Yahweh does not accept them. Now, he will remember their iniquity and punish their sins'" (Jer 14:10).

That the focus of blame for the fall of Judah is the people at large is even clearer in Jer 44:20–23. According to Jer 44:1, Jeremiah is said to be speaking to those people of Judah who have made it to Egypt as refugees after the destruction of Jerusalem. Some among them suggest that the destruction of Judah came as a result of the cessation of offerings to the Queen of Heaven, as sought in Jer 7:16–20, perhaps reflecting Josiah's Yahwistic reform of the temple cult. At any rate, Jeremiah refocuses the cause of Jerusalem's destruction in two ways—covenant infidelity[176] and collective responsibility—saying to "all the people":

> The burned offerings that you offered in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem, *you and your ancestors, your kings, and your officials and the people of the land*, will Yahweh not remember them, and take [them] up for consideration? Yahweh could not again lift his eyes from your evil deeds, from the abominations that you did. Thus your land became a desolation, a waste and a curse with no one dwelling [there], as even to this day. (Jer 44:20–22; italics added)

From the perspective assigned to Jeremiah, one cannot claim the sins of one's leaders or one's ancestors as explanation for the fall of Judah, for the present people are guilty.

Elsewhere, the book of Jeremiah again stresses individual responsibility, that is to say, the responsibility of the present generation: "In those days they shall no longer say, 'The ancestors have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge.' Instead, each will die according to his own guilt; all who eat sour grapes, their teeth will be set on edge'" (Jer 31:29–30).[177] The book of Ezekiel also cited (Ezek 18:2) and overturned this popular saying as well, stressing, "Listen, all lives are mine, both the lives of

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[175]Brueggemann, *Jeremiah,* 136. See also Louis Stulman, *Jeremiah* (Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 140-41.

[176]Brueggemann, *Jeremiah*, 407-8.

[177]Indeed, this refutation of a prevailing proverb looks forward as well to the newness available to the present generation for coping with exile. They are not tied to the consequences of past sins; Brueggemann, *Jeremiah*, 291.

the parents and the children; the life of the sinner, it will die" (Ezek 18:4). Here too, Ezekiel focuses punishment only on the one who is guilty.[178]

In Gen 18, Abraham protests the complete destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. In Daube's words, "he saw that to exterminate the good with the bad would be wrong."[179] Abraham asks Yahweh, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?" (Gen 18:23), and he begins his familiar haggling exchange with Yahweh, with a few other challenging comments along the way:

> Let's say there are fifty in the midst of the city who are righteous. Would you really sweep away instead of forgive the place on account of the fifty righteous who are in it? Good gracious! Surely you wouldn't do such a thing as to kill the righteous with the wicked so that as the wicked are, so shall the righteous be! That's ridiculous! Shouldn't the judge of all the earth do what is right? (Gen 18:24–25)

The closing charge, as already noted, is striking: "Shouldn't the judge of all the earth do what is right?" renders God subject to a notion of justice.[180]

The biblical Israelites share these protests with their neighbors, especially the Hittites. As Itamar Singer has pointed out, protests of innocent suffering are a significant mark of some of the Hittite prayers. For example, Kantuzzili, Prince of the Hittite kingdom, assuming that some human action has angered one of the gods, prays to whichever deity is angry for relief from his misery, saying:

> Never did I swear, and never did I then break the oath. What is holy to my god and is not right for me to eat, I have never eaten and I did not thereby defile my body. / Never did I separate an ox from the pen, and

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[178]Conversely, only those deserving of salvation will be rewarded. See Ezek 14:12-20. Joel S. Kaminsky maintains that one need not argue that these passages–Deut 24:16, Jer 31:29-30, Ezek 18–represent a decisive break with Israel's corporate mentality as is often done; "Sins of the Fathers," *Judaism* 46 (1997): 319-32. I do think there is a shift of emphasis, however. Perhaps it is more a shift from a blame on previous generations to the actions of the present generation.

[179]Daube, *Studies in Biblical Law*, 155.

[180]See p. 106 n.164 above. See also R. N. Whybray, "Shall Not the Judge of All the Earth Do What Is Just," in *Shall Not the Judge*, 6.

> never did I separate a sheep from the fold. I found myself bread, but I never ate it by myself; I found water, but I never drank it by myself.[181]

Likewise, an unidentified Hittite King prays:

> Whichever deity gave me this sickness, whether that deity is in heaven or whether he is in earth, you, O Sun-god, shall go to him. Go and tell that deity: My god, what have I ever done to you and how have I sinned? My god, you created me, you made me, a human. But I, what have I done to my god? / The merchant man holds the scales under the Sun and falsifies the scales. But I, what have I done to my god? I am anxious and my soul is flowing to another place.[182]

Most importantly, King Mursilis prays the following regarding plague and the innocent sufferers of it: "Whoever is a cause of rage and anger to the gods, and whoever is not respectful to the gods, let not the good ones perish with the evil ones. Whether it is a single town, a single house, or a single person, O gods, destroy only that one."[183] Here, the explicit concern expressed is that only the guilty should be punished.

Another way to challenge divine justice in these matters is to protest the degree of punishment. In other words, the punishment—and natural and other catastrophes were understood as divine punishment—should fit the crime, not exceed it. When Ea implies Utnapishtim's innocence in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, he says,

> Punish the sinner for his sin, punish the criminal for his crime,
> But ease off, let work not cease; be patient, let not [ ]
> Instead of your imposing a flood, let a lion come up and
> diminish the people.
> Instead of your imposing a flood, let a wolf come up and
> diminish the people.
> Instead of your imposing a flood, let famine be imposed
> and [lessen] the land.

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[181]"Prayer of Kantuzzili," §3-4 (obv. 11'-19') (Itamar Singer, *Hittite Prayers* [ed. Harry A. Hoffner, Jr.; SBLWAW 11; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002], 32).

[182]"Prayer of a King," §15-16 (A rev. 2'-11') (Singer, *Hittite Prayers*, 35).

[183]"Mursili's Hymn and Prayer to the Sun-goddess of Arinna" §10 (A ii 61-67 [54'-60']) (Singer, *Hittite Prayers*, 53).

> Instead of your imposing a flood, let Erra rise up
> and savage the people.
> Tablet XI.iv.[184]

In other words, Ea is suggesting that Ellil ease up on the punishment, for it exceeds the crime. In short, "Be just."

Less frequent than the protest of innocence, and indeed bolder, is the claim that some punishments are simply wrong—that, the gods themselves are in the wrong. This claim constitutes an outright challenge to divine justice in the face of the punishment administered. King Hattusili, for example, prays:

> Whenever my father, Mursili, while still alive, offended the gods, my lords, by some deed, I was in no way involved in that deed of my father; I was still a child. When the case against Tawannanna, your maid, took place in the palace, how my father curtailed the power of Tawannanna, the queen, though she was the servant of the deity, you, O goddess, my lady, were the one who knew in [your] soul, [whether the curtailing of the power of the queen] was your wish [or whether it] was [not your wish. He caused] the curtailing of the power [of Tawannanna, but I was not involved in the matter] at all. It was [a matter of compulsion for me. If the goddess, my lady, is] somehow [angry about that matter, then] the one who conducted [that case against Tawannanna has already died. He stepped down from the road and has already paid for it] with his head. [But I] was not involved [in that decree. I was still a child. O Sun-goddess] of Arinna, my lady, [do not protract that affair against me. To protract such a thing against me during my days is not right]![185]

This accusation has but few parallels in the Hebrew Bible. However, a seemingly direct challenge, if not outright denial of divine justice, crops up in Ezek 18:25, 29. Many in the Israelite exilic community in Babylon cry, לא יתכן דרך אדני, which is variously translated, "The way of the Lord is unfair/unjust/not right."[186] Presumably, this saying in Ezekiel

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[184]Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 115.

[185]"Hattusili's Prayer of Exculpation to the Sun-goddess of Arinna" §2 (i 14-40) (Singer, *Hittite Prayers*, 97-98). The restorations are supplied largely from parallel texts.

[186]יתכן has to do with measurement and scales. Hannah's prayer, for example, proclaims, "Yahweh is a God of knowledge; actions are weighed by him," 1 Sam 2:3. Moshe Greenberg translates Ezek 18:25, 29 as, "The way of the Lord

is something like, "Yahweh's way is out of balance," that is, disproportionate.[187] These are strong words, even though they are protected in Ezekiel's refutation of it.

Theological Reformulations

In addition to *challenges* raised against the *doxa* of retribution, the *reformulation of the common tradition* regarding retribution is expressed in the Hebrew Bible as well. Because we find that the notion of retribution is central to the Israelites' understandings of natural disaster, reformulations of this notion are of interest to us, even if the text themselves do not directly discuss natural catastrophes.[188]

We find such reformulation of tradition regarding retribution[189] within several historical, prophetic and wisdom texts. What part of the basic assumptions of retribution can be rationally modified in the light of experiential challenges? First, one might radically emphasize human covenant obligation. Torah emphasis in response to the crisis of Babylonian exile as expressed in the book of (or tradition of) Ezra is exemplary of this response. Ezra's confession in Ezra 9:5–15 argues that the people are guilty and have deserved exile, understood as covenant punishment. Attending catastrophes to the community include defeat, death, captivity, plundering and "utter shame" (Ezra 9:7). In fact, the claim is made that the people did not suffer as much as they should have (Ezra 9:13). Then, commitment to more specifically and intentionally abide by divine commandment is

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does not conform to rule"; *Ezekiel, 1-20* (AB 22; New York: Doubleday, 1983), 333. The same phrase occurs in translation by Greenberg in Ezek 33:17, 20; *Ezekiel 21-37* (AB 22A; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 672. G. A. Cooke translated the phrase as "not equitable"; *The Book of Ezekiel* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936), 201-2.

[187]William H. Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1-19* (WBC 28; Waco, Tex.,: Word Books, Publisher, 1986), 290.

[188]This reformulation of *doxa*, one could say, is what Carroll means by the rationalization of cognitive dissonance by hermeneutic; Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed*, 110.

[189]We have, of course, already been dealing with reformulated traditions, e.g., the flood tradition above.

expressed. This renewed commitment specifies separation from foreigners by restricting intermarriage.[190]

Second, one might emphasize attributes of God other than divine anger. If the basic *doxa* of the ancient Israelites is that God always *punishes* the guilty, one could adjust that understanding of God to emphasize more *compassion* on God's part, even toward the guilty. Hosea 11, for example, emphasizes God's compassion despite Israel's covenant transgressions. "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and offering incense to idols" (Hos 11:1–2). Picking up in vv. 8–9:

> How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? . . . My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.

This emphasis places radical love over legal justice.

Another possibility of adjustment within the *doxa* of retribution relates to the terms of covenant. Jeremiah and Ezekiel offer a new covenant, one written upon the heart, one within which God *forgives*. "I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more," says Yahweh (Jer 31:34).

Still other options for reformulation exist and are expressed by the ancient Israelites. The final option that we shall emphasize is the rejection of retribution as the operative theology. It seems that Ecclesiastes, for example, concludes that there is no clear relationship between guilt and punishment. Ecclesiastes 3:16 states, "I saw under the sun that in place of justice, wickedness was there, and in the place of righteousness, wickedness was there as well." In Eccles 3:19, we read, "For the fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same; as one dies, so dies the other . . . for all is vanity." A reliable formula for action and consequence is just to ambiguous

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[190]See also Neh 10. For a discussion of the notion of separation (בדל) in the Ezra-Nehemiah tradition as physical separation, i.e. divorce, from foreign wives as an act of obedience to Yahweh/Torah, see Charles E. Carter, *The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period: A Social and Demographic Study* (JSOTSupp 294; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 313-14.

an equation to figure out, it is "chasing after wind," so one might as well "eat, drink and be merry."

Finally, the book of Job reformulates the *doxa* pertinent to guilt and punishment too. As many have pointed out, the book of Job, or more particularly, Job's innocence in contrast to Job's experience of suffering, calls this traditional thinking into question.[191] As Norman C. Habel asserts, for righteous Job to suffer calls even God's integrity into question.[192] As we have already seen through Eliphaz,[193] Job's companions propose traditional answers to Job's suffering based on endoxic propositions of retribution. If it is true that you reap what you sow, then Job has transgressed in some way to deserve his suffering. "Think about it," says Eliphaz, "who among the innocent has perished? Or where have the upright been effaced?" (Job 4:7). But Job is described as ישר (Job 1:1). Later, Bildad says to Job, "Look, God does not reject a blameless person (חך־אל לא ימאס־תם; Job 8:20a). Job, however, is described as blameless (האיש ההוא תם; Job 1:1). The suffering of Job, "a man blameless and upright, a God-fearing man who turns aside from evil" (Job 1:1), is a direct challenge to Israel's *doxa* of divine punishment for human misconduct. Ultimately, the retributive theology of Job's friend's is rejected (Job 42:7).

The book of Job, however, offers not a despairing view, but a constructive one, especially via Yahweh's speeches in chapters 38ff, and the epilogue. Here, the book of Job offers alternative views of the traditional retributive mentality. Habel suggests that Yahweh's speech depicts a world ruled by the freedom of God with the constraints of his cosmic design. That design has the sun rising on the evil and on the good, and the rain falling on desert as well as arable land. Natural laws govern the cosmic order. But these natural laws are not governed by a higher law of reward and retribution which is applied mechanically.[194] Furthermore, as E. W.

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[191]See e.g., A. S. Peake, "Job: The Problem of the Book" in *Theodicy in the Old Testament*, 100. His perspective is very much on par with our approach. He says, "It was an axiom of theology that the lot of the righteous was blessed, and Job was assured of his uprightness and fidelity to God. But now the axiom, so long verified in his own felicity, had proved unequal to the strain of facts."

[192]Norman C. Habel. *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 61.

[193]P. 87.

[194]Habel, *Job*, 67.

Nicholson suggests, Yahweh's speech may be viewed as the divine renewal of beneficent attention to creation.[195]

SUMMARY

First, it is very clear that the people of the ancient Near East understood that deities control—i.e., have the power to send, cease or withhold—natural catastrophes. The numerous so-called plague gods of the ancient Near East exemplify this understanding well.[196] For example, the Mesopotamian gods Namtar(a), Nergal and Erra,[197] the Anatolian god Yarris, and the Canaanite god Resheph, to name a few, were all considered plague deities, at least in part. Also, the Mesopotamian deity Marduk was seen as controlling destructive winds and thereby raising the "flood weapon" against Tiamat in the cosmic battle described in *Enuma Elish*.[198]

Yahweh, God of Israel, was understood in part as a war and plague deity as well.[199] Habakkuk 3:5, for example, describes Yahweh as a warrior and plague god coming from Teman, and "before him goes pestilence (דבר), and plague (רשף) comes after him."[200] In addition, the expression, "the hand of Yahweh," is associated with the action of Yahweh striking the people with plague as is well known from parallel phraseology in ancient

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[195]See also the more recent essay by E. W. Nicholson, "The Limits of Theodicy As a Theme in the Book of Job," in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honour of J. A. Emerton* (John Day, Robert P. Gordon and H. G. M. Williamson, eds.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 81.

[196]See Martinez, "Epidemic Disease," 425.

[197]Erra is "a warrior whose main weapon is famine"; Roberts, "Erra-Scorched Earth," 14.

[198]Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 251.

[199]Hendel, "Exodus in Biblical Memory," 609. Yahweh as a divine warrior has been amply demonstrated; see Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 91-111; and Patrick D. Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel* (HSM 5; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973). As for Hebrew Bible texts, see especially Exod 15; Deut 33; Judg 5; Hab 3.

[200]See J. J. M. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 154.

Near Eastern texts in reference to other deities.[201] For example, *lipit erra*, literally the "touch of Erra," is an Akkadian general designation for disease.[202] In addition, Mesopotamian medical texts frequently refer to "the hands of the gods," thereby diagnosing diseases and identifying the divine sender of the diseases.[203] Like some other ancient Near Eastern deities, Yahweh in Deut 32:22–24 is pictured as holding a quiver full of arrows which he lets loose, even hurls, upon the people.[204] From these examples,

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[201]J. J. M. Roberts, "The Hand of Yahweh," in *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 98. See especially note 22.

[202]Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign*, 244. As Gallagher explains, *lipit*, from *lapātu*, is used here in the sense of "attacking, striking"; CAD L, p. 82. The related noun *liptu* is possibly "plague"; CAD L pp. 200-202.

[203]Heessel, "Hands of the Gods," 121-22.

[204]Such as the Canaanite plague deity *Resheph* who spreads disease with bow and arrow; Paolo Xella, "Resheph," *DDD*, 701; cf. Ps 91:5-6; Ezek 5:16; Hab 3:5. On arrows as weapons of poison and pestilence, see John Pairman Brown, "Archery in the Ancient World: 'Its Name Is Life, Its Work Is Death,'" *BZ* 37 (1993): 32-33. Arrows are listed in Deut 32:24. Paul Sanders argues that the *yod*(s) at the end of ולחמי כמזי and מרירי should be read as a personal suffix, rendering רשף כרעב and קטב as personal possessions of Yahweh (i.e., Yahweh's arrows). An alternative translation that recognizes four deities including Lamu reads, "The ravages of Ra'ab and Lamu, / of Resheph and bitter Qeeb"; J. R. Boston, *The Song of Moses: Deuteronomy 32:1-43* (Ph.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1966), 91-93, quoted in Paul Sanders, *The Provenance of Deuteronomy 32* (Oudtestamentische Studiën; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 199. Sanders interprets רשף כרע and קטב here as deities, the latter two known from the ancient Near East, but deities who are clearly under the power of Yahweh according to this passage; Sanders, *Provenance*, 193-98. For more on *Resheph*, see W. J. Fulco, *The Canaanite God* Rešep (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1976); for more on *qeev*, see Johannes C. de Moor, "'O Death, Where Is Thy Sting?'" in *Ascribe to the Lord: Biblical and Other Studies in Memory of Peter C. Craigie* (ed. Lyle Eslinger and Glen Taylor; JSOTSupp 67; Sheffield; Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), 99-107. A. Caquot states, "Whereas *Ra'ab* may not translate as anything other than a common name, *Resheph* and *Qeeb* are demons called by their names"; "Sur quelques démons de l'ancien testament (reshep, qeteb, deber)," *Sem* 6 (1956): 59. Of the latter two, *Resheph* is well established as a deity, while the status of *Qeeb* is conjectural at best; Xella, "Resheph," *DDD*, 700-703; Nicholas Wyatt, "Qeeb," *DDD*, 673-74.

we can see a basic understanding in the ancient Near East that natural disasters are controlled by the gods.

Second, the ancient Israelites understood natural disasters to be categorically continuous with defeat in warfare. A few additional examples underscore this conclusion. According to 2 Sam 24:13, King David is offered three choices of divine punishment regarding his census of Israel: famine, sword or plague. Presumably, any of these three choices would be appropriate punishment and equally catastrophic to the community.[205] In addition, the concurrence of disease with warfare is acknowledged in the frequent tripartite formula of "sword, famine and plague," which is invoked over twenty times in the Hebrew Bible, such as in Jer 14:11–12 and Ezek 6:11. This understanding is especially evident, however, in the treaty curse tradition. There, curses of natural disasters *and* curses of defeat by the enemy are both prominent.[206]

Yet the preceding focus reveals another aspect of ancient Israel's *doxa* regarding natural disasters: natural disasters were understood as divine punishment for human behavior. In other words, natural disasters were understood as an aspect of divine retribution. It follows that piety was implied at times, as in the case of Noah, as a way to avoid the ill effects of natural disaster.

Emphasizing piety, however, is but one intellectual way of responding to natural disasters. Other responses highlighted thus far are protests of innocence, intercession, ritual appeasement, emphasis on divine forgiveness and compassion, and the reformulation of endoxic propositions regarding retribution. In the next chapter, we shall consider practical and, especially, other ritual responses to communal catastrophes.

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[205]Peter R. Ackroyd, *The Second Book of Samuel* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 232.

[206]See also the divine horsemen of Rev 6:8.

CHAPTER 5: PRACTICAL AND RITUALISTIC RESPONSES TO NATURAL CATASTROPHES AMONG PEOPLES OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST, INCLUDING ANCIENT ISRAEL

The ancients responded to communal catastrophes with both practical, physical changes and religious, ritualistic actions. We are most concerned with their religious responses that have not been referenced already in the previous chapter; however, we must first acknowledge that the ancients took some practical measures to manage the existing environment in attempts to minimize potential destruction.

PRACTICAL RESPONSES

Just as contemporary Americans build levies along the Mississippi River in order to attempt to manage flood waters, there is archaeological evidence suggesting that people built flood walls to protect their city, as with the people of Sippar in Mesopotamia.[1] Likewise, Nebuchadnezzar had a wall, known as the Wall of Media, built between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

[1]Butzer, "Environmental Change," 144.

It seems to have been intended to serve double duty as protection against invading enemies and against invading flood waters.[2]

Also, there is evidence of field terracing which minimized soil erosion from downpours of rain and which retained moisture in times of drought.[3] In addition, cisterns and underground reservoirs were a common means of storing run-off water, although they too could dry up during drought.[4] Silos and storage jars were used to store grain.[5] These examples show that ancient peoples did manage their environment to some degree. They did not simply let natural destructive forces run their course; rather, they tried to modify and manage their effects.[6]

When unable to prevent severe destruction and/or when the gods took no favorable notice of the people's religious responses, the adverse effects of communal catastrophes could be drastic, and three practical responses likely became necessities. One response was food redistribution, which could occur within one's community.[7] A related response was food importation. Texts related to the importation of food in response to famine in Hatti, for which the balance of natural and human causes is not certain,[8] are numerous.[9]

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[2]Michael Roaf, "Palaces and Temples in Ancient Mesopotamia," *CANE* 1:438.

[3]Butzer, "Environmental Change," 147. For more extensive discussions, see David C. Hopkins, *The Highlands of Canaan: Agricultural Life in the Early Iron Age* (SWBA 3; Sheffield: Almond, 1985), 173-86; and Oded Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1987), 15-18.

[4]King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 127.

[5]On silos, see B. Rosen, "Subsistence Economy," 343-44.

[6]For more specific methods to minimize the effects of disasters on food sources, see Rosen, *Civilizing Climate*, 9-10.

[7]See Arlene Miller Rosen, "The Agricultural Base of Urbanism in the Early Bronze II-III Levant," in *Urbanism in Antiquity from Mesopotamia to Crete* (ed. by Walter E. Aufrecht, Neil A. Mirau and Steven G. Gauley; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 97.

[8]Rhys Carpenter isolates "a drastic climatic change" as explanation for the chronic, low food supply in and subsequent collapse of Hatti at the end of the Late Bronze Age, ca. 1200; *Discontinuity in Greek Civilization* (Cambridge: Cambridge

For example, Queen Puduhepa of Hatti responds in a letter to Ramses II of Egypt regarding the marriage of Ramses to a Hittite princess. Apparently, Ramses has complained that his bride has been withheld from him. In offering an explanation, the Queen also comments on the princess' dowry, saying, "What civilian captives, cattle, and sheep will I give (as a dowry) to my daughter? In my lands I do not even have barley."[10] King Tudkhaliyas IV of the Hittites requested grain from King 'Ammurapi of Ugarit during a time of famine.[11] The Hittites also received provisions from Pharoah Merneptah of Egypt.[12] Furthermore, Lam 5:6 ("Egypt gave us a hand, Assur a supply of bread") implies that Judah at times received provisions from external sources.

Another necessary response at times, especially to drought and famine, was relocation.[13] Acknowledgment of this response is seen in the classical writers. Herodotus, for example, states that the Lydians divided

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University Press, 1966), 18. Trevor Bryce, on the other hand, considers a constellation of internal and external variables. Nonetheless, if not a single, catastrophic drought, he gives serious consideration to the possibility of the cumulative effect of a series of droughts that could have tipped the scale for survival of the Hittites in that region ca. 1200; *The Kingdom of the Hittites* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 375. See also the discussion by Drews, *End of the Bronze Age*, 77-84.

[9]See Horst Klengel, "'Hungerjahre' in Hatti," in *Altorientalische Forschungen* I (eds. Helmut Freydank, *et al.*; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1974), 165-74. Singer focuses on the "better known sources on this matter"; "Takulinu and Haya: Two Governors in the Ugarit Letter from Tel Aphek," *TA* 10 (1983): 4-5.

[10]"Letter to Queen Puduhepa of Hatti to Ramses II of Egypt," §4 (obv. 17'-24') (Gary Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts,* 2nd Edition [ed. Harry A Hoffner, Jr.; SBLWAW 7; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999], 133).

[11]G. A. Wainwright, "Merneptah's Aid to the Hittites," *JEA* 46 (1960): 25.

[12]It is not clear that this exchange is a response to a request by the Hittites. Wainwright suggests that it was "an effort at self-preservation" on the part of Egypt. Egypt wanted to maintain a viable buffer zone between them and other invaders from the north and east; "Merneptah's Aid," 24-25.

[13]Some food preservation was practiced, but these supplies could not outlast a two to three year drought. See Niels Peter Lemche, "The History of Ancient Syria and Palestine: An Overview," *CANE* 2:1197.

into two groups by lot and one of the groups left Lydia because of extended famine. They resettled in northern and central Italy and changed their name.[14] Likewise, famine *may have* motivated, even necessitated the movement of the "Sea Peoples" in search of adequate food supplies.[15] Egypt was one such destination for the Sea Peoples. Hans Goedicke suggests that Semites from Palestine moved into Egypt as refugees from an epidemic in Syro-Palestine during the Hyksos period, ca. 1750 B.C.E. onward.[16] According to Biblical tradition, Jacob and sons went to Egypt to buy grain during a devastating famine in Canaan (Gen 42ff.). It is important to note, however, that relocation may have been only temporary.

Finally, it seems all too likely that selling family members into slavery was a necessary evil at times. Whether or not the practice occurred in Egypt, Gen 47:13–26 acknowledges it as do several Mesopotamian texts.[17]

According to Edward Neufeld, quarantine of a person acknowledged as having a communicable disease is evident in Mesopotamia from at least the eighteenth century B.C.E.[18] ARM X is a letter from Zimrilim to Queen Šībtu:

> I have heard that Nanname is suffering from skin lesion; yet, she frequents the palace. It will infect many women with her (ailment). Now, then, give strict orders that no one drink from the cup she uses, and no one sit on the seat on which she sits, and no one lie on the bed on which

[14]Herodotus, *The Persian Wars* 1.94.

[15]Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 244.

[16]Goedicke, "Canaanite Illness," 104.

[17]See Victor Avigdor Hurowitz on Gen 47:13-26 and documents from Kultepe, Emar and Nippur; "Joseph's Enslavement of the Egyptians (Gen 47:13-26) in Light of Famine Texts from Mesopotamia," *RB* 101 (1994): 355-62.

[18]Edward Neufeld, "The Earliest Document of a Case of Contagious Disease in Mesopotamia (Mari Tablet *ARM* X, 129)," *JANESCU* 18 (1986): 53.

> she lies, so that it should not infect many women with her (ailment). The [skin lesi]on is catching.[19]

These various responses show that the people dealt with natural disasters in practical ways. They manipulated their environment or adapted to new environments in efforts to minimize the ill results of disasters. In addition to these practical responses, we now give our attention to the varied ritualistic responses, for according to the ancients, natural disasters were not an environmental problem only, they were cosmological.[20]

RITUALISTIC RESPONSES

It is helpful to categorize the various ritualistic responses not only according to popular and official religion, but also according to personal/family piety, local practice and official, state practice, to the extent to which we are able to differentiate them.[21]

Personal/Family Piety and Local Practice

Our presupposition in emphasizing personal and family practice in response to catastrophes is that the individuals and family are acting in accord with socially compelling *doxa*. That is to say, even family practices in response to household matters reflect *social* constructs regarding catastrophe. In addition, individual and family practices may be observed simultaneously by other individuals and families within a community in response to the threat of, or experience of a communal catastrophe.

Mourning rites in response to disaster and performed as a means of supplication for the relief of disaster include tearing the clothes, wearing sackcloth, rubbing or heaping ashes upon the head and/or body, fasting,

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[19]Letter from Zimrilim to Queen Šībtu, ARM X, 129, lines 4-20 (Neufeld, "Earliest Document," 54-55); cf. J.-M. Durand, *Les documents épistolaires du palais de Mari*, Vol. 3 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2000), 345.

[20]Rosen, *Civilizing Climate*, 10.

[21]Albertz, *History of Israelite Religion*, vol. 1, 19-21. See also Patrick D. Miller, *The Religion of Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 62-105, 241 n.82.

shaving the head and offering lamentation.[22] On the one hand, these are individual, penitential practices because individuals perform them. On the other hand, they most often go beyond the individual, for the practices are often group activities, or the practice of an individual is performed on behalf of the group. In the imaginative book of Jonah, for example, the whole city, even the animals, participate by wearing sackcloth. While these practices are rites of mourning, they feature in particular also as aspects of personal penance during times of distress, often related to disasters.[23]

Xuan Huong Thi Pham presents Job's actions in Job 1–2 as representative of mourning rites in the ancient Near East,[24] but other passages from the Hebrew Bible are more relevant for our purposes. In 1 Kgs 21, for example, Elijah threatens disaster (מבי, v.21) upon King Ahab. Though it could be a later insertion,[25] Ahab's response, according to 1 Kgs 21:27, nonetheless is presented as an appropriate one for the occasion of crisis:[26] "When Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes, put sackcloth upon his flesh/body; he fasted and lay down in the sackcloth." Such actions are then acknowledged as, presumably, sufficient penance ("he humbled himself") for his misconduct that had brought the threat of disaster, and the disaster was averted (1 Kgs 21:29). As king, Ahab performs penance not only for himself, but for the safety of his kingdom as well, for the threat of disaster extends beyond himself (1 Kgs 21:22–24).[27] These actions of penance in response to the threat of disaster may be seen elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible as well.[28]

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[22]For comment on these and other mourning rites referenced in the Hebrew Bible, see Xuan Huong Thi Pham, *Mourning in the Ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSupp 302; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 24-27.

[23]See John Muddiman, "Fast, Fasting," *ABD* 2:774.

[24]Pham, *Mourning*, 24-27.

[25]John Gray, *I and II Kings: A Commentary*, 2nd Edition (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), 443.

[26]John Gray, *I and II Kings*, 444.

[27]Cf. 1 Chron 21:16.

[28]For example, Mordecai mourns at the city gate in immediate response to King Ahasuerus's orders to kill the Jews (Esth 3:13), by tearing his clothes, putting on sackcloth and ashes and wailing (Esth 4:1). The community of Jews participates

The response of lamentation is easily demonstrated. The entire book of Lamentations, according to Adele Berlin, is, in fact, a lament that seeks comfort, but comfort does not come. It is, then, "the lamenting part of the mourning ceremony"[29] that "provides a way for the catharsis of suffering."[30] Some argue that the divine response of deliverance comes in 2nd Isaiah, which also indicates that laments were performed during the exilic period.[31]

Such rites of mourning and penance in response to natural disaster are especially important to us. According to Jer 14:12, the people of Judah fast in response to drought. In Joel 1, the community, each individually, is called upon to lament in sackcloth, mourn, wail and fast (Joel 1:8–14) in immediate response to a devastating locust invasion that has stripped the

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as well, with fasting, lamentation, sackcloth and ashes (Esth 4:3). Lewis B. Patton comments "these rites . . . were believed to be efficacious in turning away the divine wrath"; *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Esther* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908). The disaster was averted, and Levenson comments, "A marvelous set of coincidences does indeed reverse the apparently hopeless plight of the Jews, and it is best to think that the author wants us to suspect that this was indeed partially in response to the extraordinary penitential exercises of Mordecai, Esther, and the rest of the Jewish people"; *Esther: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 78. See also (not exhaustive) Ps 35:13, 69:10-11; Jer 6:26; Lam 2:10; Ezek 7:18; and Dan 9:3; Jonah 3:5.

[29]Adele Berlin, *Lamentations: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 16; Pham focuses on chapters 1 and 2 as specifically part of a mourning ceremony; Pham, *Mourning*, 13.

[30]Pham, *Mourning Rites*, 38.

[31]Claus Westermann, *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 231. See, for example, Isa 40:27; 49:14; see also Pham, *Mourning*, 148, on Isa 51:9–52:2.

land bare (Joel 1:2–7).[32] The "call to repentance" in Joel 2:12–17, includes these rites as well.[33]

The use of *amulets* account for another individual/family ritualistic practice in response to natural disasters. In fact, apotropaics go beyond the family to vicinal and national protection. In this portion of the study, we shall survey amulets and other apotropaic items from the ancient Near East, their provenance and function, describing their use in particular as a popular means of coping with potential communal catastrophes. We shall then turn to ancient Israel and highlight what within the written remains and the material culture illustrates this concern.

An amulet has been defined as an object that, by virtue of its shape, material and/or color, or an inscription, is believed to hold or invoke supernatural power capable of warding off evil and/or bringing good fortune to the individual, home or vicinity under its purview.[34] Most often, amulets are worn on the person, both the living and the interred,[35] for protection in this life and the next.[36] Some larger amulets were hung on walls or erected within temples. Usage for protection is underscored by the fact that the Egyptian words translated as "amulet"—*mkt, nht and s3*—are derived from verbs meaning "to guard," "to protect."[37] Carol Andrews informs us that amulets are known from as early as ca. 4100 B.C.E.;

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[32]Ronald A. Simkins argues that it is not necessary to posit both a locust plague and a drought, even though dry conditions are evoked in Joel 1:10-12. Instead, the locusts devour the vegetation just before the normal dry period of the summer. The locusts stripped plants of their foliage and, therefore, their moisture reserves. The bare plants were then further desiccated when summer arrived ; "God, History, and the Natural World in the Book of Joel," *CBQ* 55 (1993): 441.

[33]For other examples of communal fasting, see Ezra 8:21-23; Neh 9:1;

[34]Carol Andrews, *Amulets of Ancient Egypt* (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1994), 6.

[35]Christian Jacq, *Egyptian Magic* (trans. Janet M. Davies; Wiltshire, England: Aris and Phillips, 1985), 53. Some commentators seem to ignore this point. See also Andrews, *Amulets*, 6.

[36]David E. Aune, "Amulets," *OEANE* 1:113.

[37]Andrews, *Amulets,* 6.

however, they were most prevalent (in Egypt) during the last few centuries B.C.E.[38]

Sometimes inscribed with words invoking divine protection, or shaped as a god or goddess of protection, amulets in some respects function like prayers.[39] As protection, amulets were used prophylactically. More particularly, we can say that amulets are apotropaic devices used to *turn away* evil forces and their harm.[40] That is, rather than a means of propitiating an angered god in order to end harm or a means of transferring harm to a scape-goat, an amulet, from the perspective of the people of the ancient Near East, was a means for keeping the protected one out of harm's way.[41] At times, such a "problem-oriented ritual"[42] has been labeled, somewhat pejoratively, as "magic," or worse, as "superstition." J. A. Scurlock does well to remind us, however, that from the ancients' perspective, magic and religion "were part of the same belief system and . . . there was none of the hostility between them to be seen in later times."[43]

Amulets known from the ancient Near East include, but are not limited to, jewelry, such as beads and pendants,[44] cylinder seals,[45] figurines, masks, bowls, plaques, stelae, perhaps even pillars and statues. Indeed, almost any item might serve as an amulet, so long as it is recognized as manifesting supernatural powers. These powers are often underscored by

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[38]Andrews, *Amulets,* 8.

[39]Aune, "Amulets," 1:113.

[40]Andrews, *Amulets,* 36.

[41]For these three categories of "magic" see: J. A. Scurlock, "Magic (ANE)," *ABD* 4:465.

[42]Scurlock, "Magic," 465.

[43]Scurlock, "Magic," 465. See also Fritz Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World* (trans. Franklin Philip; Cabridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 8-19.

[44]See especially Sally Dunham, "Beads for Babies," *ZA* 83 (1993): 237-57.

[45]Often a seal has an amuletic inscription or incantation. Erica Reiner, "Magic Figurines, Amulets and Talismans," in *Monsters and Demons in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds* (ed. Ann E. Farkas, Prudence O. Harper and Evelyn B. Harrison; Mainz am Rhine: Philipp von Zabern, 1987), 27. See also Andrews, *Amulets*, 42.

words spoken over them.[46] Indeed, their specific protective roles are sometimes attested by inscriptions and/or accompanying incantations.

Amulets and other apotropaic items were used for personal (worn on the person) and home protection (hung on the wall or buried under the floor), if not also vicinal and national protection (erected within the temple or other public place). The use of amulets for personal protection against harm in this life and the next is well known. Ancient Egypt offers abundant evidence. Amulets for safety in the afterlife were incorporated with mummies and their wrappings, often having spells from the Book of the Dead inscribed on them. In fact, the Book of the Dead was itself amuletic as well. Copies were frequently placed either on the mummy, in the coffin, or at another specifically designated location inside the tomb.[47] Royal mummies, of course, were elaborately adorned with amulets. For example, King Tutankhamen's mummy was adorned with 143 amulets.

Usage of amulets in the ancient Near East was by no means restricted either to funerary contexts or to persons of the upper classes. The widespread occurrence of jewelry illustrates our point. As King and Stager say, "While jewelry was used for adornment, it had a much more powerful purpose as amulets and prophylactics."[48] Elizabeth E. Platt concisely surveys the widespread and consistent archaeological evidence for jewelry in the Levant from the Stone Age to the Arab periods, noting, for example, the abundance of faience amulets and the eye-of-Horus representations from Bronze Age Lachish.[49] Archaeologists have found jewelry in a variety of settings—domestic, common and sacred—in addition to burial sites.[50] King and Stager remark, "Practically all the burial sites in the Iron Age have produced anklets, bracelets, earrings, and beads," many of which were used

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[46]According to Geraldine Pinch, this is especially true for what she calls "temporary" amulets, i.e., those used in crisis situations, as opposed to jewelry; *Magic in Ancient Egypt* (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1994), 105-6. See also Jacq, *Egyptian Magic*, 53-55.

[47]Andrews, *Amulets*, 6.

[48]King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 276-77.

[49]Elizabeth E. Platt, "Jewelry in the Levant," in *Near Eastern Archaeology*, 199.

[50]Platt, "Jewelry," 200.

as amulets.[51] Amulets have been found under the floor in stashes of both domestic and cultic sites.[52]

In particular, scarabs, originating in Egypt and frequent in Syria-Palestine, were widely associated with the sun god Re and the creator god Atum. A scarab represents the dung beetle. Dung beetles roll large balls of dung along a sometimes treacherous path that is unseen by the beetle, which is facing the reverse direction.[53] The beetle eventually deposits the ball of dung in underground passages. In this way, the dung beetle's activity is associated with the movement of the sun disk across the sky and into the underworld. Also, the beetle lays its eggs in the dung ball. As if by spontaneous regeneration, many beetles eventually emerge from the dung.[54] Thus, scarabs represented rebirth and ultimately resurrection,[55] and they were a model for amulets.[56] "There is hardly a site in Canaan without at least a few scarabs," says William A. Ward, "which occur in all archaeological contexts from the Early Bronze Age to the Late Iron Age," not to mention the especially impressive number of scarabs found at Jericho and Lachish.[57]

Figurines, no doubt ritually endowed with supernatural, apotropaic powers by those who used them,[58] are also a common find in burial and

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[51]King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 277.

[52]King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 277.

[53]R. Bianchi points out, however, that the visual use of dung beetles in mythological scenes opposes nature and shows that the "mythological beetle . . . propelled the sun disc across the heavens by using its forelegs, not its hind legs"; "Scarabs," *Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, 3:179.

[54]Andrews, *Amulets*, 50-51. She also points out that the beetle pupa look like mummies and the shafts of tombs resemble those made by the beetle to its underground nest.

[55]Andrews, *Amulets*, 51.

[56]William A. Ward. "Scarabs," in *Near Eastern Archaeology*, 218. See also Andrews, *Amulets*, 11, 50-51.

[57]Ward, "Scarabs," 218.

[58]For example, dog figurines are know from Mesopotamia. The dog was a sacred animal associated with the goddess Gula. Names were written on the

domestic sites.[59] At Iron Age Dan, for example, the excavators recovered terra-cotta and faience figurines representing both males and females. In addition, "Iron Age public or household shrines have been found at Tell el-Far'ah (North), Megiddo, Ta'anach, Samaria, Lachish, Kuntillet 'Ajrûd, and elsewhere" which, according to Dever, "have yielded . . . female figurines and molds."[60]

The popular *wedjat*, or "Eye-of-Horus" amulet, has been found in many Israelite Iron Age tombs as well.[61] The *wedjat* represents the left or moon-eye of Horus. According to mythological texts, the eye of Horus was offered to his dead father, Osiris, who was then resurrected to life. As for the living, it was the most common of amulets on mummies, and, according to Andrews, was "the most powerful of all protective amulets."[62]

Amulets and related apotropaic items flourished in Palestine, especially in the Persian period.[63] Ephraim Stern states: "Unlike the official cults . . . remains [of popular apotropaic cults] have been encountered all over the country, including Judah and Samaria."[64] Masks, vases with Bes figures, figurines of Bes, Pataikos, and Ptah, as well as various necklaces and charms were in use in this period, as amulets.[65]

The Bes amulets are especially interesting. This deity is usually depicted as a partially clad dwarf with a lion's tail, holding his hand at his hip. Sometimes, Bes was depicted with a drum or tambourine as a noise

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figurines and then buried outside the doorways for protection; Reiner, "Magic Figurines," 35.

[59]For a discussion, see Dever, *Did God Have a Wife?*, 176-81.

[60]William G. Dever, "Religion and Cult in the Levant: The Archaeological Data," in *Near Eastern Archaeology*, 389.

[61]Dever, "Religion and Cult in the Levant," 389.

[62]Andrews, *Amulets*, 10, 43.

[63]Ephraim Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible Volume 2: The Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian Periods* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 479.

[64]Stern, *Archaeology*, 507-8.

[65]Stern, *Archaeology*, 507-10.

maker to drive away malevolent forces.[66] The amulet was used typically during childbirth, but also is common in tombs.[67]

A common, specific harm targeted by amulets was illness, which could include communal, endemic diseases. In Mesopotamia, the demoness Lamashtu, "a paramount evil force," was especially feared for her sudden and unprovoked attacks on pregnant women and her affliction of infants.[68] Lamashtu plaques were utilized to guard against Lamashtu and sometimes include an image of Pazuzu forcing Lamashtu back to the underworld.[69] Pazuzu, who can also be malevolent, was, in these cases, a specific counter to Lamashtu. (Pazuzu amulets were also placed in dwellings and worn by pregnant women.[70])

A Lamashtu plaque from the Judean Shephela and several plaques from the vicinity of Emar in Syria have a hole in them toward the top for suspension on a wall, perhaps in the room of the sick individual, and are inscribed with incantations against the demon, Lamashtu.[71] Sometimes, a Lamashtu figurine was placed by the head of the sick individual, presumably for protection against evil forces.[72]

Finally, Aramaic incantations on Jewish amulets of late antiquity manifest their personal use against disease. Although somewhat late for our primary focus on the world of ancient Israel, some of these amulets are of particular value because they come from controlled excavations. One such amulet, a copper amulet inscribed and rolled, was discovered in a shallow

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[66]Andrews, *Amulets*, 39-40.

[67]Andrews, *Amulets*, 40. Tombs were understood as places of "re-birth."

[68]Walter Farber, "Lamastu: Agent of a Specific Disease or a Generic Destroyer of Death?" in *Disease in Babylon*, 141, 145.

[69]Jeremy Black and Anthony Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Illustrated Dictionary* (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1995), 116.

[70]Black and Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols*, 148.

[71]Mordechai Cogan, "A Lamashtu Plaque from the Judean Shephela," *IEJ* 45 (1995), 155; Stephanie Dalley and B. Teissier, "Tablets from the Vicinity of Emar and Elsewhere," *Iraq* 54 (1992), 109.

[72]Cogan, "Lamashtu Plaque," 252.

pit within a building (erected ca. 350–500 C.E.) adjacent to a synagogue at Horvat Kanaf, near the Sea of Galilee. It reads:

> An amulet proper to heal Ya'itha the daughter
> of Marian from the fever and the shiver and the evil
> eye. Abrasax Ya Ya Yahu
> El El El (series of letters)
> Yahu Yahu Yahu Yahu Yahu Yahu
> exorcise the fever and the shiver, the female demons
> (and) the spirits from the body of Ya'itha the daughter
> of Marian. In the name of I-am-who-I-am
> Amen Amen Selah. An amulet proper to exorcise
> the fever and the shiver and the hectic (fever) from
> Ya'itha the daughter of Marian. In the name of Kariel,
> Kasiel, Zariel tststststststs; in the name of
> qqqqqqq; in the name of Michael [ ] 'Ezreil [ ].[73]

To summarize thus far, amulets and other apotropaic items, often showing a enduring Egyptian influence, are known to be used for *personal protection* from evil—illness, injury, etc.—and are well represented throughout the ancient Near East, including, but not limited to, the Late Bronze Age through the Persian period in Palestine.

Our particular interest, however, lies in those amulets that were used in the ancient Near East to protect home and vicinity against maladies that were a threat not just to individuals but to the community at large. As we have already seen, some amulets were used specifically for protection against disease, perhaps especially in times of epidemics,[74] and, as we shall see, against other select, potentially *communal* catastrophes.

First, let us consider the means of protecting hearth and home. Such protection might begin at the time of the construction of a house. The Hittite "Ritual for the Erection of a House" lays out the blue-print, as it were, for securing the protection of the structure. A number of items are listed—foundation pegs, precious metals and stones—to be placed along with the foundation, the cornerstones, beneath the door, etc. Words of

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[73]Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1985), 45-47.

[74]Michael Levi Rudkinson, *History of Amulets, Charms and Talismans* (New York: 1893), 4-5.

blessing accompany the placement of these items, such as, "Let the sacrificer, and (his) children and children's children likewise be dear to the gods (and gain) enduring life by their grace."[75]

We also have many such items from Mesopotamia. In addition to pegs, figurines and other amulets are known from domestic dwellings. Concerning house and foundation deposits, R. S. Ellis states: "There is no doubt that protection is the sole purpose of the figures of gods and demons that were buried under floors. It is possible that other types of building deposits involved a certain amount of prophylactic intention as well."[76]

Once a house was built and occupied, the people could protect house and home further with other apotropaic items and accompanying rituals. The Phoenician or Canaanite amulets from Arslan Tash, Syria, dating to the seventh century B.C.E., exemplify such protection of the home. These plaques also have a hole at the top and were most likely hung on the wall. The obverse features a winged sphinx, an infant-eating wolf, and the inscription, "Incantations against the Flyers, [that is, the night-demons] the goddesses, (against) Sasm son of Padrishisha', the god, and against the Strangler of the Lamb. The house I enter, you shall not enter!" (Lines 1–6)[77] The reverse features a divine warrior with an axe, and has an inscription:

> The court I tread, you shall not tread! Ashur has made an eternal covenant with us. He has made (a covenant) with us, along with all the sons of 'El and the leaders of the council of all the Holy Ones, with a covenant of the Heavens and Eternal Earth, with an oath of Ba'l (lines 7–14).[78]

The remaining text, inscribed on the edges and upon pictured figures, reads:

> Lord of Earth, with an oath of Hawran, whose mouth is true, and his seven consorts, and the eight wives of Ba'l Qudsh. Against the Flyers:

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[75]"Ritual for the Erection of a House," translated by Albrecht Goetze (*ANET* 356).

[76]R. S. Ellis, *Foundation Deposits in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Yale Near Eastern Researches 2, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1968), 166.

[77]"An Amulet from Arslan Tash," translated by P. Kyle McCarter (*COS* 2.86:223).

[78]"An Amulet from Arslan Tash," McCarter, 223.

> From the dark chamber pass away! At once! At once, O night demons! In the house, against the Crushers (?): Go! As for Sasm, let (the house) not be opened to him, and let him not come down to the doorposts! Let the sun arise against Sasm! Pass away, and forever fly away!(lines 15–29.)[79]

The purpose of the amulet is to bar entry of these demons into the house and home.[80]

Other protectors of hearth and home include the numerous so-called magic bowls from late antiquity known from Mesopotamia, especially Nippur. Magic bowls are house amulets with inscriptions, largely for protection against harm and disease. They are thought to trap demons and contain them in the bowl, thereby preventing them from being at large within the house.[81] One such bowl has its inscription divided into four segments:

> 1) Bound are the demons, sealed are the dēvs, bound are the idol-spirits, sealed are the evil liliths, male and female, bound;
> 2) bound is the evil eye away from the house of Khwadāy son of Pālī from this day to eternity. Bound is the evil eye
> 3) Bound is the evil eye from the house of Khwadāy son of Pālī, from his house and from his . . ., (and) from;
> 4) and from Ādur-dukh and from her sons from this day to eternity. Amen, Amen, Selah.[82]

In Egyptian mythology, Horus, son of Isis and Osiris, nearly dies from a scorpion sting, but his life was cured by Thoth and Isis via magical formulae.[83] Related to this myth, we have the so-called cippi of Horus, i.e.,

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[79]"An Amulet from Arslan Tash," McCarter, 223.

[80]See also the Bes plaque, which may have been similarly used, in James P. Allen, *The Art of Medicine in Ancient Egypt* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005), 23.

[81]Naveh and Shaked, "Amulets and Magic Bowls," 17.

[82]Naveh and Shaked, "Amulets and Magic Bowls," 173.

[83]"Story of Isis and the Infant Horus," on the Metternich Stela, translated by James P. Allen, in *Art of Medicine*, 57-58. See also the citation of this text below, 138-39.

house amulets in the form of statues. These cippi were typically used for the protection of the people and the home from snakes, scorpions and other dreaded forces,[84] and some were even worn on the person.[85] Stationed in temples, however, these cippi were clearly also communal in reach.[86] The cippi featured formulae believed to turn evil away, together with the figure of Horus holding serpents and scorpions in his hands and trampling crocodiles underfoot.[87] Protection could be obtained from them by pouring water over the cippus statue. The water was believed to absorb the power of the cippi's scenes and spells, and once the powerful water was ingested, the person was protected.[88]

One famous such cippus of Horus is the so-called Metternich Stele, unearthed by workmen in Alexandria in 1828, and dated to the reign of Nectanebo II, 360–343 B.C.E. James P. Allen describes it as "One of the most perfectly preserved objects to have survived from ancient Egypt."[89] Water poured over it was understood to serve as an antidote to the venom of scorpions and snakes. As Allen describes it,

> The stela's front, back, and sides are covered with images of protective deities, including Bes and Taweret. The most important of these is the scene in high relief on the front . . . which shows the infant Horus protected by the head of Bes and Horus eyes . . . as he subdues snakes, scorpions, a lion, and an oryx (all animals emblematic of the desert). . . . Most of the stela's texts . . . relate the story of how the infant Horus was cured of a poisonous bite by Thoth and Isis.[90]

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[84]See also Papyrus Cleveland 14.723, lines 18-19; Briant Bohleke, "An Oracular Amuletic Decree in the Cleveland Museum of Art," *JEA* 83 (1997): 158.

[85]Andrews, *Amulets*, 39. To see an example, see Allen, *Art of Medicine*, 64.

[86]Robert Kriech Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1993), 107.

[87]For a discussion on the magical significance of trampling underfoot, see Ritner, *Mechanics*, 119-42.

[88]Andrews, *Amulets*, 39. For a discussion on magical swallowing, see Ritner, *Mechanics*, 102-10.

[89]Allen, *Art of Medicine*, 49.

[90]Allen, *Art of Medicine*, 49.

One spell on the front reads in part, "Be spewed out, you poison! Come, come out on the ground! Now that Horus has enchanted you, constrained you, and spat on you, you cannot rise up."[91]

It is important to note, however, that the curing of Horus is understood to extend to the curing of others. When Thoth speaks interceding for Horus, he says, "Darkness has happened and sunlight is repelled until Horus gets well for his mother Isis—and every man who is suffering as well."[92] Isis also proclaims, "Horus's protection is his own identity, which the gods serve by aiding him—and the protection of the afflicted as well."[93] Finally, Thoth declares, "I am Thoth, the eldest son of the Sun, and Atum and the Ennead have commanded me to heal Horus for his mother Isis, and to heal the afflicted as well. . . . Horus is alive for his mother, and the afflicted as well."[94]

While the Cippi of Horus protect the home and community against scorpions and other dreaded pests, we know also of additional dreaded pests that potentially bring great catastrophe beyond house and home, viz., locusts. By their nature, locusts swarm and attack unpredictably. They may raze one's own field or that of one's neighbor.

We know from biblical and other ancient Near Eastern texts that the locust was a dreaded curse. It comes as little surprise, then, that we have pendant shaped amulets in the form of locusts (and other insects) from Egypt. Most importantly, we know of a stele from Tanis inscribed with a prayer by Pharaoh Taharqa (688–663 B.C.E.) petitioning the deity to keep a beautiful field safe from locusts in order to have a bumper crop of grains and fruits.[95]

In considering house amulets, we have seen their use as protection against sickness and pests, and lastly, against the great, albeit local, destruction by locusts. Most important to our interest in protection against

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[91]Allen, *Art of Medicine*, 53.

[92]Allen, *Art of Medicine*, 57.

[93]Allen, *Art of Medicine*, 57.

[94]Allen, *Art of Medicine*, 57.

[95]Ludwig Keimer, "Pendeloques en forme d'insectes faisant partie de colliers Égyptiens," *Annales du Service des antiquitâes de l'Egypt* 33 (1933): 75.

potential communal catastrophe, however, are the so-called plague amulets from Mesopotamia.[96] By plague, we mean any epidemic disease, not the Black Plague in particular. The words contained on such house amulets are often excerpts from the very popular Mesopotamian myth, *Erra and Ishum*. The myth is known from both Assyria and Babylonia, ca. eighth century B.C.E. According to Erica Reiner, some amulets contain large portions, even the complete text of the myth, as does a tablet from Assur. These house amulets are provided with a hole so as to be hung on the wall of a house.[97]

The portion of *Erra and Ishum* most often quoted, albeit with some variations, is from the last lines of Tablet III, which read:

> Warrior Erra, you hold the nose-rope of heaven,
> You control the whole earth, and you rule the land.
> You made the sea rough and encompass mountains,
> You govern people and herd cattle.
> Esharra is at your disposal; E-engurra in your hands.
> You look after Shuanna and rule Esagila,
> You control all the rites and the gods respect you.
> When you give counsel, even Anu listens.
> The Igigi revere you, the Anunnaki fear you,
> Ellil agrees with you. Does conflict happen without you,
> Or warfare take place in your absence?
> The armory of war belongs to you
> And yet you say to yourself, "They despise me!"
> Tablet III, lines 148–60[98]

While these words may not immediately explain themselves as words of protection against plague, Erra is considered the Mesopotamian god of

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[96]L. W. King champions plague amulets as "a living tradition among peasants of the land, for whom they had a practical rather than a literary interest"; "New Fragments of the Dibbarra-legend on Two Assyrian Plague-tablets," *ZA* 11 (1896): 62.

[97]Erica Reiner, "Plague Amulets and House Blessings," *JNES* 19 (1960): 148.

[98]*Erra and Ishum*, translated by Stephanie Dalley (*COS* 1.113:412).

plague, or perhaps more correctly, as Roberts has pointed out, god of war, anarchy and famine.[99]

In addition, words of Erra near the close of the myth, which may also be quoted or paraphrased on house amulets, proclaim,

> Wealth shall be piled up in the shrine of the god who praises this song!
> But whoever discards it shall never smell the incense-offering!
> The king who magnifies my name shall rule the world,
> The prince who recites the praise of my valiant deeds shall have no rival,
> The musician who sings it shall not die in an epidemic.
> The words of it will find favor with kings and princes.
> The scribe who learns it will survive even in enemy country,
> and will be honored in his own.
> In the shrine of craftsmen where they ever proclaim my name
> I shall make them wise,
> In the house where this tablet it placed, even if Erra becomes angry
> and the Sebitti storm,
> The sword of judgement shall not come near him, but peace is
> ordained for him.
> Let all countries listen to it and praise my valor!
> Let settled people see and magnify my name!
> Tablet V, lines 49–61[100]

Reiner further explains that,

> it is on account of its protagonists that the epic was qualified to serve as a plague amulet, since the gods around whom the story is woven were those who could best extend their tutelage over a menaced house: Marduk . . . as a patron god of magic; Er[r]a, who sovereignly decides who shall be afflicted with the plague and who shall not; the Seven Gods, [the Igigi], who are charged with administering the scourge; and above all, Išum, who, as the night watchman . . . and as the envoy of the gods . . . has jurisdiction over the streets . . . prowls the streets at night, and will, upon seeing the amulet suspended at the gate, mark that house as one which the plague should pass by.[101]

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[99]Roberts, "Erra-Scorched Earth," 14-16. Roberts acknowledges, however, the association of these characteristics with plague.

[100]*Erra and Ishum*, Dalley, 415-16.

[101]Reiner, "Plague Amulets," 150.

Amuletic protection may have extended beyond the home as well. While neither is conclusive, it is worthwhile to note two potential examples. Statues of Sekhmet at the temple of Mut at Karnak (Thebes) may very well have been erected for protection from coming epidemic, or, at least, acknowledgment of past protection.[102]

In addition, the stories of Balaam from Deir 'Alla in the Jordan valley (Gilead) may have served, as Victor H. Matthews and Don. C. Benjamin suggest, "to protect the people of Deir 'Alla from the natural disasters which the stories describe."[103] The text was inscribed upon plaster, either on a stele or on the walls of the structure where the inscriptions were discovered. The inscriptions date to 800 B.C.E.[104] According to Baruch Levine, the inscriptions were produced by the inhabitants of Deir 'Alla, very likely, Gileadite Israelites.[105] Combination 1, briefly summarized,[106] indicates that Balaam, a divine seer, is made aware by divine revelation of coming natural catastrophes ("Sew up, close up the heavens with dense cloud / That darkness exist there, not brilliance" [in lines 7–13][107]). The gods say to him, "So will it be done, with naught surviving" (in lines 1–4).[108] Balaam fasts and weeps. Then, upon enquiry, Balaam (or "he") relates his vision. Balaam then acts to save the land, and succeeds. The divine council (presumably) "heard incantations from afar. . . . Shagar-and-Ishtar did not"

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[102]Allen, *Art of Medicine*, 47.

[103]Victor H. Matthews and Don. C. Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels: Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East*, 2nd Edition (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 124. On earthquakes at the site and the destruction of the plaster text, see H. J. Franken, "Archaeological Evidence Relating to the Interpretation of the Text," in *Aramaic Texts from Deir 'Alla* (J. Hoftijzer and G. van der Kooij, eds; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), 7-8.

[104]Baruch A. Levine, "Deir 'Alla," (*COS* 2.27:141). See also, Jo Ann Hackett, "Religious Traditions in Israelite Transjordan," in *Ancient Israelite Religion*, 125.

[105]Levine, "Deir 'Alla," (*COS* 2.27:141).

[106]There are more than one suggested combinations of the inscriptions.

[107]"Deir 'Alla," translated by Baruch Levine (*COS* 2.27:143).

[108]"Deir 'Alla," Levine, 142.

(in lines 14–18).[109] Levine interprets this last line to indicate that disaster was diverted from the land.[110]

The Hebrew Bible also resonates with these texts and practices. As for amuletic jewelry, the catalogue of jewelry in Isa 3:18–23 may very well include amulets, although they are not identified in the text as such.[111] More importantly, the *tĕrāphîm*, or house-gods of the Laban and Rachel story in Gen 31 and elsewhere, are certainly similar to amuletic figurines.[112] Frank Moore Cross and John Saley suggest that the use of the Arslan Tash amulet is parallel to the later Israelite practice of posting *mezuzah* inscriptions of the *shema'* at the doorposts.[113] Finally, the house plague amulets and the specific notion of harm passing by the houses that have amulets of protection, certainly resonate with the prescribed practice of putting blood upon the lintels within the Passover context of the 10th plague in Egypt, a potential communal catastrophe against which families require hearth and home protection. Exodus 12:13 reads: "The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt."

Official and/or State Religious Responses

We now move from personal/family piety and local practice to various official and state religious responses to natural disasters. *Intercession*, be it by prayer or ritual, is yet another means by which to seek protection and/or deliverance from disasters. For example, even as prophets prayed on behalf of the people in times of military threat or other disasters (e.g., Exod 32:11–14; 2 Kgs 19: 1–7; Jer 37:3; 42:2), so prophets interceded on behalf of the people in times of natural disaster. Moses, for example, intercedes on behalf

[109]"Deir 'Alla," Levine, 143.

[110]Levine, "Deir 'Alla," (*COS* 2.27:143 n.26).

[111]Elizabeth E. Platt, "Jewelry, Ancient Israelite," *ABD* 3:830-31; King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 276-77.

[112]For discussions of the *tĕrāphîm*, see Albertz, *History of Israelite Religion*, vol. 1, 37-38; and Dever, *Did God Have a Wife?*, 181-82.

[113]Frank Moore Cross, Jr. and Richard J. Saley, "Phoenician Incantations on a Plaque of the Seventh Century B.C. from Arslan Tash in Upper Syria," *BASOR* 197 (1970): 48.

of the wilderness community when Yahweh threatens pestilence (and disinheritance), according to Num 14:11–19. Also, Amos intercedes for "Jacob" in response to a threat of locust plague, according to Amos 7:1–6.[114]

Annual festivals and their rituals are of particular interest, for it is then that the power of good over evil, including communal catastrophes, is publically represented. The Hittite Purulli Festival, celebrated in the spring when hopes of a beneficial agricultural season are paramount, is of particular interest. Although little is known of the Purulli festival outside of the Illuyanka tales, the struggle between chaos and order is represented by the serpent and the Storm God respectively. "In Hittite culture, as in Babylonia and ancient Israel," argues Harry A. Hoffner, "serpents usually represented evil."[115] The Purulli Festival begins, "Let the land prosper (and) thrive, and let the land be protected."[116] After an initial defeat, the Storm God, aided by humans, succeeds in defeating the serpent.

The *Akitu* or New Years Festival, as celebrated in Babylon, is also important. On the one hand, *Akitu* has been understood as signifying the political accession of Babylon. In addition, it is understood to have ensured cosmic order and agricultural productivity, because the festival is observed in the month of Nissan, which is the month of the vernal equinox and, therefore, the sowing season.[117] We find marginal reference to protection from specific catastrophes and/or productivity. For example, on the fifth day, the priest prays, "Planet Mercury, who causes it to rain, My Lord—My Lord, be calm! . . . The star Sirius, who measures the waters of the sea, My Lord—My Lord, be calm!" and "The star Namushda, who causes the rains to *continue*, My Lord—My Lord, be calm!"[118] Later, the priest assures the

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[114]Jörg Jeremias argues that the emphasis of this passage is upon Amos' intercession that makes way for a change in divine intention; *The Book of Amos: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 127. On the identification of "Jacob," see p. 128.

[115]Hoffner, *Hittite Myths*, 11.

[116]Hoffner, *Hittite Myths*, 11.

[117]Jacob Klein, "Akitu," *ABD* 1:138-39.

[118]From "Temple Program for the New Year's Festivals at Babylon," translated by A. Sachs (*ANET* 333).

king, saying, "The god Bel will bless you . . . forever. He will destroy your enemy, fell your adversary."[119] More importantly, *Enuma Elish*, in which Marduk defeats the sea monster Tiamat, is recited on the fourth day. In part, this cosmic battle represents the victory of order over chaos, the balance of cosmic forces tipped in favor of the king and the prosperity of his realm.[120]

In Egypt, and no doubt elsewhere, worship itself was understood in part as a preventive measure to keep the gods appeased so that catastrophes would be kept at bay.[121] Worship included daily, seasonal and annual rituals and festivals.[122] Cosmic order, *ma'at* for the Egyptians, and its terrestrial consequences, was at stake.

As testimony to this understanding, let us turn to specific prayers to the goddess Sekhmet, pronounced during the Coronation of the Falcon (Horus), at Edfu (257–237 B.C.E.).[123] This festival is depicted and inscribed on ten large, parallel wall sections with three registers each, on the northern enclosure wall of the temple of Horus at Edfu.[124] This festival was held annually to affirm the rule of the king, who was understood as the earthly representation of Horus, the "royal god *par excellence*."[125] It was celebrated at the time of the accession of a new king, or renewal of the reign of an

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[119]"Temple Program for the New Year's Festivals at Babylon," *ANET* 334.

[120]Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 231; Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1976), 191.

[121]Herman te Velde, "Theology, Priests, and Worship in Ancient Egypt," *CANE* 3:1731.

[122]See te Velde, "Theology, Priests, and Worship," 1744.

[123]The ritual, however, is no doubt older than the temple; Sylvie Cauville, *Edfou* (Cairo: Institute Français d'archéologie orientale, 1984), 13.

[124]Philippe Germond, *Sekhmet et la protection du monde* (Aegyptiaca Helvetica 9; Genève: Editions des Belles-Lettres, 1981), 1. See also, Barbara Watterson, *The House of Horus at Edfu: Ritual in an Ancient Egyptian Temple* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Tempus, 1998), 97.

[125]Watterson, *House of Horus,* 97.

existing king, the time commemorated as the beginning of the rule of Horus.[126] By means of the sacred falcon, a statue of which was processed on a barge during the installation ceremony,[127] the human pharaoh and the god Horus were made one.[128] Part of the ceremony included the Litany of Sekhmet, presentation of protective amulets to the falcon and invocations to Sekhmet for protection,[129] like those of the New Year's litanies.[130]

The New Year, as well as the time of coronation, was viewed as a time in which the cosmic order was thought to be vulnerable.[131] Maladies, it was thought, may strike the land and the people; therefore, the litanies in part appeal to Sekhmet, the goddess embodying such maladies—"*l'anti-Maât*"—in order that she might refrain from sending them and instead grant favor.[132] The logic, it seems, is this: the power that sends maladies is the same power that can refrain from sending them.

Sekhmet was usually depicted with a lion's head, signifying a common threat of attack in the deserts of Egypt.[133] She represents both wild and dangerous aspects in her association with disease, epidemics and destruction, and nurturing and protective aspects in her association with maternity. In the Old Kingdom, Sekhmet was in part the divine mother, as seen in reliefs from the mortuary temple. During the Middle Kingdom, Sekhmet was in part the wild, destructive lioness, the fire-breathing plague goddess. Thus, she was appealed to in times of epidemics.

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[126]Watterson, *House of Horus,* 97. The date was not the New Year exactly, but the beginning of a king's rule, the first five days of winter, immediately following the Osiris festivals.

[127]Similar to the New Year's processional; Watterson, *House of Horus*, 98.

[128]Cauville, *Edfou*, 13.

[129]For a description of the full ceremony, see Watterson, *House of Horus*, 97-103. For scenes and texts (German translation), see Dieter Kurth, *Treffpunkt der Gotter: Inschriften aus dem Tempel de Horus von Edfu* (Zürich: Artemis, 1994), 229-42.

[130]Sylvie Cauville, *Essai sur la théologie du temple d'Horus à Edfou* (Cairo: Institute Français d'archéologie orientale, 1987), 168. See also Germond, *Sekhmet*, 1.

[131]Cauville, *Essai sur la theologie*, 168.

[132]Germond, *Sekhmet*, 5-6.

[133]Allen, *Art of Medicine*, 47.

In the New Kingdom, via acknowledgment as consort of Ptah at the temple in Abydos and as divine mother at Karnak, Sekhmet was again acknowledged as having predominately maternal instincts. She was also assimilated with the lion-headed war goddess Mut, also during the New Kingdom, perhaps prompted by the rise of Thebes as the united capitol. Significantly, approximately 600 lion-headed statues of Sekhmet/Mut were erected by Amenophis III at the temple of Mut at Karnak.[134] According to Heike Sternberg, "The statues . . . are significant above all because of the numerous names and titles of Sekhmet."[135]

In the late period of ancient Egypt, Sekhmet assumes the role of the destroyer of enemies, including through epidemics, as attested in the great temples of Egypt and Nubia, hence her appearance in medical and "magical" texts.[136] But also still the raging goddess herself, she must be appeased by ritual. Typically, offerings and amulets were presented to Sekhmet for protection. In addition, priests of Sekhmet sought to restrain her destructive powers.[137]

Sekhmet, then, is seen as having a dual nature: at times protective, at times destructive. Philippe Germond captures Sekhmet's dual nature with eloquence:

> She is the grand "Dame de Vie," she who grants the wish of her life giving generosity, making verdant the twin lands [of Egypt] by means of her papyrus-like scepter of life. But it is also she who is able to manifest at any moment, especially at the time of passage from one year to the next, the terrible and destructive aspect of her dual nature, symbolizing at that time the forces of opposition to universal order. . . . Let loose, she shoots her arrows, epidemics and maladies against all humanity.[138]

Hence, New Year ceremonies and coronations included appealing to Sekhmet for order and the restraint of destructive forces in the coming year. "Without this appeasement ritual," says Germond, "the whole cosmic

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[134]Or 700 statues; Allen, *Art of Medicine*, 47.

[135]Heike Sternberg, "Sachmet," *LÄ* 5:328.

[136]Sternberg, *LÄ* 5:328.

[137]Sternberg, *LÄ* 5:329.

[138]Germond, *Sekhmet,* 357-58.

order and the work of the king of Egypt was in peril."[139] These prayers for protection from maladies, therefore, are particularly interesting for our study.[140]

The introduction to the prayers to Sekhmet is as follows:

> Words spoken unto Sekhmet the Great, Lady of all the forms Sekhmet, Mehyt, daughter of Rê, who resides in Edfu; Lady of terror in Bubastis, Lady of joy who resides in Dendera, Protectress who protects all the gods, who assures the protection of all the gods . . . Eye of Re in every one of [his] names:
> -I protect your Majesty against all evil things, I protect your *corps* [body?; society?] from the arrow.[141]

Several prayers are representative of their appeal to Sekhmet for protection:

> 1. O, Sekhmet, Eye of Re, Great One of the Flame, Lady of the protection that envelopes its creator! Come to the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Ruler of the Twin Lands, the Sons of Re, Lord of the crowns . . . the Living Image! Protect him (and) preserve him from all arrows and all impurities of this year, etc. . . .
>
> 2. O, Sekhmet, (the One) who illuminates the Twin Lands with her flame (and) who gives to all the ability to see! Come to the Living Image, the Living Falcon! Set him free, preserve him from all the evil contagions of this year. . . .
>
> 3. O, Sekhmet, Lady of the Flame, Great One of the Flame . . . for fear of what trembles the Twin Lands! Come to the Living Image, the Living Falcon! Make him to pass far [from all fevers], from all pestilence of the year. . . .
>
> 4. O, Sekhmet . . . protect him, save him, deliver him, protect him from the massacre of his master swordsmen.[142]

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[139]Germond, *Sekhmet*, 358.

[140]Germond believes that the efficacy of popular Sekhmet amulets is associated with this royal, i.e., official, ceremony; *Sekhmet*, 7-11.

[141]The prayers are my translation of Germond's French translation of the heiroglyphs; *Sekhmet*, 19.

[142]Germond, *Sekhmet*, 21-27.

These texts warrant two observations. First, we see specific appeals to Sekhmet to secure the king of Egypt with protection against common, communal catastrophes. Of course, protection of the king is understood to extend to protection of his people and his territory.[143] Second, we see the importance of establishing and/or keeping cosmic balance between order and chaos via an annual festival, which in practical terms means the difference between communal survival and catastrophe. Third, we see the logic that the deity who has the power to release disasters has the power to withhold disaster; hence, it is to that deity that supplication is made.

The prayer attributed to Solomon in 1 Kgs 8:22–53 at the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem shares some similarities with the preceding examples. These occasions are not prompted by crisis; instead, they are annual or occasional occurrences. As such, the ceremonies and prayers are performed by state officials for the benefit of the rulers and the nation. According to Mordechai Cogan, Solomon's prayer not only exemplifies Deuteronomistic theology,[144] but is "in line with the well-established ancient Near Eastern tradition in which the monarch, after the completion of the construction of a temple, offered sacrifice and prayers to the deity for his personal as well as the national welfare."[145]

First Kings 8:37–40, part of the prayer, makes reference to drought, famine, plague, mildew, locusts and caterpillars (and siege by the enemy) much as the curses of Deut 28 do. On one level, we see that natural disasters are addressed at such ceremonial occasions in the interest of the future welfare of the people. In addition, the context of this petition emphasizes a function of the temple in the lives of the people as a place to petition Yahweh in times of such natural disasters.[146]

In this chapter, we have seen both practical steps and religious (ritual) responses to natural catastrophe. The practical responses reveal that the people took action and did not merely make appeals to their deities. Within the ritualistic responses, we have seen both popular

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[143]See Germond, *Sekhmet*, 359.

[144]On the Deuteronomistic theology of Solomon's prayers, see Simon J. DeVries, *1 Kings* (WBC 12; Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1985), 121.

[145]Mordechai Cogan, *I Kings* (AB 10; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 293.

[146]DeVries, *1 Kings*, 125-26; Cogan, *I Kings*, 292.

(personal/family and local) practices such as penitential rites and the use of amulets and other apotropaic items. Official and/or state practices include festivals and prayers.

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

We have found and now filled a gap in the scholarly literature on ancient Israel's understandings of and responses to natural catastrophes. Acknowledging that they understood natural catastrophes and warfare as experientially continuous, we have kept the focus on natural catastrophes rather than the experiences of, understandings of and responses to warfare and/or exile. Our study has been informed by texts and artifacts from the ancient Israelites themselves and from their neighbors as well. As we would expect with any people across times and places, we have learned that the ancient Israelites were indeed affected by natural catastrophes and were prompted by them to articulate understandings of and enact responses to these natural agents of cultural change and adaptation.

In chapter two, we surveyed a wide range of empirical and secondary evidence of natural catastrophes that occurred in the ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean worlds. That evidence includes documented climatological and geological changes over long periods of time in the Western Asiatic steppe region and the Levant, including, for example, Lachish and Tell Leilan. Alluvium deposits over shorter periods of time are evident in Ur and elsewhere in ancient Mesopotamia. We have seen that floods of the Nile, the eruption of Mt. Etna in the western Mediterranean and Thera in the Aegean are suggested in Egyptian textual evidence. The archaeologically documented collapse of near Eastern and surrounding civilizations in the twelfth century B.C.E. is likely to have had natural catastrophes as a contributing factor. What is more, life threatening animal and human diseases are found in textual and human remains.

Evidence that agents of natural catastrophes were indeed present and active in the ancient world is just the beginning of our study. We had

taken another step by asking about what the ancient Israelites and their neighbors thought of these phenomena and how they explained them. In order to underscore the presence of pervasive, ingrained, involuntaristic assumptions—*doxa*—among such a wide group of peoples, we employed the theoretical work of Durkheim and Bourdieu in chapter three.

Durkheim's notion of collective consciousness contributes to our understanding of the notion of *doxa*, but Durkheim assumes social homeostasis. Most importantly, we have seen that *doxa*, a plural totality, lies latent in periods of cultural stasis, but comes to the foreground when cultural and cognitive stasis is disrupted. In crises, *doxa* rises to consciousness and group supported orthodoxy or heterodoxy emerges from *doxa* as groups strive for dominance and a return to social stasis. Bourdieu makes this emphasis.

Natural catastrophes, we have argued, are external agents strong enough to prompt cultural and cognition disruption. With natural catastrophes, *doxa*, though stubborn, is disrupted by radical experience. When this clash occurs, cognitive dissonance, a notion contributed by Festinger, can be a result. It is at this point of dissonance that *doxa* is articulated. Once articulated, it might be challenged, confirmed or reformed as people seek explanations that will bring a return to cognitive consonance.

In chapter four, we emphasized that throughout the period of biblical Israel, as reflected primarily in the Hebrew Bible—especially the traditions of covenant curses in Deut 28 and Lev 26, the flood narrative of Gen 6–9, the golden calf pericope of Exod 32:1–35, as well as the narratives of Num 16, 1 Sam 4:1b–7:1, 2 Sam 24:1–14 and selections from the prophetic literature—the people dealt in the affirmative or the negative with the strong, pervasive, ingrained, endoxic proposition of retribution. As retribution mentality pertains to natural disasters, basic understandings are that natural catastrophes and warfare are experientially continuous, that communal catastrophes represent divine disapproval of human actions and that the community may very well suffer for the covenant guilt of one or more members. Whereas guilt brings suffering, piety, some seem to argue, brings deliverance, such as for Noah in the biblical flood tradition.

The simultaneous and equally pervasive and ingrained belief in divine justice, however, is especially called into question during the aftermath of severe crisis, especially when a dissonance exists between presumed punishment and *innocent* suffering. And, indeed, protests against the suffering of the presumed innocent are amply demonstrated in the biblical literature and other ancient Near Eastern texts. Some of these protests come within texts regarding natural disasters, e.g., 2 Sam 24:17 and

Gen 18:23. We also emphasized the fact that reformulations of the notion of retribution are expressed by the ancient Israelites.

In chapter five, we highlighted many and varied practical and ritualistic responses to managing and/or preventing natural catastrophes by individuals, families and the larger society. Mourning rites, apotropaics, intercession and festival observances are the primary means of addressing natural disasters ritualistically.

Thus, we have accomplished our purposes for this project. We have, 1) demonstrated the understandings of natural catastrophes as implied and articulated by people of the ancient Near East in general and the ancient Israelites in particular in texts and artifacts, and, 2) demonstrated likewise the variety of responses—practical, ritualistic (official and popular) and intellectual/theological—to natural catastrophes.

Yet, more needs to be said by way of conclusion. First, we can comment further on the various responses to natural catastrophes by acknowledging several interesting trajectories. We can group responses according to the strategies for resolving cognitive dissonance as suggested by Festinger. Those responses, as re-articulated and refined by Carroll, are the avoidance of dissonance, group support from those of a like mind and rational modification.[1]

Furthermore, Carroll distills rational modification for his purposes of working with prophetic traditions by emphasizing that "dissonance gives rise to hermeneutic." He explains that, "the experience of dissonance forced individuals and groups to reinterpret their basic material or the contemporary events so as to avoid dissonance."[2] Each of these responses involves group identity and involvement, without requiring three separate groups.[3]

While each strategy is a way of resolving dissonance, avoidance suggests preventing further encounters with the experiences that produced dissonance. We can place the strategy of warding off evil forces with apotropaics in this category, as well as prayers for protection.[4]

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[1]Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed*, 93-96.

[2]Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed*, 110.

[3]See Carroll's comment on the complexity of Israelite social structure; *When Prophecy Failed*, 123-24.

[4]Carroll comments on the post-exilic, exclusionary group identity of Ezra-Neh as an avoidance technique as well; *When Prophecy Failed*, 118.

Group support, the second strategy for the return to cognitive consonance, is the Durkheimian emphasis on religious practice.[5] Other than the family or household practices, which are ultimately shared by the larger community, all participation in rites surveyed in our study contribute to social support in the face of crises that produce dissonance.[6] Crises seem to compel group unity, at least initially, to a degree that is difficult to duplicate in ordinary times.

The third strategy, i.e., rationalization—modifying thought in order to diminish dissonance either by defending or reinterpreting *doxa*—is evident in many of the texts we analyzed in the body of this project. On the one hand, much of the Hebrew Bible and those responsible for it defend the prevailing *doxa* that natural disasters are a manifestation of divine disapproval of human behavior. Stated another way, natural disasters are divine punishment. We might say that this position achieves the level of orthodoxy.

Alternative understandings of retribution, however, are expressed within the ancient Israelite community as well, even if these understandings were considered by others of ancient Israel to be heterodoxy. In that the *doxa* of understanding natural catastrophes involves the notion of retribution, then reformulations of the notion of retribution as it pertains to divine punishment for human transgression will pertain to alternative understandings of natural catastrophes. Reformulations of the traditions of covenant retribution are expressed, as we have seen, by emphasizing divine attributes other than divine anger and legal justice. The book of Hosea, for

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[5]See also Smith's emphasis on social solidarity as a "mechanism for survival" following a communal disaster; Daniel L. Smith, "The Politics of Ezra: Sociological Indicators of Postexilic Judaean Society," in *Second Temple Studies: 1. Persian Period* (Philip R. Davies, ed.; JSOTSupp 117; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 80, 97.

[6]Carroll speaks of group proselytizing, which does not fit with our topic or sources. On this dynamic, Carroll says, "This is an alternative method of adding new cognitive elements to the group. Each new convert is one more person who thinks in a similar way. This can be an effective means of reducing dissonance when explanatory schemes no longer deal effectively with dissonance caused by events or experiences impinging on the belief system. . . . As more and more believers join the group the strength of the dissonance producing event is steadily eroded and becomes less and less a source of significant cognitive dissonance"; *When Prophecy Failed*, 95-96.

example, emphasizes radical love over justice. The books of Ecclesiastes and Job reject retribution as an operative reality.

These conclusions also have contemporary implications. First, while some people accept natural disasters in our day and time as divine punishment for human transgression, it is important to see that the Old Testament articulates alternative theologies. A second matter is of great importance. A part of the seeming orthodox position, while one might disagree with its theology, contains an important emphasis nonetheless: the people addressed natural catastrophes by taking responsibility for and by their actions. If we ask the question, "When did the gods employ natural disasters?" according to the biblical tradition, we find that it was axiomatic in the ancient Near East that communal catastrophes are sent by the gods (or God) when they are angry. For example, "The Disappearance of Telipinu," a Hittite myth, directly connects famine with divine anger: "The mountains and the trees dried up, so that the shoots do not come (forth). The pastures and the springs dried up, so that famine broke out in the land. . . . The Storm God thought about (i.e., remembered) his son Telipinu . . . 'He became enraged and removed everything good.'"[7] Likewise, in 2 Sam 24:1 we are told "Once again the anger of Yahweh was kindled against Israel," which opens a pericope that involves the divine dispatch of a plague (2 Sam 24:15). These instances are paradigmatic of the relationship between divine anger and natural, communal catastrophes.

To immediately conclude, however, that the ancient Israelites understood natural disasters as simply a result of divine anger, is to stop short of their full understanding.[8] Until radically challenged, they assumed and expressed the thought that *human behavior*, specifically human transgression of the divine/human relationship, was the initiating

[7]"The Disappearance of Telipinu," §4-5 (A i 16-25) (Hoffner, *Hittite Myths*, 15).

[8]On Mesopotamian balag, eršemma and city laments, Ferris states, "*capricious* anger or wrath of the gods would be a logical starting point for a theoretical ordering of the thematic elements. This anger is represented in many of the laments as the underlying cause of the calamity and suffering commemorated in the laments"; *Communal Lament*, 54-55; italics added. As we have seen, the ancient Israelites are less inclined to understand divine anger as capricious.

provocation of divine anger and/or the resulting natural (and all communal) disasters.[9]

Note Hos 2, for example, which Tikva Frymer-Kensky describes as, "a poetic prophetic reflection on the relationship between Israel and God and its impact on fertility."[10] Hosea 2:7 (Eng 2:5) explains that, "[Israel] has played the whore." As a result, (לכן Hos 2:8, 11 [Eng 2:6, 9]) Yahweh proclaims, "I will take back my grain in its time, and my new wine in its time. . . . I will lay waste her vines and her fig trees" (Hos 2:11a, 14a [Eng 2:9a, 12a]). As we can see, Israel's causal understanding of events linked their religious infidelity with a divine curse of infertility. Frymer-Kensky concludes, "This poem encapsulates the classic Israelite view of human action and divine reactivity: the action of Israel determines God's actions in the world."[11] In this way, the ancient Israelites, more so than most of their neighbors, insisted on an anthropogenetic cause for natural catastrophes, even if the operative axis was between humans and the divine.

Great natural catastrophes have occurred during the preparation of this study (as well as many acts of war and terrorism). In addition, the potential effects of global warming strike like biblical judgements of the end. Many are inclined to conclude that these things happen the way they do because of divine will. If God is in charge, then we humans do not have much to do with it, some would argue; however, the dominant ancient Israelite model is to discern human behavior in explaining and managing natural crises. While the modern operative axis for explaining natural catastrophes is between humans and nature, the anthropogenetic focus is both appropriate and necessary for our time and the challenges of individual, communal and global survival.

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[9]The wisdom tradition, namely Eccl and Job, challenges this understanding; yet, their responses are not of despair in taking action, for their intellectual reflections are actions.

[10]Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 144.

[11]Frymer-Kensky, *Wake of the Goddesses*, 146.

APPENDIX A: THE LATE ISRAELITE/JUDEAN MONARCHY: AN ERA OF CUMULATIVE TRAUMA

Contra Cohn, there was in reality a series of crises in ancient Israel preceding 587 B.C.E. that contributed to a mounting trauma in the lives of the people of ancient Israel and that culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile post 587. The exilic period obviously prompted intellectual and theological challenges to and constructions of ancient Israel's understandings of themselves and their world view, but this period of foment had its antecedents.

The crises of the middle to late monarchy, culminating in the fall of Judah in 587, constituted an era of cumulative trauma that prompted theological reassessment, especially of notions of retribution, by various parties. Our purpose here is to outline an era of cumulative trauma from the mid-late Israelite/Judean monarchies to the fall of Judah in 587.

Attendant complications to this task are multiple. First, there is the complication that understandings of and responses to 587 are shaped by antecedent traditions.[1] Second, those antecedent traditions themselves are

[1]Hanson, "Israelite Religion," 485. On the complication of delimiting the "exilic period," note that Klein begins with 597; *Israel in Exile*, 1. See also Albertz, who acknowledges the exile following the fall of the northern kingdom, even as early as 732. He delimits the beginning of the exilic period, however, as 587/586 and sets the end at 520 with the work of re-building the temple; *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E* (Harold Green, trans.; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 2.

most likely shaped by equally defining experiences of their own. That is to say, before even focusing on the exilic period, we must first reconnoiter the pre-exilic landscape. There, we find a series of events that contributed to an era of cumulative trauma for biblical Israel.

Surely 722 B.C.E., the final fall, climaxing the reported three-year siege of Samaria [other portions of the northern kingdom had fallen to Assyria previously] was very traumatic to the people of the Kingdom of Israel. The people in Judah must have been somewhat traumatized also, even if they could account for the fall of the northern kingdom by reference to its idolatry. According to 2 Kgs 17:5–6:

> The king of Assyria attacked all the land, and he attacked Samaria, besieging it for three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the King of Assyria captured Samaria and deported the Israelites to Assyria, relocating them in Halah, on the Habor, the river of Gozan and in the cities of the Medes.

To speak of an exilic period, then, we cannot rightly ignore *this* exile. Besides, it, like 587, prompted an explanation and evaluation from the Deuteronomisitic historian, in 2 Kgs 17:7–20. Verses 7–8 state:

> It was so because the Israelites sinned against Yahweh their God, who had delivered them from the land of Egypt, from the oppression of Pharaoh, King of Egypt. They feared other gods. They followed the customs of those whom Yahweh had driven out from the presence of the Israelites, and of the kings with whom Israel dealt.

While not all of the Israelites were deported, or even the 27,290 that the scribes of Sargon II claim,[2] Maxwell Miller and John Hayes suggest that "a significant portion" was deported.[3] In addition, others captured by the Assyrian empire were relocated to Samaria.[4] On this fall and exile, Gary Knoppers has recently commented that, although most scholars recognize

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[2]See "The Great 'Summary' Inscription," translated by K. Lawson Younger, Jr. (*COS* 2.118E:296); cf. "Nimrud Prisms D & E," translated by K. Lawson Younger, Jr., which reads 27,280 (*COS* 2.118D:295).

[3]J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (2nd ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 2006), 389.

[4]2 Kgs 17:24; "Nimrud Prisms," Younger, Jr., 296.

the accusations leveled at the Israelites in 2 Kgs 17:7–41 as Deuteronomistic propaganda, many have nonetheless agreed with the basic picture the passage presents of a radical metamorphosis in the land. In this reconstruction, the defeat, destruction, and dislocation associated with the Assyrian western campaigns were nothing short of catastrophic.[5]

Others, of course, argue for a reality "hardly as revolutionary" and directly affecting only the Israelite elite.[6] Knoppers himself takes a mediating view, allowing for significant depopulation of select Israelite settlements, but emphasizing the existence of Samarian Yahwists in the Persian period as suggestive of a more or less continuous cultural heritage from the people of the northern kingdom to the post-exilic Samarians (later, the Samaritans).[7]

Whatever the particulars, a once powerful kingdom has fallen, and that is a significant contribution to the trajectory of cumulative trauma that we are outlining. In addition, the fall of Israel directly affected Judah in a variety of ways, though they could deflect that by noting that they had a proper cult center in Jerusalem, unlike the "false" centers in the north. Also, there is reason to believe that some survivors of the fall of Samaria, i.e., those not deported elsewhere, took refuge in Judah,[8] stretching Judah's resources.[9]

As for Judah itself, it comes under the increasing pressure of the Assyrians after the fall of Israel. Even earlier (ca. 734 B.C.E.), King Ahaz of Judah, refusing to join the alliance of Aram-Damascus and Israel under King Pekah against the Assyrians, paid tribute to Tiglath-pileser III of

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[5]Gary N. Knoppers, "In Search of Post-Exilic Israel: Samaria after the Fall of the Northern Kingdom" in *In Search of Pre-Exilic Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar.* (JSOTSupp 406*;* John Day, ed.; London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 150-51.

[6]See the discussion in Knoppers, "In Search of Post-Exilic Israel," 159-60.

[7]Knoppers, "In Search of Post-Exilic Israel," 172. According to 2 Kgs 17:27-28, an exiled Israelite priest was sent to Bethel to be with them.

[8]Miller and Hayes, *History*, 390.

[9]Delbert R. Hillers, *Micah* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 5.

Assyria, thus placing Judah under direct Assyrian influence.[10] King Sennacherib of Assyria captured much of Judah's territory around 701. Even though Jerusalem itself was spared at that time, the kingdom suffered great losses. Stephen Stohlmann attributes great significance to the likely exile of many people from Judah at this time, a number comparable to those exiled from Israel in 722 and later from Judah in 587.[11] This significant disruption was overshadowed, however, by the dramatic survival of the capitol in 701. Stohlmann concludes, saying, "The 8th century Judean exile is important . . . because it marks the beginning of those necessary changes in the prophetic understanding of Israel's covenant relationship with her God which were caused by the later Babylonian exile."[12] Submission to Assyria may have followed under King Manasseh of Judah, 697–642.

Subsequently, under King Josiah (640–609 B.C.E.), there was hope for religious reform and presumably even full autonomy, but his sudden death in 609 must have been yet another major, unsettling tremor in the land of Judah. Acknowledgment of his death in 2 Kgs 23:29 is terse: "In his days, Pharaoh Neco, King of Egypt advanced against the King of Assyria at the Euphrates. King Josiah also went to meet him, and [Neco] killed him when he saw him at Megiddo."

Josiah's sudden death no doubt shook Judah.[13] "There is little doubt that the sudden and tragic death of Josiah was considered a calamity

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[10]2 Kgs 16:8, 10. Indeed, the Syro-Ephraimite war was another early crisis for Judah, amounting nearly to civil war.

[11]Stephen Stohlmann, "The Judean Exile after 701 B.C.E." in *Scripture in Context II: More Essays on the Comparative Method* (William W. Hallo, James C. Moyer, Leo G. Perdue, eds.; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 168-69. King Sennacherib claims to have taken 200,150 people from among forty-six Judean cities in his campaign; "Sennacherib's Siege of Jerusalem," translated by Mordechai Cogan (*COS* 2.119B:303).

[12]Stohlmann, "Judean Exile after 701," 175.

[13]On the issue of Josiah's intentions at Megiddo, see Cogan and Tadmor. They point out that 2 Kgs 23:29 does not imply a military confrontation; *II Kings* (AB 11; New York: Doubleday and Co., 1988), 301. Richard D. Nelson opts for Josiah's benevolence toward Neco, but argues that he was double-crossed by the Pharaoh; "*Realpolitik* in Judah (687-609 B.C.E.)" in *Scripture in Context II*, 83-84, 88. In addition, Nelson argues elsewhere that Neco was going to aid the Assyrians,

by his contemporaries," say Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor.[14] R. N. Whybray calls it "shocking and unexpected" and "completely at variance" with expectations, "a personal and national tragedy that hastened the demise of the Kingdom of Judah."[15] The main issue here is theological dissonance, for the death of the publically pious, reformer King Josiah is at variance with covenant expectations of reward for loyalty to its stipulations. King Josiah gets a "high pass" from the Deuteronomistic historian, yet he meets an untimely death. Indeed, it is in direct variance with the prophecy of Huldah who, according to 2 Kgs 22:20, claims that he would die a peaceful death. Especially compared to his predecessor, King Manasseh, who "did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh" (2 Kgs 21:2), why did Josiah get only 31 years on the throne and die at 39, and Manasseh 55 years, dying at 67 (Deuteronomistic History dates)?

With the death of Josiah, two issues are raised, probably not for the first time, but at least enhanced. Rafael de Sivatte correctly states that these events mark a time when "experience contradicted the logic of personal retribution," bringing the doctrine of retribution into crisis.[16] What is more, Josiah's death and the failure of his reform, "appears to have provoked considerable debate concerning the role of the monarchy in the period following Josiah's death from the late monarchic period, through the exilic period, and beyond," as Marvin Sweeney suggests, especially regarding restoration.[17]

Still, before the climax, we should acknowledge the increased Babylonian dominance of Judah, beginning at least around 604,[18]

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whereas 2 Kgs 23:29 suggests that Neco went up to attack the Assyrians; *First and Second Kings* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1987), 253.

[14]Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 301.

[15]Whybray, "'Shall Not the Judge of All the Earth Do What Is Just?'" 12.

[16]Rafael de Sivatte, "La fe del pueblo del Antiguo Testamento frente al sufrimiento (1): Los profetas: Jeremias, Habacuc e Isaias" *Revista Latinoamericana de Teologia* 59 (2003): 165-66.

[17]Marvin A. Sweeney, *King Josiah of Judah: The Lost Messiah of Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 322; for his comments regarding a pattern for restoration, see pp. 19-20, 315.

[18]Miller and Hayes, *History*, 468.

accented with the demise of King Jehoiakim in 598. At that time, according to 2 Kgs 24:12, the young successor, the last Judean enthroned by the people of Judah, "Jehoiachin, King of Judah, went out to the king of Babylon—himself, his mother, his servants, his princes and his palace officials—and the king of Babylon took him captive in the eighth year of his [i.e., the king of Babylon's] reign." What is more, the king of Babylon took the temple and palace furnishings as well as many of the elite personnel, according to 2 Kgs 24:13.

Thus, we have surveyed an era of cumulative trauma from ca. 734 B.C.E. to the dawn of the fall of Jerusalem. The fall of Jerusalem is the climax.[19] Many people of Judah were taken into exile. Some remained in Judah, of course, but one would think that all were dislocated to a significant degree experientially, emotionally, spiritually and intellectually.

Between the polarities of maximalist and minimalist scholars regarding the reliable historicity of the biblical texts, a substantial group of scholars agree that the Babylonian exile was a period of both great trauma and great foment for those responsible for much of the Old Testament corpus. Albertz captures this notion well when he states, "Of all the eras of Israel's history, the exilic period represents the most profound caesura and the most radical change."[20] To say the least, the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 587/586 was a major disruption of Judean society and religion, life and thought. In spite of assured understandings during the monarchy—the inviolability of Zion, an everlasting Davidic monarchy (2 Sam 7), covenant retribution—how was one to reconcile these understandings with the comprehensively harsh and very real experience of exile?

[19]See 2 Kgs 25:1-19.

[20]Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 1.

APPENDIX B: DURKHEIMIAN SOCIAL THEORY IN OLD TESTAMENT STUDY AND RECENT SOCIOLOGY

Of the three most important founders of social theory—Karl Marx, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim—biblical scholars have employed the first two most successfully.[1] Durkheim, however, has been the figure in the shadows. Robert R. Wilson pointed out some time back that Durkheim's work "has had little direct influence on Old Testament studies."[2] Later, Norman K. Gottwald was very reserved in crediting the utility of Durkheim's social theory for his reconstruction of the social world of ancient Israel. It is "one more version of idealism," he says. Without help from additional theory, he maintains, it is mere murky intuition.[3]

That is not to say that Durkheim has been completely overlooked. In fact, Andrew D. H. Mayes claims that "Much, if not most, of the recent explicitly sociological study of the Old Testament and ancient Israel [as of

[1]On the founders of sociology, see Robert M. Farr, "From Collective to Social Representations: *Aller et retour*," *Culture and Psychology* 4 (1998), 285.

[2]Robert R. Wilson, *Sociological Approaches to the Old Testament* (Guides to Biblical Scholarship; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 16.

[3]Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B.C.E.* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Press, 1979), 625.

1989] stands in the Durkheim tradition," albeit incognito.[4] For him, this includes Gottwald's *Tribes of Yahweh*.[5] Explicit appeals to Durkheimian social theory by biblical scholars include the usage of concepts such as social anomie from Durkheim's *Suicide*,[6] social unity through cultic ritual,[7] and collective representations.[8]

Of course, anthropologists as well have approached the Hebrew Bible through a Durkheimian lens. There is the well known work of Mary Douglas, who employs Durkheim's concept of the sacred and the profane (her ultimate focus is holiness) in ancient Israelite religion, specifically in regard to the abominations of Lev.[9] Another is Jarich Oosten, who has examined Gen 1–11 for what these myths and narratives reflect of the writer's and the people's understanding of the origin and development of society. Oosten employs Durkheim's theory that social phenomena can only be explained by other social phenomena.[10]

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[4]Andrew D. H. Mayes, "Sociology and the Old Testament" in *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological and Political Perspectives* (ed. Ronald E. Clements; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1989), 58.

[5]Mayes, "Sociology and the Old Testament," 50; see also Berlinerblau, "The Delicate Flower of Biblical Sociology" in *Tracking the Tribes of Yahweh: On the Trail of a Classic* (JSOTSupp 351; ed. Roland Boer; New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 69.

[6]Mark R. Sneed, "The Social Location of Qoheleth's Thought" (Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 1990).

[7]Antonin Causse, "From an Ethnic Group to a Religious Community: The Sociological Problem of Judaism," in *Community, Identity, and Ideology*, 95-118; see also S. T. Kimbrough's overview of Causse's Durkheimian approach in, "A Non-Weberian Sociological Approach to Israelite Religion," *JNES* 31 (1972): 195-202.

[8]H. Wheeler Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), and Berlinerblau, "Book of Genesis."

[9]Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Limited, 1966), 7-8, 53-54.

[10]Jarich Oosten, "The Origins of Society in the Creation Myths of Genesis: An Anthropological Perspective" *NedTT* 52 (1998): 123; see also Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method* (trans. by S. Solovay and J. E. Mueller; New York: The Free Press, 1938/1966), 141-46.

Sociologists have taken a renewed interest in Durkheim's work in the last decade. As Donald Nielsen states, "The work of Emile Durkheim and his school has been the subject of increasing attention recently."[11] Several emphases have coaxed the figure out of the shadow into the light. First, some sociologists maintain the need for a wider field of view in their discipline, namely, to expand from a focus on the individual to a focus on the group. "The time is ripe," says Farr, "to restore the cultural dimension" to sociological inquiry.[12] Second, in order to discount the frequent accusation that sociology is a-historical, some sociologists have called their colleagues back to the discipline's classic texts. Besides, argues Alan How, the classic texts maintain their "disclosive power" even when read in light of contemporary social circumstances.[13] If classical sociological texts and theories such as Durkheim's are, as How argues, "vital to the health of [contemporary] sociology," then they are vital to the health of contemporary biblical sociology as well, at least if this interdisciplinary biblical conversation is to keep apace with its interlocutor.[14] Lastly, because Durkheim has simply been misinterpreted, it is now time to reconsider his thought.[15]

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[11]Donald Nielsen, "On Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life,*" *Sociology of Religion* 61.2 (2000): 239-40.

[12]Farr, "From Collective to Social," 288.

[13]Alan How, "That's Classic! A Gadamerian Defense of the Classic Text in Sociology," *The Sociological Review* 46 (1998): 842.

[14]How, "That's Classic!" 829. Berlinerblau has passionately called upon the biblical, sociological guild to revere the ancestors of sociology; "The Present Crisis and Uneven Triumphs of Biblical Sociology: Responses to N. K. Gottwald, S. Mandell, P. Davies, M. Sneed, R. Simkins and N. Lemche," in *Concepts of Class*, 117.

[15]See especially Jones, *Durkheim Reconsidered*, vii-21; see also Ken Morrison, "The Disavowal of the Social in the American Reception of Durkheim," *Journal of Classical Sociology* 1 (2001): 117.

APPENDIX C: CURSES FROM ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TEXTS

LAWS OF HAMMURAPI

We find curses of defeat, famine, pestilence and disease in the epilogue of the most famous Babylonian law collection, the "Laws of Hammurapi." Over one hundred years ago, French archaeologists working at Susa discovered the purloined stela on which the code is inscribed. It was preserved almost in its entirety, and subsequent discoveries have supplied many, if not most, of the gaps. Hammurapi ruled Babylon from 1728–1686 B.C.E., and the collection dates from the last years of his reign.

Like treaties, the Laws of Hammurapi end by delineating curses upon anyone who disregards the laws. Within lines xlix.18–li.91, regarding those who are not in accord with the "laws," we read:

> O May the god Adad, lord of abundance, the canal-inspector of heaven and earth, my helper, deprive him of the benefits of rain from heaven and flood from the springs, and may he obliterate his land through destitution and famine; may he roar fiercely over his city, and may he turn his land into the abandoned hills left by the Flood.[1]

In the next paragraph, we read, "May the god Zabab, the great warrior, the first-born son of the Ekur temple, who travels at my right side,

[1]"The Laws of Hammurabi," translated by Martha Roth (*COS* 2.131:352).

smash his weapon upon the field of battle; may he turn day into night for him, and make his enemy triumph over him."[2] Then, four paragraphs later, we read:

> May the goddess Ninkarrak, daughter of the god Anu, who promotes my cause in the Ekur temple, cause a grievous malady to break out upon his limbs, an evil demonic disease, a serious carbuncle which cannot be soothed, which he cannot ease with bandages, which, like the bite of death, cannot be expunged; may he bewail his lost virility until his life comes to an end.[3]

THE SOLDIER'S OATH

Although this important Hittite text is missing the first 17 lines, it is safe to assume that in them military troops take an oath. Following the oath, curses for breaking the oath are enumerated, specifically defeat, disease and crop failure.

> §3 Who transgre[sses] these oaths. . . . may these oath deities seize him and [may they] blind him and [may they] blind his army too, and further, may they deafen them. May comrade not see comrade. May this one not hear [that one]. May they give them a horrible d[eath]. May they fetter their feet with a wrapping below, and bind their hands above. Just as the oath deities bound the troops of the land of Arzawa by their hands and feet and set them in a heap, in the same way may they bind his troops too, and set them in a heap. . . . §4 May he be completely broken up by diseases. . . . §8 In the plain, the field and the meadow may the vegetation not grow. . . §12 Who breaks these oaths let it happen that the [troop]s of Hatti trample his city with (their) foot. . . . §14 Just as vegetation does not come up from an oven, may wheat and barley not come up in his field.[4]

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[2]"The Laws of Hammurabi," Roth, 353.

[3]"The Laws of Hammurabi," Roth, 353.

[4]"The First Soldier's Oath," translated by Billie Jean Collins (*COS* 1.66:165-66).

THE ARAMAIC INSCRIPTIONS FROM SEFÎRE

Three stelae with treaty inscriptions in Old Aramaic, dating from ca. 750 B.C.E., were discovered at Sfire near Aleppo in 1930.[5] The treaties are between King Bir-Ga'yah of KTK[6] and King Matî'el of Arpad, who are named in the opening lines of the treaty. The curses include various catastrophes. As stated on Stele 1,

> If Matî'el should be false to Bir-Ga'yah [and to] his son and to his offspring . . . (and) [may Ha]dad [pour (over it [i.e., his kingdom])] every sort of evil (which exists) on earth and in heaven and every sort of trouble; and may he shower upon Arpad [ha]il-[stones]! For seven years may the locust[7] devour (Arpad) and for seven years may the worm eat and for seven [years may] TWY [blight][8] come upon the face of its land! May the grass not come forth so that no green may be seen; and may its vegetation not be [seen]! . . . May the gods send every sort of devourer against Arpad and against its people. . . . May its vegetation be destroyed unto desolation.[9]

INSCRIPTION FROM TELL FEKHERIYE:

Yet other curse inscriptions invoking the terror of the natural elements, in this instance in Akkadian and Aramaic, come from late ninth century B.C.E. levels at Tell Fekheriye. The stele was inscribed on the occasion of dedicating a statue of Had(ad)-yith'i, governor of Guzan(a), in the temple of Hadad in Sikanu. The concluding curse, addressed to anyone who tampers

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[5] *ANET* Supp, 659-61.

[6] For a discussion on the identification of KTK, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Aramaic Inscriptions of Sefire* (Biblica et Orientalia 19; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1967), 127-35. He concludes that it is possibly the name of a town in the area of Gurgum in North Syria.

[7] Fitzmyer, *Sefire*, 46.

[8] On TWY, Fitzmyer comments, "It must refer to some kind of blight, since it follows the attack of locusts and worms and precedes the mention of the lack of vegetation"; *Sefire*, 46.

[9] Fitzmyer, *Sefire*, 14-15.

with the statue, states, "And may plague, the rod of Nergal, not be cut off from his land."[10]

THE VASSAL TREATIES OF ESARHADDON

The "vassal" or "succession" treaties of King Esarhaddon of Assyria (680–669 B.C.E.) were made with various vassal rulers of Median cities in the king's larger domain on behalf of the succession of his son, the crown prince Assurbanipal. It dates from 672 B.C.E. There are numerous examples of catastrophes listed among the curses that will befall those who break the treaty, otherwise deface or destroy the tablet on which the treaty is written, or disrespect it in anyway (see §§ 35–36).[11] They are:

> §38A. May Anu, king of the gods, let **disease**, exhaustion, malaria, sleeplessness, worries and ill health rain upon all your houses.
>
> §39. May Sin, the brightness of heaven and earth, clothe you with **leprosy** and forbid your entering into the presence of the gods or king. May you roam the desert like the wild ass and the gazelle!
>
> §47. May Adad, the canal inspector of heaven and earth, cut off sea[sonal flooding] from your land and deprive your fields of [grain], may he [submerge] your land with a great **flood**; may the **locust** who diminishes the land devour your harvest. . . . In your hunger eat the flesh of your sons! In want and **famine** may one man eat the flesh of another.
>
> §49. May Nergal, hero of the gods, extinguish your life with his merciless sword, and send slaughter and **pes[til]ence** among you.
>
> §52. May Gula, the great physician, put **sickness** and weariness [in your hearts] and an unhealing wound in your body. [May you] Bathe in [blood and pus] as if in water!
>
> §56. May the grea[t go]ds of heaven and earth . . . strike you, look at you in anger, uproot you from among the living and curse you grimly with a painful curse. . . . May food and water abandon you; may want and **famine**, hunger and **plague** never be removed from you. . . . May an irresistible **flood** come up from the earth and devastate you.

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[10]"Hadad-yith'i," translated by Alan Millard (*COS* 2.34:154).

[11]Parpola and Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths*, 44-45.

> §60. May Ea, king of the Abyss, lord of the springs, give you **deadly water** to drink, and fill you with dropsy.
>
> §63. Ditto, ditto, may all the gods that are [mentioned by name] in th[is] treaty tablet make the ground as narrow as a brick for you. May they make your ground like iron (so that) nothing can sprout from it.
>
> §64. Just as rain does not fall from a brazen heaven so may rain and dew not come upon your fields and your meadows; instead of dew may burning coals rain on your land.
>
> §73. May your streams and your springs make their waters flow backwards.
>
> §85. (Ditto, ditto;) may they cause **locusts**, . . . , may lice, caterpillars and other field **pests** devour your towns, your land and your district.
>
> §102. Just as (this) waterskin is split and its water runs out, so may your waterskin break in a place of **severe thirst**; [may you] die [of th]irst![12]

The extensive attestation of communal catastrophes in the curses of these extra-biblical texts make it clear that the connection between curses and natural disasters—more specifically, between human conduct and divine response through natural disasters—is part and parcel of the ancient Near Eastern mentality. This mentality biblical Israel shared.

[12]Parpola and Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths*, 45-49, 51-52, 55, 58. Emphasis added.

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