



The Language of Rebellion in the Hebrew Bible and the Ambivalent Attitude(s) It Represents

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The Language of Rebellion in the Hebrew Bible and the Ambivalent Attitude(s) it Represents

A dissertation presented

by

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to

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Abstract

Rebellion has been an incessant feature of human history and every society has had to struggle with it. The states of Israel and Judah were no different in this regard. These two societies, insofar as they are represented in the Hebrew Bible, discussed the topic of rebellion with some frequency. Their discussions provide readers with a window into what some in ancient Israel thought about this political act. As is the case with many societies, the language of rebellion in ancient Israel was vast and complicated. As a result, modern scholars have often confused the numerous rebellion terms appearing in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. מרד, פשע, קשר, הזא) and have failed adequately to discuss others as rebellion terms (e.g. ישע). In the following dissertation, I will clarify what these terms indicate in a rebellion context and highlight additional terms the biblical writers use to describe rebellion.

The results of my research demonstrate that while the ancient Israelites may not have written political treatises on the phenomenon of rebellion, they did have a set of interrelated terms in place, a type of terminological system, to describe the various types of rebellions that existed within their society. The presence of the system, along with the ways in which they manipulated it, betray, albeit to a limited extent, their recognition of a larger or overall category of rebellion. The biblical writers had descriptive words to describe rebellion, as in מרד, פשע and קשר. They had expressions that could stand in to describe rebellion as in רום יד ב. There are also positive rebellion terms—ישע and נצל—that focus on the aspect of liberation. In contrast the biblical writers also employ terms connected to criminal behavior (e.g. הזא) to describe select rebellions. The words they chose and the contexts in which these words appear betray their

ambivalent feelings about rebellion. The biblical authors recognize that rebellion can be destructive and present a challenge to the divine order, but they also recognize it can serve to bring freedom from foreign oppression or in other circumstances to remove a wayward monarch.

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Abbreviations

<i>AB</i>	<i>Anchor Bible</i>
<i>ABD</i>	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York, 1992
<i>ANEM</i>	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Monographs</i>
<i>AOAT</i>	<i>Alter Orient und Altes Testament</i>
<i>AOS</i>	<i>American Oriental Series</i>
<i>ATD</i>	<i>Das Alte Testament Deutsch</i>
<i>BA</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
<i>BETL</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium</i>
<i>BJS</i>	<i>Brown Judaic Studies</i>
<i>BibOr</i>	<i>Biblica et Orientalia</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
<i>BWA(N)T</i>	<i>Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten (und Neuen) Testament</i>
<i>BZABR</i>	<i>Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte</i>
<i>BZAW</i>	<i>Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CHANE</i>	<i>Culture and History of the Ancient Near East</i>
<i>CM</i>	<i>Cuneiform Monographs</i>
<i>FAT</i>	<i>Forschungen zum Alten Testament</i>
<i>FOTL</i>	<i>Forms of the Old Testament Literature</i>
<i>FRLANT</i>	<i>Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen</i>
<i>HAT</i>	<i>Handbuch zum Alten Testament</i>
<i>HBT</i>	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
<i>HCOT</i>	<i>Historical Commentary on the Old Testament</i>
<i>HdO</i>	<i>Handbook of Oriental Studies/Handbuch der Orientalistik</i>
<i>HS</i>	<i>Hebrew Studies</i>
<i>HSM</i>	<i>Harvard Semitic Monographs</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>IrAnt</i>	<i>Iranica Antiqua</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JANES</i>	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JCS</i>	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
<i>JESHO</i>	<i>Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOTSup</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series</i>
<i>KHC</i>	<i>Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament</i>
<i>KUSATU</i>	<i>Kleine Untersuchungen zur Sprache des Alten Testaments und seiner Umwelt</i>
<i>LHBOTS</i>	<i>Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies</i>
<i>LSAWS</i>	<i>Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic</i>

<i>MesCiv</i>	<i>Mesopotamian Civilizations</i>
<i>MTA</i>	<i>Münsteraner Theologische Abhandlungen</i>
<i>NEA</i>	<i>Near Eastern Archaeology</i>
<i>NIVAC</i>	<i>The NIV Application Commentary</i>
<i>NTM</i>	<i>New Testament Monographs</i>
<i>OBO</i>	<i>Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis</i>
<i>OLA</i>	<i>Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta</i>
<i>Or</i>	<i>Orientalia</i>
<i>OTE</i>	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
<i>OTG</i>	<i>Old Testament Guides</i>
<i>OTL</i>	<i>Old Testament Library</i>
<i>OTS</i>	<i>Old Testament Studies</i>
<i>OtSt</i>	<i>Oudtestamentische Studiën</i>
<i>RAI</i>	<i>Rencontre assyriologique internationale</i>
<i>RIMA</i>	<i>The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods</i>
<i>RINAP</i>	<i>Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period</i>
<i>RLA</i>	<i>Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie, 8 vols.,</i>
<i>SAA</i>	<i>State Archives of Assyria</i>
<i>SAAB</i>	<i>State Archives of Assyria Bulletin</i>
<i>SAAS</i>	<i>State Archives of Assyria Studies</i>
<i>SBLDS</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series</i>
<i>SBLMS</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series</i>
<i>SBLss</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series</i>
<i>SBT</i>	<i>Studies in Biblical Theology</i>
<i>SBT(SS)</i>	<i>Studies in Biblical Theology (Second Series)</i>
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
<i>ST</i>	<i>Studia Theologica</i>
<i>TA</i>	<i>Tel Aviv</i>
<i>TLOT</i>	<i>Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament. Edited by E. Jenni and C. Westermann. 3 vols. Peabody, 1997.</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>VTSup</i>	<i>Supplements to Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>WAW</i>	<i>Writings from the Ancient World</i>
<i>WAWSup</i>	<i>Writings from the Ancient World Supplement Series</i>
<i>ZABR</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZDMG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gessellschaft</i>
<i>ZDPV</i>	<i>Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i>
<i>ZTK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Though rebellion has been an incessant feature of human history it does not always receive an unbiased treatment in ancient historiography. One reason for this is that many of the extant ancient sources emanated from the ruling elites of the imperial powers. These rulers tended to universally demonize their opponents, often leaving modern readers with a very limited and partisan view of rebellion in the ancient world. The Hebrew Bible, on the other hand, presents a more complex picture with respect to rebellion. The political volatility associated with the small states of Israel and Judah makes the Hebrew Bible an interesting source from which to study the topic of rebellion because it does not originate from the perspective of a world power trying to delegitimize all rebels.

Further, the types of rebellions discussed in the Hebrew Bible and the perspectives on these events fluctuate from situation to situation. In certain instances we see domestic rebellion, as subjects within Israel and Judah rebel against the reigning king and attempt to appropriate the throne.¹ These coups d'état are discussed with mixed reaction by the authors and editors of the Hebrew Bible. Occasionally they are viewed positively and the authors understand God to have commanded the rebellion. At other times they are looked at in a negative light. In additional cases, Israel and Judah rebel against an outside imperial authority, for instance, Egypt, Assyria, or Babylonia. Yet at other times they submit to the hegemonic nation. Moreover, not only does the Hebrew Bible record cases of rebellion narrated in a terse and annalistic style, but theological commentary related to many of these events is also present. This appears in the form of prophets and historians commenting on these events based on their beliefs about the world. Sometimes, this theological commentary reaches the point where the biblical prophets equate rebellion

¹ One example would be Absalom's rebellion against David, as narrated in 2 Sam 15–18 with background information starting in chapter 13.

against the imperial power to a crime against the Israelite God, Yahweh (cf. Ezek 17).

The ancient Israelite writers' numerous discussions of rebellion and their varied views on the topic raise a variety of questions. One such question, which will be the focus of this dissertation, relates to whether or not the ancient Israelites had a distinct set of terms for describing political rebellion, what we might preliminarily refer to as a terminological system for discussing rebellion.² Two secondary questions are: what might these terms reveal about the existence of a larger or overall category of rebellion in ancient Israel, and ultimately what did the various writers think about the phenomenon? While the present dissertation will argue in the affirmative for the first question, there are no straightforward answers to the second and third questions. Both the word and the act of rebellion have an inherent ambiguity.³ The term and the act can be either positive or negative depending on the circumstances and/or standpoint. This reality makes the topic of rebellion a difficult one for writers to discuss, especially if they or the leaders they write about are often put in a position where they would have to rebel to gain freedom. This was often the case in ancient Israel. The opposite of this situation, however, has the same leaders who might contemplate and engage in rebellion, recognizing that they want to maintain the power they possess. To retain power, they must keep those they rule from rebelling against them. For this reason, studying episodes of rebellion while thinking about this ambiguity

² What we are asking is if the word the writer chooses to describe a rebellion is to a certain extent pre-determined based on the type of rebellion involved and/or how the writer evaluates the rebellion. By noting that there is a system in place, we are not suggesting that these writers did not have other means by which they could describe a rebellion. These terms are simply the primary means these writers have to describe different types of rebellions. When put together, these terms create an organized set of terms available to the writers to describe rebellion, wherein the individual terms often relate to each other in certain defined ways or patterns.

³ This is a sentiment that modern political scientists have also recognized. Morkevicius stated it as follows: "On the one hand, rebellion is viewed with a distrustful eye—as a disruptive, chaotic force that threatens to destroy the day-to-day order on which civilization is built. On the other, rebellion is perceived more optimistically—as a regenerative, creative force that can leave a better civilization in its wake." Valerie Morkevicius, "Why We Need a Just Rebellion Theory," *Ethics and International Affairs* 27 (2013): 401.

can reveal important details about ancient attitudes toward rebellion.⁴ It can further illuminate how ancient writers navigated these delicate issues by using very meticulous language.

The questions just raised fit into discussions of political and social history. The social and political climate, along with the political system in ancient Israel, had an impact on the biblical text and this includes discussions of rebellion. Unfortunately, these discussions have not been treated adequately outside the field of biblical studies, as Jaruzelska has noted. She states, “Despite the richness and diversity of biblical evidence relating to political structure and functioning, the contribution of the ancient Near East, of which Israel is a part, is generally either omitted from books on the history of social and political thought or is treated very superficially.”⁵ The present dissertation will contribute to this discussion by analyzing episodes of rebellion through the terms these texts employ. Due to the universal nature of rebellion, we can categorize events discussed in the Hebrew Bible using the definitions and terminology of social and political scientists to help modern readers better grasp these events. In doing so, this work will provide a synthesis of the primary source data and an analysis of how those in ancient Israel defined and discussed rebellion and other related forms of collective action. It will show

⁴ There are many reasons why attitudes toward rebellion vary, not all of which we will have the space to discuss adequately. For example, the political leaders argued over whether it was right to submit to the foreign empire to maintain peace, or to rebel and risk having your land destroyed. This is an issue in Isa 7–8, 30–31 and in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Jeremiah and Ezekiel are both at odds with the Judahite king, Zedekiah, over his decision to rebel against Babylonia (Jer 27–29; Ezek 17). This is one reason why the question focused on attitudes toward rebellion must remain a secondary focus of this dissertation. Due to the focus on rebellion terminology, we cannot touch on all of the reasons for why these writers have different views of rebellion. This is an area for future exploration.

⁵ Izabela Eph'al-Jaruzelska, *Prophets, Royal Legitimacy and War in Ancient Israel* (Warsaw: Warsaw University Press, 2009), 7. Biblical scholars have in the past and in the present approached the biblical text from a sociological perspective. Some prominent scholars who have historically applied these methods are Max Weber and Norman Gottwald. For examples of their work see, Max Weber, *Ancient Judaism*, trans. Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale (New York: The Free Press, 1952); Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250–1050 BCE* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999). More recent scholarship also approaches the Bible with social theory in mind. In the introduction to a study on warfare and ritual, Jacob Wright stated, “The editors hope this volume will make a timely contribution to a growing concentration on the ways social theory and ritual studies can contribute to the interpretation of biblical texts and ancient social realities, especially related to warfare.” Jacob L. Wright, “Introduction,” in *Warfare, Ritual, and Symbol in Biblical and Modern Contexts*, ed. Brad Kelle, Frank Ames, and Jacob Wright, SBLAIL 18 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 1.

how they engaged in a form of political thought.⁶ By focusing on the terms the ancient writers employ, this discussion will also shed light on how a small state like Israel/Judah, one often oppressed by foreign powers, navigated the ambiguity of rebellion.

State of the Field

Studies on Select Rebellions in the Hebrew Bible

A survey of previous scholarship reveals that rebellion as a general phenomenon has not been the subject of extensive discussion among scholars of the Hebrew Bible. Scholars have tended to focus on the literary or historical aspects of rebellion stories. For example, Jonathan Robker, in his book on Jehu's rebellion, is not concerned with what the writers of 2 Kgs 9–10 think about rebellion. He states that his first objective is “to reconstruct the textual history of the narrative in 2 Kings 9–10 and any related texts within the book of Kings.” Second, he states, “This undertaking attempts to offer a historical reconstruction of the events surrounding the revolt of Jehu as described in 2 Kings 9–10.”⁷ Likewise, in his book on Absalom's rebellion, Keith

⁶ Some scholars may wish to refer to the discussion in the Hebrew Bible as a primitive form of political thought or political philosophy. The reason some might wish to use primitive is that, as Hamilton says, “nowhere does the Hebrew Bible spend time thinking about the nature of politics in the abstract, a move that entered Western intellectual life only through Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Constitutions*.” Mark Hamilton, *A Kingdom for a Stage*, FAT 116 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 3. However, the fact that biblical writers did engage in a form of intellectual reflection on political events, suggests that they did engage in a form of political philosophy. This holds even if they did not systematically write treatises on these topics. The difference is in how they express their political philosophy, and perhaps the amount of effort and intentionality with which they approach intellectual reflection on political events.

⁷ Jonathan Miles Robker, *The Jehu Revolution: A Royal Tradition of the Northern Kingdom and its Ramifications*, BZAW 435 (Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), 2. Similar to this study is that of Susanne Otto who also deals with the compositional history of the Jehu story. Susanne Otto, *Jehu, Elia, und Elisa: Die Erzählung von der Jehu-Revolution und die Komposition der Elia-Elisa-Erzählungen*, BWANT 8/12 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2001). See also the work of Marsha White who discusses the legitimacy of Jehu's coup but focuses on the textual history rather than thinking about what this says about ancient attitudes toward rebellion. Her work does help to demonstrate that the positive attitude toward rebellion came from a supporter of Jehu. The perspective from which a text originates has a lot to do with the evaluation of rebellion. Marsha White, “Naboth's Vineyard and Jehu's Coup: The Legitimation of a Dynastic Extermination,” *VT* 44 (1994): 66–76. In a different way, Lisa Wray Beal deals with the tension in the story between the positive and negative aspects of Jehu's rebellion, but not by focusing on the attitude toward rebellion. She instead looks at the many voices of the text through narrative analysis. In this way she touches on the attitudes of the characters in the story toward rebellion, but not by thinking about rebellion as a political phenomenon. Lisa Wray Beal, *The Deuteronomist's Prophet: Narrative Control of Approval and Disapproval in the Story of Jehu (2 Kings 9 and 10)*, LHBOTS 478 (New York: T & T Clark, 2007).

Bodner concentrates on a “narrative-critical engagement of the story that focuses on the dramatic contours of the text.”⁸ He highlights issues of characterization and plot development. He does note the tension in the story over Absalom’s quest for revenge and the divine decree to punish David as a reason for the rebellion on the one hand, along with the personal quest for power on the other. Yet, he discusses this in terms of the characterization of Absalom rather than of the ambiguity of rebellion as a political phenomenon. Nevertheless, part of the reason for the characterization of Absalom in this way has to do with the ambiguity of rebellion. The narrator recognizes a positive aspect to this rebellion in that it serves to punish a wayward monarch, but is ultimately uncomfortable with the coup due to the possible outcome, that is the death of Yahweh’s anointed, David.

In another work, focused entirely on Jeroboam, Bodner addresses the phenomenon of rebellion more directly. Bodner notes that Jeroboam is “a rebel with a cause authorized by God.” He further states that “The idea that God raises up rebels in the Hebrew Bible is not a commonly held assumption.”⁹ These comments highlight the ambiguity of rebellion, but do not do so explicitly because Bodner is not analyzing rebellion as a political or social concept. Rather, he intends to analyze the narrative in terms of the tension which the ancient writers feel toward the person of Jeroboam. While he is correct in this analysis, Bodner overlooks another dimension at work: that the story, even if indirectly, highlights a positive aspect of rebellion. The presentation of Jeroboam in this way is not only due to the historical reality the writers must grapple with; it is also due to a conceptual issue: that rebellion can occur to punish or remove a wayward

⁸ Keith Bodner, *The Rebellion of Absalom* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 4.

⁹ Keith Bodner, *Jeroboam’s Royal Drama* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 14. This is not a statement suggesting that other scholars do not recognize that Jeroboam initially had a mandate from God to establish the northern kingdom. For example, Knoppers notes that 1 Kgs 11:26–12:20 presents Jeroboam as Yahweh’s appointed king. Gary Knoppers, *Two Nations Under God: The Deuteronomistic History of Solomon and the Dual Monarchies: The Reign of Solomon and the Rise of Jeroboam, Vol. 1*, HSM 52 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 170. Bodner’s comment, however, specifically connects this to analyzing attitudes toward rebellion and the violent overthrow of the ruling power.

monarch, which is often latently expressed within the Hebrew Bible as a reason for rebellion.¹⁰ However, these same texts often reveal that the writers are ultimately uncomfortable with rebellion because it can lead to a loss of power, territory, or other destructive aspects.¹¹ Thus, in stories like that of Jeroboam, the attitude towards rebellion vacillates between positive and negative elements. The texts accept the rebellion as initially worthy, yet refrain from continuing to support the rebellion as an overall positive event.

Most scholars who discuss Hezekiah's rebellion also do not engage in extensive analysis of what this narrative can show us about the biblical writers' views of rebellion.¹² Again, scholars often focus either on an historical reconstruction of the episode or on the composition history of 2 Kgs 18–20.¹³ Nevertheless, they touch upon attitudes toward rebellion as they discuss foreign policy during the reign of Hezekiah. So in his book on Isaiah, Matthijs de Jong states, "Isaiah furiously opposed the policy of rebellion, portraying those who advocated it as enemies of the

¹⁰ This is often a secondary feature of these texts that is subordinated to divine causation in these events. Despite the subordination of the human cause of these rebellions, it is still present. Many refer to this feature as the principle of dual causality.

¹¹ Even the Chronicler, who largely ignores the northern kingdom of Israel, reluctantly recognizes the legitimacy of Jeroboam's rebellion. See the discussion in Williamson's work: H. G. M. Williamson, *Israel in the Books of Chronicles* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 110–14; also Troy D. Cudworth, "The Division of Israel's Kingdom in Chronicles: A Re-examination of the Usual Suspects," *Biblica* 95 (2014): 498–523.

¹² This is especially noteworthy when we contrast the portrayal of Hezekiah in 2 Kgs 18 with the way that Ezekiel discusses Zedekiah's rebellion. See Ezek 17 for the portrayal of Zedekiah.

¹³ For some general studies on the topic that deal with issues of historiography, archaeology, and a reconstruction of what took place see, Lester L. Grabbe, ed., *Like a Bird in a Cage: The Invasion of Sennacherib in 701 BCE*, JSOTSup 363 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003); Isaac Kalimi and Seth Richardson, *Sennacherib at the Gates of Jerusalem: Story, History and Historiography*, CHANE 71 (Boston: Brill, 2014); William R. Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah: New Studies* (Boston: Brill, 1999); Robb Andrew Young, *Hezekiah in History and Tradition* (Boston: Brill, 2012). The discussion of the composition typically begins with the following two works: Bernhard Stade, "Miscellen: Anmerkungen zu 2 Kö. 15–21," *ZAW* 6 (1886):156–89; Brevard Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, SBT(SS) 3 (London: SCM Press, 1967). For a more recent discussion of the composition see, Ian Provan, *Hezekiah and the Book of Kings: A Contribution to the Debate About the Composition of the Deuteronomistic History*, BZAW 172 (Berlin: W. De Gruyter, 1988); 118–30; Paul S. Evans, *The Invasion of Sennacherib in the Book of Kings: A Source Critical and Rhetorical Study of 2 Kings 18–19*, SVT 125 (Boston: Brill, 2009).

state.”¹⁴ To make this point, he focuses on the prophecies in Isa 30–31 that criticize Judah’s political leaders for making an alliance with Egypt. The formation of such an alliance would, in his view, constitute a rebellion against Assyria.¹⁵ Discussions such as de Jong’s highlight a possible tension in the ways that the biblical writers depict rebellion, but modern scholars tend to omit further analysis. Some within the society (e.g. Hezekiah and elsewhere Zedekiah) felt that rebellion against the imperial power was necessary and legitimate, while others (e.g. Isa 30–31 and Ezek 17) may have felt that rebellion was illegitimate.¹⁶ Scholars who address one of these opinions touch on attitudes toward rebellion in ancient Israel, but they do so primarily to highlight the historical situation underlying the biblical text, not the conceptual issues at stake.

This is what Nadav Na’aman does in his article on the foreign policy of Judah in the ninth-eighth centuries.¹⁷ Based on both biblical stories and other ancient Near Eastern sources, he

¹⁴ Matthijs J. de Jong, *Isaiah Among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets: A Comparative Study of the Earliest Stages of the Isaiah Tradition and the Neo-Assyrian Prophecies*, SVT 117 (Boston: Brill, 2007), 456. See also the discussion elsewhere in de Jong’s book, specifically on pages 167–69, 243–49. Additional works also discuss foreign policy during Hezekiah’s time in a similar way: Shawn Zelig Aster, *Reflections of Empire in Isaiah 1–39: Responses to Assyrian Ideology*, ANEM 19 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 179–81.

¹⁵ De Jong’s comments do indeed touch on attitudes toward rebellion, but he misses the point of the passage. The text is not advocating against political rebellion, but it is arguing against relying on Egypt and entering into foreign alliances. This does not automatically imply that the text argues that Judah should remain as a submissive vassal to the Assyrians. As Aster has demonstrated, the text is neither pro-Assyrian or anti-Assyrian. The point is that Judah should submit to Yahweh rather than any foreign power. Sean Aster, “Isaiah 31 as a Response to Rebellion,” *JBL* 136 (2017): 359–61. Thus, the text is not opposing a policy of rebellion. See also, J. J. M. Roberts, “Review of *Isaiah and the Deliverance of Jerusalem: A Study of the Interpretation of Prophecy in the Old Testament*, by R. E. Clements,” *JBL* 101 (1982): 442–44. Roberts says, “One may also question whether Isaiah’s opposition to Hezekiah’s plans was an opposition to rebellion as such, or an opposition to trust in human alliances.” Support for these positions comes in noting that Isa 31:8 declares that foreign alliances represent disobedience toward Yahweh. This could be a foreign alliance with either Egypt or Assyria. Nevertheless, de Jong’s comment shows that some discuss attitudes toward rebellion through texts that speak on foreign policy.

¹⁶ The texts do not directly state that Hezekiah, and elsewhere Zedekiah, believe rebellion to be legitimate, even though 2 Kgs 18:7 comes quite close. Nevertheless, we can assume that these two kings believed their rebellions to be legitimate because both of them chose to rebel against their overlords. Aster states the following regarding Isaiah: “Although it appears that Isaiah discouraged Judah from actively rebelling during the reign of Sargon, it seems that he encouraged Judah’s participation in the general revolt against Assyria that swept the Levant after Sargon’s death in 705.” Aster, *Reflections of Empire in Isaiah 1–39: Responses to Assyrian Ideology*, 239. This comment reflects our position, while also recognizing that no text states this directly. Interestingly, while the text of Isaiah discourages foreign alliances, the text also never condemns rebellion.

¹⁷ All the dates mentioned in this work are BC unless otherwise specified. Nadav Na’aman, “Let Other Kingdoms Struggle with the Great Powers—You, Judah, Pay the Tribute and Hope for the Best: The Foreign Policy of the

demonstrates that Judah resisted rebellion and maintained a policy of submission to the greater powers. This, he argues, was Judah's policy until Hezekiah reversed it and rebelled against the Assyrian empire after the death of Sargon II. For Na'aman the policy of submission is why Judah survived as a state longer than Israel.¹⁸ Indeed, Na'aman's discussion adds to our understanding of the complicated and ambiguous nature of rebellion in the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near East, but there is room for more. He does not frame his discussion in terms of analyzing the words the biblical writers employ to describe rebellion and what these terms might suggest about attitudes toward rebellion within the Hebrew Bible. Rather, he limits his thoughts to a few examples of imperial rebellion. Moreover, he does not address rebellion as a political phenomenon.

Studies on Warfare

Some of the significant works on war in the Hebrew Bible tangentially address the topic of rebellion and are worth mentioning. Any recent discussion of warfare in the Hebrew Bible should begin with the seminal work of Susan Niditch. She does, on occasion, mention rebellion in her work. For example, in a discussion of Judges 9 she states, "The biblical narrator, in fact, frames their rebellion in terms of just vengeance, for Abimelech had come to power by murdering his opponents, all his own kin 'the sons of Jerubbaal.'"¹⁹ Her statement is relevant to a discussion of the ways in which the biblical writers discuss rebellion. She is, however, focused

Kings of Judah in the Ninth–Eighth Centuries BCE, in *Isaiah's Vision of Peace in Biblical and Modern International Relations: Swords into Plowshares*, ed. Raymond Cohen and Raymond Westbrook (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 55–74.

¹⁸ Nadav Na'aman, "Let Other Kingdoms Struggle with the Great Powers—You, Judah, Pay the Tribute and Hope for the Best: The Foreign Policy of the Kings of Judah in the Ninth–Eighth Centuries BCE, 55–74. See also, Carl D. Evans, "Judah's Foreign Policy from Hezekiah to Josiah," in *Scripture in Context: Essays on the Comparative Method*, ed. Carl D. Evans, William W. Hallo and John B. White (Pittsburgh: The Pickwick Press, 1980), 157–78; Jesper Høgenhaven, "The Prophet Isaiah and Judaeon Foreign Policy under Ahaz and Hezekiah," *JNES* 49 (1990): 351–54.

¹⁹ Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 124.

on the aggression of Abimelech rather than the concept of rebellion. Unfortunately, specific references to rebellion do not appear frequently enough in her work to clarify attitudes toward rebellion within the Hebrew Bible. This is not her focus and so should not be expected.

Nevertheless, because of the similarities between rebellion and warfare, there is still much to glean from her work, especially as it relates to her approach. Niditch states on more than one occasion that she intends to explore “precisely what are the attitudes to war” in the Hebrew Bible.²⁰ Likewise, the present study aims to explore the set of terms available for describing rebellion and to evaluate what it suggests about attitudes toward rebellion among the writers of the Hebrew Bible. Niditch frames her approach with reference to the ethics of warfare in ancient Israel and focuses on a descriptive approach.²¹ The most important comment in this regard is her statement that “To study war or attitudes toward wars (even in texts that may not be records of real wars) is in part to ask what social organization is assumed by the people for whom the text is meaningful.”²² One question that follows is what type of problem or need does war address for the society? The same can be said for a study of rebellion: what type of need does rebellion address in the society? As this dissertation answers this question, it reveals how those in the society viewed the phenomenon, be it war or rebellion. With the focus of this dissertation on the set of terms available for describing rebellion, this comment will be especially relevant in chapter four on rebellion as salvation. This chapter will demonstrate how the writers of the Hebrew Bible describe acts of aggression, rebellion, with unequivocally positive terms. The word used to describe rebellion demonstrates that rebellion can bring liberation and serve a

²⁰ Ibid., 4, 14.

²¹ The opposite of this would be a prescriptive approach that attempts to determine what a text can teach a reader about a topic.

²² Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence*, 14.

positive function in society.²³

Likewise, in her study on the ethics of war, Carly Crouch also addresses rebellion in a few circumstances and in one case notes that the Deuteronomistic author of 2 Kgs 18:7 positively evaluates Hezekiah's rebellion.²⁴ Comments of a similar kind are, however, limited in Crouch's study.

Nevertheless, her work is important for discussions of rebellion as it addresses the issue of justifying aggression in war and the divergent ways in which societies approach this. This is relevant for the present study because rebellion involves aggression in the context of war. To describe the royal prerogative (the justification) of war in the ancient Near East, Crouch focuses on the contrasting ideas of order and chaos.²⁵ From the dominant party's perspective, rebellion creates a situation of chaos that they need to defeat. This is the picture of rebellion that predominates in the Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions.²⁶

Her discussion continues by highlighting how the position of the imperial power can contrast with that of the subordinate state. For example, she states that within Nahum the language "with which Assyria is described not only speaks of it as chaotic, but speaks of it as

²³ As the discussion will also highlight, rebellion can serve to remove wicked or oppressive kings and can also serve a positive function in this way.

²⁴ C. L. Crouch, *War and Ethics in the Ancient Near East: Military Violence in Light of Cosmology and History*, BZAW 407 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 86.

²⁵ She appeals to the work of Mario Liverani as it relates to the ideology of the Assyrian empire. Liverani discusses the idea of the center as representing order and the periphery as representing chaos. C.L. Crouch, *War and Ethics in the Ancient Near East: Military Violence in Light of Cosmology and History*, 22, 27. For the article by Liverani that she discusses, see Mario Liverani, "The Ideology of the Assyrian Empire," in *Power and Propaganda: A Symposium on Ancient Empires*, ed. M.T. Larsen, Mesopotamia 7 (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979), 297–317. Liverani also touches on these ideas in his recent book: Mario Liverani, *Assyria: The Imperial Mission*, MesCiv 21 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2017). K. Lawson Younger discusses a similar phenomenon in the Egyptian texts: K. Lawson Younger Jr., *Ancient Conquest Accounts: A Study in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical History Writing*, JSOTSup 98 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 183, 194.

²⁶ Crouch, *War and Ethics in the Ancient Near East: Military Violence in Light of Cosmology and History*, 30–32, 65–96.

becoming chaotic as a result of losing its hegemonic authority.”²⁷ There is a sense in which the small nation of Judah, thought of as part of the rebellious and chaotic periphery by the Assyrians, is jubilant over the creation of chaos because this entails the destruction of their oppressor.²⁸ This contrasts with many of the available Assyrian sources, which would never recognize that they were becoming the chaos that they consistently sought to defeat.

These contrasting positions on warfare can help us think about attitudes toward rebellion in the Hebrew Bible. The terminology of rebellion in the Hebrew Bible suggests that it is occasionally legitimate to rebel, thus creating chaos in the eyes of the ruling power. For a small and oppressed state, rebellion is necessary to bring about liberation from the larger state that is the overlord. Despite this representation of rebellion that contrasts with the imperial powers, there is also a sense in which the writers of the Hebrew Bible recognize that Israel wants to create order and become the center against which no one should rebel. The latter point is suggested by the predominant word that the authors of the Hebrew Bible employ to describe rebellion against Israel and Judah. They employ *פִּשְׁע*, a word with a distinct connection to criminal behavior, which will be discussed in chapter two. Similar to how Crouch discusses the idea of the Assyrian empire becoming chaotic and, in her view, being replaced by Judah,²⁹ the set of rebellion terms available to the biblical writers demonstrates that there is a sense that rebellion

²⁷ Ibid., 169. The book of Nahum does not argue, as Crouch believes it does, that Judah fills the role of the entity that creates order out of the chaos. The historical context demonstrates that the Babylonians entered the position of Hegemon rather than Judah. Further, Judah’s king does not play a role in the recompense against the Assyrian empire according to Nahum. Nahum focuses on the role of Yahweh in creating order. This is a further reason to question Crouch’s assumption that Judah fills the void. See Peter R. Bedford, “Assyria’s Demise as Recompense: A Note on Narratives of Resistance in Babylonia and Judah,” in *Revolt and Resistance in the Ancient Classical World and the Near East: in the Crucible of Empire*, eds. John J. Collins and J. G. Manning (Boston: Brill, 2016), 55–75, who also questions Crouch’s assumption that Judah fills the void to create order. Nevertheless, her discussion does highlight the contrasting ways that the Assyrians, as the imperial power, and Judah, as an oppressed state, discuss the issue of aggression in war. Crouch’s point, however, still demonstrates the varying ways that the oppressed state and the imperial power think about warfare, which helps us understand their approach to rebellion.

²⁸ It is not Judah alone who is jubilant over the creation of chaos, but also all of the other small nations that the Assyrians ruled (Nah 3:19).

²⁹ See footnote 27 above for a discussion of who fills the void created by the destruction of the Assyrians.

can bring freedom (יִשׁוּעַ). But once Israel or Judah holds the mantle of power, rebellion returns to a phenomenon that creates “chaos.”³⁰ In other words, rebellion is often sanctioned when it is the writer’s party that is rebelling, but no longer legitimate when a group ruled by his party is rebelling.

Studies Focused on Rebellion

One exception to the works we have surveyed is the 1977 article of Robert P. Carroll titled “Rebellion and Dissent in Ancient Israelite Society.”³¹ The article focuses on the wilderness period and looks at how the biblical representation of this period as one of what he calls rebellion speaks more generally to rebellion and dissent throughout Israelite history. He admits that it is hard to determine what historical period(s) the narrative derives from since he does not view the text as actual history. Deserts represent chaos and any community that borders on the desert is likely to experience the difficulty that such an environment can bring at numerous points throughout their existence. These hardships inevitably lead to various forms of political conflict as described in the wilderness stories.³² Carroll focuses on the fact that the wilderness stories represent the problem of political leadership in ancient Israelite society in general and as it relates to the priesthood.³³

Despite a focus on the wilderness period, Carroll does begin the article by discussing rebellion and dissent in more general terms. It is these comments that are pertinent to the discussion of attitudes toward rebellion in the Hebrew Bible. He frames his discussion by

³⁰ This becomes complicated in part due to the motivation behind many of the rebellions described with פִּשְׁעֵי, as we will see in the following chapters. Yahweh provides justification for some of these rebellions. This may be due to a difference in perspective. From the human side there is some negativity as your side loses power, but that does not change the fact that Yahweh is still controlling the political order.

³¹ Robert P. Carroll, “Rebellion and Dissent in Ancient Israelite Society,” *ZAW* 89 (1977): 176–204.

³² He does, however, suggest that the Elijah-Elisha narratives provide a possible background for some of the wilderness traditions. *Ibid.*, 196.

³³ *Ibid.*, 191–92.

thinking about how societies construct their view of reality. He says they do so “in such a way that their world may be viewed as orderly. Part of this orderly structure is the classification of elements into good and bad, clean and unclean, legitimate and illegitimate, inclusion and exclusion.”³⁴ When this statement is considered in terms of the title of his article, “Rebellion and Dissent in Ancient Israelite Society,” the reader is led to place rebellion and dissent into one of these categories. He proceeds to state that the Hebrew Bible represents one party’s position on these ideas because it preserves “the record of these struggles presented by one particular party which represented what came to be regarded as the orthodoxy of post-exilic Judaism.”³⁵ He does note the presence of dissenting groups in ancient Israel and that there must have been alternative positions, but his position suggests that these views were suppressed and written out of the historical record. Carroll’s statement implies that the Hebrew Bible is unified in its position on rebellion as falling into the illegitimate category. He is correct to note that many dissident movements in ancient Israel are denounced within the Hebrew Bible, but even from the dominant party’s perspective, rebellion is a far more ambiguous concept than he allows. It does not fall neatly into either the legitimate or the illegitimate category. There is a sense in the Hebrew Bible that rebellion can be regenerative. While the texts may not state this directly, the sentiment is present, as we will see. As mentioned above, the biblical writers must at times consider rebellion legitimate and regenerative because they understand that rebellion can allow a once subordinate nation to gain or regain power. These writers also recognize that rebellion can serve to remove or punish a wayward monarch.

The primary defense Carroll gives for his position centers on a couple of words. He notes

³⁴ Ibid., 176.

³⁵ Ibid., 177.

that a primary term for political rebellion is **פִּשַׁע**, which is a word that “came to mean sin.”³⁶ He also focuses on the word **מַרְדָּה** as furthering this point. He proceeds to state that the “definition of revolt as sin applied to political acts as well as to religious actions.”³⁷ There is no doubt that in some cases this is true. However, rebellion is a far more complex concept than what he states. While he is correct to note that the word **פִּשַׁע** connects rebellion and criminal behavior, there are additional words that appear to describe episodes of rebellion that suggest the opposite. Some contexts suggest that throwing off the yoke of a superior party or removing a king can be a legitimate action. One such word that this work will discuss is **יָשַׁע**, “to save.” Furthermore, in some cases when the verb **פִּשַׁע** describes a rebellion, the rebellion is legitimate because God ordains it.³⁸ The diverse set of terms employed in the Hebrew Bible to discuss rebellion suggests that the ancient writers struggled with the ambiguity of rebellion and that it did not fit neatly into one of Carroll’s categories. While societies may try to construct their view of reality to create an orderly world, their texts often betray the difficulty with this.

Works on Rebellion in the Ancient Near East

There have been a couple of recent books on rebellion in the ancient world that are important to mention. These works focus on rebellion in a more general and wide-ranging sense. The first is a work edited by Seth Richardson entitled, *Rebellions and Peripheries in the Cuneiform World*. The preface by Eva von Dassow and the introductory article by Richardson both highlight the differing perspectives involved in all episodes of rebellion but also note that “revolt, resistance,

³⁶ Ibid., 181.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ This is the case in 1 Kgs 11–12 as Israel rebels against Judah.

and dissent” do not occupy a prominent place in Mesopotamian historiography.³⁹ The primary reason that these phenomena do not occupy a prominent place in ancient historiography is the nature of the extant sources. As Richardson and von Dassow discuss, most ancient texts emanate from the ruling elites of the imperial powers. These Mesopotamian sources are consistent in their representation of all historical rebellions as failures.⁴⁰ This, however, is not the case for Israel and Judah which often occupied a subordinate position within the international situation of the ancient Near East. These often-subdued states complicate the representation of rebellion. Their writings allow us insight into rebellion as presented by states that were dominated and oppressed by the imperial powers.

The more recent work edited by John J. Collins and Joseph G. Manning entitled *Revolt and Resistance in the Ancient Classical World and the Near East*⁴¹ continues this discussion. The most important article to mention at this point is by Eckart Frahm, who highlights the complications societies face in discussing rebellion. Frahm analyzes how a variety of Neo-Assyrian sources discuss the various types of revolts in order to gain an understanding of the discourse pertaining to revolts in the Neo-Assyrian empire. He notes what many who discuss rebellion in the Mesopotamian world miss. As he analyzes the attitude toward revolts in the myths and epics of Mesopotamia, he states that the depiction of rebellion in these sources is not entirely condemnatory. This contrasts markedly with the depiction of rebellion within the Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions. He further believes that this depiction of revolt “cannot have failed

³⁹ Eva von Dassow, “Preface to *Rebellions and Peripheries in the Cuneiform World*,” in *Rebellions and Peripheries in the Cuneiform World*, ed. Seth Richardson, AOS 91 (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2010), ix. Within this volume, see also Seth Richardson, “Introduction: The Fields of Rebellion and Periphery,” xvii.

⁴⁰ While most Mesopotamian sources, especially the royal inscriptions, are consistent in their representation of historical rebellions as illegitimate, there are myths which appear to present an alternate position. See the discussion in the following paragraphs for more on this.

⁴¹ John J. Collins and J. G. Manning eds., *Revolt and Resistance in the Ancient Classical World and the Near East: in the Crucible of Empire* (Boston: Brill, 2016).

to have an impact on how their audiences, including Neo-Assyrian ones, thought about revolts in general.”⁴² The primary example he cites is the rebellion of the younger gods within *Enuma Elish*. Rebellions such as this are “presented by the texts as necessary steps towards higher forms of civilization—they create order, not chaos.”⁴³ While the impact of this and other similar texts on Mesopotamian society is nearly impossible to gauge, Frahm indeed highlights the ambiguity of rebellion and shows how this could be the case—albeit to a far lesser extent—even in a society which almost universally demonized rebellion. If it is possible to argue this for the Neo-Assyrian world, it would be even more so for the societies of Israel and Judah who viewed rebellion as the primary means by which they could attain freedom and gain power.

This survey has gathered the types of scholarly works that relate or could relate to rebellion. What stands out in the first set of works discussed, those of Bodner, Na’aman, and de Jong, is the focus on historical or narrative issues rather than a focus on overall attitudes toward rebellion or any thoughts on the variety of terms employed within the Hebrew Bible to discuss the topic. In the two examples of Niditch and Crouch, the works do not directly address rebellion but the related topic of warfare.⁴⁴ As for the works edited by Richardson and by Collins, these

⁴² Eckart Frahm, “Revolts in the Neo-Assyrian Empire: A Preliminary Discourse Analysis,” in *Revolt and Resistance in the Ancient Classical World and the Near East: in the Crucible of Empire*. eds. John J. Collins and J. G. Manning (Boston: Brill, 2016), 79. Frahm does not explicitly cite evidence for gauging the impact of these texts, but notes earlier in the work (76–77) that these texts would have been known and heard by many in society. In doing so, he must assume that since many in society knew these texts, the positive position on rebellion presented in them would have impacted the way that the readers/hearers would have viewed rebellion.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 79. Another place in the Neo-Assyrian texts that condones rebellion is the succession treaty of Esarhaddon. This text legitimizes a rebellion against any person who usurps the throne from Assurbanipal. The text states, “if either a bearded (courtier) or a eunuch puts Assurbanipal, the great crown prince designate, to death, and takes over the kingship of Assyria, you shall not make common cause with him and become his servant but shall break away and be hostile (to him), alienate all lands from him, instigate a rebellion (*sihu*) against him . . .” See lines 237–48 in the Succession treaty of Esarhaddon. Simo Parpola and Kazuko Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths*, SAA II (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1988), 38. This comment legitimizes rebellion in a very specific circumstance. The word choice is important to note. The text employs a descriptive term for rebellion (*sihu*) against one who usurps Assurbanipal’s throne rather than a word that describes a rebel as a “criminal” (*hātu*) or an evil person as is often the case in the Neo-Assyrian texts. For more on these terms see chapter five below.

⁴⁴ There are of course additional works on the topic of war in the Hebrew Bible and these texts also sparingly mention rebellion. See P. C. Craige, *The Problem of War in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981); T.R. Hobbs, *A Time for War: A Study of Warfare in the Old Testament*, OTS 3 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier,

focus more generally on rebellion also in various settings, but do not focus exclusively on the Hebrew Bible. Carroll's study does address rebellion in a more general sense, but as noted above, the presentation of rebellion among the writers of the Hebrew Bible is far more complex than what he suggests.

A look at works like these demonstrates why there is a need for a study that will analyze the phenomenon of rebellion within the Bible with a more inclusive lens. Rebellion, a universal societal experience, has been a problem for every civilization. Analyzing the variety of ways in which these ancient sources discuss rebellion will shed light on how some in ancient Israelite society compare with others throughout history. A more comprehensive analysis that goes beyond one or two episodes of rebellion will show the diversity and struggle encountered by the biblical writers in their discussions of rebellion and how they engaged in a form of political thought to address this topic.

Approach and Definition

This dissertation takes a descriptive approach to the study of rebellion. It outlines and defines the terminological system the biblical writers employ for rebellion and uses this as the foundation to understand attitudes toward rebellion within the Hebrew Bible. Thus, the focus will be on the lexicon of rebellion within the Hebrew Bible. Despite this focus, the present dissertation is not a series of word studies akin to what one would find in a theological lexicon. It does not seek to determine the meanings of the words discussed in all of their contexts or even the basic meaning of the words analyzed below if the latter is judged irrelevant to rebellion. Rather, the focus will be on understanding the meaning of these words and phrases in their capacity to describe a

1989); Gerhard von Rad, *Der heilige Krieg im alten Israel* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1952); Patrick D. Miller, Jr., *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973); Rudolf Smend, *Jahwekrieg und Stämmebund: Erwägungen zur ältesten Geschichte Israels* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963); Millard C. Lind, *Yahweh is a Warrior: The Theology of Warfare in Ancient Israel* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980); Sa-Moon Kang, *Divine War in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East*, BZAW 177 (New York: De Gruyter, 1989).

rebellion both in themselves and in relation to one another. Establishing the relationships between these rebellion terms will provide insight into a writer's reasoning behind employing a particular term, which will enlighten the writer's view of the rebellion. It will also show how these interrelated terms form a set or system providing a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of rebellion than has been previously provided.

The Definition of Rebellion

As a starting point, this dissertation will use the tools and definitions of modern political and social scientists. We are studying the political act of rebellion, and so it is these definitions that are appropriate. A definition provides the control for choosing what ancient sources, especially texts, to work with. In modern parlance, many use the word "rebel" or even "rebellion" to refer to any act of disobedience. Some dictionaries reflect this generic usage. The Merriam-Webster dictionary records one definition of rebellion as "opposition to one in authority."⁴⁵ When thinking in political terms and trying to categorize political phenomena, a definition such as this is inadequate because it lacks specificity. It allows for no differences among rebellion, disobedience, coup d'état, rioting, protesting, or a disagreement. Furthermore, this definition does not help to distinguish among various political actions because it is not focused exclusively on political events. This dissertation studies the political act of rebellion.⁴⁶

Moreover, scholarly work needs a definition that is specific enough to allow the project to focus on a set of situations that can be organized according to their commonalities yet differentiated from similar actions. The definition must also be attentive to the primary source data. The definition cannot be so specific that it prevents comparison with phenomena from other

⁴⁵ "Rebellion," Merriam-Webster.com, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rebellion. Accessed 30 Jan. 2019.

⁴⁶ For a helpful discussion of the idea of politics as it relates to ancient Israel see Hamilton, *A Kingdom for a Stage*, 5. Hamilton notes that politics refers first to the "operations of the state and its functionaries as they carry on the administration of the polities of ancient Israel and Judah." Thus, a rebellion is political if it involves the rejection and overthrow of the "functionaries" of the state and/or of the state itself.

times and places. Diana Russell's definition of rebellion provides a good starting point as it helps scholars think about various political events as part of a specific phenomenon known in the modern world and also in the ancient world.⁴⁷ Russell defines rebellion as "a form of violent power struggle in which the overthrow of the regime is threatened by means that include violence."⁴⁸ Despite providing a solid foundation for defining rebellion by highlighting its core features, this definition has two elements that deserve attention. First, the repetition of the word violent creates confusion. Second, by stating that it is a violent power struggle, the definition appears to imply that a rebellion always includes violence. The point that should be stressed, however, is that the subordinate group will threaten violence if the ruling party will not relinquish its position. Most rebellions involve violence, because it is unlikely that a ruling party will relinquish their power to a subordinate group at the mere threat of violence. This scenario is, however, possible.⁴⁹ Rebellion is, therefore, better defined by Jack Goldstone as an "act by a group or individual that refuses to recognize, or seeks to overturn, the authority of the existing government."⁵⁰

There are a number of features to highlight regarding this definition as it concerns the present work. The action involved in the rebellion will recognizably take many forms and the

⁴⁷ As the following chapters will demonstrate, there is evidence from the Hebrew Bible that ancient Israelite society did think of the various episodes discussed below as part of a larger phenomenon.

⁴⁸ Diana Russell, *Rebellion, Revolution and Armed Force* (New York: Academic Press, 1974), 6. See also Erich Weede and Edward N. Muller, "Rebellion, Violence and Revolution: A Rational Choice Perspective," *JPR* 35 (1998): 44. Weede and Muller also discuss the definition of Russell for their work.

⁴⁹ The most famous example of this is the Glorious Revolution of 1688 when James II fled from the rebels and no violence ensued in the actual rebellion. As some have discussed, the entire revolution may have involved violence, but in the moment of the overthrow no violence ensued. This is why this revolution has often been referred to as bloodless. See Steven Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 5, 7, 21. See also Stuart E. Prall, *The Bloodless Revolution: England, 1688* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), vii.

⁵⁰ Jack A. Goldstone, *Revolutions: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 8. Another possibility would be to modify Russell's definition and define rebellion as follows: a form of power struggle in which the overthrow of the regime is threatened by means that include violence. It is, however, worth discussing both definitions to highlight the main features of rebellion that these two definitions share.

degree of violence, if it exists, will vary. The point is that rebellion progresses beyond disagreement or disobedience and involves some action aimed at the rejection or replacement of the present political authority with the group being ruled. This definition entails the presence of at least two parties.⁵¹ The first group, the ruling faction, has established authority over a second group and understands that authority to be legitimate. The subdued group has been put into a position of subjugation from which it desires to be free. The relationship between the two parties has typically been established in a formal manner. In cases of domestic rebellion, the ruling administration has established its authority over the people by means of force and/or custom. This authority, in the case of governments in the ancient Near East, was normally a king. The king's rule was lawful because of his enthronement and often because of divine legitimation.⁵² In cases of imperial rebellion, the relationship was often imposed on the subdued group by means of an enforced treaty. When present, the ruling power sets regulations in this treaty that the subjugated group is required to obey. Rebellion occurs when the subjected group chooses to break the treaty, thereby refusing to recognize foreign rule.⁵³

Methodological and Other Challenges

The application of modern terminology to the study of ancient events naturally raises questions, and cautions are necessary. Employing a modern definition of rebellion does not imply that this is the precise definition that the ancient Near Eastern writers are working with. The biblical

⁵¹ There are cases where a rebellion involves more than two groups. In some cases, outside parties will intervene and aid a subject group in a rebellion or even instigate a rebellion. Chapter four will discuss some cases of rebellion involving more than two groups.

⁵² See 2 Sam 7 and Ps 2 which both demonstrate that the king is legitimate due to divine command. For more on the legitimation of kings in the Bible and ancient world see Dale Launderville, *Piety and Politics: The Dynamics of Royal Authority in Homeric Greece, Biblical Israel, and Old Babylonian Mesopotamia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003).

⁵³ In this type of scenario there may be no violence that accompanies this initial decision and violence will only ensue when the ruling party punishes or attacks the subordinate party for their choice to rebel. Additionally, as the statement in this section implies, a treaty will not always be involved. In these cases, the subjugation is often evident by the dissolution of the subjugated state by the imperial power, which replaces that state with other administrative units, like provinces.

writers did not often provide definitions for various concepts nor did they operate within an Aristotelian framework in which they actively attempted to categorize various phenomena by writing treatises on them.⁵⁴ As this dissertation will make clear, however, there is evidence that they did think in categories. Modern definitions can help us identify these categories and make the ideas of an ancient culture intelligible to a modern reader. We should therefore not eschew employing modern definitions to the study of ancient events. The key is to employ a definition that will aid in finding the dialectic between the ancient and modern terms along with a definition that will allow us to appreciate the similarities and differences between societies, be it ancient or modern. Goldstone's definition, in agreement with Russell's, is fitting because it defines a recognizable political act focusing on a forced change to the political authority through either renunciation or overthrow. The definition is applicable to the study of any political situation involving a ruler regardless of the beliefs of the society or the structure of the government.

A second and related caution when applying modern terms to ancient events is the charge of anachronism. Admittedly, this is impossible to avoid entirely. There is never a one-to-one correspondence between events in the modern world and those in the ancient world. Rebellion is a modern overarching category into which we can place a number of different events, such as coups, secessions, and revolts. The Hebrew Bible never states that all of the events discussed in this dissertation are part of the overarching category of rebellion. This is a necessary caveat to make. There might be a sense that the present work imposes a framework or system on these texts that the writers do not explicitly mention. However, the ancient sources do show

⁵⁴ There is evidence that some biblical writers engage in systematic reflection of various concepts and even create a "technical vocabulary" to discuss them. For an example of this see Peter Machinist, "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. Ziony Zevit, Seymour Gitin, and Michael Sokoloff (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 159–75. See page 172 for a discussion of the emergence of a technical vocabulary in Qohelet.

connections among many of the events and words analyzed in this work. These events also involve the attempt to replace a current ruler and therefore fit under the definition quoted above. Moreover, the ancient writers knowingly distinguish among the events that they write about, which suggests that they are cognizant of different categories. This justifies examining a set of interrelated terms employed for describing political actions and an analysis that focuses on both the similarities and the differences among them. This approach allows the ancient sources to speak for themselves, and yet explains them using definitions and terms familiar to modern readers.

A final point of caution regarding the employment of a modern definition is to note the potential shortcomings of every definition. No matter how specific the definition is, debate will remain over whether certain actions fit under a particular definition. There are additional forms of collective action that are similar to rebellion and often involve some of the same actions or goals. One such action is protesting. Protest and rebellion are two forms of collective action that have similarities, and the scale from one to the other is fluid. Further, a protest often transforms into a rebellion, or might even have the goal of pushing others to rebel, which creates complications in classifying certain actions. This is an issue that will arise prominently in chapter six, which will discuss the actions of the Israelites in the wilderness. Many scholars generically refer to the behavior of the Israelites in the wilderness as rebellions despite these actions and the words describing them not fitting under the definition quoted above.⁵⁵ Protesting can be defined as “public group activity utilizing confrontation politics to apply stress to specific targets for the purpose of affecting public policy.”⁵⁶ The main difference between a protest and a rebellion is

⁵⁵ See the discussion in chapter six, specifically footnote 476, for examples of scholars who do this.

⁵⁶ Herbert M. Kritzer, “Political Protest and Political Violence: A Nonrecursive Causal Model,” *Social Forces* 55 (1977): 630. For a more recent and similar definition of protest see Sabine C. Carey, *Protest, Repression and Political Regimes: An Empirical Analysis of Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 13. Carey states that protest is “disruptive collective action that is aimed at institutions, elites, authorities, or other

that protestors do not reject the authority of the leaders even if they hope to weaken or undermine it. Rather, they apply pressure to the leaders to make changes. The biblical authors recognize distinctions between these two forms of collective action, and make that clear, as we will see, by their employment of a different set of terms to describe these similar yet distinct phenomena.

Additional methodological challenges exist in relation to historical and source issues. As we begin to study the rebellion terms of the Hebrew Bible and to determine what these terms suggest about the various attitudes toward the topic, we need to determine precisely whose attitudes and terms are in focus. Is the focus on attitudes toward rebellion in the Hebrew Bible or in ancient Israel? Debate exists over the extent to which these two are the same. While I contend that there is a significant amount of overlap between the attitudes toward rebellion among the writers of the Hebrew Bible and those in ancient Israel, it is a point that is difficult to prove. We therefore need to exercise caution in regard to what we can state definitively. Nevertheless, clarifying the type of historical study this dissertation undertakes will shed light on the relationship between attitudes in the Hebrew Bible and those present in ancient Israel.

It is imperative to recognize that this is a study in the history of ideas. The attitudes and the struggles in these texts reflect the attitudes of ancient people. In a discussion of early Babylonian history, Piotr Steinkeller notes, “The concepts and categories of a particular culture shape the ways in which its members perceive and interpret whatever happens in their time.”⁵⁷

While they may not always be identical, there is a connection between what happens in history

groups on behalf of the collective goals of the actors or of those they claim to represent.” The one problem with this definition is that if the goal is to replace the current authority it is difficult to distinguish between rebellion and protest and this is why the definition cited above is more appropriate as it focuses on policy. These comments do raise the issue of the possible fluid scale between a protest and a rebellion. For more on the definition of protest see table 2.1 in Karl-Dieter Opp, *Theories of Political Protest and Social Movements: A Multidisciplinary Introduction, Critique, and Synthesis* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 35.

⁵⁷ Piotr Steinkeller, *History, Texts and Art in Early Babylonia: Three Essays*, Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Records 15 (Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), 179.

and what people write about these events. What people write, regardless of genre, reveals their attitude and understanding of various phenomena commonplace in their society. Steinkeller is building upon the work of John Elsner, who touches on this last point about how texts reveal the existence of common assumptions within a society:

What matters about any particular version of history is that it be meaningful to the collective subjectivities and self-identities of the specific group it addresses. In other words, we are not concerned with “real facts” or even a coherent methodology, but rather with the consensus of assumptions and prejudices shared by the historian... and his audience ... It is this consensus of shared assumptions—a shared subjectivity in response to the world out there—that forms the frame within which explanations of monuments or works will compete and, it is hoped, convince.⁵⁸

The present study will follow these ideas as it seeks to determine perceptions of rebellion within the Hebrew Bible and what these suggest about the various attitudes and assumptions toward rebellion that these writers share with their audiences. Insofar as there is a connection between the writers and their society regarding shared assumptions, this study also has implications for understanding attitudes toward rebellion in ancient Israel.

Given that the Hebrew Bible is the primary source for our historical analysis and that there is disagreement on the dates and compositional history of this Bible, our historical analysis begins synchronically: describing the attitudes toward rebellion that the biblical writers all together present. The disagreement on biblical dates and composition centers first on the nature of the sources and whether these texts originate in the monarchic period, the exilic period, or the Persian period and second on the extent to which these texts have been reworked by later editors. Therefore, even if we can suggest that the biblical writers and their respective groups share assumptions about the concept of rebellion and its function in their society, we cannot always prove exactly when these attitudes circulated. Thus, we cannot rest alone with a synchronic analysis of the biblical materials. We must accompany it diachronically: with a need to recognize

⁵⁸ John Elsner, “From the Pyramids to Pausanias and Piglet: Monuments, Travel and Writing,” in *Art and Text in Ancient Greek Culture*, ed. S. Goldhill and R. Osborne (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 226.

possible sources and/or redactional layers in some of the texts reviewed below if we are going to determine when a particular word or attitude circulated.

Indeed, despite the debate over the origin of sources or redactional layers, we can make a couple of claims related to the historical situation from which these texts derive. First, we can claim that these texts originate with a group of people who were often subject to an imperial power. In the Iron II period, the Israelites were first subject to the Assyrians, followed by the Egyptians and Babylonians, and later they became subject to the Persians. The book of Exodus also narrates a story in which the Israelites were subject to the Egyptians in a much earlier period of their history. We can, therefore, state that the attitudes expressed toward imperial rebellion in these texts are coming from individuals who were part of a state subject to an imperial power for much of its history. Based on the similar socio-political contexts from which these texts derive, we can suggest that at least some of the attitudes toward rebellion in the Hebrew Bible would have been similar to those of some in ancient Israel. These are individuals struggling with the rule of an imperial power, and while there will be different views regarding, for example, the Assyrians and Persians,⁵⁹ this is one similarity that we must keep in mind.

Second, it is important to note that Israel's domestic situation varied. The writers discuss a time in which Israel had no king other than God (cf. Judges and the early part of 1 Samuel). Additionally, after the fall of Jerusalem in 586, and in the Persian period, they had no domestic king. Nevertheless, for much of their history the Israelites lived under the rule of a monarch. The texts on kingship in the Hebrew Bible reflect this diversity. Some texts highlight the positive aspects of kingship (e.g. 2 Sam 7, Ps 2), while others warn of the dangers of kingship (e.g. Deut 17:14-20; 1 Sam 8, 12) and even suggest that a king will lead to their demise (2 Kgs 21:10-15).

⁵⁹ The biblical view of Cyrus, a Persian king, is more positive than that of the Assyrians kings. It follows that the view of rebellion for those writing these texts would have been different. Similar differences will occur with discussions of rebellion under Babylonian rule. Further, this also depends on perspective. Some individuals living under Assyrian rule had a positive, or at least conciliatory, view of the Assyrians, as appears to be the case with Manasseh, while others had a negative view of the Assyrians.

In light of these divergent historical situations and views of kingship, we should expect different positions on rebellion against a local king depending on the date of a text. The view will depend on the historical context and on the behavior of an individual king. As we discuss the various attitudes toward rebellion, we must recognize that these different historical situations would have had an impact on a writer's view of a rebellion.

Outline of the Dissertation

The preceding discussion has touched on the main arguments and focus of this work and how it fits into discussions of rebellion among scholars of the Hebrew Bible. Each chapter is organized around a set of key words or phrases that describe rebellion. The second chapter lays the foundation for the work by focusing on the three words that describe the three main types of rebellions discussed within the Hebrew Bible. These words are מרד, פשע and קשר. מרד overwhelmingly describes imperial rebellion, while פשע focuses on more localized regional rebellion, and, finally, קשר predominantly indicates a coup within a domestic context.

In chapter three, we move to discuss phrases that appear, at times, to be synonyms of the three preceding words. This, however, is not the case. These phrases all employ the word יד, “hand” in conjunction with a verb of movement. The first is רום יד ב, “to raise a hand against,” the second is נשא יד ב, “to lift a hand against,” and the third is שלח יד ב, “to send a hand against.” All three phrases have a meaning connected to a defiant or violent act and the writers employ these phrases to record failed rebellions.

In chapter four, the dissertation examines words for salvation (ישע and נצל) that are used to describe select rebellions. The writers employ these unequivocally positive terms when it is their party rebelling against a regional foreign ruler. They use these terms rather than the rebellion terms noted above to focus the rebellions on the actions of Yahweh and the freedom from oppression.

By way of contrast, chapter five analyzes words often connected with “sin,” such as חטא, which can also describe select episodes of rebellion. The writers employ the word חטא in a rebellion story in the context of a confession. They do so to engage the perspective of the ruler and to further demonstrate how failed rebels attempt to avoid punishment for a previous rebellion. This chapter also addresses several related terms—מרה, סרר, מעל—that many translate as “to rebel.” However, these terms do not explicitly indicate political rebellion.

Finally, in chapter six, this dissertation looks at various words and phrases that record social actions that have often been described as rebellions but do not reach that level. Words and phrases such as לון על, “to grumble against,” ריב עם, “to quarrel with,” קהל על, “to assemble against,” and רבר ב, “to speak against” more accurately depict an action akin to a modern protest. These phrases are concentrated in the biblical wilderness texts and are important to discuss because a number of scholars refer to the events described with these phrases as episodes of rebellion. Distinguishing these related events from episodes of rebellion will help to establish that the writers of the Hebrew Bible do have a defined set of terms, a terminological system, in place to describe rebellion along with other social and political phenomena occurring in their world.

An investigation of the extant rebellion terms within the Hebrew Bible and the relationships among them reveals three general features. First, it reveals the presence of a network of interrelated terms, what we are calling a terminological system, that provides the writers with specific words to describe different types of rebellions. While the consistent usage of these terms to depict a specific type of rebellion does appear to break down in a couple of texts (e.g., 2 Chron 13:6), the biblical writers are intentional in their use of words as they

describe rebellion and the related action of protesting.⁶⁰ Second, this set of terms betrays the biblical writers' recognition of a larger, overall category of rebellion. Significantly, it is a diverse set of terms. Some of the terms are unequivocally positive, while some suggest illegitimacy. This diversity highlights the third general feature that a study of the rebellion terms within the Hebrew Bible can reveal, namely, that the terms reflect a certain ambivalence in the way our biblical authors look at rebellion. Indeed, they show that while the writers are often uncomfortable with rebellion, they recognize its legitimacy in many cases and show how it can serve a positive function for society.

⁶⁰ This is not to suggest that these writers did not have additional methods by which they could discuss a rebellion or that this is a closed system. It is possible that a text such as Chronicles is working with a slightly different system and we should recognize this possibility. We will return to this issue in the conclusion.

CHAPTER 2

THE FOUNDATION OF THE SYSTEM: SPECIFIC REBELLION TERMS: מִרְדַּ, פִּשְׁעַ, קִשְׁרַ

In order to gain a proper understanding of the phenomenon of rebellion in the Bible, we must begin by analyzing these words and phrases in detail, since the choice of a particular Hebrew verb often betrays the attitude of a writer towards the event portrayed. In the present chapter, I argue that various types of rebellions are distinguished in the Hebrew Bible primarily by means of three words מִרְדַּ, פִּשְׁעַ and קִשְׁרַ.⁶¹ Moreover, as I will show, when the biblical writers use these terms in the context of political rebellion, they are doing so in an annalistic or descriptive way,⁶² i.e., not to make a moral judgment on the legitimacy or the illegitimacy of political rebellion, but rather to narrate a specific action. This is the case even though two of these words—מִרְדַּ and פִּשְׁעַ—have a connection to sinful or criminal activity in other contexts.⁶³

The three words just mentioned—מִרְדַּ, פִּשְׁעַ and קִשְׁרַ—are the most informative and widespread Hebrew words for understanding political rebellion.⁶⁴ These words form a foundation on which we can construct the basic set of terms, or system, for discussing rebellion in the Bible, and each one refers to a distinct type of rebellion, albeit with a few exceptions. These are the

⁶¹ It is possible this system was more comprehensive than we can say. In Ezra 4:19 the word מִרְדַּ, “revolt/sedition” occurs and it appears alongside the triconsonantal root מִרְדַּ. Since this is the only time the word appears, we cannot say with certainty if it was regarded as a different type of action. Some suggest that the term may have a Persian etymology and mean a breach of peace. Ernst Vogt, ed., *A Lexicon of Biblical Aramaic Clarified by Ancient Documents: Translated and Revised by J. A. Fitzmyer* (Roma: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2011), 55. See also the discussion in Thomas Willi, “Die Freiheit Israels. Philologische Notizen zu den Wurzeln *ḥpš*, ‘zb und *drr*,” in *Beiträge zur alttestamentlichen Theologie: Festschrift W. Zimmerli zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. H. Donner, R. Hanhart and R. Smend (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 531–46. Willi suggests that the term should be taken from the triconsonantal root מִרְדַּ meaning to move freely. It, therefore, represents a freedom movement similar to that expressed by מִרְדַּ.

⁶² This is a comment strictly about rebellion against earthly kings. Rebellion against Yahweh is always considered wrong, as the following analysis will demonstrate.

⁶³ This begins to draw our attention to the inherent ambiguity or tension that exists within every episode of rebellion, as discussed in the previous chapter. The ambiguity stems largely from the presence of two opposing sides in a rebellion, the one rebelling and the one attempting to suppress the rebellion. Each side believes they are in the right.

⁶⁴ מִרְדַּ occurs sixteen times to describe a rebellion, while קִשְׁרַ narrates twenty six rebellions. The word itself is often repeated in these texts with the nominal form קִשְׁרַ following the verbal form. פִּשְׁעַ occurs eight times to narrate a rebellion.

only three words that are precisely employed by biblical writers to describe a specific type of political rebellion. As noted in the previous chapter, the first, **מָרַד**, deals with an international or imperial situation (e.g., 2 Kgs 18:7); the second, **פָּשַׁע**, is employed for regional situations (e.g., 2 Kgs 3:5), and the third, **קָשָׁר**, describes a domestic situation of political rebellion (e.g., 2 Kgs 21:23).⁶⁵

This chapter addresses the general meaning of the three terms listed above, but focuses primarily on the contextual: on the way they are used to describe particular cases of political rebellion. It is worth noting here that the word “rebellion” within the English language is somewhat generic and can apply to any context involving the overthrow of the political authority. In light of this, to translate a Hebrew word as “rebel” often creates ambiguity. For example, the English word “rebellion” does not clarify whether the aggressor acted against an imperial power or the king of a smaller sate, but the Hebrew words analyzed in this chapter typically do. The following analysis will determine the target of these words when they are used as verbs, along with the social locations in which the words appear when discussing rebellion. Further, by determining the specific nuances of the events described in the Hebrew Bible and investigating how the various terms for rebellion are connected, this chapter provides the first opportunity to discuss whether there existed a broader, overarching category of rebellion in ancient Israel. Finally, the analysis in this chapter allows us to compare the way the biblical

⁶⁵ This threefold breakdown of terms corresponds in many ways to the presentation of rebellion in the Assyrian sources. Karen Radner has outlined the three types of rebellions she sees in the Assyrian sources. She suggests there are independence movements by vassal rulers, which correspond to secession attempts by formerly independent territories, as we discuss in relation to biblical texts. Second, Radner says there are “regional insurgencies” or, as she titles the section, “revolting against a false king.” This corresponds to what we describe below as rebellion on the regional level, or regional secession. Finally, there are succession or dynastic wars or what we would call domestic rebellions or coups, where individuals seek to kill and replace the king. See Karen Radner, “Revolts in the Assyrian Empire: Succession Wars, Rebellions against a False King, and Independence Movements,” in *Revolt and Resistance in the Ancient Classical World and the Near East: in the Crucible of Empire*, ed. John J. Collins and J. G. Manning, CHANE 85 (Boston: Brill, 2016), 41–54. Frahm also upholds the levels of rebellion outlined by Radner. He says, “My point of departure is Radner’s distinction among three types of revolts, or rebellions, that periodically rent the fabric of the Neo-Assyrian state: . . . I find this typological analysis convincing and helpful.” See Frahm, “Revolts in the Neo-Assyrian Empire: A Preliminary Discourse Analysis,” 76.

writers viewed political rebellion against various authority figures—namely, a king, an overlord, or God.

מרד – Rebellion against the Imperial Power

I begin by analyzing words with the triconsonantal root מרד. This includes מָרַד as well as the Aramaic מְרַד and מְרָד found in Ezra. The root appears thirty times, twenty-five of them occurring as a verb in the *qal*.⁶⁶ The word is found distributed throughout all texts and genres of the Hebrew Bible and in texts considered both early and late.⁶⁷ It appears twice in the Pentateuch, in Gen 14:4 and Num 14:9, and occurs throughout the Deuteronomistic History, appearing six times in Josh 22, once in 1 Sam 20:30, and four times in 2 Kings (2 Kgs 18:7, 20; 24:1, 20). It also appears in the major prophetic books of Isaiah (Isa 36:5), Jeremiah (Jer 52:3), and four times in Ezekiel (Ezek 2:3; 17:15; 20:38). It is found in late texts such as Dan 9:9, Ezra 4:12, 15, 19, and Neh 2:19; 6:6; and 9:26. It also occurs twice in 2 Chronicles (2 Chron 13:6; 36:3).

The word, when appearing as a verb, has two different nuances, depending on whether the one rebelled against is an earthly king or Yahweh/God. The usages, however, are connected, especially in Ezekiel. We will explore these usages shortly. For the moment, let us notice that in twelve instances the object,⁶⁸ or implied target of מרד is an earthly king and eleven times it is Yahweh. It is almost always followed by either the preposition כּ or less often עַל, indicating that the rebel acts “against” or to the detriment of a superior. There are only two examples where the object of the verb/preposition is not Yahweh or an earthly king (Josh 22:19 and Job 24:13). One

⁶⁶ This triconsonantal root also appears in a personal name in 1 Chron 4:17–18.

⁶⁷ The issue of dating biblical texts is complicated, but texts generally considered to have been written earlier include the Deuteronomistic History, and texts considered later include the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel, and Chronicles.

⁶⁸ It is worth noting that in all cases מרד does not take an accusative object. Rather it takes an oblique object marked by the preposition כּ. In the following discussion I will at times use object with מרד recognizing that this is not an accusative object.

of those examples, Josh 22:19, contains some text-critical issues, and we will discuss it below. That leaves us with Job 24:13 as the only certain case where the object is not either God or a king;⁶⁹ here the rebellion is not against God or a king but against light. In this case, light must stand for “good,” which generally stands on the side of God. This example, therefore, falls within the context of rebelling against Yahweh.

In what follows, we divide the discussion of מרד into two main parts, corresponding to rebellion against an earthly king or empire, on the one hand, and rebellion against Yahweh, on the other.⁷⁰

Part 1- Rebellion against Human Kings and Their Empires

When the target of מרד is an earthly king, the word has the basic sense of a subordinate party attempting to throw off the yoke of a superior party for the purpose of gaining political independence.⁷¹ The breaking of a treaty or oath, whether specifically mentioned or not, is in the background in almost all of these cases. Historically, the subordinate party carried out such a rebellion by means of withholding tribute or forming alliances with other potential rebels or larger independent states. Hezekiah, for example, is said to have rebelled (מרד) against Sennacherib by withholding tribute and forming an alliance with the Egyptians.⁷² As a response

⁶⁹ See below for a discussion of this passage and the text critical issues involved.

⁷⁰ It is important to break down the discussion of מרד into these two sections, because this word is employed with Yahweh as the object in political situations as well as in situations dealing with general wrongdoing. This is not as clear with the other two words treated in this chapter.

⁷¹ For examples see, Gen 14:4; 2 Kgs 18:7, 20; 24:1, 20; Isa 36:5; Jer 52:3; 2; Ezek 17:15; Chron 36:13. In some cases, מרד does not narrate the attempt of a subordinate party to break with the superior party, but rather an accusation of such an act (Neh 2:19; 6:6). The root also appears in Ezra to describe a city that has attempted to sever its relationship with a subordinate party (Ezra 4:12, 15, 19).

⁷² In Isa 30:1–31:19 the Judahites are criticized for going to Egypt to form an alliance against the Assyrians. The comment in 2 Kgs 18:7 must involve the initial withholding of tribute by Hezekiah which he later paid when he was attacked according to 2 Kgs 18:14. For more on the dating of Isa 30:1–31:19, see Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 19 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 411. Assyrian records also make it clear that Judah had paid tribute prior to this time. An Assyrian letter, ND 2765, records a tribute of horses arriving from Egypt, Gaza, Judah, Moab, and Amon. See Simo Parpola, *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part I: Letters from Assyria and the West*, SAA I (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press,

to the rebellious vassal's attempt to gain political independence, Sennacherib attacked Judah and Jerusalem.

The Sennacherib example may be taken as a paradigm for the cases where the target of *גָּזַר* is an earthly king, since in every instance but one the subordinate party is a vassal or former vassal of an imperial power.⁷³ Genesis 14:1–2 describes an international conflict where Chedorlaomer, the leader of an imperial coalition, has conquered the southern Levant. Genesis 14:1 lists all the kings of the coalition together, but Chedorlaomer is the only king mentioned in Gen 14:4–5, which suggests he is their leader. In Gen 14:4, the subordinated kings are said to have served (*עָבַד*) Chedorlaomer for twelve years.⁷⁴ To indicate that the servants/vassals intend to free themselves from this subservient position, the text uses *גָּזַר*. The international setting of this episode is evident in that the ruling kings are not described as being from the area surrounding Israel, but are from distant places such as Elam and Shinar (southern Mesopotamia). To relate this back to our initial example in 2 Kgs 18:7, Hezekiah was likewise in a subordinate relationship with Sennacherib until he refused to serve (*עָבַד*) the Assyrian king. When Judah initially became an Assyrian vassal (ca., 734), King Ahaz submitted to King Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria by using *עָבַד* to describe his new subordinate status as vassal: *עָבַדְתִּי וְיָבִינָה אֲנִי*, “I am your son and servant” (2 Kgs 16:7).⁷⁵ It is this political relationship from which Hezekiah attempted

1987), 110. See lines 33–46. The Assyrians considered Judah a vassal, and the withholding of tribute constituted an attempt to break that relationship.

⁷³ See the note below for an explanation of the cases when this verb occurs in a non-vassal relationship. This also does not include the textually difficult passage in Josh 22:19. See below for more on that passage, which falls within the category of rebellion against Yahweh.

⁷⁴ In the Hebrew Bible the root *עָבַד* is often indicative of vassal status. In addition to the examples listed here see also 1 Kgs 20:9 and 2 Kgs 17:3.

⁷⁵ For more on Ahaz's comment as an indication of subordination see, Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 11 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 187; Paul-Eugene Dion, “Ahaz and Other Willing Servants of Assyria,” in *From Babel to Babylon: Essays on Biblical History and Literature in Honour of Brian Peckham*, ed. Joyce Rilett Wood et al. (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 133-45. For more general comments on Judah's position at this time see Peter Dubovsky, “Tiglath-pileser

to break free by participating in a widespread rebellion against the Assyrian empire a few years after the death of Sargon II in 705.⁷⁶ In both Genesis 14 and Hezekiah's rebellion against Assyria, מָרַד functions in coordination with עָבַד to indicate the previous status of the relationship, one of vassalage. The five kings served (עָבַד) Chedorlaomer until they rebelled (Gen 14:4), and Hezekiah refused to serve (עָבַד) Sennacherib any longer (2 Kgs 18:7). These subordinates, as indicated by עָבַד, were vassals attempting to rupture the established relationship with their overlord through aggressive action aimed at regaining independence. The verb מָרַד does not focus on any specific military action they took, but rather refers to their attempt to throw off the imperial yoke and regain autonomy.

This usage is continued in 2 Kgs 24, when both Jehoiakim and Zedekiah rebel against Nebuchadnezzar II, the king of the Neo-Babylonian empire, at the end of the seventh century. The beginning of this chapter declares that Jehoiakim lived as a servant (עָבַד) of the king of Babylonia for three years (2 Kgs 24:1), a servitude that was likely initiated in 604 after Nebuchadnezzar sacked Ashkelon.⁷⁷ Following this period of subjugation, 2 Kgs 24:1 states that the Judahite king attempted to gain independence through an act of aggression, a rebellion (מָרַד). Jehoiakim may have been at least partially successful, since we learn that the Babylonians were

III's Campaigns in 734–732 B.C. Historical Background of Isa. 7, 2 Kings 15-16 and 2 Chr 27–28," *Biblica* 87 (2006): 166; for an overview of the historical situation, see Marc Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East ca. 3000–323 BC* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 247–69.

⁷⁶ Amelie Kuhrt, *A History of the Ancient Near East c. 3000-300 BC, vol. II* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 499.

⁷⁷ The destruction of Ashkelon is well attested with both textual evidence and archeological remains confirming it. See Lawrence E. Stager, "Ashkelon and the Archaeology of Destruction: Kislev 604 BCE," in *Eretz-Israel: Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies. Joseph Aviram Volume* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1996), 61–74. See also Alexander Fantalkin, "Why did Nebuchadnezzar II Destroy Ashkelon in Kislev 604 B.C.E.?" in *The Fire Signals of Lachish: Studies in the Archaeology and History of Israel in the Late Bronze Age, Iron Age, and Persian Period in Honor of David Ussishkin*, ed. Israel Finkelstein and Nadav Na'aman (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 87–111. The Babylonian Chronicle mentions this destruction in Chronicle 5. A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 99. Considering Nebuchadnezzar's activity so close to Jerusalem, it is likely that Jehoiakim paid tribute for three years starting in 604. See also the next footnote.

forced to attack and besiege Jerusalem again under Jehoiakim's son Jehoiachin a few years later (2 Kgs 24:10–12). This suggests at least a brief period of regained Judahite autonomy beginning in 601 or 600. This period of Judahite autonomy fits within the historical situation; it likely took place after Nebuchadnezzar suffered a defeat at the hands of the Egyptians in 601 and thus remained in Babylon the following year.⁷⁸ Soon after his rebellion, Jehoiakim appears to have died in peace (2 Kgs 24:6), and his son Jehoiachin succeeded him on the throne.⁷⁹ After Jehoiachin's ascension, King Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem, and the new king surrendered and lost his position; thus Judah again became a subject of the Babylonian empire (2 Kgs 24:10–16). The new king of Judah, Jehoiakim's brother Zedekiah, also attempted to free Judah from Babylonian control through a rebellion (מַרְדָּו) against his overlord (2 Kgs 24:20; Jer 52:3; Ezek 17:15; 2 Chron 13:6). Nebuchadnezzar had appointed Zedekiah to the throne (2 Kgs 24:17), and Ezek 17:15 refers to a בְּרִית, “covenant” between the Babylonian and the Judahite king.

Historically, a subordinate king who enters into a treaty with an imperial power is considered a servant of the greater king.⁸⁰ Although the word מְשִׁבֵּר or its verbal cognate does not appear in this

⁷⁸ Only a short time before this, in 605, the Babylonians took control of the southern Levant. In the last few decades of the 7th century, the Egyptians exerted their influence over the southern Levant; when Jehoiakim rebelled, it is likely that Babylonian control was not yet firmly established. When these new Babylonian vassals saw the destruction of Ashkelon in 604, they likely attempted to revert to the situation three years prior. Nebuchadnezzar fought the Egyptians around 601–600 and suffered losses, forcing him to return to Babylon. One chronicle reads, “They fought one another in the battlefield and both sides suffered severe losses. The king of Akkad and his army turned and [went back] to Babylon. The fifth year: The king of Akkad stayed home and refitted his numerous horses and chariotry.” A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian*, 101. See chronicle 5 lines 7–8 of the reverse. That the king of Babylonia returned home and remained there suggests the Egyptians were victorious in their battle with the Babylonians. If it was at this time that Judah rebelled, they may have been free of Babylonian control for a short time while Nebuchadnezzar stayed home. This would suggest that Jehoiakim's rebellion was temporarily successful. For more on this historical period see, Bernd U. Schipper, “Egypt and the Kingdom of Judah under Josiah and Jehoiakim,” *TA* 37 (2010): 200–26; Abraham Malamat, “The Kingdom of Judah between Egypt and Babylon,” *ST* 44 (1990): 65–77. See also the preceding footnote.

⁷⁹ The death of Jehoiakim is shrouded in mystery; he may not have actually died in peace, as 2 Kings appears to imply. We might expect the writer of 2 Kings to have described Jehoiakim's demise, which could be viewed as a fitting punishment within the narrative about Judah being punished for the sins of Manasseh. See 2 Kgs 24:3–4. For more on the death of Jehoiakim see Oded Lipschits, “‘Jehoiakim Slept with his Fathers...’ (II Kings 24:6) – Did He?” *JHS* 4 (2002): 1–33.

⁸⁰ This is evident in the Assyrian treaties where vassals were forced to swear allegiance to the Assyrian king. See Jacob Lauinger, “Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty at Tell Tayinat: Text and Commentary,” *JCS* 64 (2012): 87–123;

text, then, we may rightly assert that this is another case where מרד describes the rebellion by a servant and vassal against an imperial overlord.

The usage of מרד in Ezra and Nehemiah likewise describes a vassal or servant attempting to break the relationship with an imperial overlord. In Neh 2:19 and 6:6, Nehemiah’s adversaries accuse him of building a wall in Jerusalem to defend against an impending attack, claiming the Judahites are planning “to rebel” (מרד) against their Persian overlords. A primary function of city walls in the ancient Near East was to keep invaders out, and in many cases, the act of rebuilding a wall insinuated preparation for a defensive stand and a future rebellion.⁸¹ These opponents further accuse Nehemiah of plotting to make himself king in Judah. If Nehemiah was in fact planning to make himself king without Achaemenid consent, this would have been a blatant act of rebellion challenging Persian rule.⁸² In Neh 2:5, Nehemiah calls himself the king’s servant תַּבְּכָר, as he speaks directly to the Persian monarch. Nehemiah’s status as a servant of the king is also confirmed in his title as the מְשַׁקֵּה לַמֶּלֶךְ, “cupbearer to the king (Neh 1:11).”⁸³ The

and Simo Parpola and K. Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths*, SAA 2 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1988), XXXVII. On this page, he lists several texts mentioning the swearing of allegiance by the vassal.

⁸¹ For a survey of the positions relating to understanding the function of Nehemiah’s wall, see Manfred Oeming, “The Real History: The Theological Ideas behind Nehemiah’s Wall,” in *New Perspectives on Ezra-Nehemiah: History and Historiography, Text, Literature, and Interpretation*, ed. Isaac Kalimi (Winona Lake, IN: 2012), 11–149. See also the comments and note below related to Ezra and the opponents there.

⁸² While there is no direct evidence to suggest Nehemiah was an open rebel against the Persians as his opponents claim, some have argued that his relationship to the authorities is complicated. For more on the complicated relationship of Nehemiah to the imperial authorities, see Don Polaski, “Nehemiah: Subject of the Empire, Subject of Writing,” in *New Perspectives on Ezra-Nehemiah: History and Historiography, Text, Literature, and Interpretation*, ed. Isaac Kalimi (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 37–60. Polaski suggests that while Nehemiah is a loyal subject, in some ways he subverts the authority of the empire as he resists the empire and its fundamental technology, writing.

⁸³ For a discussion of the status of Nehemiah, see Reinhard G. Kratz, “Judean Ambassadors and the Making of Jewish Identity: The Case of Hananiah, Ezra, and Nehemiah,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Achaemenid Period: Negotiating Identity in an International Context*, ed. Oded Lipschits, Gary Knoppers, and Manfred Oeming (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 421–44.

status of Persian period Yehud as a vassal of the Achaemenid rulers is quite evident.⁸⁴ As a servant governing a vassal state, Nehemiah had no authority to make himself king in Judah. Whether or not they were true, the accusations of rebellion in Nehemiah provide further evidence that the word מָרַד specifically denotes the attempt of a smaller, once autonomous, polity to establish independence from an empire to which it has become subservient.⁸⁵

The book of Ezra also employs the triconsonantal root מָרַד nominally and adjectivally to portray Jerusalem as a city that repeatedly attempted to sever the relationship with its imperial overlords (Ezra 4:12, 15, 19). In an effort to halt the reconstruction of the walls and temple in Jerusalem, the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin write a letter to the Persians stating that the Judahites desire to rebuild their city and temple in order to establish themselves as an independent state. The adversaries claim that if the Judahites rebuild the city, the Persians will no longer be able to control the province (Ezra 4:16). They describe Jerusalem as a historically rebellious city using the Aramaic word מַרְדָּא, a cognate to the Hebrew מָרַד. The rebellions they are referring to must be the one undertaken by Hezekiah against Assyria in 701, and the more recent rebellions of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah against Babylonia in the late seventh and early sixth centuries. This historical reality, along with the fortification of Jerusalem, makes the accusations against Judah plausible.⁸⁶

In addition to the walls, the presence of a reconstructed temple in Jerusalem dedicated to Yahweh also had the potential to galvanize the local authority. Since temples served as a symbol

⁸⁴ For more on this status, see Oded Lipschits, “Achaemenid Imperial Policy, Settlement Processes in Palestine, and the Status of Jerusalem in the Middle of the Fifth Century B.C.E.,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*, ed. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 19–53.

⁸⁵ Nehemiah’s position as servant is different from the kings mentioned above who were vassals of the imperial rulers, but that they are all in some way servants to the imperial powers allows for these connections.

⁸⁶ Hoglund states that “the presence of urban fortifications allowed a city to consider itself independent of the empire, capable of determining its own destiny.” Kenneth G. Hoglund, *Achaemenid Imperial Administration in Syria-Palestine and the Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah*, SBLDS 125 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1992), 210.

of the king's power and were an important marker of legitimization from the resident deity, building a temple dedicated to the national deity was on occasion perceived as an attempt to establish independence. In 2 Samuel and 1 Kings, we see that the establishment of the united monarchy under David and Solomon coincides with the building of the Jerusalem temple, which symbolically empowers the new rulers.⁸⁷ Moreover, in the book of Kings, there are three occasions where reforms in the temple are connected either with subservience to a foreign ruler or with a movement towards independence from a foreign ruler.⁸⁸ After Ahaz submits to Tiglath-pileser III, he implements drastic changes to the temple, including building an alter patterned after what he sees during his meeting with Tiglath-pileser III (2 Kgs 16). Prior to his rebellion against Sennacherib, on the other hand, Hezekiah restores the temple to a more strictly Yahwistic state: "He did what was right in the eyes of Yahweh just as his ancestor David had done. He removed the high places, broke down the pillars, and cut down the sacred pole. He broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it; it was called Nehushtan" (2 Kgs 18:3–4). King Josiah, who gains increased autonomy with the waning of Assyrian power in the Levant, similarly recommits the temple to Yahweh (2 Kgs 22–23). It is no accident that the temple reforms reestablishing Yahwistic practice coincide with increased autonomy, whereas the reform that strays from the national deity coincides with submission to a foreign ruler.⁸⁹ As these connections demonstrate, the

⁸⁷ See specifically 2 Sam 7 and 1 Kgs 5–8.

⁸⁸ See Oded Borowski, "Hezekiah's Reforms and the Revolt against Assyria," *BA* 58 (1995): 148–55. See also Frank Moore Cross and David Noel Freedman, "Josiah's Revolt against Assyria," *JNES* 12 (1953): 56–58. Some of the dates in this article need adjusting, but their argument raises a valid point.

⁸⁹ See the notes immediately above and below. Some scholars do not accept a correlation between religious reforms and international policy. Cogan and Tadmor state that "Hezekiah's cultic reform was the central religious act of his reign and should most likely be dissociated from his policy toward Assyria." Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 11 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 218. This comment, however, suggests too strong a division between religion and political policy.

construction of a temple, or cultic reforms could have significant political implications.⁹⁰

Temples were at times the brunt of Persian military pressure when they were perceived as threatening. The Persians may have attacked temples in places such as Babylon, and monitored and controlled temples throughout the empire putting pressure on them by collecting taxes or reorganizing the temple's administration.⁹¹ The fact that the Persians pressured temples on

⁹⁰ Scholarly arguments ensue over what those implications are, but there is no denying that there is a correlation. One of the most significant arguments is related to Assyrian policy on foreign religious practice. Whether or not the Assyrians imposed their religion on subordinate nations has been a topic of scholarly debate. Many originally assumed they did, but at this point the debate leans heavily toward the view that the Assyrians did not impose their religion on vassal states. See Morton (Mordechai) Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Judah and Israel in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries B.C.E.* SBLMS 19 (Missoula, MT: Society of Biblical Literature and Scholars Press, 1974). Mordechai Cogan, "Judah under Assyrian Hegemony: A Re-Examination of Imperialism and Religion," *JBL* 112 (1993): 403–14; John McKay, *Religion in Judah under the Assyrians: 732–609 BC*, SBT(SS) 26 (London: SCM Press, 1973); Steven Holloway, *Aššur is King! Aššur is King! Religion in the Exercise of Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire*, CHANE 10 (Boston: Brill, 2002); Ariel M. Bagg, *Die Assyrer und das Westland: Studien zur Historischen Geographie und Herrschaftspraxis in der Levante im 1. Jt. V. u. Z.*, OLA 216 (Löwen: Peeters, 2011); Ariel M. Bagg, "Palestine under Assyrian Rule: A New Look at the Assyrian Imperial Policy in the West," *JAOS* 133 (2013): 119–44. For the contrasting position see Hermann Spieckermann, *Juda unter Assur in der Sargonidenzeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982); and Norbert Lohfink, "Recent Discussion on 2 Kings 22-23: The State of the Question," in *A Song of Power and the Power of Song: Essays on the Book of Deuteronomy*, ed. Duane L. Christensen (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1993), 42.

⁹¹ Such attacks often took place when groups were viewed as rebelling against the Persians. This provides a historical precedent for the association of rebuilding temples and rebellion. See Peter Ross Bedford, *Temple Restoration in Early Achaemenid Judah* (Boston: Brill, 2000), 230–35. Jeremiah Cataldo remarks that "Temples symbolically represented the freedom of the people." For this reason, he says, the Persians monitored the temples and only allowed temples as a religious symbol and would often exact punishments on temples to keep them suppressed. Jeremiah Cataldo, *A Theocratic Yehud?: Issues of Government in a Persian Province* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2009), 36. For a more comprehensive look at Persian control of temples see Lisbeth S. Fried, *The Priest and the Great King: Temple-Palace Relations in the Persian Empire* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004). She suggests that the Persians took a bureaucratic approach to governing their empire and were always in control of the temples and their resources, often freezing out local priests. Kuhrt disagrees with the notion that the Persians, and Xerxes specifically, destroyed the temples in Babylon. She argues there is little evidence for this, but she does state that, "what the evidence shows is not a destruction of cults – there is sufficient evidence to show they continued – but a breaking by the Achaemenid authorities of the concentration of power in the hands of a powerful, traditional elite group. This would, of course, have necessitated a thoroughgoing re-staffing of temples." Amélie Kuhrt, "Reassessing the Reign of Xerxes in the Light of New Evidence," in *Extraction & Control: Studies in Honor of Matthew W. Stolper*, ed. Michael Kozuh et. al. (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2014), 166. Even if the Persians did not destroy the temples, Kuhrt's analysis still demonstrates the Persians were worried about temples and the power the people had when they controlled the temple. Kuhrt has written extensively on Achaemenid religious policy in comparison with that of the Assyrians and Babylonians. She suggests Achaemenid policy was no different from that of the Assyrians and Babylonians. Her views have become stronger over time. See, at first, Amélie Kuhrt, "The Cyrus Cylinder and Achaemenid Imperial Policy," *JSOT* 25 (1983): 83–97, followed by many other articles addressing the topic including, Amélie Kuhrt, "The Achaemenid Concept of Kingship," *Iran* 22 (1984): 156–60. Amélie Kuhrt, "Usurpation, Conquest and Ceremonial: from Babylon to Persia," in *Royal Rituals: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies*, ed. David Cannadine and Simon Price (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 20–55. Amélie Kuhrt, "Cyrus the Great of Persia: Images and Realities," in *Representations of Power: Case Histories from Times of Change and Dissolving Order in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Marlies Heinz and Marian H. Feldman (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 169–192. Amélie Kuhrt, "The Problem of Achaemenid 'Religious Policy,'" in *Die Welt der Götterbilder*, ed. Brigitte Groneberg and

certain occasions does not speak to the historical situation in all places or rule out the possibility that the Persians allowed autonomy in the governance of some areas.⁹² Since the adversaries in the book of Ezra knew that a rebuilt temple and walls could indicate a bid for independence and that the Persians would respond aggressively if they sensed a vassal moving in this direction, they attempted to present the situation in Jerusalem in a way that would work to their advantage.

The above analysis confirms that in Ezra, too, the root *נִרְד* is employed to describe the action of a once autonomous polity that is now said to threaten the rule of and to attempt to secede from the empire that subordinated it. In fact, Judah and Benjamin did not actually rebel against Persia; rather we have here in Ezra an allegation by the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin that the latter are in the process of initiating a rebellion of Jerusalem against the imperial power, and the allegation uses *נִרְד*.

Based on the discussion thus far, we may conclude that the word *נִרְד* denotes the attempt of a smaller, once autonomous, state to establish independence from the domination of an empire. This word is used in discussions of rebellions against the Assyrians, Babylonians, and the Persians—the three dominant empires of the ancient Near East during the first half of the first millennium. Literarily, Genesis 14 also sets Chedorlaomer up as the effective ruler of an empire. In almost all the cases described above, the rebels who break with the imperial powers have been described with a form of the root *עִבַד*, “to serve.” This indicates that the subordinate kings who

Hermann Spieckermann, BZAW 376 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 117–42; Amélie Kuhrt, “Ancient Near Eastern History: The Case of Cyrus the Great of Persia,” in *Understanding the History of Ancient Israel*, ed. H.G.M. Williamson (New York: Oxford, 2007), 107–27. See also R. J. Van der Spek, “Did Cyrus the Great Introduce a New Policy Towards Subdued Nations?,” *Persica* 10 (1982): 278–83.

⁹² Dandamayev argued for a theory of self-governance and claimed the Persians did not interfere in the administration of their provinces. This may have been possible for certain regions, but such a policy was not in effect everywhere, as the discussion in this paragraph and the preceding footnote suggest. See M.A. Dandamayev, “Achaemenid Imperial Policies and Provincial Governments,” *IA* 34 (1999): 269–82.

rebelled (מרד) were rulers of vassal states or provinces.⁹³ מרד, then, is concerned with the breaking up of a certain type of political relationship.⁹⁴ It is the only one of the three rebellion terms, מרד, פשע, and קשר, that the biblical writers use to describe the rebellion of a vassal against an empire.⁹⁵

These findings stand in contrast with the meaning certain scholars have suggested for מרד. Some have conjectured that the word focuses on the outcome of the rebellion. Rolf Knierim claims that “*mrd* refers basically to incomplete rebellion.”⁹⁶ Because Knierim appears to use “incomplete” and “failed” synonymously, מרד must indicate a failed rebellion. But this position is difficult to sustain. In addition to the exception Knierim notes in 2 Chron 13:6, which appears to be a different usage of this word, there are other instances where the writers do not have in view an incomplete or failed rebellion. For example, in 2 Kgs 18:7 the text never implies that Hezekiah’s rebellion is a failure or incomplete; in fact, it implies the opposite. Regardless of the historical outcome, Hezekiah’s rebellion against Assyria is viewed as a success according to the writer of 2 Kgs 18:7, where the rebellion is recounted immediately after the phrase, בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר

⁹³ See Ezek 17, which explicitly mentions a covenant and a sworn oath between kings (Ezek 17:15).

⁹⁴ In 2 Chron 13:6, the verb is used to indicate a domestic rebellion rather than a rebellion by a vassal against an overlord. In describing Jeroboam’s rebellion against Solomon, the Chronicler uses מרד, which contrasts with the verb in the account of the same rebellion in the book of Kings (1 Kgs 12:19), which uses פשע. See also the account of the initial rebellion, which is more likely the parallel text, which uses the phrase יד ריב (1 Kgs 11:26–27). It is likely that in this later context the Chronicler does not use מרד in the same way as earlier writers. In this text, it appears the word has lost its meaning to describe specifically the rebellion of a vassal against the imperial power. When the Chronicler is writing, the two words (מרד and פשע) had often been paired together to indicate rebellion against Yahweh or sin, which may explain why he no longer uses the word in the same way. The discussion in this chapter will elaborate on this.

⁹⁵ The only other time we have something close is in 2 Kgs 18:14, when Hezekiah speaks directly to the Assyrian king and calls his rebellion חטא, “sin/offense.” As we will see in chapter five below, there is a rhetorical reason for this: Hezekiah is speaking directly to the king against whom he has rebelled.

⁹⁶ Rolf Knierim, “מרד,” *TLOT*, 2:685. Overall the position outlined above is similar to Knierim’s position except in this regard.

יֵצֵא יִשְׁכַּל, “every place he goes out, he achieves success.”⁹⁷ It is difficult to understand how the writer of this verse has a failed rebellion in view when the rebellion is connected to a phrase indicating success.

Jehoiakim’s rebellion is also at least partially successful, as noted in 2 Kgs 24. After the notice that Jehoiakim rebelled (מרד) against the king of Babylonia (2 Kgs 24:1), we are told that Yahweh sent against Jehoiakim marauding bands of Chaldeans, Arameans, Moabites, and Ammonites. If the Babylonians were still ruling Judah after this rebellion, why would they send marauding bands of Chaldeans (Babylonians) to pester them? This text downplays the success of the rebellion and paints Jehoiakim in a negative light, but nonetheless hints that he achieved a degree of independence from Babylonia. The Deuteronomist records these attacks to show that even if Jehoiakim’s rebellion succeeded, Yahweh was still punishing the city for Manasseh’s sins (2 Kgs 24:3–4). The narration of the Babylonian response to this rebellion also contrasts markedly with their response to the subsequent rebellion under Zedekiah. Instead of sending marauding bands against the city, Nebuchadnezzar came with his entire army and laid siege to Jerusalem following Zedekiah’s rebellion (2 Kgs 25:1). Jehoiakim’s victory is confirmed in 2 Kgs 24:10 when Nebuchadnezzar must reconquer Jerusalem under Jehoiachin after his father “slept with his ancestors” (2 Kgs 24:6). There would have been no reason to attack the city under Jehoiachin unless Judah had enjoyed at least a modicum of independence under Jehoiakim.⁹⁸

In other cases as well, it is difficult to see how מרד indicates a failed rebellion.

Sometimes the rebellion being referred to is nascent or even in progress, as in the speech of the Rab-shaqeh in 2 Kgs 18:20 (Isa 36:5), who declares, עתה על-כני בַּטְחָתָהּ כִּי מְרִדְתָּ בִּי, “Now, in whom are you trusting that you have rebelled against me?” The Rab-shaqeh views Judah’s initial

⁹⁷ Compare this statement to 1 Sam 18:14, which employs the same verb (שכל) to describe the success of David.

⁹⁸ See the discussion above on page thirty four for how this fits into the historical context.

decision to break with Assyria as having been completed.⁹⁹ Similarly, when Nehemiah's adversaries accuse him, they ask, *העל המלך אתם מרדדים*, "Are you rebelling against the king" (Neh 2:19)? Since the Nehemiah case describes a rebellion that never occurred, it can hardly be considered a failed rebellion. It indicates, rather, the deliberate choice of a servant to break with the imperial king. The question in Neh 2:19 could be rephrased as, "Are you attempting to throw off the rule of the imperial king?" These pieces of evidence help to confirm that *מרד* denotes an act by a servant against an imperial power and has little to do with the outcome of that act.

At this point it may be helpful to suggest a modern term or action that further clarifies the meaning of *מרד*. Often, to differentiate among types of rebellion, one needs to look at the intended outcome. The word *מרד*, when employed in a political context, indicates a type of rebellion involving secession, and specifically imperial or colonial secession. Mark Hagopian states that "Secession involves the breaking off of one part of the state and the proclamation of its independence."¹⁰⁰ Peter Radan defines secession as the creation of a new state "upon territory previously forming part of, or being a colonial entity of, an existing state."¹⁰¹ In the Hebrew Bible, *מרד* more specifically involves the breaking of a treaty with the imperial power and an

⁹⁹ This is similar to what we see recorded in 2 Kgs 3:7 where Jehoram says, "The king of Moab has rebelled against me." The word here, however, is *פשע*. In both cases the rebellion has just begun and is neither complete nor incomplete, yet *פשע* is the word Knierim suggests indicates a completed rebellion; Knierim, "*פשע*," *TLOT* 2: 1033–34. For such a case to stand, one must argue that the writer views the event retrospectively; since he knows what happened he can therefore speak of the event as failed. It seems very unlikely, however, that in the case of Hezekiah and Sennacherib, the writer wanted to portray Hezekiah as a king who led a failed rebellion. The difference between these two words is not whether a rebellion described with *מרד* or *פשע* is complete or incomplete. The difference is related to the political situation the two different events describe. See the comments in the following section of this chapter on the word *פשע*.

¹⁰⁰ Hagopian, *The Phenomenon of Revolution*, 31. Horowitz defines secession as, "an attempt by an ethnic group claiming a homeland to withdraw with its territory from the authority of a larger state of which it is a part." Donald L. Horowitz, "Irredentas and Secessions: Adjacent Phenomena, Neglected Connections," *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 33 (1992): 119. We could take out the word "ethnic" and replace it with unified group and it would yield the same meaning.

¹⁰¹ Peter Radan, "Secession: A Word in Search of a Meaning," in *On the Way to Statehood, Secession and Globalization*, ed. A Pavković and P. Radan (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2008), 18.

attempt at regaining autonomy; thus, the word “re-creation” may be more appropriate than “creation” for the biblical secessions under discussion. מָרַד represents a quest for independence from an imperial power on the part of a formerly independent state.

Part II – Rebellion against God

Biblical writers also use מָרַד in mostly later texts to indicate either a break with or an act of disobedience toward God, whom the writers of the Hebrew Bible understand to be the suzerain of the people. Yahweh’s position as suzerain is evident throughout the Hebrew Bible and especially in the covenants in Exodus and Deuteronomy.¹⁰² Since Yahweh is viewed as a political actor, political terms are often employed in reference to the deity. To begin this discussion, we note that when Yahweh appears as the object of מָרַד, two different situations may be described. In some cases, מָרַד indicates that the people attempt to break with Yahweh in similar ways to the political situations described above, only with Yahweh standing in as the ruler. Second, מָרַד develops into a generic word for sin in later texts. This could be a contributing factor for the unique usage of the word in 2 Chron 13:6, which we will discuss below.

The first example to examine occurs in Numbers, where the people challenge Yahweh as their political leader. In the wilderness tradition of Num 14, the Israelites are without an earthly king, but Moses and Aaron act as the leaders who represent God as the final authority figure. The context of the passage describes an attempted overthrow of Yahweh and his designated human leaders. Protesting that Moses, Aaron, and Yahweh have failed in their leadership roles, the people first accuse Yahweh of bringing them into the desert to die by the sword. They state, “Why is Yahweh bringing us into this land so that we will fall by the sword” (Num 14:3)? The protest becomes more threatening when the people propose choosing a new leader: “Let us

¹⁰² See C. L. Crouch, *Israel and the Assyrians: Deuteronomy, the Succession Treaty of Esarhaddon and the Nature of Subversion* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 1; Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 35; Jon D. Levenson, *The Love of God: Divine Gift, Human Gratitude, and Mutual Faithfulness in Judaism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 9.

choose a leader so we can return to Egypt” (Num 14:4). The entire situation is described in Num 14:9 as a “rebellion” (מִרְדָּה) against Yahweh; it is not a generic sin, but a movement that has clear political ramifications. The text portrays Yahweh as a ruler, whom one faction attempts to replace by choosing a new רֹאשׁ, “leader” (Num 14:4). Yahweh is the political suzerain that the group is attempting to replace, and since they cannot physically overthrow the deity, they pick up stones to kill Yahweh’s representatives, Moses and Aaron: “the entire congregation planned to stone them” (Num 14:10). This is comparable to the endeavor of a smaller nation attempting to establish independence from an empire that has subdued them.¹⁰³ It is unlikely accidental that this is the only time in the wilderness texts of Exodus and Numbers that a technical term for rebellion appears. It is in this episode that the Israelites forcibly attempt to choose a new ruler by killing the old ones.

The use of מִרְדָּה to describe the action taken against Yahweh continues in biblical books related to the exilic and postexilic periods. In these texts, the word often loses its original meaning and becomes a generic way to describe wrongdoing against Yahweh. This is evident from its use in parallel with words such as מִרְדָּה in Neh 9:26, or חַטָּא, עוֹה, and רִשָּׁע in Dan 9:5–9. In both of these texts, מִרְדָּה describes disobedience to Yahweh’s commandments rather than a rejection of him as a political leader. This is clear in Dan 9:5: חַטָּאנוּ וְעָוִינוּ וְהִרְשָׁענוּ וּמִרְדָּנוּ. “We have sinned, done wrong, acted wickedly, and rebelled by turning aside from your commandments and judgements.” The stacking of words is a literary feature to establish a point. Thus, this example provides a clear indication that מִרְדָּה has become a synonym for sin against Yahweh.

¹⁰³ See chapter six for more on the rebellion in Num 14 and for a discussion of understanding precisely how this text indicates that the people attempt to choose a new leader.

The previous two paragraphs demonstrate that the Hebrew Bible employs מרד with Yahweh as the object in two related but different ways. In one case, it presents him as the political leader the people rebel against, and in other cases it describes general sinful acts the people commit against Yahweh.¹⁰⁴ We can see in Ezekiel how these two usages are related. First, Ezekiel recognizes the specific use of מרד in political contexts to denote a vassal breaking allegiance with a human overlord, so in Ezek 17:15. Here, the text describes Zedekiah's rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian empire. This usage is in line with our discussion of a smaller, once autonomous, state's attempt to establish independence from an empire through secession. As the discussion below will demonstrate, however, the presentation of מרד in Ezek 17 is decidedly negative. Outside of Ezekiel, we do not find such a negative attitude toward the action depicted by מרד where the word describes the rebellion of a vassal against an overlord. In many occurrences of מרד, the word is merely descriptive. One important point to note is that the attitude toward Zedekiah's rebellion expressed in Ezek 17 may be largely attributed to the context in which the word is used. For example, Ezek 17:15–16, 18–19 specifically condemn the breach of a treaty and the despising of Yahweh's oath rather than denouncing the rebellion. The overall negativity of chapter 17, however, appears to impute a negative meaning to מרד, which continues as the book discusses “rebellion/disobedience” against Yahweh.

Ezekiel also employs מרד to describe a political rebellion against Yahweh. The connection between the usage of מרד and the concept of Yahweh as suzerain is confirmed in Ezek 20, which is a tirade against Israel as an intractable people. Three times Ezek 20 discusses the people's disobedience towards God, but instead of using מרד, the text indicates the activity

¹⁰⁴ Based on the distribution first in Ezekiel and then in Nehemiah and Daniel, the usage of מרד to describe rebellion against God seems to be a late phenomenon derived from its earlier meaning denoting rebellion against imperial rulers. The word also appears prominently in Josh 22, where it describes a rebellion against God. See the discussion and note below for more on that text.

of a recalcitrant society with מרה (Ezek 20:8, 13, 21). Revealingly, however, the word used for “rebellion” (if that is the best translation for מרה here) switches from מרה to מרד after 20:33–37, which is precisely where Yahweh declares he will be king over the people, אֶמְלֹךְ עֲלֵיכֶם, “I will be king over you” (Ezek 20:33). A few verses later, in Ezek 20:37, Yahweh declares, וְהִבֵּאתִי אֶתְכֶם בְּמִסְכַּת הַבְרִית, “I will bring you into the bond of the covenant.” These phrases are overtly political and are reminiscent of language describing the rule of an empire over its vassal.¹⁰⁵ Now that Yahweh has revealed his intention to become king of the people and enters into a covenant with them, anyone attempting to break the relationship with Yahweh as king/suzerain is described as being among הַמְרֹדִים, “the rebels” (Ezek 20:38). The word associated with disobedience has changed: instead of simply disregarding Yahweh’s word or statutes, as מרה indicates in Ezek 20:8, 13, 21, the people are now rebelling against Yahweh as a political actor. Based on the occurrences of מרד elsewhere in Ezekiel and in the political contexts outlined above, the specific use of מרד in this case indicates that those who attempt to make a break with Yahweh as king and covenant maker are equivalent to those who attempt to break their relationship with a suzerain on the world’s political stage.¹⁰⁶

Although מרד is used here to describe action taken against Yahweh as a political ruler, we also begin to see occurrences of מרד outside of overtly political contexts in Ezekiel and in later texts.¹⁰⁷ Ezekiel 2:3 employs מרד without referencing a specific action. It appears that מרד

¹⁰⁵ Compare the language in Ezek 17 which uses the same term (ברית) to describe the covenant.

¹⁰⁶ This is to be distinguished from rebellion against a king of Israel where קשר is used, as will be discussed below. For a similar suggestion regarding this word see Marc Brettler, *God Is King: Understanding an Israelite Metaphor*, JSOTSup 76 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 99.

¹⁰⁷ See the comments above on page eighteen related to the texts in Dan 9 and Neh 9 where this is the case. The word מרד appears four times in the book of Ezekiel. Three of these times it describes people as acting rebelliously against God (Ezek 2:3 (2x); 20:38) and once it describes the rebellion of a vassal, Zedekiah, against the imperial power (Ezek 17:15). The more common word for the rebelliousness of the people against God in Ezekiel is מרי or

was originally used as a political term and only later became a generic word for sin. As soon as the inherently political word came to describe political rebellion against Yahweh, which is naturally regarded by the biblical writers as negative, it is easy to see how the usage of מרד expands to encompass any type of disobedience against Yahweh. It is possible that generic usage, or perceived generic usage of the word in Ezekiel paved the way for later writers, such as Daniel and Nehemiah, to use the word as a synonym for sin against Yahweh.

Difficult Passages

Generic usage of מרד might help to explain why מרד loses its more specific meaning in 2 Chron 13:6, where it describes the action taken by Jeroboam against Solomon: וַיִּקְרָם יִרְבֵּעֵם בְּיָדָם עֶבֶד וַיִּקְרָם יִרְבֵּעֵם בְּיָדָם עֶבֶד, “Jeroboam the son of Nebat, servant of Solomon, son of David arose and rebelled against his master.” The same event is described on two separate instances in the book of Kings (1 Kgs 11:26–27; 12:19). In 1 Kgs 12:19, the rebellion is presented as a regional, rather than imperial, conflict based on the choice of verb: וַיִּפְשְׁעוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּבֵית דָּוִד עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה, “Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David until this day.” In 2 Chron 10:19, we find the parallel to this verse; here, the Chronicler reproduces the exact wording found in 1 Kgs 12:19. It appears, then, that 2 Chron 13:6 is derived from the other description of the event in 1 Kgs 11:26–27, which reads, וַיִּרְבֵּעֵם בְּיָדָם אֶפְרַתַי מִן־זֶרֶדָה וְשֵׁם אִמּוֹ זְרוּעָה אִשָּׁה אֶלְמָנָה, “Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an Ephraimite from Zeredah, a servant of Solomon, whose mother’s name was Zeruah, a widow, raised his hand against the king.” If מרד became more generic over time rather than describing a specific type of rebellion, this may be why the Chronicler uses that word rather than פשע as in 1 Kgs 12:19, or רום יד ב, “to raise a

the associated verb מרד. This appears many times, as in Ezek 2:5, 6, 7, 8; 3:9; 26, 27 5:6; 12:2, 3, 9, 25; 17:12; 20:8, 13, 21; 24:3; 44:6.

hand against,” as the same event is described in 1 Kgs 11:26–27.¹⁰⁸ The different vocabulary here likely arose due to the Chronicler’s interpretation of the phrase **רָוַם יָד בַּ**, “to raise a hand against,” which does not occur in Chronicles. Rather than using this unfamiliar idiom, the author of 2 Chron 13:6 seeks a different word to describe the rebellion as appears in 1 Kgs 11:26–27 and chooses **מָרַד**. This could be because, as we are arguing here, **מָרַד** has become more generic in these late texts and so is seen as appropriate to any context of rebellion. An alternative is to suggest the Chronicler wants to present Solomon and his kingdom as an empire against which Jeroboam, his servant, rebels. While not impossible, the former provides a simpler explanation.

Connected to the more general meaning of the word as found in Ezekiel and these other late texts, the root **מָרַד** appears six times in Josh 22.¹⁰⁹ In this chapter, the Transjordanian tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh are accused several times of rebelling against Yahweh: **לְמָרְדְּכֶם הַיּוֹם בַּיהוָה**, “that you are rebelling today against Yahweh” (Josh 22:16, 18, 19). They are accused of this because of their efforts to build an altar apart from the central altar in Jerusalem, which is seen as disobedient to the law of centralization in Deut 12. By using the word **מָרַד** here, Cisjordanians are charging the Transjordanian tribes with attempting to break free from Yahweh’s sovereignty in order to establish their own polity. The event described in

¹⁰⁸ See the following chapter for a discussion of the phrase **רָוַם יָד בַּ**. As that chapter will argue, the events in 1 Kgs 11 and 12 are separate events and so the word **פִּשַׁע** does not fit in 1 Kgs 11.

¹⁰⁹ While the textual origin of this particular episode is unclear, a number of scholars have suggested it was edited or added to the book of Joshua at a later time and that it stems from the exilic or post-exilic period, which fits with our observation that many texts describing sin against God with **מָרַד** are late. For a survey on the origins and possible dates for Josh 22, see Elie Assis, “Position and Function of Jos 22 in the Book of Joshua,” *ZAW* 116 (2004): 528–30. Assis cites J. Vink and R. Goldstein as suggesting that the chapter reflects later disputes over the possibility of worship outside of Israel in exilic and post-exilic times. For those positions, see J. G. Vink, “The Date and Origin of the Priestly Code in the Old Testament,” in *The Priestly Code and Seven Other Studies*, OtSt 15, ed. P. A. H. de Boer (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 73–77; and Ronnie Goldstein, “Joshua 22:9–34: A Priestly Narrative from the Second Temple Period,” *Shnaton* 13 (2002): 43–81 [Hebrew]. For discussions on the presence of a later Deuteronomistic or Priestly hand, see Martin Noth, *Das Buch Josua 2nd ed.*, HAT 7 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1953), 134, who thinks the chapter was reworked by a priestly source, and John S. Kloppenborg, “Joshua 22: The Priestly Editing of an Ancient Tradition,” *Biblica* 62 (1981): 347–71.

Josh 22 stands in parallel with the actions of Jeroboam I, who seceded and established cultic sites at Bethel and Dan.

It is worth noting that in Josh 22, the notions of rebelling against Yahweh as a cultic action and as a political action are combined. The cultic connection is demonstrated by the use of *מַעַל*, “to act unfaithfully” (Josh 22:16, 22) and the focus on the legitimacy of a single central altar, a very Deuteronomistic or Priestly concern. The earthly political notion, on the other hand, is evident in the accusation that the two and a half tribes are attempting a rebellion (*מִרְדָּ*) against the other tribes.¹¹⁰

This political notion appears in the textually difficult portion of Josh 22:19, which in the MT reads, *וְאַתֶּנּוּ אֵל תִּמְרְדוּ*, literally, “and us to you will rebel.” Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, the *qal* form of *מִרְדָּ* never takes an accusative object, as it appears to in this text, with *אֶתְכֶם*, “us.” In every other case, there is an oblique object marked by a preposition. Moreover, here the object of *מִרְדָּ* does not appear to be either God or an earthly king. The (accusative) object of *מִרְדָּ* is rather the group of earthly tribes, which is unique in the Hebrew Bible. It is also unclear whether the consonants *אל* should be understood as indicating the preposition “to” (*אֵל*) or the negative particle *אַל*. The best explanation is to read *אַל*, “do not” with many other manuscripts rather than *אֵל*, “to” as vocalized in the MT. The text would then read, *וְאַתֶּנּוּ אֵל תִּמְרְדוּ*, “do not rebel (against) us,” which is intelligible. This is close to what appears in Num 14:9, *בְּיַהֲנֹךָ אֶל-תִּמְרְדוּ*, “do not rebel against Yahweh,” only without the usual preposition.

To account for why the direct object of *מִרְדָּ* is a group of tribes in this case, instead of God or the imperial suzerain, it should first be noted that outside of this occurrence in Josh

¹¹⁰ This contrasts with the position of Kloppenborg, who suggests that the dispute is not primarily political or territorial, but cultic. While the final redaction may ultimately be more concerned with a central altar, to exclude the political and territorial aspect of building an altar misses at least part of what is being described as a rebellion in this text. If the act does stand in parallel with Jeroboam’s secession, then setting up a distinct place of worship may be considered an act of sedition, here described with *מִרְדָּ*. See Kloppenborg, “Joshua 22: The Priestly Editing of an Ancient Tradition,” 347.

22:19, the word מרד appears five additional times in the same chapter (Josh 22:16, 18, 19, 22, 29). In each of these cases, the word describes a rebellion against Yahweh. The dense clustering of the word in this chapter is remarkable considering that מרד appears only twenty four times outside of this chapter. A plausible reason for the use of the word with an atypical object here may be that the writer of this chapter simply had a predilection for the word מרד.¹¹¹

The versions provide little help in solving this text-critical problem. The LXX has something of a doublet, καὶ μὴ ἀποστάται ἀπὸ θεοῦ γενήθητε καὶ μὴ ἀπόστητε ἀπὸ κυρίου, “do not become rebels against God, and do not rebel against the Lord.” This is similar to the phrase in the MT of this verse, “do not rebel against Yahweh and do not rebel against us,” if the proposal mentioned above is accepted along with the new object. Exactly why the Greek text would have employed κυρίου instead of אֱלֹהֵינוּ is difficult to determine. The Greek text may have changed the object of the second verb to “the Lord” because it observed the irregular usage in the MT, and since Yahweh is the object in the five other occurrences of this word in Josh 22. The Targum also seems to have altered the object וְאֵתֵנוּ to וְבֵנָא, “against us,” in conformity with the typical usage of מרד being followed by the preposition ב, and not with an accusative object.¹¹² While this portion of Josh 22:19 is difficult, it does not change or detract from the meaning of מרד as described above. It fits into the paradigm of later texts that use this word to describe general rebellion and disobedience against Yahweh.

מרד as a Neutral Rebellion Term

The last issue to address is the overall tenor of מרד. The word appears in both positive and negative contexts. When discussing rebellion against God, the word always describes a negative

¹¹¹ See footnote 109 above for more on the dating and editing of the text.

¹¹² The editors of the BHS suggest reading a *hiphil* verb form תִּמְרָדוּ, which is also difficult as this would be the only *hiphil* occurrence of the verb attested in the Hebrew Bible.

action,¹¹³ but when referring to a rebellion against an earthly king, מרד can be either positive or negative. Hezekiah's rebellion against Sennacherib is discussed in 2 Kgs 18 in a context that praises the Judahite monarch. The text of 2 Kgs 18:3–7 commends Hezekiah for doing right in the eyes of Yahweh by removing the high places and cutting down the Asherah, among other actions. The section concludes in 2 Kgs 18:7–8 by saying that Yahweh was with Hezekiah and that he prospered in all he did, including his rebellion and refusal to serve (ולא עבד) the king of Assyria. This repudiation of vassal status is presented as the culmination of the list of Hezekiah's pious deeds. His rebellion is part of his trust in Yahweh (cf. the use of בטח in 2 Kgs 18:20, 21, 30). The positive evaluation of his refusal to accept or to continue as an Assyrian vassal is further strengthened by textual links to the condemned Ahaz and his decision to serve the king of Assyria rather than rebel or enforce a policy of isolationism.¹¹⁴

In contrast to the text of Kings, Ezek 17 chastises Zedekiah for his rebellion and more specifically for breaking the covenant he made with the king of Babylonia. Ezekiel 17:15 says, וַיִּמְרֹד-בּוֹ לְשַׁלַּח מַלְאָכָיו מִצְרַיִם לְתַת־לוֹ סוּסִים וְעַם-רַב הַיּוֹצֵאת הַיְמִינִיט הַעֲשָׂה אֱלֹהִים וְהַפִּיר בְּרִית וְנִמְלֵט “But he [Zedekiah] rebelled against him [the king of Babylonia] by sending his messengers to Egypt so they [the Egyptians] would give him [Zedekiah] horses and many people. Will he [Zedekiah] prosper? Will one who does these things escape? Can he break the covenant and escape?” The text goes on to indicate that by rebelling against the king of Babylonia, the Judahite king is, as a matter of fact, breaking God's oath, so that his political rebellion also becomes a sin against

¹¹³ The negative aspect of מרד can be seen in its pairing with words indicating sin, such as חטא, עוה, and רשע in Dan 9:5. This usage, however, appears to be a late phenomenon and not entirely indicative of the word's function. In the section below we will compare this to the usage of פשע, which occurs much more frequently in a negative context.

¹¹⁴ For more on the connection between these two texts see Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983), 143–44; Marvin Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39 with an Introduction to Prophetic Literature*, FOTL XVI (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 152; Christopher R. Seitz, *Zion's Final Destiny: The Development of the Book of Isaiah: A Reassessment of Isaiah 36-39* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 195; Nadav Na'aman, “The Deuteronomist and Voluntary Servitude to Foreign Powers,” *JSOT* 65 (1995): 37–53; Dominic Rudman, “Is the Rabshakeh also among the Prophets? A Rhetorical Study of 2 Kings XVIII 17-35,” *VT* 50 (2000): 103.

Yahweh (Ezek 17:19). Zedekiah's act was sinful not merely because he rebelled but because this particular rebellion consisted of breaking a covenant with God and His political instrument, the king of Babylonia. The same negative tone is palpable in 2 Chron 36:13, which likewise employs *נָרַד* to describe Zedekiah's rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar. The negativity again does not stem from the word *נָרַד* alone, but from the additional note that Nebuchadnezzar forced Zedekiah to swear by God, *אֲשֶׁר הִשְׁבִּיעָו בְּאֱלֹהִים*, "who made him swear by God." These added descriptions suggest that the act of rebellion itself was not the problem. The perfidy was the breaking of the covenant or the oath. While there may have been a treaty in the background of 2 Kgs 18 as well, the writer chooses to deflect this by neglecting to mention any treaty or the swearing of an oath. It is possible the biblical writer would have regarded that treaty as misguided, or even void, because Hezekiah's treaty would have been with Sargon II who died on the battlefield in 705. Hezekiah rebelled against Sennacherib, not Sargon II, with whom he would have made the covenant.¹¹⁵ This obfuscation allows the term to appear positive because Hezekiah never swears by God before Sennacherib.

Elsewhere, *נָרַד* is found in contexts that appear to be neutral. There is no explicit evaluation of the rebellion that takes place in Gen 14. On the one hand, Abram's war against the foreign rulers could indicate his support for the rebellion narrated earlier in the chapter. One could argue, then, that the rebellion is being presented in a positive light. Yet it is important to remember that Abram did not join the initial rebellion and only became involved when it directly affected his family. Abram's decision not to join the initial battle may demonstrate his distaste for Sodom and Gomorrah and his reticence to support these two wicked polities. The names of the Canaanite kings *בְּרִשָׁע* and *בְּרֵעַ* and the association of their names with wickedness further suggest a literary bent against these rulers. The message underlying the names of these kings

¹¹⁵ I deal more specifically with this issue below.

adumbrates their impending destruction in Gen 19.¹¹⁶ The chapter does not appear to be concerned with evaluating the rebellion, as it gives no clear clue as to whether the activity should be perceived as positive or negative. The lack of concern for this matter in Gen 14 would appear to suggest that *מרד* is merely a descriptive term describing the choice of subordinate states to rebel against an imperial power. In summary, the political rebellions narrated with the word *מרד* must be evaluated on a contextual basis, since *מרד* is a neutral, almost annalistic word.

¹¹⁶ See B. Ziemer, *Abram- Abraham. Kompositionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Genesis 14, 15 und 17*, BZAW 350 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 105–09; G. Granerød, *Abraham and Melchizedek. Scribal Activity of the Second Temple Times in Genesis 14 and Psalm 110*, BZAW 406 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 121–22. For the possible dates surrounding the composition of Genesis 14, see most recently Nadav Na’aman, “Abraham’s Victory over the Kings of the Four Quadrants in Light of Darius I’s Bisitun Inscription,” *Tel Aviv* 42 (2015): 72–88, and the literature cited therein.

Table 1. מָרַד – Rebellion against an Imperial King

Text	Ruler	Political Status of Rebel	International Situation	Part of Speech		Type of Rebellion/ Intended Result
Gen 14:14	King – world power	Servants (עֲבָד) (5 kings)	Dominant world power ruling over smaller political entities	Verb – <i>Qal</i> stem	מָרַדוּ	Colonial secession
Josh 22:19	Cisjordan tribes (Yahweh)	Transjordan tribes	Tribes against other tribes (influenced by the use of מָרַד to describe rebellion against Yahweh, irregular usage)	Verb – <i>Qal</i> stem (some alter to <i>hiphil</i>)	תִּמְרְדוּ	Regional secession
2 Kgs 18:7, 20; Isa 36:5	Assyrian king - world power	(Former) servant/vassal Hezekiah	Dominant world power ruling over smaller political entities	3x Verb – <i>Qal</i> stem	וַיִּמְרָד מְרָדָה מְרָדָה	Colonial secession
2 Kgs 24:1	Babylonian king - world power	Servant Jehoiakim	Dominant World power ruling over smaller political entities	Verb <i>Qal</i> stem	וַיִּמְרָד	Colonial secession
2 Kgs 24:20; Jer 52:3; 2 Chron 36:13	Babylonian king - world power	Servant Zedekiah	Dominant world power ruling over smaller political entities	3x Verb <i>Qal</i> stem	וַיִּמְרָד וַיִּמְרָד מָרַד	Colonial secession
Ezek 17:15	Babylonian king - world power	Servant Zedekiah	Dominant world power ruling over smaller political entities	Verb <i>Qal</i> stem	וַיִּמְרָד	Colonial secession
Ezra 4:12, 15, 19	World power	Vassals	Dominant world powers ruling over smaller political entities	3x – 2x adjective 1x - noun	מְרָדָתָא מְרָדָא מָרַד	Colonial secession
Neh 2:19; 6:6	Persian king - world power	Vassal	Dominant world power ruling over smaller political entities	Verb <i>Qal</i> Part. <i>Qal</i> Inf. Const.	מְרָדִים לְמָרֹד	Colonial secession
2 Chron 13:6	King – regional power	Servant	One tribe ruling over multiple tribes	Verb - <i>Qal</i> Stem exception	וַיִּמְרָד	Regional secession

Table 2. מִרְדָּ – Rebellion against Yahweh

Text	Ruler	Political Status of Rebel	Situation	Part of Speech		Type of Action
Ezek 2:3	Yahweh	Covenant people	Yahweh over his vassal	2x Qal perfect and participle	מִזְרְדִים מְרַדוּ	General disobedience/ possible political overtones
Ezek 20:38	Yahweh	Covenant people	Yahweh over his vassal	Qal participle	מִזְרְדִים	Rejection of Yahweh as political ruler
Num 14:9	Yahweh	Covenant people	Yahweh over his vassal	Verb – Qal	תִּמְרְדוּ	Replacement of Yahweh as political ruler
Josh 22:16, 18, 19, 22, 29	Yahweh	Covenant people	Yahweh over his vassal	4x verb – Qal 1x - noun	לְמַרְדְּכֶם תִּמְרְדוּ תִּמְרְדוּ מִרְדָּ לְמִרְדָּ	Cultic sin as well as political secession
Dan 9:5, 9	Yahweh	Covenant People	Yahweh over his vassal	2x verb Qal	מְרַדְנֵנוּ מִרְדְּנֵנוּ	General disobedience
Neh 9:26	Yahweh	Covenant People	Yahweh over his vassal	Verb Qal imperfect	וַיִּמְרְדוּ	General disobedience
Job 24:13	Light (Yahweh)	People	Poetic description of people rebelling against Yahweh	Qal participle	מִרְדֵי	General disobedience

פֶּשַׁע – Secession from a Regional Power

The second word to discuss is פֶּשַׁע. While מִרְדָּה occasionally is used in similar contexts to מִרְדָּה (e.g. Ezek 2:3), when the biblical writers employ פֶּשַׁע in the context of rebellion against an earthly political authority, it ultimately finds its home in a different range of political situations. The verb מִרְדָּה primarily indicates the rebellion of a vassal or servant against an imperial overlord. In contrast, פֶּשַׁע is used only secondarily to indicate the breaking of a political relationship, and it never refers to one in which a vassal breaks with an empire. It is instead used on occasion to indicate that a small state has illegally broken its imposed political ties with another state that is relatively equal in size. One of these states, always Israel or Judah, has become the transient regional hegemon, and the subordinate state seeks independence from its dominance. It is significant that either Israel or Judah is always the offended party. Since the biblical texts in question are always written from the perspective of the offended party, the use of פֶּשַׁע, a word with the core meaning of offense, naturally presents the subordinate party as the aggressor, and at fault for their rebellious activity.¹¹⁷

Before proceeding with our discussion, it is imperative to outline in greater detail the basic sense of פֶּשַׁע. Grasping the nuances of the word will give us additional insight into the underlying way in which certain rebellions were viewed, and will help to explain why פֶּשַׁע became a technical term to describe these events. In the Hebrew Bible, פֶּשַׁע appears 134 times, 93 times as a noun and 41 times as a verb, all in the *qal* except in Prov 18:19, where it appears in the *niphal*.¹¹⁸ The word originally was used to denote a range of offenses or crimes committed

¹¹⁷ As we will see below, however, even when these rebellions are presented as negative, some of them are nonetheless described as having been ordained by Yahweh, which in some sense justifies the misbehavior of the subordinate party. It is too simplistic, then, to say that because these rebellions are described by the word פֶּשַׁע, the ancient Israelites must have understood them as sinful acts.

¹¹⁸ This count is taken from Knierim, “פֶּשַׁע,” *TLOT 2: 1033*.

against another party. Such offenses often occur in legal contexts and in social situations.¹¹⁹ The word indicates that there is a set of norms, whether detailed in law or generally understood within a society, that individuals or groups should not break; when the norms are broken, however, this breach is referred to as **פֶשַׁע**, meaning offense or crime. The word often describes a rift between two parties. In Gen 50:17, Joseph’s brothers ask him to forgive their **פֶשַׁע** after they kidnap him, throw him into a pit, and sell him as a slave. They understood the seriousness of their crime. Asking for forgiveness was their attempt to mend the breach in the relationship. In Exod 22:8, **פֶשַׁע** is used to indicate illegal possession of property, such as an ox or donkey that belongs to someone else, i.e., an act of theft.¹²⁰ In Gen 31:36, Laban accuses Jacob, or one of his associates, of stealing his household gods. Jacob, in proclaiming his innocence, asks, “What is my **פֶשַׁע**?”¹²¹ While this provides a general picture of the basic usage of **פֶשַׁע**, it will also prove informative as we examine a few significant scholarly studies on the term, which have helped to shape subsequent analysis.

Two prominent scholars who have written influential articles on **פֶשַׁע** are Ludwig Köhler and Rolf Knierim.¹²² Köhler has suggested that **פֶשַׁע** has two basic meanings in Biblical Hebrew. According to him, the word refers either to a rebellion/revolt or a property dispute. He derives

¹¹⁹ For an example from a legal context, see Exod 22:8; for social relationships, see Prov 18:19. **פֶשַׁע** also occurs in cultic contexts (e.g., Lev 16:16), a usage that appears to have arisen from the original meaning in legal contexts.

¹²⁰ Although Köhler regards Exod 22:8 as describing the basic sense of the word as a property dispute, it is clear that a range of offenses is covered by this that have nothing to do with disputes over property. As the above discussion illustrates it can refer to theft, kidnapping, laying a hand on someone, and even killing. For a refutation of Köhler’s position, see Knierim, “**פֶשַׁע**,” *TLOT* 2:1033–34. See also the discussion in the following paragraphs.

¹²¹ There are many other occurrences of this word that confirm this basic meaning of an offense see for example Prov 10:12, 19; 17:9; 18:19; 19:11; 28:4. In many other contexts, the acts described as **פֶשַׁע** are not specified, but entail a wide range of offenses against God.

¹²² Ludwig Köhler, “Zu Ex. 22:8: Ein Beitrag zur Kenntnis des hebräischen Rechts,” *ZAW* 46 (1928): 213–18; Rolf Knierim, *Die Hauptbegriffe für Sünde im Alten Testament* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus G. Mohn, 1965); R. Knierim, “**פֶשַׁע**” *TLOT*, 2:1033–37.

the latter from Exod 22:8, and regards this as constituting the original meaning of פשע. When the word appears with God as its object, Köhler suggests this was a later development of the rebellion concept and that it represents the gravest of sins.¹²³ In response to Köhler, Knierim suggested the essential meaning of פשע is broader than a property dispute and involves an offense or crime, specifically those “crimes subject to legal penalties.”¹²⁴ According to him, and in partial agreement with Kohler, the theological idea that this term connoted sin is a later development stemming from the original meaning of a crime with a legal penalty. Knierim has made many good points, and he is correct that the basic meaning of פשע is broader than a crime or offense related to property disputes. But it is also imperative to define what is meant by “crimes subject to legal penalties.” The word פשע also refers to offenses committed in political contexts (which are not necessarily subject to legal penalties per se),¹²⁵ and in passages that Knierim considers as early and thus indicative of the basic meaning of פשע.¹²⁶ In many passages, פשע refers to crimes related to political affairs, which may or may not have been conceived of in legal terms.¹²⁷ While similar due to the relationship between nations often being conceived of in terms of a treaty, there are differences. Crimes on the international scale are not litigated at the gate of a city but rather are dealt with by means of warfare or sanctions. This type of crime may have differed from those committed in the domestic legal sphere, as not all nations had treaties

¹²³ Köhler, “Zu Ex. 22:8: Ein Beitrag zur Kenntnis des hebräischen Rechts,” 214. Because Köhler believes Exod 22:8 to be the earliest text that uses פשע, he therefore determines that the original meaning of the word must be related to a property dispute.

¹²⁴ Knierim, “פשע,” *TLOT*, 2:1035.

¹²⁵ The term legal has different connotations in the modern and ancient worlds, so a more clear definition of what “legal penalties” entails is necessary to make this point.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1036. See below for more on the discussion of the word as it appears in political contexts.

¹²⁷ In addition to political offenses, פשע also refers to cultic issues in the book of Micah in particular. In Mic 1:5, we find critiques of the illegitimate high places, whose presence indicates פשע. See also Mic 1:13; 3:8 and Amos 1:3–2:6; 3:13. In Amos, the legal connection may be due to the idea that there is a breach of covenant behind the offenses committed by the nations in Amos 1–3. However, as we will argue below, it is more likely that a breach of covenant is not in view and that these are simply universal criminal offenses.

one with the other. Thus, Knierim's claim that פשע refers to "crimes subject to legal penalties," is correct but needs clarification. Further, in addition to the fact that some crime or offense is involved, it is clear that the result of the action described by פשע is usually a distancing or separation between two parties. This concept appears to be central to the meaning of פשע.

The notion that acts of פשע often cause a separation or a breach between two parties is supported by the use of פשע in parallel with words that indicate a physical separation. In Hos 7:13 the word is used in parallel with נדר, "to flee," "Woe to them for they have wandered away from me, destruction to them, for they have committed an offense against me." In Isa 1:28 פשע parallels עזב, "to abandon"; in Jer 2:29–31, פשע is associated with רווד, "to wander," whereas in Jer 3:13 it is associated with שוב, "to return." In this last case, the implication is that those who have committed פשע have offended God and caused a separation, hence the reason they need to return. These verbs indicate a separation between two parties resulting from the crime or offense behind the root פשע. The notion of separation is also evident in other texts discussed above.

Joseph and his brothers are at odds, and there is a clear breach in the relationship because of the brothers' פשע. The brothers hope that the breach can be mended with an act of forgiveness (Gen 50:17), which would result in a restored relationship or a movement of the parties back together.

In addition to those examples mentioned above, the major prophetic texts of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel all begin with Yahweh using the word פשע as he accuses the people of breaking with him. In Isa 1:2 Yahweh says, בָּנִים אֲנִי וְרוּלְמִנְתִּי וְהֵם פָּשְׁעוּ בִּי, "Children I have reared and raised, but they broke with me." The same idea occurs in the early chapters of Jeremiah. In Jer 2:8, there is a list of people including priests, prophets, those who hold the law, and shepherds, all of whom are accused of no longer being associated with Yahweh. The shepherds are specifically described as breaking with Yahweh וְהֹרְעִים פָּשְׁעוּ בִּי, "and the

shepherds broke with me.” The book of Ezekiel likewise begins by stating that the Israelites have rebelled against (מרד) and broken with (פשע) Yahweh: מִרְדוּ-בִי הַמָּה וְאַבוֹתֵיכֶם פָּשְׁעוּ בִּי, “They rebelled against me, they and their ancestors have broken with me” (Ezek 2:3). In these prophetic books, פשע describes actions that cause a breach between Yahweh and his people; in many later texts by contrast the term comes to denote actions of a more personal and moral nature. As Knierim observes, the “term is finally used in the sense of objectionable, immoral behavior.”¹²⁸ It is significant that פשע often indicates a crime or offense that causes a breach in a social relationship, since a rebellion always involves a rift or separation between two parties as one breaks away from the other.

As mentioned, the term פשע also often indicates wrongs committed in political contexts, particularly in interactions between states. In these contexts, there is an established or assumed set of behaviors that states are supposed to follow. פשע describes situations where one party breaks one of these norms, or what we might describe as customary law. The source or measure by which such standards would have been evaluated in the realm of international politics has been the object of much discussion. Many scholars have assumed that the use of פשע presumes a treaty background.¹²⁹ This assumption stems largely from the first two chapters of Amos, which deal with standards of international conduct that are possibly confirmed by actual treaties.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Knierim, “פשע,” 1036. This sense of פשע occurs most frequently in the wisdom texts and Psalms. See Prov 10:12; 12:13; 17:9; 28:2, 13; 29:6; Job 31:33; Ps 25:7; 32:5; 39:9; 51:3, 5; 65:4; 103:12; Job 14:17. In this way, פשע becomes another generic word for sin that is often employed to describe cultic and personal offenses. Many appearances of פשע with parallel words meanings sin or iniquity occur in cultic contexts, which is likely a late development, as Knierim suggests. For these references see Exod 34:7; Lev 16:16, 21; Num 14:18; Josh 24:19; 1 Kgs 8:50; Isa 1:28; 43:27; 44:22; 50:1; 53:12; 58:1; 59:12; Jer 33:8; Ezek 21:29; 33:10, 12; 37:23; Ps 51:5; Job 8:4; 35:6. This is not to indicate that words such as חטא, עוה, and רשע are synonyms, it is clear that in many cases the terms have different nuances, but they all are used in many cases to indicate general wrongdoing.

¹²⁹ See Michael Fishbane, “The Treaty Background of Amos 1:11 and Related Matters,” *JBL* 89 (1970): 313–18. Fishbane says that פשע indicates a rebellion or the breaking of a treaty.

¹³⁰ See John Barton, *Amos's Oracles Against the Nations: A Study of Amos 1:3–2:5* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 52.

Barré suggests the text of Amos 1–2 presumes a treaty between Israel and the surrounding states, which is based on the notion of an idealized Davidic state that subordinated all the surrounding nations. In his view, the word פשע and the crimes detailed in the first two chapters of Amos, such as tearing open pregnant women (Amos 1:13), sending whole communities into exile (Amos 1:6, 9), or burning the bones of a king (Amos 2:1), indicate the breaking of a treaty and ultimately a rebellion against Yahweh as the suzerain of the Davidic state. These rebellious acts led to a fracture in the relationship, which would entail a need for punishment. Yahweh responds by sending fire on these nations as punishment and refusing to take them back as vassals. This is what the phrase לֹא אֲשִׁיבֵנּוּ, “I will not restore it,” may indicate.¹³¹

Aside from Amos 1:9, however, which uses בְּרִית אֱחָיִם, “the covenant of brotherhood,” it is not clear if the rest of the passages in Amos 1:2–2:3 are set against the background of a treaty and thus represent a rebellion threatening the rule of the sovereign.¹³² It is more likely that the offenses described in Amos 1–2 with the word פשע refer to a set of universal norms, or, as John Barton puts it, “the common moral sense of all right minded men,” or as “international customary law.”¹³³ If Barton is correct, the plural אֱחָיִם in the phrase בְּרִית אֱחָיִם may be an

¹³¹ For this position see Michael L. Barré, “The Meaning of l’sybnw in Amos 1:3-2:6,” *JBL* 105 (1986): 611–31. According to Barré, all the nations indicted in Amos 1:3–2:3 “were considered to have been under the domination of the united kingdom of Judah-Israel.” These nations would have been thought of as the subjects of Yahweh and, therefore, their crimes, as outlined here, would have been committed against him as the suzerain. Their actions are therefore understood as a rebellion, which necessitated military punishment. This position has also been argued by others such as Max E. Polley, *Amos and the Davidic Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); John Mauchline, “Implicit Signs of a Persistent Belief in the Davidic Empire,” *VT* 20 (1970): 287–303; Duane L. Christensen, *Transformations of the War Oracle in Old Testament Prophecy* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975); Jeremy M. Hutton, “Amos 1:3–2:8 and the International Economy of Iron Age II Israel,” *HTR* 107 (2014): 81–113.

¹³² For a critique of Barré’s position, see Paul Noble, “Israel Among the Nations,” *HBT* 15 (1993): 56–82. Noble sees only limited evidence for this treaty background.

¹³³ Barton, *Amos’s Oracles Against the Nations: A Study of Amos 1:3–2:5*, 43. See also Noble, *Israel Among the Nations*, 63. Noble adds that these are particularly grave offenses which adds to the notion that all people should know they should not rip open pregnant women even if they are not directly subject to Yahweh’s laws.

abstract plural rather than representing an actual covenant.¹³⁴ Such an interpretation is consistent with the basic meaning of **פִּשַׁע** as an offense or wrongdoing often involving legal penalties rather than referring to a rebellion in which an inferior party attempts to break free from the subordination of a more powerful entity. If this is the case, it seems that in Amos 1–2 the word **פִּשַׁע** describes general offenses committed in a political context that may have included the breaking of a treaty. The term does not, therefore, describe the rebellion against an overlord here. Scholars who have suggested the meaning of rebellion in Amos 1–2 have been influenced by the less common usage of **פִּשַׁע** to describe the attempted overthrow of the temporarily more powerful Israel or Judah. That, however, is not what is in view in Amos 1–2. Our interpretation is consistent with the way in which **פִּשַׁע** is used elsewhere in the book of Amos to describe a general offense or wrongdoing (Amos 3:14; 5:12). What the first two chapters of Amos demonstrate is that the word **פִּשַׁע**, which often describes an offense or wrongdoing committed on an interpersonal level, can also be used to denote an offense committed in political contexts on the state or regional level.

This understanding of **פִּשַׁע** is similar to the way the term is used in the narrative of David’s rise. Saul has accused David and others of an attempt to usurp the throne and he employs **קָשַׁר** to indicate this: **וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו שָׂאוּל לָמָּה קָשַׁרְתָּם עָלַי**, “Saul said to him, why have you conspired against me” (1 Sam 22:13 cf. 1 Sam 22:8)? In 1 Sam 24, David is a fugitive from the crown, and Saul providentially wanders into the cave where David is hiding. David proceeds to cut off the hem of Saul’s garment, but refrains from killing the king as his men urge him to do. David, in pleading his innocence to Saul after he surreptitiously cuts the king’s garment, declares that there is no **פִּשַׁע** in his hand: **דַּע וּרְאֵה כִּי אֵין בְּיָדִי רֵעָה וּפִשַׁע וְלֹא־חֲטָאתִי לָךְ**, “Know and see that

¹³⁴ For more on the abstract plural, see Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 121.

there is no evil or offense in my hand. I have not committed a crime against you” (1 Sam 24:12). With this statement, David denies Saul’s accusation that he is rebelling (קָשָׁר) against the king; he insists that he has no intention of committing an offense (פֶּשַׁע) against the monarch that would cause a rupture in their relationship and be deserving of punishment. Here, פֶּשַׁע is not a technical term for the rebellion of David against Saul—that is קָשָׁר—but it retains its meaning of offense.¹³⁵ Nevertheless, this example indicates that the writers use פֶּשַׁע in the context of rebellion. It appears here because Saul certainly would have viewed an attempt on the throne, or an act that would undermine him, as a punishable offense. If David was in fact rebelling against his monarch, as Saul believed, then he was breaking the obligation of expected loyalty a king demanded.¹³⁶ A similar situation appears both here and in Amos 1–2, with one example on the domestic level and another on the international level. In these two episodes, פֶּשַׁע has connections to a rebellion only because of the context.

פֶּשַׁע - For Political Rebellion

The previous discussion focused on two issues: first, that פֶּשַׁע often entails an offense causing a breach in a social relationship; second, that there is on occasion a political aspect to this word. These two features make the word fit to describe a certain type of rebellion. Arising from the basic meaning of פֶּשַׁע briefly discussed above, there are several occurrences where פֶּשַׁע is indicative of a rebellion. The word is suitable for use in these political situations because, from the perspective of the ruling power, rebellion is an offense and ultimately causes an unwanted breach in the relationship. The ruling party would have deemed this a crime that was subject to a

¹³⁵ See the discussion in chapter five on the word מַטָּא when it appears in the context of rebellion, as it has parallels with this particular case. See also 1 Sam 25:28 for another comparable example.

¹³⁶ See below in the chapter on domestic rebellion for more on this. We also see this term used when Yahweh is viewed as the political ruler and the Israelites are seeking alliances with foreign nations as they break with him. See Hos 7:10–13 for this specific reference as well as the discussion of this in the next few pages.

“legal” penalty.¹³⁷ In all cases when the writers use **פָּשַׁע** with this particular meaning, it denotes the attempt of a subordinate state or tribal group to throw off the yoke of the power to which they have become subservient. When used with this meaning, the ruling power is always Israel or Judah and never a foreign power.¹³⁸ Instead of breaking a law or social norm in the realm of interpersonal relationships or international customs, the word indicates the breaking of one state’s imposed subordination established in some cases by a treaty.¹³⁹

One place where such a treaty is mentioned is in 2 Sam 5:1–3. According to this passage, the tribes of Israel make a treaty with David, king of Judah, after seven years of war and the assassination of Saul’s son Ishbaal (Ishbosheth). The treaty is confirmed when the tribes of Israel descend upon Hebron and say, “We are your bone and flesh.” Then **וַיַּכְרֵת לָהֶם הַמֶּלֶךְ דָּוִד בְּרִית**, “King David makes a covenant with them,” that is, with the elders of Israel (2 Sam 5:3). This act binds Israel to David and Judah in a political relationship. In another case, which can be dated to the middle of the ninth century, Ahab and the Israelites impose vassal status on Mesha and the Moabites. According to 2 Kgs 3:4, Mesha’s obligation as a vassal is to pay tribute of a hundred thousand lambs and the wool of a hundred thousand rams to Israel. The large number is perhaps meant to highlight the Moabite king’s submission to Israel, confirming his vassal status and the presence of an arranged agreement or treaty.

In both cases, a treaty must have been in place, and the breaking of the relationship, or the rebellion, is described with the verb **פָּשַׁע**. Israel’s rebellion against the house of David is

¹³⁷ As noted above, we need to make sure we are careful how we define “legal” in an international context, this must include the breaking of a treaty, or “international customary law.” In some cases, no legal code or standard would have been in effect, and so the way legality is defined on an international level is not identical to domestic law.

¹³⁸ In most cases when the Israelites rebel against the rule of a relatively equal sized state, the rebellion is described not in terms of rebellion but rather in terms of salvation. See the discussion in chapter four below for more on this.

¹³⁹ The notion that **פָּשַׁע** indicates a rebellion in which a subordinate party frees itself from a superior party is confirmed in the associated use of the phrase **בְּיַד**, “from under the hand/power of.” This phrase is used on multiple occasions in the context of rebellion: see Exod 18:10; 2 Kgs 8:20, 22; 13:5; 17:7; 2 Chron 21:8, 10 for these references. In 2 Kgs 8:20, 22; 2 Chron 21:8, 10 this phrase is used in conjunction with **פָּשַׁע**, confirming its connection to a rebellion and the focus on breaking away from the power of the superior.

described in 1 Kgs 12:19 and 2 Chron 10:19 with the phrase **וַיִּפְשְׁעוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּבֵית דָּוִד**, “Israel rebelled against the house of David.”¹⁴⁰ Eventually, Israel successfully threw off Judah’s rule and established a sovereign nation apart from Judah. In the other case, after Ahab’s death and the change to a new Israelite ruler, the Moabites, led by Mesha, attempted to throw off the yoke of Israel. The biblical writer uses the verb **פָּשַׁע** to describe this rebellion against Israel in 2 Kgs 1:1; 3:5, 7, where Moab engages in violent action in an attempt to reestablish its independence. With Israel’s withdraw as recounted in 2 Kgs 3:27, the Moabites succeed in their efforts.

Two other cases of rebellions described by **פָּשַׁע** in the book of Kings follow a similar pattern, where a group successfully breaks away from the imposed rule of Israel/Judah through an act of secession, which constitutes rebellion. During Joram’s reign in the 9th century, both Edom and the priestly city of Libnah rebel against Judah. First, **בְּיָמָיו פָּשַׁע אֱדוֹם מִתַּחַת יְרֵי־הַיְּהוּדָה**, **וַיִּמְלְכוּ עֲלֵיהֶם מֶלֶךְ**, “In his days, Edom rebelled from under the power of Judah, and they established their own king” (2 Kgs 8:20). Then, **אֲזַי תִּפְשַׁע לִבְנָה בְּעַת הַהִיא**, “Libnah also rebelled at that time” (2 Kgs 8:22). The writer of Kings provides little explanation for the events, but uses **פָּשַׁע** to describe the breach in the political order. The relationship between these parties is not clear, as the text does not contain evidence of a covenant or a description of how Judah subordinated these entities. The context of these two verses, however, does indicate that both Edom and Libnah were subordinate to Judah’s rule and at least for a time comprised part of Judah’s territory. The phrase **מִתַּחַת יְרֵי־הַיְּהוּדָה**, “from under the power of Judah” (2 Kgs 8:20) indicates that Judah was in the position of power that Edom and Libnah needed to break from if they wanted independence. In this act of rebellion, both groups liberate themselves from

¹⁴⁰ In 2 Chron 13:6 the Chronicler uses the verb **נָמַר** to describe Jeroboam’s rebellion against Solomon. As previously argued, this is likely because the word lost its original meaning in later texts.

subordination and begin to rule themselves independently when they set up a king for themselves (וַיִּמְלְכוּ עָלֵיהֶם מֶלֶךְ), as recorded in 2 Kgs 8:20.

Moving out of the earthly political realm for a moment, פִּשַׁע also indicates an offense against or a break with Yahweh, which occasionally has political implications. The political implications of this word appear most frequently in the prophets. In Isa 1:2, the people of Israel are described as Yahweh’s children whom he raised. Once they reach maturity, they break this relationship; and the breach is described with פִּשַׁע. Hosea 7:13 provides a warning for those who break (פִּשַׁע) with Yahweh. אֲוִי לָהֶם כִּי־נָדְדוּ מִפְּנֵי טָרַד לָהֶם כִּי־פָשְׁעוּ בִּי, “Woe to them for they fled from me, destruction to them for they broke with me.” In pairing פִּשַׁע with נָדַד, “to flee,” the author of this verse may have intended to emphasize how establishing political alliances with the major powers of the day is an offense that causes the people to move away from Yahweh. The preceding verses (Hos 7:8–12) outline Ephraim’s relationship with the Egyptians and the Assyrians. Hosea 7:9 contains a likely reference to the paying of tribute to these nations;¹⁴¹ Hos 7:8 mentions mixing with foreigners; and Hos 7:12 specifically accuses Ephraim of calling to Egypt and traveling to Assyria. Thus, there is little doubt that the fleeing from Yahweh described in Hos 7:13 refers to Israel’s political relationships. The people reject Yahweh’s covenant and enter into a relationship with foreign nations, which is analogous to a rebellion, as they trade the rule of Yahweh for the rule of these imperial powers. Ezekiel 2:3 also uses פִּשַׁע to indicate that the people’s actions constitute an offense against Yahweh; in this case, פִּשַׁע is set in parallel with מָרַד, an overtly political term. These are cases when Yahweh’s role as the political suzerain, with whom the people break is visible. When associated with Yahweh, פִּשַׁע appears first to have

¹⁴¹ The phrase that indicates the paying of tribute is אֲכָלְיוּ זָרִים כֹּחֹו, “foreigners consumed his strength.” As Andersen and Freedman note, this whole section is focused on Israel’s involvement in international politics. They further state that “strength” in this verse could refer to crops or produce and in this case may be used figuratively to mean the payment of tribute to a foreign ruler. Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 24 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 467.

legal/political connotations, and from there it develops into a generic word for sin.¹⁴² פשע is used as a general word for sin against Yahweh, as we see in 1 Kgs 8:50; Lam 1:14, 22; Isa 43:27; 44:22; Ps 5:11; 32:5; 39:9; 51:3, 5; 65:4; 103:12. In these cases, פשע is used for a wide range of offensive actions against Yahweh, and often the specific action or offense is not even recorded, which emphasizes the generic meaning of the word.¹⁴³ Similar to מרד, פשע appears, prior to being a generic word for an offense against God, with a political meaning to indicate a break with Yahweh as the suzerain. From here it is easy to understand how פשע becomes equivalent to sin and subsequently is used to describe any sin against Yahweh. When Yahweh is the object, פשע and מרד have a similar meaning.

As should be clear, this discussion has highlighted similarities between מרד and פשע. Both words may denote a subordinate state rebelling against an overlord and attempting to throw off the yoke of a state that has become dominant. Both מרד and פשע also eventually describe general wrongdoing against Yahweh. Despite these similarities, there are a few important differences between the words. The verb מרד is primarily used to describe a subordinate state, usually Israel or Judah, rebelling against the present world empire. The object of מרד is typically the earthly king, as when Judah rebels against the kings of Assyria, Babylonia, and is accused of attempting to foment a rebellion against the Persian king, or when the kings of the southern Levant rebel against Chedorlaomer, who is presented as the world power in Gen 14. In these contexts, the relationship of the subordinate state to the empire is often described using a form of עבר or detailing that a covenant had been established between them, (cf. Ezek 17). As discussed above, the verb מרד appears to be neutral in its outlook on the rebellions; the writer's attitude towards those rebellions cannot be determined by the use of מרד alone.

¹⁴² Knierim, "פשע," 1036–37.

¹⁴³ See 1 Kgs 8:50; Ps 25:7; 51:3; 59:4 for some examples of this.

In contrast, the verb **פָּשַׁע** does not deal with empires, but rather is used in relation to the territories of Judah and Israel in their rule over neighboring polities, tribes, or, in one case, a border city in the monarchic period. The political situation is regional rather than international in all the cases of **פָּשַׁע** described above. The type of relationship between the two parties in these situations narrated with **פָּשַׁע** varies slightly, but it is never an imperial situation. The parties are all small regional entities that are traditionally said to be related to each other in some way, either as sibling (Israel and Judah; Judah and Edom), or cousin nations (Israel and Moab). In most cases, the parties involved are described as distinct entities. Judah and Israel had a closer relationship than Israel and Moab did, but the nations are still distinct. According to the biblical text, Judah and Israel were united for a time under David and Solomon, but even in the time of the so-called United Monarchy, a clear delineation is still made between these two entities. As noted above, the biblical text describes David as warring against Israel for seven years before uniting Judah and the northern tribes. In fact, Daniel Fleming goes so far to state that our, “entire analysis of biblical evidence for Israel rests particularly on a political distinction between Israel and Judah.”¹⁴⁴ The biblical passages using **פָּשַׁע** describe two separate entities that had been united for a time.¹⁴⁵ When the subordinate states or tribes such as Israel, Moab, Edom, or Libnah rebel

¹⁴⁴ Daniel Fleming, *The Legacy of Israel in Judah's Bible: History, Politics, and the Reinscribing of Tradition*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 20. See also the following pages and part IV of Fleming's book. This distinction is clear from the beginning of David's reign, when he sets up an alternative kingdom in Hebron and rules apart from Israel for seven years (1 Kgs 2:11). Even when Israel and Judah unified, the biblical text continues to betray the idea of a distinction between Israel and Judah. Kuhrt agrees with this analysis and states, “Perhaps it is simply erroneous to see the events following Solomon's death as the division of an original whole: Israel and Judah were probably always, and continued to be, two separate political units that were only temporarily united by the astounding successes of David and Solomon.” Amélie Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East, C. 3000–330 BC: Vol. 2*, 458.

¹⁴⁵ This is the case for all these nations, except possibly for Libnah, for which our knowledge is limited. However, as Ron E. Tappy has suggested, Libnah may have been a liminal city whose allegiance vacillated between Judah and the coastal cities of the Philistines. Tappy cites this to explain the rebellion mentioned in the biblical text, and this would confirm the status of Libnah as in some ways a separate entity from Judah. Ron E. Tappy, “The Archaeology and History of Tel Zayit: A Record of Liminal Life,” in *The Shephelah During the Iron Age: Recent Archaeological Studies*, ed. Oded Lipschits and Aren M. Maeir (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2017), 155–80. We should mention that the exact location of Libnah is debated. Libnah is located somewhere in the Shephelah. Itzhaq Shai believes Libnah should be identified with Tel Burna, while Ron Tappy believes it should be identified with Tel Zayit. See Itzhaq Shai, “Tel Burna: A Judahite Fortified Town in the Shephelah,” in *The Shephelah During the Iron Age*:

against Israel or Judah, the biblical understanding of the situation is that these groups are breaking an established agreement with the regional power. That most of these groups were originally independent makes it easier to understand why they sought to rebel and regain their independence. In the context of rebellion, the focus of **פִּשַׁע** is on the attempt to break the regional rule of either Israel or Judah.

What the contrast with **מִרְד** shows is that the word **פִּשַׁע**, when used to describe this specific type of rebellion, is more concerned with the political relationship the rebellion breaks than with the outcome of the rebellion. This is an important point to highlight because, as we will see, scholars have debated whether **פִּשַׁע** focuses on the decision to rebel against the authority (Israel or Judah), or if **פִּשַׁע** refers to a successful separation from a superior. All the rebellions described with this term eventually prove successful, which is noteworthy. It is due to this distribution that Knierim has suggested that while **מִרְד** indicates an incomplete rebellion, **פִּשַׁע** indicates “an accomplished reality.”¹⁴⁶ This claim needs clarification in light of the use of **פִּשַׁע** in the context of 2 Kgs 3:7. Here, Jehoram marches from Samaria and attempts to summon Judah to help him quell Moab’s rebellion. He states, **מֶלֶךְ מוֹאָב פָּשַׁע בִּי הִתְגַּלַּד אֶתִּי אֶל־מוֹאָב לְמִלְחָמָה**, “The king of Moab has rebelled against me. Will you go with me to Moab for battle?” (2 Kgs 3:7). Jehoram does not view this rebellion as a success. The word indicates that a regional territory he rules has chosen to withdraw from him and establish its independence. The rebellion does not prove successful until 2 Kgs 3:27, which records Israel’s retreat from Moab. The verb itself describes the decision of one of the small Levantine polities to rebel against the rule of Israel or Judah. In Neh 2:19, the word **מִרְד** occurs in a similar context. In this verse, the Judahite

Recent Archaeological Studies, ed. Oded Lipschits and Aren M. Maeir (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2017), 45–60. For more on the city and debate, see Anson F. Rainey and R. Steven Notley, *The Sacred Bridge: Carta’s Atlas of the Biblical World* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2006), 127–28, 205–06.

¹⁴⁶ Knierim, **פִּשַׁע**, *TLOT*, 2:878.

adversaries ask Nehemiah, **העל המלך אתם מרדדים**, “Are you rebelling against the king?” In both cases, the verbs occur in the context of a question about an ongoing action; therefore, the concern is not on whether the act is complete or not, but rather whom the rebel is acting against.¹⁴⁷

There are several additional clues in the text that suggest the biblical writers were not primarily concerned with using **פשע** to indicate an accomplished reality. In addition to the example involving Jehoram and Moab discussed above, 1 Kgs 12:19 states, **ויפשעו ישראל בבית** **היהודה עד היום הזה**, “Israel has been in rebellion against the House of David until this day.” The editorial comment “until this day” indicates that the rebellion is an act that started in the past and continues until the time of the writer or editor. The same phrase “until this day” also occurs in 2 Kgs 8:22 to describe Edom’s rebellion against Judah. This rebellion appears to be successful because Edom manages to establish their own king as narrated two verses earlier, in 2 Kgs 8:20, but this chronistic detail indicates that the writer does not view the rebellion as a singular accomplished event, but rather as the order of the day.

Nevertheless, it is notable that the writers always employ this term in the context of rebellions that prove successful. The most we can say about this term is that it fits in contexts where the regional event will prove successful. Further, there are other terms these writers employ that describe failed acts of rebellion against Israel/Judah, namely **יד ב רום** and **יד ב נשא**. What needs to be emphasized is that **פשע** does not demand the rebellion be viewed as a success and that it contrasts with **יד ב רום** and **יד ב נשא** rather than **מרד**.

As we reflect on the usage of **פשע** to describe a rebellion, we see that it appears in only eight verses to describe a rebellion against an earthly political entity. In each of these cases, the writers of the Hebrew Bible employ this word for rebellions against Israel and Judah, that while not necessarily accomplished, always prove successful. The limited yet specific usage of **פשע**

¹⁴⁷ 2 Kgs 18:20 is another example of **מרד** appearing in a question describing an action in progress.

deserves an explanation. The reason for this particularity could be due to the desire of the biblical writers to portray any successful rebellion against Israel or Judah as at least in part negative. The basic meaning of this word is a crime of one party against another. Above, we argued that **פשע** suits the context of rebellion because it is an offense that causes a breach between two parties and that it can have political implications. As a rebellion term, **פשע** therefore indicates an offense, specifically an offense viewed from the perspective of the ruling party. And since the biblical texts are written from the perspective of Judah and Israel, it is these nations or their kings that are consistently the objects of **פשע**, in contrast to the objects of **מרד**.¹⁴⁸

The use of **פשע** to describe this specific type of rebellion can loosely be understood as a societal decision. In this case, the society decides to employ a word with a negative core meaning to describe an offense or rebellion against it. This use of **פשע** stands in marked contrast to those cases when Israel rebels against her regional neighbors. The word **פשע** never occurs in those contexts.¹⁴⁹ However, while the notion of any rebellion against Israel and Judah as negative may be part of the societal background of this word, it would be erroneous to claim, as some have, that because the writers use **פשע** to describe these rebellions, these rebellions are therefore understood as illegitimate or sinful. The notion that **פשע** indicates an offense against one party that causes a breach in the relationship is why it suits the context of political rebellion, but this does not demand that all cases described with this word should automatically be classified as sinful according to the biblical writers.

Simply because **פשע** indicates an offense against the ruling party and contains some negativity does not entail that the act itself should be regarded as a crime or even that the biblical

¹⁴⁸ It may be helpful to point out that, when used in a political context, the object of **מרד** is always a king or a person's name, but with **פשע** the object is more often the political entity such as the house of David or Israel or Judah. While this does not seem to explain the alternative uses of these words it is interesting to point out.

¹⁴⁹ See chapter four for more on this. When Israel rebels against a regional power, the biblical texts typically use a form of **ישע**, "salvation" to describe the action.

writer views it as a crime. Yahweh can legitimize any action. For example, the Chronicler provides a theological justification for the revolt of Edom and Libnah against Judah (2 Chron 21:10). Elsewhere, Ahijah the prophet attributes divine legitimation to Israel's rebellion against Judah, despite the fact that these actions are recorded with the word **פִּשַׁע** (1 Kgs 11:29–40; 1 Kgs 12:19). While **פִּשַׁע** itself may describe the rebellion as an offense committed against the regional ruler, the rebellions themselves are occasionally legitimized in other ways, as these comments make clear. This makes it possible to see the offense committed in these contexts only as an offense when viewed from the perspective of the earthly ruling party, not as a sin or an act that was objectively wrong. Using **פִּשַׁע** to describe rebellions against Israel/Judah allowed the society to express some dissatisfaction as its nation lost territory, but does not discount the possibility that some of these rebellions are divinely sanctioned.¹⁵⁰

Second, that **פִּשַׁע** has negative overtones yet can be legitimized by Yahweh suggests that the word, when describing a rebellion, is descriptive. It does not imply that all writers using this word thought of the act of rebellion as sin. This tension between rebellions that are viewed as both an offense committed against a ruling party and yet also legitimate will be discussed further below. Nevertheless, this discussion begins to highlight the tension societies feel toward rebellion and the complicated ways in which they approach it.

As we conclude this section, it may again prove enlightening to think about how **פִּשַׁע** fits into the language of modern rebellion. As noted above, **פִּשַׁע** is similar to the word **מִרְד** in many ways. Both words imply a situation involving two political entities that in most cases were initially independent of each other. One group becomes dominant over the other for a time, and both **פִּשַׁע** and **מִרְד** describe a scenario when the subordinate state attempts to break with or secede

¹⁵⁰ The tension the writer feels towards such rebellions is quite clear in the Chronicler's description of Jeroboam's actions. In 2 Chron 10 the Chronicler appears to justify the rebellion of Jeroboam, as he states this was a turn of affairs brought about by God to fulfill the words spoken by Ahijah (2 Chron 10:15). Despite this, in 2 Chron 13:5–7 the Northern kingdom is presented as illegitimate.

from the dominance of the ruling territory and regain their autonomy and former structure of governance. The main difference between **פִּשְׁע** and **מִרְד** in this context is that the object of **מִרְד** is a world empire, whereas the object of **פִּשְׁע** is a regional hegemon, specifically Israel or Judah. The description is one of rebellion involving regional secession rather than colonial secession.¹⁵¹ In these cases, Israel, Edom, Moab, and Libnah are all ruled by another political entity. Their rebellions threaten the rule of their overlord as they seek to form a new independent territory. They are attempting to create or recreate another political entity at the expense of the former ruler who no longer has power over the new state. Therefore, rebellions described by **פִּשְׁע** may be regarded as rebellions involving secession.

¹⁵¹ For definitions of secession, see above under the discussion of **מִרְד**.

Table 3. פשע – Rebellion against a Regional Ruler

Text	Ruler and Ruled	Political Status of Rebel	International Situation	Part of Speech	Form	Type of Rebellion/ Intended Result
1 Kgs 12:19	Judah over Israel	Voluntary submission, vassal	Regional neighbors	Verb Qal stem	וַיִּפְשְׁעוּ	Regional secession
2 Chron 10:19	Judah over Israel	Voluntary submission, vassal	Regional neighbors	Verb Qal stem	וַיִּפְשְׁעוּ	Regional secession
2 Kgs 1:1; 3:5, 7	Israel over Moab	Vassal	Regional neighbors	Verb Qal Stem	וַיִּפְשְׁעוּ וַיִּפְשְׁעוּ פָשַׁע	Regional secession
2 Kgs. 8:20	Judah over Edom	Vassal	Regional neighbors	Verb Qal Stem	פָּשַׁע	Regional secession
2 Kgs. 8:22	Judah over Libnah	A ruled city	Domestic situation	Verb Qal Stem	וַיִּפְשְׁעוּ	Secession of a small territory
2 Chron. 21:10	Judah over Edom and Libnah	Vassal/ ruled city	Regional situation/ domestic	Verb Qal stem	וַיִּפְשְׁעוּ הִפְשַׁעוּ	Regional secession

קָשַׁר - Palace and Military Coups

We next turn our attention to the verb קָשַׁר and the associated noun קָשָׁר. When discussing rebellion this word finds its usage in a very different political context from the previously analyzed words. Prior to looking at examples of קָשַׁר in the context of rebellion, however, we must first gain an understanding of the word's basic meaning and distribution. The word appears sixty times in the Hebrew Bible, including a few conjectural occurrences in Jer 12:6 and Isa 8:13–14. The majority of cases occur as a verb in the *qal*, but it also appears a few times in the *niphal* and *piel*, once in the *pual*, and three times in the *hitpael*. The basic meaning of קָשַׁר is to tie or bind something to another object. In Deut 6:8 and 11:18, the Israelites are commanded to tie the words of God upon their hands. This meaning is also present in Gen 38:28, which states that a midwife tied (קָשַׁר) a scarlet thread on the finger of Perez. Jeremiah ties (קָשַׁר) a scroll to a rock before throwing it into a river (Jer 51:63). These occurrences demonstrate that קָשַׁר connotes the attachment of one object to another. This meaning of attachment or binding together also occurs in a metaphorical sense, with two objects or lives being metaphorically intertwined.¹⁵² Joseph's brothers use קָשַׁר to describe how Jacob's life is bound to Benjamin's life (Gen 44:30). If Jacob believes that Benjamin is gone, the brothers state that Jacob will die because of the intertwining of their lives (cf. 1 Sam 18:1).

Arising from this basic usage of the word, קָשַׁר secondarily appears to indicate that a group of people have joined, or metaphorically bound themselves together, almost always for the purpose of overthrowing and replacing the current king.¹⁵³ Due to the association of קָשַׁר with

¹⁵² The notion of tying one object to another underlies the example given in Deuteronomy of metaphorically tying the words of God to your hand.

¹⁵³ Ezekiel 22:25 contains an example in which a group of prophets binds themselves together not for the purpose of overthrowing the king. In this case קָשַׁר may simply mean “group/band” and would, therefore, be closer to the meaning of “to tie” or “to bind” rather than to conspire to assassinate the king. This is the only time this word appears to indicate a band of prophets.

tying or binding, many texts translate the word as “to conspire,” or “to be in league with.”¹⁵⁴ In these cases, a group joins together (or an individual acts)¹⁵⁵ with the goal of killing and replacing the king. In this context, קָשַׁר indicates a rebellion or organized attack on the ruling authority. The majority of these occurrences are found in 1 and 2 Kings and the associated passages in 2 Chronicles. Many of the examples of the verb and noun with this meaning are set within narrations of regime changes in the Northern kingdom of Israel. As many have pointed out, the North saw much greater dynastic instability than the southern kingdom of Judah, and so we will begin with these examples.¹⁵⁶

The context in which this type of rebellion appears involves occasions of domestic rebellion. Individuals or factions within or even outside of a state rise up against a king and attempt to replace him using violent actions. This is often analogous to the modern notion of a military or palace coup, a point that will be elaborated below. In 1 Kgs 15:27; 16:9, 16, 20; 2 Kgs 9:14; 10:9; 15:10, 15, 25, 30, Baasha, Zimri, Jehu, Shallum, Pekah, and Hoshea are said to have “conspired (rebelled) against” (וַיִּקְשֶׁר עָלָיו) the reigning king. In these cases, the king dies and these individuals begin to rule the same state in the former king’s stead. The background of these individuals varies: Zimri, Jehu, and Pekah are military figures and must have gained the support

¹⁵⁴ The text of the NRSV almost always translates this term with the word “conspired.” See 2 Sam 15:31; 1 Kgs 15:27; 1 Kgs 16:9 for some examples.

¹⁵⁵ See 1 Kgs 16:16, 20 where it is stated that Zimri “conspired” (קָשַׁר) and killed the king with the verb in the singular. See also 2 Kgs 15:15 which details Hoshea’s coup and where the verb קָשַׁר also appears in the singular form. This suggests that while the word may have originally been employed to describe the joining together of a group as they conspire to revolt against the king, it is no longer used in that sense alone. It has now become a technical term for a specific type of rebellion, a coup involving an assassination. See below for more on this.

¹⁵⁶ Albrecht Alt attempted to explain the high number of revolts in the North using a model of charismatic kingship compared to the dynastic principle in the South. Many scholars, such as Buccellati, disagreed with this claim and demonstrated the ways in which Alt’s reasoning was erroneous. See Albrecht Alt, “The Formation of the Israelite State in Palestine,” in *Essays in Old Testament History and Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), 171–237; G. Buccellati, *Cities and Nations of Ancient Syria: An Essay on Political Institutions with Special Reference to the Israelite Kingdoms* (Rome: University of Rome, 1967), 195–212. For more recent comments on this debate, see the notes below as well as Marvin Sweeney, *King Josiah of Judah: The Lost Messiah of Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 162.

of at least part of the military.¹⁵⁷ The background of the other conspirators is not clear, as the narrators decline to provide titles for them. In two cases where no title is given, the tribe of origin is provided. Baasha was from the tribe of Issachar (1 Kgs 15:27), and Shallum from Jabesh in Gilead (2 Kgs 15:10). Tomoo Ishida has suggested that this means that they must have gained support from their tribes of origin and that factional or tribal politics are at work.¹⁵⁸ No information is given for Hoshea's background except that he was the son of Elah. The historical context may provide some explanation for Hoshea's actions. Hoshea's rebellion took place after the Syro-Ephraimite War, and it is likely that he took a pro-Assyrian stance in contrast to Pekah, the king he murdered. Thus, Hoshea had the support of Tiglath-Pileser III and a pro-Assyrian faction within Israel.¹⁵⁹ What is important to note is that, in all of these cases, individuals are fomenting a rebellion from within the nation of Israel against the current king of Israel. This situation contrasts with a rebellion that is carried out by a vassal against an overlord and that involves multiple states.

Further confirming the basic sense of קָשַׁר as a rebellion term, the priest Amaziah accuses Amos of stirring up a plot to kill the king and to cause political upheaval within Israel proper (Amos 7:10–17). This plot is described using the word קָשַׁר. Amaziah declares to Jeroboam that Amos has prophesied that the king will die by the sword. Amaziah must fear that a prophecy against the king's life will eventually come to fruition if Amos stays, or at least that his presence

¹⁵⁷ See 1 Kgs 16:9; 2 Kgs 9:5; and 2 Kgs 15:25, respectively, for the mention of the military position of these individuals.

¹⁵⁸ Tomoo Ishida, "The People Under Arms in the Struggles for the Throne," in idem, *History and Historical Writing in Ancient Israel: Studies in Biblical Historiography* (Boston: Brill, 1999), 71.

¹⁵⁹ It is clear that Hoshea accepted Assyrian vassalage as he paid tribute to Tiglath-pileser III after he usurps the throne. The Israelite king paid tribute outside of Israel in Sarrabini and so we do not know if Tiglath-pileser actively helped Hoshea take the throne. The Assyrian king had already left Israel. What is clear is that the new Israelite king's pro-Assyrian stance contrasted with that of Pekah. For more on this transition, see Carl S. Ehrlich, "Coalition Politics in Eighth Century B.C.E. Palestine: The Philistines and the Syro-Ephraimite War," *ZDPV* 107 (1991): 48–58; and Rainey, *The Sacred Bridge*, 232; Ron Tappy, *The Archaeology of Israelite Samaria: Volume II the Eighth Century BCE* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2001), 560–61.

has the potential to inspire a rebel group to kill the king and rule in his stead.¹⁶⁰

Domestic events described with קָשַׁר also occur in Judah—albeit to a lesser extent, and the outcome is never as severe as in Israel. Most of the rebellions against the kings in the North result in the king’s death and a change in dynasty. Rebellions in Judah also result in the king’s death, but do not engender a change in dynasty. The first rebellion described with קָשַׁר in the South takes place under the rule of the usurper Athaliah. When she seizes the throne, Athaliah attempts to purge the house of David, but fails. The infant Joash escapes when Jehosheba, Joram’s daughter, hides the child from the massacre of Athaliah (2 Kgs 11:2). Six years later the rightful Davidic ruler, Joash, supported by a priest named Jehoiada and various military figures, plot to take back the throne. As she sees the conspiracy unfolding, Athaliah yells, בָּקָשָׁר בָּקָשָׁר (2 Kgs 11:14). Athaliah saw their acts as a local assault on her reign. This was not an interstate conflict, but involved only a change at the highest levels of government. The goal of this rebellion was to kill Athaliah and reinstall a member of the Davidic house on the throne.

Various court servants also carry out rebellions in the Southern kingdom, which are described with קָשַׁר. Joash’s servants, Jozacar and Jehozabad, kill the king and their plot is described with the phrase וַיִּקְשְׁרוּ-בְקָשָׁר (2 Kgs 12:21–22; 2 Chron 24:26). Amaziah and Amon are both killed in a plot against their lives by people attempting to take their throne. Amon was killed by his servants, and those who killed Amaziah are not specified, but both texts use קָשַׁר to describe the uprising against them (2 Kgs 14:19–20; 2 Chron 25:27; 2 Kgs 21:23–24; 2 Chron 33:24). In each case the only change that takes place is that the conspirators kill the former king

¹⁶⁰ Stanley Rosenbaum takes this further and understands the word קָשַׁר to indicate that Amos must have been a Northerner. In his view, acts of rebellion described with קָשַׁר are only carried out by people who are native to that land. This supposition seems unnecessary; even if Amos was from Judah, he could still work in the North and attempt to foment a rebellion from within that community. The point of the word is that the rebellion takes place on the domestic level rather than the international level. It does not typically involve multiple states as the words discussed above do. For this view, see Stanley Rosenbaum, “Northern Amos Revisited: Two Philological Suggestions,” *HS* 18 (1977): 132–48.

and rule or establish a ruler in his or her stead. These examples are consistent with our observation that קָשַׁר describes rebellions on the domestic or state level that involve replacing only the king and possibly his court.

Saul likewise uses קָשַׁר when he accuses the priests of Nob, along with his son Jonathan, of helping David rebel and take the throne: לָמָּה קָשַׁרְתֶּם עָלַי, “Why have you conspired against me” (1 Sam 22:13; cf. 1 Sam 22:8)? David was a member of Saul’s family through marriage as well as a military leader within Saul’s army. The priests of Nob and Jonathan are also actors within the state rather than actors on the international level. Although the biblical narrator rejects the notion that David is attempting to usurp the throne and kill Saul, the king views David’s rise as a clear case involving a plot against his rule, a rebellion in his own state. David will suffer the same fate as Saul when his son Absalom stages a coup and seeks to take the throne and likely kill him. The writers describe Absalom’s rebellion, as it is in progress, using קָשַׁר furthering our understanding that this word describes events that are confined to the domestic rather than international sphere (2 Sam 15:12, 31).

In all of these cases, individuals, or groups, rebel and attempt to take the throne from the king. We are not dealing with cases in which one state rises against the power of another. The most important point to take away from the above discussion is that in every case of rebellion described with קָשַׁר, the rebellion does not cause a dramatic change in the political structure. The same state and governing structure continue to exist, only with a new ruler, in those cases where the rebellion proves successful. In most cases, קָשַׁר involves only individuals from one particular state. For this reason, Rosenbaum has argued that קָשַׁר only applies when individuals native to a state rebel against their king.¹⁶¹ The point of the word, however, is not to suggest that the individuals had to be native to that land, but that writers use קָשַׁר for rebellions in which the

¹⁶¹ Rosenbaum, “Northern Amos Revisited: Two Philological Suggestions,” 132–48.

action and its results are confined to the domestic level. The individual actors could come from outside of the state, as with Amos, but that does not make the rebellion an international event with states vying for independence or hegemony. Outside actors are occasionally involved, but the changes are confined to one state and are focused on the executive branch.

This is confirmed as we look at Isaiah's comments related to the Syro-Ephraimite War. At the time of this war, various groups from inside and outside Judah are grappling with how to deal with the burgeoning threat of Assyria. Isaiah 8:12 recognizes that rebellions might arise over the issue of which foreign policy decision Judah would implement: לְאַתְּמִירוֹן קִשָּׁר לְכָל אֲשֶׁר לְאַתְּמִירָה הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה קִשָּׁר, "Do not call a conspiracy to all that this people call conspiracy." The text uses the word קִשָּׁר to describe the attempts of various groups to take the throne in order to implement their policy decisions within Judah. The conflict among the various groups centers on whether Judah should accept Assyrian dominance and pay tribute, or whether they should form an anti-Assyrian coalition to counteract the imperial threat. The context suggests that the rebellion, or attempted coup, referred to in this text is specifically related to the actions taken by Damascus and Samaria who attempt to foment a rebellion within Judah against Ahaz. Their goal is to kill and replace Ahaz with a new king who will accept the foreign policy position they support (Isa 7:6). The rebellious actions recorded here are similar to what we saw above with Amos. In these two cases, outside groups are involved, but their goal is not to subdue another state. The rebels rather conspire to push the political climate in another state in a certain direction by inciting a domestic rebellion in that state. The text of Isaiah uses קִשָּׁר because there are groups joining together and because these groups are not attempting to create a war on the international level or subdue another state, but are rather attacking and attempting to replace a king within an individual state. Their hope is that the new king will support their own policy decision and that they will be able to control him. The besieged states in these cases are not in danger of losing

their autonomy. Rather, it is the current king who is in danger of losing his life and position. There is no indication that the political structure is about to change in any of these situations that involve foreigners.

If the word קָשַׁר is used to indicate a rebellion on the domestic level with the goal of killing the king, as suggested above, we are left with a few examples that may not fit into this paradigm. Hoshea, in 2 Kgs 17, is said to have plotted a rebellion against Shalmaneser V by sending messengers to Egypt. A world empire is involved in this case; based on the proposed paradigm outlined thus far, we might expect the word מָרַד to be used here. There are a couple of possible explanations for the use of קָשַׁר in this context. The first and most likely possibility is that 2 Kgs 17:4 is narrated from the perspective of the Assyrian king. The text reads וַיִּמְצָא מֶלֶךְ־אֲשׁוּר בְּהוֹשֵׁעַ קָשָׁר, “The king of Assyria uncovered a conspiracy in Hoshea.” Here the conspiracy, or plot to rebel, indicates an attempt to secede from the Assyrian empire. But it is important to note that the king of Assyria, rather than Hoshea, is the subject in this phrase. In the cases where the Hebrew Bible uses מָרַד, the formula occurs as וַיִּמְרַד בּוֹ, “he rebelled against,” and the vassal king who is rebelling is the subject of the verb. In 2 Kgs 17, however, the Assyrian king is the subject of the verb, and from his perspective, he is the king of the four corners of the world and everything belongs to him. When someone rebels, that person is rebelling against the only legitimate ruler, and therefore any rebellion could be viewed as a domestic rebellion when seen from his perspective. Confirmation of this comes when we consider another seemingly anomalous use of the word in Jer 11:9.¹⁶² In Jer 11 there is a conspiracy unfolding against Yahweh. This is the only time where the word קָשַׁר appears to denote a sin or rebellion against Yahweh. Elsewhere, words describing “rebellions” against Yahweh are limited to מָרַד and פִּשְׁעַ

¹⁶² It is anomalous in that the word קָשַׁר is associated with Yahweh, which does not occur elsewhere.

as mentioned above.¹⁶³ What is noteworthy is that Jer 11:9 and 2 Kgs 17:4 are also the only two occurrences that combine the verb **מִצָּא** with **קָשַׁר**. In both cases, the plot is narrated from the perspective of the suzerain, either the Assyrian king or Yahweh in Jer 11:9. And in both cases, the suzerain is actively uncovering the plot against him. This is likely why the text uses a form of **קָשַׁר** in these two cases. From the perspective of the suzerain, the whole world belongs to him; thus, all rebellions take place in his land. Therefore, this can be conceived as a legitimate, if rare, use of **קָשַׁר**.¹⁶⁴

Another possibility is to see the situation in 2 Kgs 17 as an issue of vassalage, as opposed to provincialization. At this time, parts of Israel, Megiddo and Dor specifically, had become Assyrian provinces. It is possible that the writer may have used **קָשַׁר** to describe the rebellion of a province, rather than that of a vassal. In contrast to Samaria, Hezekiah was an Assyrian vassal, and so the writers might have used a different word for rebellion in that context. This possibility becomes less likely when we consider the status of Jerusalem under Zedekiah. Jerusalem was a Babylonian province yet, the texts employ the verb **מָרַד** to describe Zedekiah's rebellion. Further, Hoshea ruled from Samaria, which was not an Assyrian province until the time of Sargon II (ca. 720), making this possibility unlikely, unless we assume the biblical writer was unclear on the historical details.¹⁶⁵

It is also possible that in this context **קָשַׁר** may have a different meaning from the one we have outlined above. Perhaps it does not describe a rebellion against the king with the goal of

¹⁶³ In this way, more power is ascribed to God, as he is compared to an overlord rather than to a domestic king. See Brettler, *God is King*, 99.

¹⁶⁴ This suggestion is not without its difficulties. If this is true, we might expect 2 Kgs 18:20, which is also narrated from the perspective of an Assyrian official, to use **קָשַׁר** as well. Yet instead, it uses **מָרַד**. Based on this example, we might deduce that either term would have been appropriate to describe such a situation.

¹⁶⁵ Rosenbaum takes this example of a domestic rebellion by suggesting that **קָשַׁר** is used because Hoshea entered voluntarily into an alliance with the Assyrian king. Presumably, his comment indicates that the other kings who rebelled in contrast would have had their vassalage imposed on them. Rosenbaum, *Northern Amos Revisited*, 136.

taking his life, but instead indicates that Hoshea was involved in another form of sedition. While I believe the first explanation outlined above makes the most sense, we also should accept the possibility that this example is atypical and is not consistent with the word's usage elsewhere.

Chronicles provides an additional example that appears to fall outside of the normal usage of קָשַׁר to describe a domestic coup. In 2 Chron 24:21, the assassination of the priest Zechariah is described with קָשַׁר. Instead of being the target of the assassination attempt as in all other cases of קָשַׁר, here the king is the driving force behind the murder of the priest. The individuals involved in this plot stone Zechariah: וַיִּקְשְׁרוּ עָלָיו וַיִּדְגְּמֵהוּ אֶבֶן בְּמִצְנַת הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּחֶזֶר בַּיִת יְהוָה, “They conspired against him and stoned him at the command of the king in the court of the house of Yahweh.” The way in which the Chronicler adds to his source document of 2 Kgs 12 may help to explain this anomalous usage of the verb. The Chronicler has divided the reign of Joash into two parts; his life while Jehoiada the priest was still alive, and his life after Jehoiada's death. Beginning in 2 Chron 24:15, when Jehoiada dies, the Chronicler adds a section related to king Joash's wickedness to help explain why he is later killed in a coup. The section begins by applying language normally associated with a Judahite king (e.g. קָשַׁר) to the priest Jehoiada.

Japhet says,

The significance of this completely new passage for the Chronicler's narrative is twofold: in the immediate context, the death of Jehoiada marks the end of the first period of Joash's career; in the broader context this is the only case of the Chronicler reporting the death and burial of someone other than a king, and in fact, the terms used here are those regularly employed for the kings.¹⁶⁶

There appears to be an intentional reversal of language taking place in the recording of Jehoiada's death in 2 Chron 24:15–16. The reversal continues as the chapter prepares the reader to understand why Joash will be killed in a coup. Namely, Joash is killed in a coup (קָשַׁר) because he gave the order to assassinate (קָשַׁר) Jehoiada's son Zechariah (2 Chron 24:25–26). This is the

¹⁶⁶ Sara Japhet, *Chronicles: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 847.

only time in Chronicles and in the Hebrew Bible where a rebellion described with קשר is not directed at a king.¹⁶⁷ While this case is related to the normal usage of קשר in that we are dealing with an assassination of a political opponent confined to the domestic context, we are not dealing with a coup against the king. This appears to be related to the Chronicler's addition to his source text, as he reverses the language normally applied to a king and instead applies it to the priests, who are presented as being superior to the king in this episode. As we have seen, these irregular usages of קשר may be sensibly explained and we should not change our understanding of the primary meaning of קשר in a rebellion context based on these intentional exceptions to the rule.

Lastly, the late text of Nehemiah (Neh 4:2) describes a situation in which groups from outside of a state plot to cause upheaval within a different state. In this case, external groups band together to cause political changes in another state. The reason for the use of קשר in Neh 4 may be twofold. First, the biblical writer uses the root to denote the tying together of individuals in a conspiracy for the purpose of political upheaval. Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites are the individuals and groups involved in Neh 4. Second, the conspirators' actions are not intended to cause a war on the international level, but are designed to create confusion within Judah proper, a domestic context. They are looking to change the policy or the political situation by fighting in Jerusalem (לְהִלָּחֵם בְּיְרוּשָׁלַיִם, Neh 4:2). The upheaval they sought to cause in Judah is described with the word תועה, “confusion,” which is not indicative of a war on the international level, when one state attempts to subdue another. In this case, the action, rather surprisingly, is not taken against the ruler, as in almost all other cases when קשר is used. This is perhaps a unique usage of this term. The MT, however, may have revealingly used לִי in the phrase וְלַעֲשׂוֹת לִי תוּעָה, “to make confusion for him/it,” which does not

¹⁶⁷ This excludes the example from Nehemiah mentioned below, because that example focuses on the binding of the group and so it perhaps provides a related but different usage than what we have elsewhere.

agree in gender with the referent, Jerusalem,¹⁶⁸ under the assumption that the action was taken against a masculine singular referent, i.e., the leader Nehemiah. This scenario would fit better with the typical usage of קָשַׁר to describe an attempt to replace the current ruler. It is very possible that the usage of קָשַׁר in this context is focused on the joining of the group rather than their specific political goal and is an anomalous use in a political context.

Prior to summarizing our findings, we should look briefly at how קָשַׁר is employed in reference to Yahweh, as we did with מָרַד and פָּשַׁע analyzed above. In contrast to מָרַד and פָּשַׁע, קָשַׁר is never used to describe disobedience or rebellion against Yahweh, except in the one case that is narrated from His perspective (Jer 11:9).¹⁶⁹ This pattern of usage is likely due to the way in which Yahweh was conceived in relation to Israelite society. Yahweh would have been regarded as much more powerful than a king of Israel; and if Yahweh could be compared to any political position on earth, he would be most aptly compared to the ruler of an empire.¹⁷⁰ It is likely for this reason that the writers of the Hebrew Bible began to use מָרַד and פָּשַׁע to describe rebellion or sin against Yahweh and not קָשַׁר.

Our overall evaluation of קָשַׁר is that it is a neutral, descriptive term. Since it is not connected to words that indicate sin or wrongdoing, it is not necessarily perceived as negative. Most of the rebellions described with קָשַׁר occur with no comment on the positive or negative nature of the rebellion itself. These narrations are found primarily in the concluding remarks or

¹⁶⁸ Cities are grammatically feminine in Biblical Hebrew. See for example 2 Sam 24:16 where there is a feminine singular suffix that refers to Jerusalem.

¹⁶⁹ This comment is made in recognition that the plot against Yahweh narrated in Jer 11:9 comes from the perspective of Yahweh as the suzerain, which is why the word is used in that context.

¹⁷⁰ Evidence for this can be found prominently in the book of Isaiah. As Aster has shown, there are numerous texts within Isa 1–39 that argue that Yahweh was greater than the Assyrian king and his god. He states in one context, “Like Isa 6, the passages discussed in this chapter reference Assyrian imperial propaganda while undermining the ideology it was designed to promote. In particular, they attack the notion of the universal rule of the Assyrian king and his omnipotence, and attribute these characteristics to YHWH.” Aster, *Reflections of Empire in Isaiah 1–39: Responses to Assyrian Ideology*, 132. See also Marc Brettler, *God is King*, 99.

the regnal formulae of the king's reign, making them annalistic in character. For example, in 2 Kgs 12:21 we read, **וַיִּקְמוּ עֲבָדָיו וַיִּקְשְׁרוּ-קֶשֶׁר וַיַּכּוּ אֶת-יֹאשָׁה בֵּית מִלּוֹ הַיְזוּרָה סִלָּא**, “His servants arose, and plotted a conspiracy and struck down Joash in the house of the Millo on the way to Silla.” The phrase is purely descriptive. In additional cases, a rebellion narrated with **קֶשֶׁר** occurs as a result of a prophetic judgment against a particular ruler. Elisha and his company anoint Jehu in 2 Kgs 9 for the sole purpose of deposing Joram. “You shall strike down the house of Ahab, your master, so I can avenge on Jezebel the blood of my servants, the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of Yahweh” (2 Kgs 9:7). This results in Jehu's coup: **וַיִּתְקַשֶּׁר יְהוּא בֶן-יְהוֹשָׁפָט בֶּן-נִמְשִׁי**: **אֶל-יֹרָם**, “So Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi conspired against Joram” (2 Kgs 9:14). Baasha's rebellion against Nadab and the subsequent murdering of his descendants take place due to the prophecy of Ahijah against Jeroboam. “Baasha son of Ahijah of the house of Issachar, conspired against him (**קֶשֶׁר**)... and when he became king he struck down all the house of Jeroboam... according to the word of Yahweh that he spoke through his servant Ahijah the Shilonite” (1 Kgs 15:27–29). The divine support in these cases demonstrates that an evaluation of the rebellions narrated with **קֶשֶׁר** can only be undertaken through analyzing the larger context of each rebellion, not from the word itself. If legitimized by God, the rebellion is a condoned event and is not presented as a negative act.

To conclude our discussion of **קֶשֶׁר** as a rebellion term, we again consider this term in correspondence with modern terms for rebellion. First, we have seen that **קֶשֶׁר** is focused on the joining together of a group to conspire to kill that group's political opponent, who is almost always the king. The local king is the target in eighteen of these cases; only once is it another political figure. We know the joining together of the group must be part of the meaning of the word, because this appears to be the focus in Neh 4:8, which does not record the killing of the leader, but another form of sedition. Second, the rebellions described with **קֶשֶׁר** share much in

common with a coup d'état.¹⁷¹ What is described in most of the cases outlined above are military coups (e.g. 1 Kgs 16, Zimri and Omri; 2 Kgs 9, Jehu) or palace coups within a domestic context (2 Kgs 11; 14:19–20). This means that the rebellion is led either by the military or by one of the king's officials. The conspiring of a group may be in the background of קָשַׁר, but it is not the focus of the word in these contexts. Rather, the word is focused on the action taken to kill and overthrow the local ruler. This is clear in that the verb often appears in the singular, meaning the group aspect is not the focus in many cases.¹⁷² A coup, unlike a revolution or the rebellions involving secession discussed above, does not seek to make major changes to the existing political structure. It is a quick process involving only personnel change at the executive level of the state government. In the case of ancient Israel, קָשַׁר involved only a change to the monarch and individuals aligned with the monarch: his cabinet, to use a modern analogy. In the context of the ancient Near East, these individuals were often members of the king's family. In a dynastic monarchy, the family members of the previous ruler were a threat to the new dynasty, as they could make a claim to the throne and perhaps find support. This is the reason that in some of the cases mentioned above, the rebel kills the ruler along with his family.¹⁷³ There is limited bloodshed within a coup because the action is often quick and does not involve two competing armies unless the coup develops into a civil war.¹⁷⁴

That some of these coups involve outside actors does not necessarily complicate this suggestion. Outside actors often involve themselves in foreign politics and coups. A modern

¹⁷¹ Dubovsky discusses a formula that describes many of the coups, especially in 2 Kgs 15. This formula includes, in many cases, more than the word קָשַׁר. The formula in this chapter to narrate a coup also includes the verbs נָזַח and נָכַח. Peter Dubovsky, "Why Did the Northern Kingdom Fall According to 2 Kings 15?" *Biblica* 95 (2014): 322. It should be noted, however, that while this chapter often includes the formula it is not required to describe a coup. In some cases all that appears is the word קָשַׁר.

¹⁷² See 1 Kgs 15:27–29; 1 Kgs 16:9, 16 for examples of this.

¹⁷³ See 1 Kgs 15:27–29 for an example of this.

¹⁷⁴ A civil war does develop during Omri's coup, as "half of the people follow Tibni" (1 Kgs 16:21).

example of this would be the CIA's involvement in the coup that ousted the Iranian leader Mohammed Mossadeq in 1953 AD.¹⁷⁵ One comparable biblical example would be the attempt of Damascus and Ephraim to install a new leader in Judah during the Syro-Ephraimite War as mentioned in Isa 7:6. The outside actors only involve themselves to put a new ruler on the throne and to gain influence, but not to conquer or go to war with the foreign state. When the coup is complete, the new ruler simply takes the place of the old ruler without seeking to fundamentally change society or the governing structure, and the foreign player withdraws or more likely operates behind the scenes of the new regime.¹⁷⁶

In summary, the root קָשַׁר in the Hebrew Bible typically describes a rebellion in a domestic context, and in most cases it indicates a coup involving an assassination of the king or an attempted assassination. When successful, the king is always killed. Matthew Suriano has remarked, “the קָשַׁר always results in the death of the king and therefore necessitates an irregular act of installment to the throne.”¹⁷⁷ However, קָשַׁר also appears to narrate attempted rebellions that may not result in the death of the king, but have that as their goal. We need to make sure to note this distinction. The point of employing קָשַׁר can only be that the event involves a plan to kill the king. Absalom's actions against David are described with קָשַׁר, and yet David is not killed. Therefore, we can conclude that Absalom plans to kill the king and rule in his place, but once he fails, it is no longer considered a קָשַׁר.

¹⁷⁵ For more on the outside involvement in the Iranian coup of 1953, see Ervand Abrahamian, *The Coup: 1953, the CIA, and the Roots of Modern U.S. –Iranian Relations* (New York: The New Press, 2013); Mostafa T. Zahrani, “The Coup that Changed the Middle East: Mossadeq v. the CIA in Retrospect,” *World Policy Journal* 19 (2002): 93–99.

¹⁷⁶ For more on the definition of a coup, see Mark Hagiopan, *The Phenomenon of Revolution*, 6–8.

¹⁷⁷ Matthew J. Suriano, *The Politics of Dead Kings: Dynastic Ancestors in the Book of Kings and Ancient Israel* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 87.

Table 4. קָשָׁר – Rebellion against a Local King

Text	Rebel and Ruler	Political Status of Rebel	Political Situation	Result of the Rebellion	Type of Rebellion/ Intended result	Cause (not always stated)
1 Sam 22:8, 13 קָשָׁרָהֶם קָשָׁרָהֶם	David vs. Saul (Jonathan, common people, Ahimelek are involved)	Member of Saul's military, court, king's son, priests(s)	Involves Israel, no other states (possibly tribal factions)	King dies not by the hand of the rebel, the rebel replaces the king	Rebel denies it is a coup	Yahweh rejects Saul
2 Sam 15:12, 31 קָשָׁר קָשָׁרִים	Absalom, Ahitophel vs. David	The king's son, and counselor	Domestic conflict involving only Israel	The rebellion fails and the rebel is killed	A coup with Absalom attempting to take the throne	Punishment for David
1 Kgs 15:27 בִּיקָשָׁר	Baasha vs. Nadab	From the house of Issachar	Domestic conflict involves only Israel, possibly tribal politics	Rebel kills the king and rules in his place	Coup to replace the king	Nadab is a wicked king, destruction of Jeroboam's house according to prophecy 1 Kgs 15:29
1 Kgs 16:9, 16, 20 בִּיקָשָׁר קָשָׁר קָשָׁרוֹ	Zimri vs. Elah	King's servant, commander of half the king's chariots	Domestic conflict involving the king and his military leader	Rebel kills the king and rules in his place, but a civil war develops and the rebel is killed	Coup to replace the king	Baasha and Elah were wicked, destruction of Baasha's house according to prophecy 1 Kgs 16:12–13
2 Kgs 9:14; 10:9 בִּיהָקָשָׁר קָשָׁרָהֶי	Jehu vs. Joram (Jehoram)	Leader of the army	Domestic conflict involving the king and his military leader	Rebel kills the king and rules in his place	Military coup to replace the king	Prophecy announcing Jehu will be king and kill the ruler (2 Kgs 9:1–3, 7; 2 Kgs 10:10; avenge the blood of Naboth

Table 4 (Continued).

2 Kgs 11:14 גִּישָׁר גִּישָׁר	Jehoiada and Joash vs. Athaliah	Priest in Jerusalem with a Davidic descend- ant	Domestic Conflict involves rival dynasties in Judah	Rebel kills the king and installs a new ruler	Military coup to replace the king led by a priest	Reinstall a member of the Davidic House
2 Kgs 12:21 גִּישָׁר נִיקְשָׁרִי	Jozacar and Jehozabad vs. Joash	Servants of the king	Domestic Situation involving only people from Judah	Rebels kill the king and a son of the ruler takes the throne	Palace coup	No reason provided (cf. the reason provided by the Chronicler)
2 Kgs 14:19 גִּישָׁר נִיקְשָׁרִי	Unnamed assailants vs. Amaziah	People from Jerusalem	Domestic situation involving people from Judah	The rebels kill the king and “the people of Judah” install the dead king’s son as king	Coup	No reason provided in Kings, but Chronicles provides a reason (see below)
2 Kgs 15:10, 15 נִיקְשָׁר קִשָׁרִי גִּישָׁר	Shallum vs. Zechariah	“Son” of Jabesh possibly from Gilead	Domestic conflict involving clans?	Rebel kills the king and rules in his place	Coup	Fulfills the prophecy that only four of Jehu’s descendants would sit on the throne (2 Kgs 15:12)
2 Kgs 15:25 נִיקְשָׁר	Pekah vs. Pekahiah	Military leader	Domestic conflict involving the military and different clans	Rebel kills the king and rules in his place	Military coup	Not stated (foreign policy issues?)
2 Kgs 15:30 נִיקְשָׁר גִּישָׁר	Hoshea vs. Pekah	An Israelite aligned with Assyria	Domestic situation involving Israelites (likely aided by Assyria)	Rebel kills the king and rules in his place	Coup	Not explicitly stated, but clear it was over foreign policy decisions

Table 4 (Continued).

2 Kgs 17:14 קָשָׁר	Hoshea vs. Shalman- eser III	Vassal ruler	Imperial situation told from the perspective of the imperial power	Rebel attempts to break with the empire but is thrown into prison	Attempt to secede from the Assyrian empire; internal since from the Assyrian perspective	The vassal no longer wants to pay tribute to the Assyrians
2 Kgs 21:23– 24 וַיִּקְשְׁרוּ קָשָׁרִים	Servants of Amon vs. Amon	Servants of the king	Domestic situation involving people from Judah	Rebels kill the king but are killed by “the people of the land”	Palace coup	No reason stated (mention of the king’s wickedness) 2 Kgs 21:21
Isa 8:12 קָשָׁר	Not an actual coup but a reference to the possibility	Different groups in Judah, pro- Assyrian party vs. anti- Assyrian party	Domestic situation involving groups in Judah with outside parties trying to exert influence	The coup does not occur, but those involved have the goal of killing and replacing the king	Possible coup	Differences in foreign policy approach
Amos 7:10 קָשָׁר	Amos vs. Jeroboam	Prophet	Domestic situation, a prophet attempts to stir a coup	Coup does not occur, but focuses on the death of the king	Prophecy that the king will die in a coup	Prophet is unhappy with the way Israel is behaving
Neh 4:2 (Eng. 4:8) וַיִּקְשְׁרוּ	Sanballat, Tobiah, Arabs, Ammon- ites and Ashdod- ites vs. Jerusalem	Foreigners joining to impact the political climate in another state	Domestic situation involving foreigners trying to impact a foreign state	The group joins together but is not successful	Not a rebellion, the word is focused on the joining of the group for sedition	Attempt to halt the rebuilding of the walls in Jerusalem
2 Chron 23:13 קָשָׁר קָשָׁר	Jehoiada and Joash vs. Athaliah	Priest in Jerusalem with a Davidic descend- ant	Domestic conflict involving rival dynasties in Judah	Rebel kills the king and installs a new ruler	Military coup to replace the king led by a priest	Reinstall a member of the Davidic House

Table 4 (Continued).

2 Chron 24:21 וַיִּקְשְׁרוּ	People and king vs. Zechariah	People in power	Domestic conflict	Those in power kill a political opponent	Political assassin- ation (not rebellion)	A group is angry at an opponent, who is described with language that normally applies to a king
2 Chron 24:25– 26 הַתְּקַשְׁרוֹת בְּיַד הַשָּׂרִים	Zabad and Jehozabad vs. Joash	Servants of the king	Domestic conflict involving the king and his court	Rebels kill the king, but are killed by the new king	Palace coup	Reprisal for killing Zechariah, the priest 2 Chron. 24:25
2 Chron 25:27 וַיִּקְשְׁרוּ בְּיַד הַשָּׂרִים	Unnamed assailants vs. Amaziah	People from Jerusal- em	Domestic conflict involving people from Judah	Rebels kill the king and the “people of Judah” install the dead king’s son as king	Coup	Prophet says he will be destroyed, Amaziah turned away from Yahweh 2 Chron. 25:16, 27
2 Chron 33:24– 25 וַיִּקְשְׁרוּ בְּיַד הַשָּׂרִים	Servants of the king vs. Amon	Servants of the king	Domestic situation involving people from Judah	Rebels kill the king but are killed by the people of the land	Palace coup	No reason stated, but a mention of the king’s wickedness

Conclusion

In summary, what we have seen from the analysis of מרד, פשע, and קשר is that the biblical writers had a basic paradigm for understanding the organization of the world and their position in it. This understanding is evident in the way they describe rebellion toward various political authority figures. Rebellion on the international imperial scale is described using the word מרד. Rebellion on the more local international level consisting of Israel/Judah and her immediate neighbors is described with פשע. Finally, rebellions on the domestic level are described with קשר. This threefold breakdown works in almost all cases. While the interchanging of these words does occur, it is quite rare in the biblical text. The analysis above argues that the biblical writers had a defined set of terms for describing rebellion against the various levels of political authority figures and that their word choice consistently reflects this terminological system.

Of the three words discussed thus far, מרד is the only one whose basic meaning is centered on rebellion. The other two words have distinct basic meanings that have been adapted to fit the context of rebellion. As noted above, פשע first indicates an offense or crime subject to a “legal” penalty, while קשר has the core meaning of binding objects together. When we look at the basic meaning of each of these three words, there is no common denominator. That the core meaning of each word is different suggests the initial absence of a monolithic idea of rebellion in ancient Israel. If each of the three words did have a core meaning associated with disobedience, for example, it would help to demonstrate an overarching negative view of rebellion, but that is not the case. When we focus on קשר, we can also suggest that Israelite society did not view all rebellion as criminal, as the notion of binding or joining together is not inherently negative. Rather, קשר in its core meaning is simply descriptive of what the action of rebellion often involves. Despite this, it is noteworthy that over time מרד and פשע (cf. Ezek 2:3) become associated one with the other and are quite similar. This also occurs with קשר being interchanged

with מרד in 2 Kgs 17, as noted above. This possibly suggests that a category or concept of rebellion did emerge at some point. The clustering and interchanging of these words demonstrates that some in ancient Israelite society eventually viewed them as part of a whole.

In terms of usage, פשע is recognizably the most negative word because its core meaning involves an offense against another party. Despite the negative meaning of פשע, when employed in the context of political rebellion, this word has an annalistic character. By annalistic, we mean that the writer intends to provide the reader with a neutral picture of an event rather than to condemn or condone that event. As we have seen above, there are occasions where a rebellion narrated with פשע takes place because of the sin of the Judahite monarch and at the behest of Yahweh, which legitimizes the action. The legitimacy of such rebellions suggests that in these cases, פשע has become a technical term to describe an event, not a term used to condemn an act. The act no doubt involves what one side views as a crime or misfortune, but this does not entail that the act itself is necessarily regarded as wrong. The other two words, מרד and קשר, are also annalistic in that they are employed neutrally to describe an event rather than to display the author's judgement of the event. The terms appear in both positive and negative contexts. These findings indicate that the biblical writers do not automatically equate political rebellion with criminal action or sin, even if two of these words are employed to describe sin in other situations. Based on the meaning of these words in contexts of political rebellion, then, we cannot determine the writer's outlook of the various rebellions based on his word choice alone.

The ambiguity of these words and situations means that we need to find other ways to evaluate the biblical writers' views of each rebellion. First, we might consider whether a particular rebellion is connected to prophecy and whether Yahweh is said to condone the action. Shallum's rebellion and murder of Zechariah in 2 Kgs 15:10, for example, is a direct fulfillment of the prophecy against Jehu (2 Kgs 15:12). The prophecy at least in part legitimizes the

rebellion, and yet Shallum's reward for this act is to be struck down almost immediately by Menahem. In some ways, Shallum's death undermines the legitimacy of his rebellion. This brings up another possible way to evaluate the various rebellions that are narrated in the Hebrew Bible. That is, we might consider the action taken against the rebel. Are all rebels killed, or do some thrive? Further, the descriptions added by the biblical writers, such as that a rebellion is a breach of covenant or an oath, show that a need is felt to specify that the particular rebellion under discussion is in fact a sin, or to explain why it is a sin. These additions further indicate that the writer's evaluation of a rebellion cannot be determined based on vocabulary alone.

Another way to evaluate the nature of a given rebellion is to consider it in relationship to the overall literary context. As described in 2 Kgs 21, Amon is a wicked king and his servants rebel against him and kill him. This rebellion could therefore be regarded as a reprisal for the king's wickedness, and yet those who carry out the rebellion are also killed, and the rebellion is not directly connected to his wickedness in the text. If we want to suggest that the rebellion is in fact related to Amon's wickedness, we can make this claim based on our knowledge of the overall views in the Deuteronomistic History, and the implicit connections between 2 Kgs 21:21–22 and 2 Kgs 21:23–24. There are many instances in the books of Kings and elsewhere in the Deuteronomistic History that suggest wickedness or disobedience towards God is to be punished. Commentators have claimed that the Deuteronomistic History upholds a theology of retribution: if humans disobey God, they will certainly be punished.¹⁷⁸ Rebellion could be seen as one form of retribution for the wickedness of a king.¹⁷⁹ Finally, we should look at cases in which

¹⁷⁸ For the position supporting the doctrine of retribution in the Deuteronomistic History, see M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 316–19; and Antii Laato, "Theodicy in the Deuteronomistic History," in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible*, ed. Antii Laato and Johannes de Moor (Boston: Brill, 2003), 184. See also the literature cited in these works.

¹⁷⁹ See the discussion below for more on this debate. In 2 Chron 24, the Chronicler makes explicit that the rebellion against Joash was due to his wickedness. This is not, however, always the case. This added detail is not present in the source text in 2 Kgs 12. Some texts also reveal problems with the idea that wicked kings are always punished.

the biblical writer tries to hide or deny that a rebellion has taken place by using alternate words to describe the events at hand. This occurs prominently in the book of Judges, as we will argue below. These are the types of questions that need to be addressed to evaluate individual rebellions and provide avenues for future research.

This is especially the case with Manasseh, who is not punished. It is possible that the deuteronomistic writer operates with a transgenerational notion of punishment in this case.

CHAPTER 3

MORE EXTENDED EXPRESSIONS OF REBELLION: TO RAISE A HAND AGAINST, TO SEND A HAND AGAINST

In addition to the three technical terms (קָשַׁר, פָּשַׁע, and מוֹרָד) that describe rebellion, the writers of the Hebrew Bible use additional words or phrases to describe this political act. These are words or phrases that do not connote rebellion in an explicit manner but usually depict violent or hostile actions. Despite having alternative meanings, they occasionally stand in to describe a rebellion as defined in this work.¹⁸⁰

This chapter focuses on the phrases רָוַם יָד (ב), “to raise a hand against,” נָשָׂא יָד (ב), “to raise a hand against,” and שָׁלַח יָד (ב), “to send a hand against.”¹⁸¹ In this list, there are three verbs that appear in conjunction with the noun יָד, “hand” and the preposition כַּ, “against,” to discuss political rebellion: רָוַם, נָשָׂא, and שָׁלַח. The first two are associated with the action of raising, while שָׁלַח indicates movement away from one object and toward another and means “to send.” The following discussion will demonstrate that these phrases fit rebellion contexts because the defiant attitude or the metonymic action the phrases often portray aptly characterize rebels and their struggle for power. Because of an idiomatic meaning associated with each of these phrases, the writers of the Hebrew Bible sparingly use them to narrate a political rebellion. These phrases are not, however, synonymous with the words מוֹרָד, פָּשַׁע, and קָשַׁר analyzed in the previous chapter. When writers use these additional phrases in a rebellion context, they always use them

¹⁸⁰ As stated in the introduction, we are working with the following definition of rebellion: “An act by a group or individual that refuses to recognize, or seeks to overturn, the authority of the existing government.” Goldstone, *Revolutions: A Very Short Introduction*, 8. The key is that the action is focused on rejecting and overturning the current government.

¹⁸¹ In the following chapter, we will focus on words with the base meaning of salvation such as יָשַׁע. From here we will discuss words that are connected to the idea of sin but are often translated as rebellion. They seldom appear in the context of rebellion and only one of them, הִצִּיל, is productive in functioning to describe a political rebellion. This term appears in rebellion contexts to present a message about the specific rebellion under discussion. The words מוֹרָד, סָרַד, and מִעַל are similar to this, but while they have connections to rebellious behavior, they do not indicate political rebellion against an earthly ruler and therefore add little to our understanding of the idea of political rebellion in the Hebrew Bible. See chapter five for an analysis of these words.

to narrate a failed attempt at rebellion or a violent act that might be considered a rebellion due to the surrounding context.¹⁸²

ב יד “To Raise a Hand Against”

The Basic Meaning of the Phrase

The discussion will begin by focusing on the collocation of ב יד and יד. Prior to looking at the specific use of this phrase to describe a rebellion, several comments on its grammatical and metaphorical use will help elucidate why it contextually appears as a rebellion term.¹⁸³ In Exod 14:8, the phrase modifies the verb יֵצֵא, “going out,” thus functioning as an adverb. It functions adverbially in other cases as well, such as Num 15:30 where it modifies the verb עָשָׂה in the phrase, אֲשֶׁר-תַּעֲשֶׂה בְיָדְךָ, “whoever acts high-handedly” (Num 15:30 NRSV). In neither of these cases are the texts using the phrase in a literal sense to suggest either that the Israelites left Egypt with their hands in the air or that someone performed an action with their hands in the air in Numbers. However, the meaning of the defiant attitude the phrase represents in both cases is possibly connected to the literal image of a person with their hand in the air. It is also significant that this phrase often appears in military contexts.¹⁸⁴ When we connect these two aspects, it presents an image that may underscore this phrase. As Labuschagne suggests, the phrase may have its origins in the depiction of an army raising their hands in celebration or defiance as they enter or exit combat. In most cases, warriors hold a weapon in their hand as they engage in

¹⁸² As we will discuss below, the phrases appearing in the books of Exodus and Numbers to describe the Israelite activity in the wilderness are indicative of a protest situation, or what the present work calls an incipient rebellion. This type of activity will be the focus of chapter six.

¹⁸³ We begin by specifically looking at the phrase when ב יד appears. As we will see below the phrase with נָשָׂא, “to raise” has differences, but the two phrases ultimately have a connection due to the image the phrases connect with and so the following paragraphs are pertinent to both phrases. The phrase with נָשָׂא has more of a connection to oaths but it also appears in contexts of violence. So when talking about the background of the phrase, it is impossible to separate them entirely.

¹⁸⁴ See Exod 14:8; 17:11; Num 33:3; Deut 32:27; 1 Kgs 11:26–27 for the use of this phrase in a military context. See also Isa 26:11; Mic 5:8; Ps 89:14 for comparable examples which discuss the defeat of adversaries.

battle.¹⁸⁵ The image of an individual with a raised hand with a weapon in it might thus help clarify the defiant attitude associated with the phrase. It further helps demonstrate why “to raise a hand” appears in contexts like rebellion when one side engages in violence to defeat another.

The Iconography of the Raised Hand

The aura of power expressed by the phrase and the possibility of its being connected to a literal image of an individual raising their hand with a weapon in it is consistent with what appears in the iconographic evidence from the ancient Near East. These representations portray different scene types with raised hands, but despite differences, the hand-raising scenes are often related to issues of power.¹⁸⁶

These scenes can be divided into two categories. One of the hand-raising scenes in the iconographic evidence depicts worship before a deity or individuals paying homage to a king. In some of these cases, people are bringing tribute to the king they are honoring.¹⁸⁷ Additional images contain officials raising their hand before a king in what is likely an investiture scene as they swear allegiance to the king.¹⁸⁸ The hand-raising in this context provides an image of

¹⁸⁵ See C. J. Labuschagne, “The Meaning of *beyād rāmā* in the Old Testament,” in *Von Kanaan bis Kerala*. FS J. P. M. van der Ploeg, ed. W. S. Delsman et al., AOAT 211 (Kevelaer: Verlag Butzon & Bercker, 1982), 146.

¹⁸⁶ Strawn notes that the gesture of hand raising in worship or bringing tribute is often identical to the depiction of captured foes cowering at the feet of a superior who is about to strike them down. Since these images are identical, we can connect and group them together. While Strawn focuses on the aspect of fear and praise in hand raising, in some of these contexts, we also see a raised hand on the part of the one instilling fear. While he does not focus on this depiction, this type of raised hand also appears prominently in the iconography, as will be shown below. This is the raised hand of a victor in battle. For a look at these images and a discussion of the connection between hand raising in prayer and by a captured foe, see Brent A. Strawn, “The Iconography of Fear: *YIR’AT YHWH* (יְהוָה יִרְאֵת) in Artistic Perspective,” in *Image, Text, Exegesis: Iconographic Interpretation and the Hebrew Bible*, eds. Izaak J. De Hulster and Joel M. LeMon, LHBOTS 588 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 98–99.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 112–113.

¹⁸⁸ Connected to the scenes of worship or homage before a king/deity is the raising of a hand in an oath gesture. This is likely connected to what an individual would do in the presence of a king as he swears fealty to the king and makes clear he knows where power lies. This is what Lubetski has suggested. He notes that as one approached the ruler they would raise their right hand and declare their loyalty to the crown. He analyzed various seals from the ancient Near East that depict the arrival of an envoy before a governor with an individual raising their hand in an oath gesture. This shows the connection between swearing an oath and paying homage to the ruler, and both scenes denote hand raising. He goes on to connect these seals to passages in the biblical text, which use the phrase “to raise a hand” to indicate the swearing of an oath.” Meir Lubetski, “The Function and Meaning of *MY’MN* on Hebrew

submission and a recognition that the deity or king has power over the worshipper or supplicant. This is a common posture of prayer mentioned in the Psalms, in which individuals are depicted as either raising or spreading their hands.¹⁸⁹ In prayer or worship, hand-raising can also indicate submission and a recognition of where power lies.¹⁹⁰ In the iconography, these scenes typically depict individuals with their hands raised and palms open toward the superior.¹⁹¹

Seals in Light of Accompanying Iconography,” in *Image, Text, Exegesis: Iconographic Interpretation and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Izaak J. De Hulster and Joel M. LeMon, LHBOTS 588 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 41. See also the discussion later in the chapter where we will comment on the raised hand as an oath gesture. The hand raising as part of an oath also appears in texts from the ancient Near East. A text from Ugarit reads, “In front of my messenger he raised his hand in the presence of the Sun-deity, saying: ‘May you take note, O Sun-deity! I swear that I won’t, now that the king of Assur has taken up battle order!’” RS 34. 165: obv. 12-r 20a, in Amir Harrak, *Assyria and Hanigalbat: A Historical Reconstruction of Bilateral Relations from the Middle of the Fourteenth to the End of the Twelfth Centuries B.C.* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1987), 140–42.

¹⁸⁹ The phrase *נָשָׂא יָד*, “to raise a hand” appears in the Psalms twice to indicate an individual raising their hands in prayer or worship. See Ps 28:2; Ps 134:2 (cf. Hab 3:10). Additional phrases that describe hand raising in the Hebrew Bible in prayer or supplication are *נָשָׂא כַף*, “to raise the (palm) hand,” as in Ps 141:2; Lam 2:19; 3:41 and *פָּרַשׂ כַף*, “to spread the hand(s),” as in Ex 9:29, 33; 1 Kgs 8:22, 38, 54; Isa 1:15; Jer 4:31; Ps 44:21; Job 11:13; Ezra 9:5; 2 Chron 6:12, 13, 29. A comparison of the verses listed in this note suggests that the action behind these phrases are the same. Mayer Gruber notes that there may be differences behind some of these gestures. See Mayer Gruber, *Aspects of Nonverbal Communication in the Ancient Near East* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980), 35–37. This action also appears in inscriptions from the ancient Near East, in both Ugaritic and Aramaic texts. See the Zakkur Inscription KAI 202 A:9-12; KTU 1.41 50–55. For a discussion of these and related texts, see David M. Calabro, “Gestures of Praise: Lifting and Spreading the Hands in Biblical Prayer,” in *Ascending the Mountain of the Lord: Temple, Praise, and Worship in the Old Testament (2013 Sperry Symposium)*, ed. Jeffrey R. Chadwick, Matthew J. Grey, and David R. Seely (Provo, UT: Deseret Book, 2013), 105–21. According to Christopher G. Frechette the situation is similar in the Mesopotamian world. In an analysis of the *šu-ila* texts, Frechette notes that the “hand-raising” in prayer “refers to a formal gesture of salutation to a deity that expresses loyal submission and anticipates favorable recognition.” He further goes on to analyze how this is confirmed by studying presentation scenes in the iconographic evidence. The presentation scenes demonstrate that within Mesopotamian society, hand-raising is concerned with the idea that one must obtain favor from an authority prior to presenting a petition. Christopher G. Frechette, *Mesopotamian Ritual-prayers of “Hand-lifting” (Akkadian Šuillas): An Investigation of Function in Light of the Idiomatic Meaning of the Rubric*, AOAT 379 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2012), 9, 33. This also confirms the point above that hand-raising is often connected to issues of power. See also the discussion of presentation scenes in the previous few footnotes.

¹⁹⁰ Strawn says that in the context of worship the individual stands before a deity who holds power over the one praying or worshipping and the deity could employ his or her power against the worshiper. The worshiper hopes to avert that power with raised hands. Strawn, “The Iconography of Fear: *YIR’AT YHWH* (יִרְאָה יְהוָה) in Artistic Perspective,” 113. Keel notes that the hand raising in contexts of worship or prayer may have originally had an exorcistic character. From this he says it developed a defensive or aversive character, which are similar. The worshiper attempts to restrain the deity or superior with the raised hands. Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*, trans. Timothy J. Hallett (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 312–13. This is similar to what Strawn notes in the context of the smiting scene where the individual attempts to avert the blow with raised hands. This is the identical image to what appears in the context of worship and homage before a king.

¹⁹¹ Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World*, 312–14.

The second type of scene in which hand-raising occurs depicts the smiting of an enemy, which is more pertinent to the current discussion. The famous smiting scenes so prevalent in the ancient Near East appear to have originated in Egypt, with the Narmer Palette being one of the earliest and most famous attestations. In these scenes, an individual, either the king/Pharaoh or a God, holds a weapon in a raised hand.¹⁹² While the potentate does this, he often grasps a defeated foe with the other hand. The superior is about to strike down the conquered adversary with the raised hand. This image of a raised hand with a weapon in it exemplifies the use of an image to project power and must have served a propagandistic function in some cases.¹⁹³ If, and when, an audience saw these images, they would be awed by the power of the king or god. This was certainly the case with the Assyrian stelas and some reliefs.¹⁹⁴ The Assyrian evidence also provides similar representations of the king standing with a raised hand. The Assyrian king stands in these depictions with one hand holding a staff and the other hand raised. This occurs, for example, in a relief of Sargon II from Tang-i Var, on Sargon's stele from Cyprus, and in a relief at Nahr-el Kelb from Esarhaddon. These images project the power of the Assyrian king and show his dominance over the viewer.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² See Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World*, 292–295. Keel among others have also noted the presence of these images in the Mesopotamian world. See, Strawn, “The Iconography of Fear: YIR’AT YHWH (יִרְאַת יְהוָה) in Artistic Perspective,” 91–134. For a recent discussion of one of these images see, Robert Rollinger, “Dāduša’s Stela and the Vexed Question of Identifying the Main Actors on the Relief,” *Iraq* 79 (2017): 1–10. This stela has either a king or god raising his hand to smite an opponent, while the conquered individual raises his hand in fear of the sovereign.

¹⁹³ Keel argued that the original purpose of this depiction was not propagandistic, but rather apotropaic and served as a way to establish the king's power. He said, “The significance of these representations was not of a psychological propagandistic nature... Rather, their function was to make magically present in threatened territory the irresistible, victorious power of the Egyptian king.” Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World*, 294.

¹⁹⁴ See the discussion in Sean Zelig Aster, “Transmission of Neo-Assyrian Claims of Empire to Judah in the Late Eighth Century B.C.E.,” *HUCA* 78 (2007): 1–44. See especially pages 14, 22–26. See also Aster's more recent work in which he also discusses this issue. Shawn Zelig Aster, *Reflections of Empire in Isaiah 1–39: Responses to Assyrian Ideology*, 41–47.

¹⁹⁵ See Grant Frame, “The Inscription of Sargon II at Tang-i Var,” *Orientalia* 68 (1999): 33; See *AOB* 117 Tafel LIX and 146 Tafel LXV.

Significantly, the written evidence in the Hebrew Bible employs the phrase “to raise a hand” in contexts that correspond in many ways to the ancient Near Eastern imagery discussed above. While it is difficult to determine how direct the connection between the iconography and the phrase is, a connection is possible. The Hebrew Bible also employs the phrase “to raise a hand” to describe two similar scenes.¹⁹⁶ One of the scene types, along with the corresponding phrase, projects power through violence, while the other projects submission and deference to the ruler or deity one stands before.¹⁹⁷ As an example, the Hebrew Bible uses the phrase, “to raise a hand” in contexts of violence and in episodes where one side aims to project power, as in Exod 14:8 mentioned above. The Hebrew Bible also uses the phrase, “to raise a hand” in the context of prayer or submission.¹⁹⁸

Brent Strawn notes, based on the iconographical record, that these images would have been known in ancient Israel. The accessibility of these images makes it possible that the reader/hearer recalled such images when they read the phrase “to raise a hand.”¹⁹⁹ Othmar Keel further shows connections between the iconography of smiting and language in the Hebrew Bible, specifically the language of the royal psalms. The Israelite king, as he engages in battle, “is portrayed precisely as in Egyptian iconography... he strikes down his enemies and treads them underfoot like dirt.”²⁰⁰ Scholars have also argued similarly for the Assyrian images. Balogh, for example, suggests that “the raised hand of Yahweh in Isa 14:26–27 and 23:11 may allude to

¹⁹⁶ This is the case with the phrase “to raise a hand” with both verbs נָשָׂא and קָרַם. While they do have distinctions, they overlap in some cases.

¹⁹⁷ Raising the hand in an oath context fits into the latter category of hand raising before a superior. This is complicated by Yahweh raising the hand to swear, but he must in some way be submitting to his own power. He does swear by himself. See the discussion below for more on this.

¹⁹⁸ See footnote 189 above.

¹⁹⁹ Strawn “The Iconography of Fear: *YIR’AT YHWH* (יִרְאַתַּהּ יְהוָה) in Artistic Perspective,” 119–23. See also Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World*, 291–292.

²⁰⁰ Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World*, 291.

this portrayal of the Assyrian king on the reliefs.”²⁰¹ If this is the case, images of the raised hand could have been on the writer’s mind when they wrote such phrases.²⁰²

There are also a handful of parallel phrases within the Hebrew Bible that employ the word יד, “hand” to present the same powerful image. One of these phrases appears in Ps 81:15: וְעַל צְרִיָּהֶם אֲשִׁיב יָדִי “I will turn my hand against their enemies.” LeMon connects this phrase directly to the ancient Egyptian images of smiting.²⁰³ While this is a different phrase, it provides a similar meaning to many usages of the phrase “to raise a hand” with either רָוַם or נָשָׂא. These phrases have connections with violent action directed at another party and involve verbs of movement along with יד as the object.

These comments admittedly do not establish a direct connection between the phrase “to raise a hand” (with either the verb רָוַם or נָשָׂא) and the iconography, but they help establish that raising a hand could indeed be an image or expression of power. This point will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Alternative Meanings of יד “Hand”

In addition to the possibility of a connected image, the idiomatic meaning of the noun יד, “hand” also sheds light on the meaning of these phrases. In one of its usages, the meaning of יד can help demonstrate why “to raise a hand” often presents a defiant and powerful image. The word יד, “hand” has the literal meaning of hand, but it also has several derivative meanings that make the

²⁰¹ Csaba Balogh, *The Stele of YHWH in Egypt: The Prophecies of Isaiah 18-20 Concerning Egypt and Kush*, OtSt 60 (Boston: Brill, 2011), 135. While he mentions “the raised hand” as he makes the connection, the phrase in these passages is וְנָשָׂא יָד, “to stretch out the hand,” rather than “to raise the hand” with רָוַם or נָשָׂא. As we will see below, these phrases do have similarities.

²⁰² We want to be careful not to make too much out of the connection, establishing a direct connection would take us beyond the scope of this dissertation. The point of noting these connections is only to help demonstrate what these phrases remind people of as they hear them.

²⁰³ Joel M. LeMon, “YHWH’s Hand and the Iconography of the Blow in Psalm 81:14–16,” *JBL* 132 (2013): 865–82; Joel M. LeMon, “Masking the Blow: Psalm 81 and the Iconography of Divine Violence,” in *Iconographic Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: An Introduction to its Method and Practice*, ed. Izaak J. de Hulster, Brent A Strawn, and Ryan P. Bonfiglio (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 281–94.

idiom of “raising a hand” suited for a rebellion and for the defiant attitude of a rebel. The word “hand” is often associated with ability, power, or might. It can indicate that something or someone exercises power over someone else as in Ezra 1:8: **וַיִּזְצִיאֵם בְּיַד מֶלֶךְ פָּרְסַי עַל־יַד מִתְרְדַת מֶלֶךְ הַגִּזְבָּר**, “Cyrus, king of Persia placed them into the hand (control) of Mithredat, the treasurer” (Ezra 1:8). Similar to this is the employment of **יָד**, “hand” in the prepositional phrase **יָד תַּחַת יָד**, “under the hand of,” which also indicates control over someone or something else. In many cases, when one party rebels, they rebel **יָד תַּחַת יָד**, “from under the hand of” another party, as appears very specifically in 2 Kgs 8:22. Here, the text states, **וַיִּפְשַׁע אֱדוֹם מִתַּחַת יָד־יְהוּדָה**, “Edom rebelled from under the hand (control) of Judah.” In these examples, the hand is an image of the power or control of one state over another.²⁰⁴ The term “hand” (**יָד**) also parallels **גְּבוּרָתִי**, “my might” in Jer 16:21, signifying that a hand can indicate a show of strength. The word is elsewhere indicative of a demonstration of force against the Egyptians as it is in Exod 14:31. Yahweh’s “hand” is also active in punishing and displaying his power in Deut 2:15 and Judg 2:15. Finally, the noun **יָד**, “hand” often appears in conjunction with a form of **חֵזֶק**, “strength,” which further serves to demonstrate the connection between the hand and expressions of power.²⁰⁵

The appearance of **יָד** in contexts associated with control, strength, or a demonstration of power, helps explain why “to raise a hand against” someone has a connection with the defiant attitude of a rebel. When the weaker party “raises their hand,” they are symbolically displaying their power as they contest the rule of the superior party. They raise their hand as a reversal of

²⁰⁴ See also, Gen 41:35; Exod 18:10; Judg 3:30; 1 Sam 21:4; 2 Kgs 8:20; 13:5; 17:7; Isa 3:6; Ps 106:42; 1 Chron 29:24; 2 Chron 21:8; 21:10.

²⁰⁵ See Exod 3:19; 6:1; 13:3, 14, 16; 32:11; Num 20:20; Deut 3:24; 4:34; 5:15; 6:21; 7:8, 19; 9:26; 11:2; 26:8; 34:12; Josh 4:24.

being “under the hand of” the dominant power.²⁰⁶ This ties well with the notion of rebellion involving a subordinate group’s challenge to a dominant group. These comments point to a connection between this phrase and the attitude of a subordinate group. From a meaning focused on the attitude of a subordinate, however, the phrase has been adapted to contextually indicate a rebellion, or an action that was part of a rebellion.

The Two Primary Uses of רָם יָד בַּ

The Defiant Attitude or Demeanor

The first occurrence of this phrase in a rebellion context is in the book of Exodus. Exodus 14:8 (cf. Num 33:3) describes the people of Israel as leaving Egypt בְּיָד רָמָה, “with a raised hand.” In this context, God has determined to save his people from oppression in Egypt after hearing their cries.²⁰⁷ While the text may not call it such, the reader knows the writers are discussing a rebellion because the Israelites have been subordinated to Pharaoh as slaves and are, with Yahweh’s help, freeing themselves from that oppression. The goal of the Exodus event is to replace the Pharaoh with Yahweh as suzerain and establish an independent polity, a clear threat

²⁰⁶ While this display of power is comparable to the Egyptian iconographic evidence, it is different. In rebellion contexts and in many of the other cases, it is a weaker party raising their hand. Significantly, LeMon, commenting on the phrase “to return the hand” in Psalm 81, said, “the allusion to the iconography of the blow reminds the community of the stark threat of Egyptian overlordship even as it radically inverts the standard Egyptian iconographic trope of domination and subjugation.” Joel M. LeMon, “YHWH’s Hand and the Iconography of the Blow in Psalm 81:14–16,” *JBL* 132 (2013): 882. רָם יָד עַל is similar in that it is not a projection of power from a superior, but a display of power that attempts to throw off the yoke of a superior. More work would need to be done to determine if there is a similarity to the reason for the use of “to raise a hand” with רָם to indicate a similar connection.

²⁰⁷ The rebellion against the Egyptians is conceived of in terms of salvation rather than rebellion. Exodus 14:13 says אַל־תִּירָאוּ הַתְּצִיבֻּהוּ הַיְיָ וְרָאוּ אֶת־יְשׁוּעַת יְהוָה, “Do not fear, stand firm and see the salvation of the Lord.” Rebellion as salvation is a concept that is found repeatedly throughout the book of Judges, but the idea of deliverance in Judges may originally come from the Exodus account. References to the Exodus event appear throughout the entire Hebrew Bible, and the book of Judges is no exception. Frederick Greenspahn noticed that Yahweh’s intervention within the stories in the book of Judges is based on theological ideas coming from the Exodus rather than on repentance. Yahweh responds to Israel’s oppression by bringing salvation in both cases. Frederick E. Greenspahn, “The Theology of the Framework of Judges,” *VT* 36 (1986): 385–96. See especially page 395. Lee Roy Martin builds on this idea in several of his writings. Lee Roy Martin, “Where are all His Wonders?’ The Exodus Motif in the Book of Judges,” *Journal of Biblical and Pneumatological Research* 2 (2010): 87–109. See also Lee Roy Martin, *The Unheard Voice of God: A Pentecostal Hearing of the Book of Judges*, JPTSup 32 (Blandford Forum, UK: Deo, 2008); Lee Roy Martin, “Yahweh Conflicted: Unresolved Theological Tension in the Cycle of Judges 10:6-16,” *OTE* 22 (2009): 356–72. Mark Smith also notes connections between the Gideon and Moses stories. Mark Smith, “Remembering God: Collective Memory in Israelite Religion,” *CBQ* 64 (2002): 634–38.

to Pharaoh's political rule over the Israelites. The political act of rebellion, as defined in this dissertation, involves aggressive action against the ruling authority with the goal of rejecting that authority and establishing a new leader. Yahweh commits most of the aggressive acts in this rebellion through the various plagues, the killing of the firstborn, or even judging the Egyptian gods²⁰⁸ (Num 33:4), but Moses, as the representative of Yahweh, is complicit in the process. Additionally, the Israelites rob the Egyptians as they depart and participate in aggressive action against their renounced overlord.²⁰⁹ They establish Yahweh as their new ruler in place of the Pharaoh when they enter a covenant with Him at Sinai.

The phrase *בָּיָד רָמָה* in the context of the Exodus (Exod 14:8), is not narrating the rebellion itself and the aggressive actions just described, but is instead recounting the defiant manner in which the Israelites leave Egypt after their rebellion. The phrase characterizes their attitude after having successfully thrown off the yoke of their Egyptian overlord. They feel boastful as they spurn their former ruler and leave in this spirit. This example demonstrates one of the main uses of the phrase, that is to allude to the attitude or demeanor of a subordinate group. The connection of this phrase to a rebellion starts to emerge after considering the comments above, but becomes indubitable when we look at its meaning and use in another context.

²⁰⁸ This is a point that will begin to set the stage for the next chapter, namely, that outside of the usage of *רָמָה יָד (ב)* in the Exodus narrative, no specific rebellion term appears. Indeed, what is striking is the deliberate choice in Exodus to avoid any specific terms for rebellion in the exit from Egypt. One reason for this eschewal is because Yahweh is the primary actor in the rebellion and so the focus is on his saving act rather than any rebellious action. This circumvention reframes the focus from thoughts of an earthly altercation to a glorification of Yahweh as he liberates his people. Avoiding any terms for rebellion might suggest an attempt at obfuscation and that the writers did not want to associate Yahweh with a rebellion. The astute reader could view this as the imputation of negative thoughts toward rebellion but this is not the case. It at most shows an ambiguous attitude toward rebellion. The avoidance of a specific term for rebellion is rather a reframing of the story for rhetorical reasons. The following chapter will develop these ideas in a discussion of rebellion as salvation as it appears especially in the book of Judges, but it begins in Exod 14:3 with the phrase *רְאוּ אֶת-יְשׁוּעַת יְהוָה*, "See the salvation of Yahweh." See the previous footnote for more on this.

²⁰⁹ To rob or plunder is the meaning of the verb *נָבַל* in the piel stem. For more on this see Georg Fischer, "Wann begannen die Israeliten, die Ägypter auszuplündern? Zur Interpretationsgeschichte von Ex 3,22 und 12,36," in *Von Sumer bis Homer: Festschrift für Manfred Schretter zum 60. Geburtstag am 25 Februar 2004*, ed. Robert Rollinger, AOAT 325 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2005), 257–68.

A Rebellion Term

The combination of **רום** and **יד** appears in the context of Jeroboam’s rebellion against Solomon. In this context, the phrase appears to be a synonym for political rebellion rather than a description of the attitude of the rebel or rebels. The difference in the NRSV’s translation of this phrase in the two contexts under discussion encapsulates this quite well. The NRSV translates Exod 14:8 as, “they were going out *boldly*,” but the translation of 1 Kgs 11:26 in the NRSV is, “Jeroboam... *rebelled* against the king.” Both texts contain a combination of **רום** and **יד** and also have the preposition **ב**. In the latter case, the phrase describes an event, a type of rebellion, while in the former it describes an attitude. Two key differences that help distinguish these texts are the placement of the preposition and the form of the verb. In 1 Kgs 11:26, the preposition follows a *hiphil* verb and marks the oblique object (**יד**), while in Exod 14:8 the entire prepositional phrase serves in an adverbial capacity. Further, the verb **רום** in Exod 14 is a *qal* participle that functions as an adjective modifying **יד**. The respective translations, therefore, aptly highlight the difference, and show the reader two distinctive usages of the “raised hand.” However, while the translation in Exod 14 encapsulates the meaning of the raised hand in this context, the translation in 1 Kgs 11:26–27 obscures the original image and creates confusion with terms such as **מרד** and **פשתע**. It would be more accurate to translate **יד** **רום** **ב** as “raised a hand against” in 1 Kgs 11:26–27. This is what the NRSV does in both 2 Sam 18:28 and 2 Sam 20:21 when it translates the rebellions narrated with **יד** **נשא** **ב** as “raised a hand against” the king.²¹⁰

In 1 Kgs 11:26–27 the phrase **יד** **רום** **ב** appears twice as the narration of the split of the kingdom begins. The details of Jeroboam’s initial act of rebellion that this phrase describes are

²¹⁰ This is still not a perfect solution; it does not capture any difference between **רום** and **נשא** in these phrases, but is more consistent and shows the reader that there is a difference between the rebellion terms narrated in the previous chapter and Jeroboam’s rebellion in 1 Kgs 11:26–27. To be consistent and to preserve the distinction, the translator could distinguish these phrases by using the English “lift” for **נשא** and “raise” for **רום**.

not specified. Immediately after saying *וְזֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר-הָרִים יָד בַּמֶּלֶךְ*, “This is the account of how he raised a hand against the king” (1 Kgs 11:26), the text launches into Solomon’s building construction in 1 Kgs 11:27b.²¹¹ It is unclear how Solomon’s royal building projects are related to Jeroboam’s rebellion. Furthermore, what follows in the next few verses, instead of describing the rebellion, is Ahijah’s prophecy stating that Jeroboam will eventually become king of the northern tribes at the expense of the Davidic line (1 Kgs 11:29-39). More significant is the appearance of the narration of Jeroboam’s flight to Egypt (1 Kgs 11:40).²¹² These details are related to the rebellion, but appear to be what precipitates it along with its aftermath rather than the rebellion itself. Ahijah’s prophecy demonstrates that Jeroboam has divine support and will eventually become king. The divine support provides the necessary confidence, but his flight to Egypt intimates that his initial act of rebellion failed. The “raising of the hand” certainly involves threatening behavior against Solomon, causing the king to seek his life (1 Kgs 11:40), but the details of the larger context make clear that the Israelite rebellion is only successful after a new king takes the Judahite throne years later. The rebellion recorded in 1 Kgs 12 is a different episode. In the MT, Jeroboam remains in Egypt when the north ultimately rejects Rehoboam.²¹³ It appears that the northerners succeed where Jeroboam fails; in the MT Jeroboam only becomes involved again after the North had already spurned Rehoboam and fled to their “own tents” (1

²¹¹ The phrase *וְזֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר*, “this is the account of how,” is, as Cogan says, a detailing formula and we expect what follows to provide the details of the preceding event. Mordechai Cogan, *I Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 10 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 338.

²¹² The entire issue is complicated by the long addition(s) in the LXX, which is likely a later composition intending to fill some of these gaps. See Amos Frisch, “Jeroboam and the Division of the Kingdom: Mapping Contrasting Biblical Accounts,” *JANES* 27 (2000): 15–29. Adrian Schenker, “Jeroboam and the Division of the Kingdom in the Ancient Septuagint: LXX 3 Kingdoms 12.24a-z, MT 1 Kings 11–12; 14 and the Deuteronomistic History,” in *Israel Constructs its History: Deuteronomistic Historiography in Recent Research*, ed. A. de Pury, Thomas Römer, and J. D. Macchi, JSOTSup 306 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 214–57. See also Schenker’s discussion with Sweeney in Adrian Schenker, “Jeroboam’s Rise and Fall in the Hebrew and Greek Bible: Methodological Reflections on a Recent Article,” *JSJ* 39 (2008): 367–73; Marvin A. Sweeney, “A Reassessment of the Masoretic and Septuagint Versions of the Jeroboam Narratives in 1 Kings/3 Kingdoms 11-14,” *JSJ* 38 (2007): 165–95.

²¹³ This is what the LXX attempts to fill with added details not in the MT. See the preceding note for more on the LXX and the present versions of the text.

Kgs 12:16). These details indicate that there are two separate stages to what eventually becomes a successful rebellion: Jeroboam's challenge to Solomon in 1 Kgs 11—the raised hand—and the secession of Israel from Judah in 1 Kgs 12.

The structure of 1 Kgs 11 in the MT also demonstrates that Jeroboam's initial attempt at rebellion stands apart from 1 Kgs 12 and the successful rebellion of Israel. The beginning of 1 Kgs 11 is a critique of Solomon's love of foreign women (1 Kgs 11:1–13). Yahweh, in response to Solomon's improprieties, declares that the king will lose part of the Davidic kingdom to his servant (1 Kgs 11:11). This is an adumbration of Jeroboam's later enthronement in 1 Kgs 12. The text of 1 Kgs 11:11 states, however, that this will not happen until the reign of Solomon's son. After this pronouncement, Yahweh raises adversaries, Hadad and Rezon, to punish Solomon (1 Kgs 11:14–25). Immediately after the accounts of these two adversaries, the text introduces the reader to Jeroboam (1 Kgs 11:26–27), who stands as a third adversary. Therefore, when the reader hears about Jeroboam in 1 Kgs 12, they would recall that he had previously tried to rebel, albeit unsuccessfully, and would come to the conclusion that he is a natural choice to be king of the nascent state.

There are of course two well-known and pertinent Greek versions of the Jeroboam story that support these ideas. The first is the Old Greek version often designated LXXA, which is similar to the MT in overall terms; the second is the much longer addition to the Old Greek version often designated LXXB (3 Kingdoms 12:24a-z). The combined Greek versions notice Jeroboam's absence in the successful rebellion of 1 Kgs 12 and attempt to change the narrative to make Jeroboam culpable and condemn him for the revolt. The Greek version(s) make these changes because the MT leaves the reader with several questions, the most important of which are: did Jeroboam give up his plans to revolt while in Egypt? What was his relationship with the

Pharaoh when he fled to Egypt?²¹⁴ As Sweeney correctly shows, the combined version of the LXX seeks to answer these questions. The LXX account places Jeroboam back in Israel at the time the revolt breaks out, making it appear as if he played a larger role than he could have from Egypt.²¹⁵ These changes make clear that in the MT Jeroboam’s initial rebellion, the “raised hand,” stands apart from the later successful rebellion in 1 Kgs 12. His initial absence in the second part in the MT suggests that he was not directly involved with the successful rebellion narrated in 1 Kgs 12. The unspecified act of rebellion that initially fails, rather than a successful rebellion, is likely what the phrase *הָרָם יָד בְּנִגְלֹתָיִךְ*, “he raised a hand against the king” indicates in 1 Kgs 11:26–27. As the discussion below will demonstrate, a change in rebellion terms in the following chapter (1 Kgs 12) also argues for this. In 1 Kgs 11, the writer chooses an idiomatic phrase that does not always describe rebellion to narrate this failed rebellion.

The establishment of the north as independent from the south turns this failed rebellion into a well-developed rebellion and secession. The secession includes violent actions against the Judahite ruler and people narrated in 1 Kgs 12:18 as well as discussion of a retributive war on the part of Judah (1 Kgs 14:30; 15:6). That “to raise a hand against” in 1 Kgs 11:26–27 is only describing the initial act of rebellion is supported by the use of *פָּשַׁע*, “to rebel” in 1 Kgs 12:19 to describe Israel’s secession and now mature rebellion. The use of *פָּשַׁע*, “to rebel” is a clear indication that this is the rebellion of one political entity against the rule of the regional superior. When successful, this type of rebellion results in the subordinate replacing their former ruler. The change in terms may be because the conflict progresses from a failed attempt on Solomon’s life to a successful rebellion that effects regime change. A similar change occurs in the

²¹⁴ Some of the other questions raised by this text are related to Rehoboam’s personality and his role in causing the rebellion. Further, readers must also question why both Ahijah and Yahweh approve of Jeroboam, who eventually ends up as the worst monarch in Israel’s history.

²¹⁵ Sweeney, “A Reassessment of the Masoretic and Septuagint Versions of the Jeroboam Narratives in 1 Kings/3 Kingdoms 11–14,” 181–82.

discussion of Absalom's rebellion as the narration of that event varies between using **נשא יד** and **קושר**.²¹⁶

*The Connection Between the Two Main Uses of **רום יד***

As this discussion has demonstrated, writers employ the phrase **רום יד**, “to raise a hand” in the context of various kinds of rebellions. It first characterizes the attitude of those involved in a slave's rebellion when Israel leaves Egypt, “the place of slavery” (Exod 20:2). Second, it refers to a servant's challenge to his king as Jeroboam attacks Solomon (1 Kgs 11:26), which might have served as a catalyst for others to rebel and secede from Judah. The difficulty of pairing these two texts that employ **רום** and **יד** comes in noting that only the second example refers to a rebellion, or the failed attempt at rebellion, while the first refers to an attitude that could be part of a rebellion, but does not describe a rebellion itself.²¹⁷ The only element these two texts have in common is that they both employ the root **עבר** to describe the relationship between the parties. If these episodes are compared to the paradigm outlined in the previous chapter, they are actions that correspond to rebellions narrated with the words **מרד** or **פשע** based on whom the rebels act against. The connection, however, does not have to do with the type of rebellion discussed but rather that all rebels maintain a similar attitude of defiance. The defiant attitude, which is the focus of the Exodus text, would have contextually made the phrase an apt rebellion term. It would also have made it suitable to appear in additional military contexts. This is because it focuses on an expression of power and defiance.

In some texts, writers employ the phrase, **רום יד**, “to raise a hand” figuratively to denote that an individual or group is armed and confident for battle, as in Deut 32:27. The text here

²¹⁶ See the discussion in the following section for more on this.

²¹⁷ The focus on the defiant attitude behind the phrase does not appear to be related to the collocation of **רום** and **יד** in a prepositional phrase or not. Deuteronomy 32:27, similar to 1 Kgs 11:26, does not use the words in a prepositional phrase but focuses on the defiant attitude rather than a rebellion.

reads, לֹלֵלִי כַעַס אֹיֵב אֲגִיד פֶּן־יִנְכַרְוּ זְרָמָיו פֶּן־יֵאמְרוּ יָדֵינוּ לָמָּה וְלֹא יִהְיֶה פֶּעַל כָּל־זֹאת, “But I feared provocation by the enemy, for their adversaries might misunderstand and say, ‘our hand is triumphant; it was not the Lord who did all this’” (NRSV).²¹⁸ Wong claims that the phrase in this passage represents a show of a group’s resolve to triumph against a superior power.²¹⁹ The phrase does not, however, focus on the triumph as much as it focuses on an arrogant or defiant attitude. There is a sense that one group is spurning, or attempting to defy, a more powerful entity, God, as they erroneously take credit for the victory. Their arrogance is misdirected and hypothetical, but it nevertheless establishes the focus of this phrase on a type of attitude. The confidence is misplaced because as the text says, Yahweh is the force behind a theoretical military victory, not Israel’s enemies.

As mentioned, both cases where the phrase appears in a rebellion context come with divine support (Exod 14:8; 1 Kgs 11:26). Despite these two occurrences of the phrase that are supported by God, the phrase should not be taken as describing a sanctioned event. The description of Moses striking a rock to acquire water for the Israelites in Num 20:11 is described with the identical phrase וַיָּרֶם מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יָדוֹ, “Moses raised his hand.”²²⁰ Moses’ sin, as Wong points out, may be that he sets himself up to take on God as the superior force.²²¹ Milgrom calls Moses’ action a “usurpation” and shows that in Num 20:10 Moses is arrogating credit for the

²¹⁸ The translation in the NRSV reads against the accent in the Masoretic text. The accent suggests this is a *qatal*, not a participle, and the text should be translated as “our hand has triumphed.”

²¹⁹ These other examples occur in Deut 32:27; Exod 17:11; Isa 26:11; Mic 5:8; Gen 41:44. Ka Leung Wong, “‘And Moses Raised his hand’ in Numbers 20,11,” *Biblica* 89 (2008): 397–400. See also C. J. Labuschagne, “The Meaning of *beyād rāmā* in the Old Testament,” 146. For added details about the phrase below see J. Lust, “For I Lift up My Hand to Heaven and Swear: Deut 32:40,” in *Studies in Deuteronomy: In Honour of C. J. Labuschagne on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. F Garcia Martinez et al., VTSup 53 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 160–61. This describes an alternate use of this phrase. See the section immediately following this one for more on this.

²²⁰ In this passage, the phrase is not associated with the preposition ב, but this does not seem to change the meaning of the phrase as describing rebellious action. It is significant that the phrase “to raise a hand” appears in this text. In the parallel story of Exod 17, Moses does not raise his hand, and in that episode he is not punished. That this phrase is included helps the reader see what is wrong with Moses’ actions. It shows us there is more to what is taking place than Moses raising his hand as a necessary act precipitating his striking of the rock.

²²¹ Wong, “‘And Moses Raised his hand’ in Numbers 20,11,” 397–400.

miracle of bringing water from the rock.²²² The above example in Deuteronomy shows the phrase describing the resolution of a group as they challenge a superior force. In this case, it is Moses the inferior versus Yahweh the superior. Deuteronomy 32:27 also shows how the phrase is associated with a group falsely boasting about a military victory. If the parallel to the example in Deut 32:27 stands, Moses, in this episode, must be defying Yahweh by falsely usurping credit for the miracle as the group attempts to do in Deut 32:27.

That Moses' action is a rebellion is not explicitly stated, and this event is not equivalent to a political rebellion comparable to the event in 1 Kgs 11:26–27 outlined above. This is rather a defiant act against a superior, or rebellious action.²²³ The insubordinate nature of the behavior is consistent with the usage of the phrase in the contexts mentioned above describing the attitude and actions of the weaker party. Further, Moses' actions, as narrated in Num 20, keep him from entering Canaan, the land Yahweh "had given to" the Israelites (Num 20:12). This must have constituted a serious offense, and a usurpation of God's role is naturally condemned and comes with consequences.

Thinking about Moses' actions in light of Num 15:31 will confirm them as an illegal appropriation, while also highlighting the attitude associated with the phrase. The phrase **בְּיַד רָמָה**, "with a raised hand" in this verse describes a particular type of sin, one that is committed intentionally rather than inadvertently. The individual who commits a sin **בְּיַד רָמָה** does so blatantly with no regard for the consequences coming from a superior. This callousness further highlights the type of attitude associated with the phrase **רָוַם יָד**. The sin narrated with the "raised hand" contrasts with an act committed in error described in the previous verse, Num 15:30, with

²²² Jacob Milgrom, "*The JPS Torah Commentary, Numbers* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 422.

²²³ See chapter six on protesting for more on the distinction between rebellious action and a rebellion.

the word *שָׁגָגָה*, “unintentionally.”²²⁴ Moses, in Num 20, approaches God intentionally with a defiant attitude as he attempts to take credit for what God had done and is therefore punished.

This attitude makes the phrase applicable to contexts of rebellion because any rebel group would want to be confident in their ability to overthrow a superior power. The preceding discussion demonstrates that writers typically employ this phrase in military contexts, often to discuss the actions of a weaker party against a stronger power. This association made the phrase suited to describe the attempted rebellion in 1 Kgs 11:26–27. Rebellion typically involves a weaker and stronger power. If the writers were looking to employ a descriptive word aside from one of the three main rebellion terms (*מרד*, *פשע*, *קשר*), this phrase provided them with a viable alternative due to the details presented here. One could defiantly raise their hand against a superior as a symbolic description of their rebellion. The Israelites are the weaker subjects and servants to the Egyptians, and Jeroboam is a servant of Solomon. In both cases, the preparedness for battle comes because of divine support. In the story of 1 Kgs 11, Ahijah’s prophecy to Jeroboam provides the impetus for his confidence to rebel, and Moses’ leadership, along with Yahweh’s display of power through the plagues, provides the confidence for the Israelites as they leave Egypt with “a raised hand.” This discussion demonstrates that the phrase *יד רום* has a strong connection to the stature of an individual or group as they engage in battle. When the preposition *ב*, “against” follows the phrase it indicates that the defiance is directed specifically at another party.²²⁵

²²⁴ See Roy Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 207–09.

²²⁵The connection of the phrase *יד רום*, “to raise a hand” to the stature of a group engaging in a military conflict is also possible in Exod 17. In this chapter, the Israelites are locked in a battle with the Amalekites. The conflict teeters between the two sides, with the Israelites prevailing at one moment and the Amalekites the next. The Israelites’ status as either victorious or vanquished depends on whether Moses’ hand is raised. When Moses raises his hand, the Israelites begin to prevail, but when he lowers his hand they face defeat. Exodus 17:11 reads, *וַהֲרִיחַ כַּאֲשֶׁר יָרָם*, *מִזֶּמֶת יָדוֹ וַיִּגְבַּר יִשְׂרָאֵל*, “Whenever Moses raised his hand, Israel prevailed.” The raised hand could represent the power of one group over another, while the lowered hand indicates inferiority. This is possible due to the meaning of the

Preliminary Conclusion: A Phrase to Narrate a Failed Rebellion

The discussion above suggests that **ב רום יד** appears in three related but different contexts. It possibly began from the literal image of individuals in battle raising their hands in an expression of power. The phrase also represents a defiant attitude as in Exod 14:8. It finally appears to describe a rebellion as in 1 Kgs 11:26–27. The connection of **ב רום יד** to a defiant attitude helps to explain why writers could contextually use the phrase to describe a rebellion. This occurs when the preposition **ב**, “against” follows it to mark the object against which the defiance is directed. The placement of **ב רום יד** in the Jeroboam story may reveal that the phrase does not describe a specific type of rebellion, but rather indicates a failed rebellion. The details of Jeroboam’s act of rebellion are missing in this context, but it ends with his flight to Egypt as he attempts to preserve his life.²²⁶ This suggests that the writers of the Hebrew Bible will at times employ a different set of terms when they narrate a failed rebellion. Or, more specifically in this case, the Deuteronomistic writer of 1 Kgs 11:26–27 looks for a word or phrase other than **פִּשַׁע**, “to rebel” which records rebellions that eventually prove successful, so in 1 Kgs 12.

נשא יד ב) “To Raise a Hand Against”

Similarities and Differences Between **ב רום יד** and **נשא יד ב**

Comparable to the use of **רום יד** with **יד** to indicate a rebellion, the writers of the Hebrew Bible also use **נשא יד**, “to lift” with **יד**, “hand” on two occasions to indicate a similar action. The following analysis will first focus on the similarities and differences between the two phrases mentioned above to highlight what **נשא יד** means and why the writers employ it in the context of rebellion.

phrase in comparable contexts. This, however, is difficult to prove. The phrase could also have an apotropaic function in this text and represent some type of magical or prayerful action. See Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, 618, who notes that if it is two hands it likely indicates a stature of prayer.

²²⁶ The sample size is limited so this is hard to claim with a high degree of certainty. The discussion in the following paragraph will highlight a similar usage of the same phrase with **נשא יד** and **יד**, which strengthens the argument, but still only provides two more examples so does not significantly raise the level of certainty for these claims.

While this phrase is similar to the comparable phrase containing רָוַם, a few differences indicate that the phrases are not identical. יָד נִשָּׂא often appears in an oath context and might describe a different type of rebellion than that associated with רָוַם יָד. Admittedly, the latter point is hard to confirm due to limited usage. Despite differences with רָוַם יָד, the evidence demonstrates that נִשָּׂא יָד also falls short of describing a well-developed rebellion and is employed as a rebellion term due to a symbolic meaning behind the phrase. In this case, the symbolic meaning is focused on the hostile intervention of one party against another. An analysis of the similarities and differences, along with the two cases where this phrase appears in the context of rebellion, will highlight these ideas.

The first similarity between the two phrases concerns the obvious connection between the meaning of נִשָּׂא and רָוַם. Both verbs are associated with the action of lifting or raising. Second, they both also have as their object the noun יָד, “hand.” Since the hand evokes an image of control or power, the comments above related to the alternative meaning of hand and the original image the phrase derives from may also apply here. Third, while the two phrases do appear to be at home in different contexts, they overlap in meaning and usage in some cases. The phrase with נִשָּׂא appears often in an oath context. This is not the case with רָוַם, although in one instance, Gen 14:22, the collocation with רָוַם is similar to יָד נִשָּׂא as it appears in an oath context.²²⁷ That this only occurs once does not suggest that the phrases are identical, but that they had similarities, and that in one case a writer employs one because of a marked similarity with the other. Finally, both phrases, despite having additional meanings, can stand in as rebellion terms, and, notably,

²²⁷ It is possible Dan 12:7 also indicates the swearing of an oath, but the hand raising in this context is more likely connected to the gesture of hand raising in prayer as one petitions God. This also may be the case for Gen 14:22 which is what Strine suggests. Strine notes that Gen 14:22 and Dan 12:7, both which use the verb רָוַם, are different from the oath formulation with נִשָּׂא. In neither of these cases is Yahweh the subject which is the case when נִשָּׂא appears in an oath context. Strine sees neither of these cases as explicitly dealing with an oath. See C. A. Strine, *Sworn Enemies: The Divine Oath, the Book of Ezekiel, and the Polemics of Exile*, BZAW 436 (Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2013), 9, 81. Despite his suggestion, it does seem possible that the similarity of the two phrases allowed the phrase with רָוַם to appear in an oath context on one occasion.

describe a rebellion that fails.

Now that the preceding paragraph has described the basic similarities between these phrases, the following analysis will highlight the differences. First, the distribution of נשא יד within the Hebrew Bible varies from that of the comparable phrase “to raise a hand,” when the verb רום is involved. As mentioned above, the phrase with נשא often appears in the context of oaths, especially in the book of Ezekiel. One example occurs in Ezek 20:23 נִשְׂאתִי אֶת־יָדִי אֶת־יְהוָה לְהַשְׁכֵּת אֶת־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם וְלִפְזֹזֹת אוֹתָם בְּאֶרְצוֹת הַגּוֹיִם, “Moreover I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among the nations and disperse them through the countries” (NRSV). The phrase the NRSV translates as swore very literally reads, “I raised my hand.” David Seely sees this phrase as standing in for the divine oath formula due in part to the frequent appearance of this phrase in an oath.²²⁸ If correct, this means that in this context the phrase “to raise a hand” with נשא is identical to the term נשבע, “to swear.” While there is certainly a connection between נשא יד and נשבע, Seely has likely gone too far in declaring that they are identical. Others, for example, Strine and Lust, have since questioned the one-to-one equivalence of נשא יד with the oath formula.²²⁹ Its prevalence in these alternative contexts, however, indicates that the biblical writers saw this phrase as having a different valence from that of רום יד, which does not occur in an oath context outside of the one possible case in Gen 14:22 mentioned above. This is a tangential point, but necessary to establish that these two phrases are not identical despite a strong similarity.

²²⁸ David Rolph Seely, “The Raised Hand of God as an Oath Gesture,” in *Fortunate the Eyes that See: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Astrid B. Beck et. al., (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 411–21. For the appearance of the phrase in an oath context see Exod 6:8; Num 14:30; Ezek 20:5, 6, 15, 23 28, 42; 47:14; Neh 9:15. Seely does suggest that רום can appear also to indicate an oath but this occurs less often. When it does, it appears in relation to humans rather than to God. However, this only appears in Gen 14:22 and possibly Dan 12:7, suggesting that the two phrases, while having similarities, are distinct.

²²⁹ C. A. Strine, *Sworn Enemies: The Divine Oath, the Book of Ezekiel, and the Polemics of Exile*, 89. See also J. Lust, “For I Lift up My Hand to Heaven and Swear: Deut. 32:40,” 155–64.

יד נשא To Indicate Active Hostile Intervention

In finding the meaning of יד נשא when it is not connected to the oath formula, Lust and Strine have highlighted another meaning that, while distinctive, connects to the defiant attitude behind רום יד. They demonstrate that to raise a hand with נשא יד can be a “metonymy for the active, hostile intervention of one party against another.”²³⁰ This meaning shows that יד נשא, in contrast to רום יד, focuses on action rather than attitude. So, while these two phrases do appear in different contexts, the defiant attitude of the former and the hostile intervention associated with יד נשא show how both of these phrases are connected to rebellion. Rebellion is defined by the hostile intervention of one party against another, as it always involves an action threatening the ruler.

The most obvious examples of this phrase standing in for an active hostile intervention, outside of the rebellions discussed below, are in Ps 10:12 and Isa 49:22. In Ps 10:12 the Psalmist pleads with God to rise and יד נשא יָרֵךְ, “lift up your hand.” The verse continues by asking God not to forget the oppressed and asks with wonder why the wicked seem to be insouciant, not worried about receiving punishment. The Psalmist is hoping that God will actively intervene and strike the wicked. A similar situation occurs in Isa 49:22. Here, Yahweh says, כֹּה־אָמַר אֲדַנְי יְהוָה הִנֵּה אֲשָׂא אֶל־גּוֹיִם יָדַי וְאֶל־עַמִּים אֲרָאִים נְסִי, “Thus says Yahweh, I will lift my hand to the nations, and raise my banner to the peoples.” This is a call by Yahweh for military action, as made clear by the raising of the banner and the taking of captives. The second half of

²³⁰ Ibid. It is possible this explains the connection to the swearing of an oath. Raising one’s hand could be a symbolic gesture serving as a guarantee that the swearing party would fulfill the oath. The oath, if unfulfilled by a human power, would have brought consequences on the one swearing. The raised hand is a gesture that shows that punishment is unnecessary. The discussion above discussed this in relation to the iconography of subordinates approaching their superiors and raising their hands swearing loyalty as they submit to the power of the ruler. Seely, “The Raised Hand of God as an Oath Gesture,” 7. See also Blane Conklin, *Oath Formulas in Biblical Hebrew*, LSAWS 5 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 4, 15–17 for the use of the terminology, authenticating, in a discussion of oaths. Conklin suggests oaths must contain the following two parts, the authenticating element and the content of the oath. The raising of a hand is one of the possible authenticating elements in these oaths, which he discusses in the section cited and sees it as a symbolic gesture. Strine disagrees with this position and does not think “to raise one’s hand” was a symbolic gesture performed during the swearing of an oath. He sees its presence in the oath contexts due to a separate meaning related to the transfer of land. Strine, *Sworn Enemies: The Divine Oath, the Book of Ezekiel, and the Polemics of Exile*, 73–75, 81.

the verse, וּבְנֵי תֵיבָה תִּשָּׂא אֶת־כַּתְּפֵי, “And your daughters will be carried away on a shoulder,” depicts what nations do when they force conquered people groups into exile.²³¹ The context of Isa 49:14–26 is one of restoration, but the restoration is depicted with military language. The military intervention on the part of the nations is intended as a reversal of the original destruction of Jerusalem and subsequent exile. The active and hostile intervention is clear in both Ps 10:12 and Isa 49:22.

In addition to these examples in the Hebrew Bible, several texts from elsewhere in the ancient Near East employ this phrase to indicate similar hostile activity by one party against another. In the Myth of Erra and Ishum we read,

Ishum set out for the mountain Sharshar, the Seven, warriors unrivalled, fell in behind him. When the warriors reached the mountain Sharshar, *he raised his hand* and destroyed the mountain, he reckoned the mountain Sharshar as level ground. He cut away the trunks of the cedar forest, the thicket looked as if the deluge had passed over, he laid waste cities and turned them into open spaces, he obliterated mountains and slew their wildlife.²³² (Erra and Ishum IV 139–147).

The raised hand does not indicate the act of destruction in this text, but it precedes that action. While the writer could have simply stated that Ishum destroyed the mountain, he felt it necessary to mention that Ishum raised his hand in a sort of magical gesture to initiate the destruction. This suggests that the raised hand indicates the initial intervention in this violent series of actions. Strine also points to a section in the epic of Keret from Ugarit that can be connected to this meaning even if not identical. In this text, instead of a raised hand indicating strength, it is a lowered hand indicating weakness. “He came in to his father. He lifted up his voice and cried: ‘Listen, I pray, O Keret the votary, listen, and let your ear be alert! Like a warrior can you command warriors, and give orders to those under your command? You have lowered your hand in weakness!’” This statement implies that if lowering a hand depicts inferiority as a warrior, or

²³¹ Compare the language of Ezek 12, which uses the same terminology to describe exile.

²³² Benjamin Foster, *Before the Muses. An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*. 3rd ed. (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2005), 908.

describe the attempted rebellion of Sheba son of Bichri in 2 Sam 20:21. The relevant section of that text reads as follows: **כִּי אִישׁ מֵהַר אֶפְרַיִם שָׁבַע בֶּן-בִּכְרִי שָׁמֹן נִשָּׂא יָדוֹ בַּמֶּלֶךְ בְּרוֹד**, “For a man from the hill country of Ephraim, Sheba son of Bichri, raised his hand against the king, against David.” In both cases, the writers use the idiomatic phrase of “raising a hand against” the king to indicate an attempted rebellion.²³⁵

In the former case, the story declares that Absalom attempts to replace a domestic king through some type of aggressive action but eventually fails. In this way, the phrase is commensurate with those rebellions narrated with the root **קָשַׁר** which also indicates a domestic coup involving only a change of monarch. This connection is confirmed when noticing that **קָשַׁר** describes Absalom’s rebellion in 2 Sam 15:12. One main difference between these words is that **קָשַׁר** overwhelmingly results in the death of the king. Suriano says, “the **קָשַׁר** always results in the death of the king and therefore necessitates an irregular act of installment to the throne.”²³⁶ In contrast the writers use **נִשָּׂא יָד** in this case when the king lives and the rebellion ultimately fails.

The placement of these words within the narrative likely indicates that the phrase “to raise a hand against” the king with **נִשָּׂא** depicts something slightly different from a coup narrated with a form of **קָשַׁר**.²³⁷ It is a failed act of rebellion rather than a well-developed rebellion that

²³⁵ Note also the comparable phrase **יָד שְׁלַח** in 1 Sam 24:7, 11. In this case David refuses to send his hand against the king in an act that if carried out would be connected to a rebellion. This phrase, however describes a more literal action of striking the king down in the cave and can also stand in for rebellion as it does in Esther. See the discussion in the following section for more on this phrase.

²³⁶ Matthew J. Suriano, *The Politics of Dead Kings: Dynastic Ancestors in the Book of Kings and Ancient Israel*, 87. See the previous chapter for more on this word and how it does result in the death of the king, unless it narrates an event in progress.

²³⁷ It is unlikely that the difference in words is due to a source issue. Both of these texts appear in what some scholars believe is the succession narrative, which might suggest that this section of text used a different phrase to refer to rebellion against the king because it is a stand-alone composition. Despite this possibility, the same section of text uses a more explicit word for rebellion earlier in the story, and once the rebellion fails, the text changes to this phrase. For more on the possibility that these texts are part of a Succession Narrative see, Leonhard Rost, *The Succession to the Throne of David* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1982); for a more recent argument in favor of this document see Joseph Blenkinsopp, “Another Contribution to the Succession Narrative Debate (2 Samuel 11–20; 1 Kings 1-2),” *JSOT* 38 (2013): 35–58. This is not a defense of the existence of the succession narrative, we are aware

succeeds in establishing a new king. Looking at the specific context where קָשַׁר appears during the discussion of Absalom’s rebellion will support this. While the rebellion is in progress and gaining strength, the writers use קָשַׁר. This appears in 2 Sam 15:12, וַיִּהְיֶה הַקָּשָׁר אֲמִץ וְהָעָם הוֹלֵךְ וְרַב, “And the rebellion solidified and the people continued to grow in number with Absalom.” Immediately after this comment the narrator declares that David flees Jerusalem. This is a sign that the king, at least temporarily, has to relinquish the throne to Absalom (2 Sam 15:13–17). At this point in the story, the reader does not know the outcome and might believe, based on David’s flight, that the king will end up dead. A form of קָשַׁר fits in this context.

The word for the rebellion, or in this case one of the rebels, continues to be a form of קָשַׁר in 2 Sam 15:31 where it describes Ahithophel as one of the קָשָׁרִים, “rebels.” At this point, David is fleeing and mourning over the loss of his throne: וַיָּרֶד עֲלֶיהָ בְּמַעְלָה הַיְהוּדִים עֲלֶיהָ וּבֹכָה, “David went up to the ascent of the Mount of Olives, weeping as he ascended” (2 Sam 15:30). Once it fails and the rebels are killed (2 Sam 18:15), the narrator no longer describes the rebellion with קָשַׁר as it has not proved successful in replacing or killing the king. The writer now describes it in retrospect as “he raised a hand against” (נִשָּׂא יָד בּוֹ) the king in 2 Sam 18:28; hence the writer is diminishing Absalom’s accomplishments. This phrase indicates that these are the individuals who attempted a rebellion but failed.

Sheba’s rebellion in 2 Sam 20, while also describing a failed attempt at rebellion, is not focused on an internal coup, but is closer to a rebellion involving secession. This makes this

many have questioned the existence of this document and even those who recognize its existence see the problems with it. For several scholars who question the existence of this text see A. de Pury and T. Römer, *Die sogenannte Thronfolgegeschichte Davids: Neue Einsichten und Anfragen*, OBO 176 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000). Even if the succession narrative does not exist as Rost defined it, many scholars who question the existence of the succession narrative still see 2 Sam 9–20 as a tightly bound section of text and so it is important to look at the variations in words within this unit. See Richard G. Smith, *Fate of Justice and Righteousness During David’s Reign: Narrative Ethics and Rereading the Court History According to 2 Samuel 8:15–20:26*, LHBOTS 508 (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 4 for a scholar who recognizes the problems of the succession narrative but still sees this entire section as tightly bound.

phrase comparable to **רָוַם יָד בַּ**, “to raise a hand against” in 1 Kgs 11:26–27. Jeroboam’s initial failed act of rebellion precipitates the secession of the north. Since Sheba’s rebellion precipitates this same event, the phrase **יָד נִשְׂא** likely describes an attempted secession rather than an internal coup in this case. In 2 Sam 20:1, Sheba blows the ram’s horn to initiate the rebellion. This is also a call for rebellion in 1 Sam 13:3 and 2 Sam 15:10. Following this, Sheba cries, **אֵין-לָנוּ חֵלֶק בְּדָוִד**, “We have no portion in David and we have no inheritance with the son of Jesse, each man to his tent O’ Israel.” This is not a call to kill David or an attempt to take his throne, but is rather a call for Israel to withdraw and secede from the sphere of David’s kingdom. This is clear when comparing it to 1 Kgs 12:16, which contains a phrase with nearly identical language. It says there, **מַה-לָּנוּ חֵלֶק בְּדָוִד וְלֹא-נַחֲלָה בְּבֶן-יִשְׂי לְאֹהֲלָיָהּ**, “What portion do we have in David, we have no inheritance in the son of Jesse, to your tents O Israel! Look after your own house David.” This chapter, 1 Kgs 12, describes the completed secession of Israel from Judah and the writer employs the verb **בָּשַׁע**, “to rebel” to indicate this. The almost verbatim repetition of the same phrase in these two contexts demonstrates the goal of Sheba’s rebellion, namely secession.

Similar to the case of Absalom’s rebellion, the context **יָד נִשְׂא** appears in demonstrates the contextual meaning of this phrase as a failed attempt at rebellion. The phrase **יָד נִשְׂא** appears in the same verse as the statement saying that the people in the city where Sheba is seeking refuge will cast the rebel’s head over the wall. “The woman said to Joab, his head will be thrown over the wall to you” (2 Sam 20:21). This is a clear indication of Sheba’s failure. Furthermore, this rebellion never materializes as David is successful in stemming it before Sheba acquires any fortified cities (2 Sam 20:6). In both cases where writers employ this phrase in the context of rebellion, it indicates a failed attempt.

The similar phrase describing Jeroboam’s rebellion may also indicate a failed rebellion.

The phrase **יָד הָרִים** appearing in 1 Kgs 11:26 is followed shortly after by Jeroboam’s flight to Egypt suggesting that the rebellion initially fails. In 1 Kgs 12, the writer describes the north’s successful rebellion with **פָּשַׁע**. It is more difficult to say with **יָד הָרִים** if this is the case because the phrase typically indicates an attitude rather than a rebellion, and Jeroboam’s act is the only rebellion explicitly described with this phrase. The writer may have simply wanted to avoid **פָּשַׁע**, “to rebel,” which always results in a successful rebellion. Nevertheless, the similarities of the two phrases discussed thus far, suggest that to raise a hand (with either **רוּם** or **נִשָּׂא**), when the writers employ it as a word for rebellion, indicates a failed rebellion.

Despite the similarity of these two phrases in rebellion contexts, they may have minor differences. The phrase with **רוּם** and **יָד** is connected only to **פָּשַׁע**, while **יָד נִשָּׂא** is closer to **קָשָׁר** in one episode and **פָּשַׁע** in another. The former phrase appears in an international context against Egypt as well as anticipating Jeroboam’s secession from Judah as tribe rises against tribe, while the latter occurs in a domestic context in one case and is focused on secession in another case. Due to the limited evidence, it is difficult to determine if this distribution is intentional, especially considering the significant amount of overlap. That each phrase describes a different type of rebellion, however, would be consistent with the different alternative meanings of these phrases. The above discussion demonstrates that **יָד נִשָּׂא** appears far more frequently in the context of swearing an oath, while **יָד רוּם** appears more prominently to describe the attitude of a weaker party in a conflict. A more clear difference is that the two rebellions narrated during David’s life, using **יָד נִשָּׂא**, are overall portrayed in a negative light.²³⁸ Jeroboam’s rebellion in

²³⁸ This is clear in Sheba’s case in the use of the phrase **אִישׁ בְּלִיַּעַל** “worthless man” to describe the rebel (2 Sam 20:1). The negativity associated with Absalom’s rebellion is more difficult to establish. In one sense, the narrator sets it up so it is expected. This is evident from the punishment leveled against David in 2 Sam 12:10–11. Here the narrator says the sword will not depart from David’s house and that trouble will arise from within David’s own house, which adumbrates what Absalom will do. According to the narrative, Absalom’s rebellion is in one sense part of Yahweh’s plan to punish David. The connection to Absalom is clear from the comment about David’s concubines and how one will take them and lie with them in broad daylight (2 Sam 12:11). This is what Absalom does in 2 Sam

contrast, described with **יָדוּם יָד**, is initially supported by Yahweh. Whether the writers intentionally choose different phrases for this reason would be impossible to prove, but a combination of the factors listed above at least argues for this possibility.

ב שלח יד “To Send Forth a Hand Against”

There is yet another related phrase, **ב שלח יד**, “to send forth a hand against,” that also stands on one occasion as a rebellion term. Before discussing this phrase and its meaning of “to send forth a hand against” in a rebellion context, the section will first outline the more common meaning of the phrase as describing an act of violence. From here we will move to discuss cases where there is a contextual connection between the phrase and a rebellion. This connection occasionally creates some ambiguity in identifying the action behind what is often a symbolic phrase. The ambiguity comes about because the act of harm is occasionally directed against a king. This association ultimately helps demonstrate why this phrase contextually describes a rebellion. This occurs in Esther where **ב שלח יד**, similar to the phrases discussed above, narrates a failed rebellion attempt, or more specifically, a foiled assassination attempt.

ב שלח יד - As an Act of Violence

Most occurrences of **ב שלח יד**, “to send forth a hand against” have little to do with rebellion, but rather describe a violent assault on another party, which often involves killing. The phrase occurs in the Joseph story where it narrates Reuben’s plea to his brothers not to kill Joseph. Reuben says, **הַשְׁלִיכוּ אֹתוֹ אֶל-הַבּוֹר הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר בְּמִדְבָּר נָדָר אֶל-תְּשַׁלְּחוּ-בּוֹ**, “Cast him into this pit which is in the wilderness, but do not stretch forth your hand against him” (Gen 37:22). Because Reuben is

16:21–22. Despite the fact that the narrative demonstrates that David needs to be punished for his actions, in the end, the narrators, and thereby Yahweh, still support him and show hints of negativity toward Absalom and his rebellion. One clear case of this is in 2 Sam 17:14, which shows that Yahweh is working to bring harm to Absalom. This shows that the rebellion is at least negative from the perspective of a Davidic supporter, which is the perspective of the narrative. For more on the pattern of sin and punishment in David’s story and the notion of Absalom’s rebellion as a reprisal for David’s sin, see Gillian Keys, *Wages of Sin: A Reappraisal of the Succession Narrative*, JSOTSup 221 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 127–41. See also the discussion in the following section, which shows that the narrator views it as wrong to attack or rebel against David because he is “Yahweh’s anointed.”

trying to keep Joseph alive, the phrase in this text is equivalent to killing Joseph. This is supported by Reuben's statement that he does not want his brothers to wound Joseph. He says in the same verse, אֲלֹתֶיךָ שֶׁכֹּדֶם, "Do not shed blood." In this verse, the shedding of blood is identical to stretching out one's hand against another party.

The phrase is also indicative of killing in the *Aqedah* where Abraham first "stretched forth his hand" (וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶבְרָהָם אֶת־יָדוֹ) to take the knife to slaughter Isaac (Gen 22:10). Here, the phrase is intended to be quite literal and lacks a preposition or another verb marking the target. Following this, the messenger of Yahweh says, אֲלֹתֶיךָ יָרֵךְ אֶל־הַנֶּעַר, "Do not stretch forth your hand to the boy." Now, the phrase with the added preposition is a command not to kill Isaac. This phrase has a literal dimension to it in Gen 22 as Abraham would have had to move or send his hand toward Isaac to use the knife in an act of sacrifice. The literal image this action carries allows the phrase to depict an act of bloodshed as it does in Gen 22:12.²³⁹

A similar meaning is apparent in the book of Job. Yahweh allows "the accuser" to strike all of Job's possessions, but the deity initially says, בַּק אֱלֹיֹי אֲלֹתֶיךָ יָרֵךְ, "Only do not stretch forth your hand against him" (Job 1:11–12). Because the phrase stands alone, it must indicate an act of violence against Job. This continues in Job 2:5 where the accuser tells Yahweh to "stretch forth your hand" and strike his bone and flesh so he will curse you. This is the precursor to all the painful ailments Job will experience in the coming chapters.

The violent act behind stretching out a hand also appears when Yahweh stretches out his hand to strike Egypt in Exod 3:20: וַיִּשְׁלַח־תִּי אֶת־יָדִי וְהִכִּיתִי אֶת־מִצְרָיִם, "I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt." The phrase in this case is not the actual violence, but precipitates the violence.

²³⁹ There are a few cases where the phrase is meant to be literal as in Exod 4:4 where Moses is told to stretch out his hand to seize a snake's tail.

Nevertheless, the connection of the phrase to a violent attack is clear from the ensuing actions.²⁴⁰ One could think of the violence involved in the plagues for example. The same meaning occurs elsewhere in texts such as 1 Sam 22:17; 2 Sam 18:12; 24:16; Esth 3:6; 8:7; Dan 11:42; Neh 13:21. These examples demonstrate that in most cases where this phrase appears, a violent attack is implied. This meaning is not connected to rebellion.

ב שלח יד – An Act of Violence Directed at the King

Occurrences In the Hebrew Bible

In several additional texts, the phrase ב שלח יד, “to send forth a hand against,” describes a similar action, but has connections to a rebellion because the violence in these contexts is directed against a king. This occurs prominently in the story of David’s rise, specifically in 1 Sam 24 and 26. The narrator places the phrase ב שלח יד, “to send forth a hand against,” in the mouth of David multiple times to indicate that he viewed it as wrong to attack Yahweh’s anointed. In these examples, the phrase still retains the meaning of a violent attack, but is inextricably linked to rebellion because of the context.

In 1 Sam 24:7,11 (Eng. 24: 6, 10)²⁴¹ and 1 Sam 26:9, David says multiple times that he will not “send forth a hand against” (ב שלח יד) the king because Saul is Yahweh’s anointed. In these texts, the phrase appears focused on one specific act of harm directed at another party. The focus is on the harm David would cause to Saul while in the cave (1 Sam 24:7, 11) or in the king’s camp (1 Sam 26:9). The phrase is not meant to be a synonym for rebellion and is thus similar to texts such as Gen 37:22 mentioned above. In 1 Sam 24:11 it serves as a parallel to הרג, “to kill.” Here it states, הַגִּבּוֹר הַיּוֹם הָיָה רָאִי עֵינַיִךָ אֶת אֲשֶׁר-נִתְּנָה יְהוָה הַיּוֹם בְּיָדִי בַּמַּעֲרָה וְאָמַר לְהַרְגֶנּוּךָ וַתִּתְּחַס, “Today, your eyes have seen how Yahweh has

²⁴⁰ See also Exod 9:15.

²⁴¹ The references below are all to the numbering in the MT and not the English versions.

given you into my hand in the cave. Some said to kill you but (I) spared you.²⁴² I said, I will not *send forth my hand against* my Lord, because he is Yahweh’s anointed.” The phrase is connected to rebellion due to the larger episode of Saul having previously accused David and Jonathan of a rebellion (קָשַׁר) against him (1 Sam 22:8). If David had “sent forth his hand against” the standing ruler and subsequently replaced that ruler, there is no doubt he would have been involved in a rebellion.²⁴³

If one attacks or kills an individual, it is a violent act or murder, but if one attacks a king, the action is often part of a rebellion or an assassination. In 1 Sam 24 and 26, the phrase is meant to exonerate David from being implicated in a rebellion against Saul by stating that he did not harm him. Moreover, the phrase allows the writer a chance to avoid an explicit rebellion term and to clear David from the charge of rebellion. Throughout the story of David’s rise, the writer attempts to exonerate David from Saul’s charge of rebellion. Avoiding a term for rebellion is one of his ways to accomplish this.

The phrase appears again later in this story in a similar context. The usage of this phrase in 2 Sam 1 again provides the writer with a way to exonerate David from the charge of rebellion. In 2 Sam 1, as the Amalekite soldier David is speaking with recounts a previous battle with the Philistines, he declares that the Philistines had mortally wounded Saul. As the king lay there, Saul asks the passing Amalekite to kill him. The soldier recounts to David that he complied and killed Saul. David, as he responds to this individual in 2 Sam 1:14, asks the following question:

²⁴² The verbal form here is a third feminine singular likely with ellipsis of the subject עַיִן, “eye” with a first person singular pronominal suffix. Many times the verb רָחַם appears to indicate pity or compassion, the word eye appears as the grammatical subject. This is the way to indicate either that one had compassion or did not if the negative marker is present. This is why the translation above is “I spared you.” This would also explain why the verbal form is a third feminine singular. The subject eye with the verb רָחַם is explicit in Gen 45:20; Ezek 7:4; 16:5; Deut 7:16; 19:21; Isa 13:18. The LXX takes it this way, which is apparent with the verb ἐφεισάμην, “I spared you.” It is likely this was a scribal error, a case of *homoioarkton*, with the scribe’s eye skipping from the ע in עַיִן “my eye” and jumping to the ע in עֲלֶיךָ “to you,” which is still present in the verse.

²⁴³ Indeed, for the biblical author, David had already replaced that ruler, which is why we read multiple times that David did not engage in this rebellious activity. David had nothing to do with the eventual harm Saul endured which led to David’s enthronement.

אֵיךְ לֹא נִרְאַתָּ לְשַׁלֵּחַ יָדְךָ לְשַׁחַת אֶת־מְשֻׁחֵי יְהוָה “Why were you not afraid to send forth your hand to destroy Yahweh’s anointed?” The phrase is equivalent to killing as becomes explicit in 2 Sam 1:16: אֲנֹכִי בִּתְחִילָה אֶת־מְשֻׁחֵי יְהוָה “I killed Yahweh’s anointed.” This highlights the basic meaning of the phrase as a violent attack outlined above.

Despite the meaning of *שלח יד* as a violent attack in this episode, David understands the implications of the Amalekite’s action. If someone “sends forth their hand against” the king, it has the potential to implicate that person in a rebellion. To make sure others did not have the chance to accuse David of being part of a rebellion, he has the Amalekite who “sent forth his hand” against Saul put to death. Tellingly, the text is going out of its way to make sure the reader does not think David is involved in a rebellion, which is one reason that David kills the individual, who committed regicide by “sending forth his hand against” Saul. The denial that David is involved in a rebellion could have been one reason to avoid a rebellion term in this text and in those texts when David is speaking, such as 1 Sam 24:7, 11; 26:9. The only person who utters a word for rebellion in the entire story of David’s rise is Saul (1 Sam 22:8, 13).

Occurrences of Comparable Phrases Outside the Hebrew Bible

This phrase also appears outside of the Hebrew Bible to indicate a hostile act of one party against another. The Sefire inscriptions outline a treaty between Bar-Ga’yah and Mati’el and stipulate what Mati’el and his sons should and should not do. The phrase appears on multiple occasions in these inscriptions to indicate the hypothetical attack of one party against another. The relevant section found in Stele I B 24–28 reads as follows:

But if [you obey and car]ry out this treaty and say, “[I] am an ally,” [I shall not be able to raise a hand] against you; nor will my son be able to raise a hand against [your] son, or my offspring against [your] off[spring]. And if] one of (the) kings [should speak a word] against me or one of my enemies (should so speak) and you say to any king, “What are you [going to do?”] and he should raise a hand against] my son and kill him and raise his

hand to take some of my land or some of my possessions, you will have been unfaith[ful to the trea]ty which is in this inscription.²⁴⁴

A similar passage occurs in Stele II B 5–7:

If you say in your soul and think in your mind, [“I am an ally, and I shall obey Bar-Ga’yah] and his son and his offspring,” then I shall not be able to raise a ha[nd against you, nor my son against your son, nor my offspring against your offspring], either to rout them, or to destroy their name.²⁴⁵

The first point to note is that in each case Fitzmyer translates the relevant phrase as “to raise a hand against,” which would parallel the phrases described in the first sections of this chapter. However, the Aramaic text in all cases has **שלח יד ב**, “send forth a hand against.” This is parallel to the third phrase discussed in this chapter. The implication in these texts is that if Mati’el obeys the terms of the treaty then Bar-Ga’yah will not, **שלח יד ב**, “send forth a hand against,” him or his sons. If he is not obedient to the terms of the treaty then Bar-Ga’yah will “send forth his hand against” Mati’el. The phrase clearly describes a hostile attack against the party involved in the offense. **שלח יד ב** also indicates the hostility of an outside party against Bar-Ga’yah. If Mati’el sees another party “sending forth a hand against” the son of Bar-Ga’yah “to kill him” and fails to thwart this, he will be guilty of breaking the treaty. The equivalence between “sending forth a hand against” and the killing of Bar-Ga’yah’s son demonstrates the violent act to which this phrase also refers outside of ancient Israel.

Likewise, in some of the Neo-Assyrian treaties there is a phrase that appears to be comparable, although these texts use a different verb. Esarhaddon’s succession treaty states:

You shall not slander his brothers, his mother’s sons, before Assurbanipal, the great crown prince designate, nor speak anything evil about them, nor lift your hands against

²⁴⁴ This translation is from Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Aramaic Inscriptions of Sefire: Revised. Edition*, BibOr 19-A (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1995), 51.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 123.

their houses or commit a crime against them, nor take anything away from the gift which their father has given them, or the acquisitions which they themselves have made.²⁴⁶

The relevant phrase in this Assyrian treaty does not use a form of a verb meaning either “to raise” or “to send” but rather the verb *ubālu*, “to carry, to take.” The relevant line translated above as “nor lift your hands against their houses” reads as follows: *Á.2-ku-nu ina É.MEŠ-šu-nu tu-bal-a-ni*. There are a few cases where we do see the verb *ubālu* as meaning “to send.” In SAA II 002: 23’, a treaty of Assur Nerari V, we read *ʿšúm¹-mu a-na KUR 02-te tu-še-bal-ni*, “nor send him to another country.”²⁴⁷ It may thus be better to translate this as “to send a hand against,” instead of “to raise a hand against” to indicate some sort of hypothetical violent action against Aššurbanipal. Translating the phrase as “to carry the hand” also would not be incorrect as it would still indicate the same thing and keep the reader from thinking that the verb is *nāšu*. Regardless of the exact verb employed by the text, there is a similarity to the above phrases. There is a verb of movement along with the word “hand” as the object to indicate a violent or hostile act, which is made clear by the context.²⁴⁸ More importantly, these phrases in the Akkadian texts are in the context of an assassination of the king or his entourage and may be connected to a replacement of the king and therefore a rebellion. This is similar to some of the texts analyzed in the Hebrew Bible. This comparison helps draw out the points noted above related to the meaning of the phrase as an attack that can contextually indicate a rebellion.

²⁴⁶ Simo Parpola and Kazuko Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths*, SAA 2 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1988), 39.

²⁴⁷ Parpola and Watanabe also translate this phrase as “to send” in line iii 10’ of the same text. Parpola and Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths*, 11.

²⁴⁸ In SAA 12 there are several occurrences of a similar phrase occurring. In these texts, we read multiple times “Where he lies you shall not disturb him, and you shall not raise your hand against him, to do him evil, because he is one who has deserved kindness and favor of the king his lord.” The phrase reads as follows: *ŠU.2-ka a-na HUL-tim i-na ŠÀ-šú la tu-ub-bal*. This may not be the best comparison, because the phrase is specifically connected to moving a corpse in all the cases appearing in SAA 12. It does, however, show that the phrase “to raise/send” a hand depending on how we translate *ubālu* in this text can indicate an evil act against another party, in this case specifically the moving of a grave. See L. Kataja and R. Whiting, *Grants, Decrees and Gifts of the Neo-Assyrian Period*, SAA 12 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1995). See specifically SAA 12 025, r 19; 026, r19; 031, r22 for these specific examples.

Comparisons with נשא יד

Further examples in the Hebrew Bible demonstrate that in addition to the meaning of a direct and violent attack on another, the phrase is also comparable to the meaning of נשא יד, “to raise a hand” to indicate a hostile intervention. Twice in the Psalms, the writer implores Yahweh to “stretch forth” his hand to intervene against his enemies in what would be a hostile act. Psalm 138:7 reads, תִּתְּנֵנִי עַל אֶרֶץ אֹיְבֵי תִשְׁלַח יְדְךָ וְתוֹשִׁיעַנִי יְמִינְךָ, “You keep me alive despite the anger of my enemies, you stretch forth your hand, your right hand saves me.”²⁴⁹ The meaning still connects to the analysis above as the phrase has a dual meaning in these passages. First, to intervene on behalf of the one making the request. Second, the intervention must be accompanied by a violent act, which Yahweh will direct at the Psalmist’s enemies. This is the meaning of the phrase as demonstrated above, but here it is connected to an active hostile intervention. The comparison among the phrases further demonstrates that, while distinct, they have similarities. The final similarity discussed below is the most important, as it shows how this phrase also connects directly to rebellion.

שִׁלַּח יָד בַּ As a Rebellion Term

The book of Esther narrates an attempted palace coup or assassination using the phrase שִׁלַּח יָד בַּ, “to send forth a hand against.” In this case the narrator intends for the phrase to describe a rebellion. It is not solely focused on the violent attack of one person against another as it was in the story of David’s rise. It is a rebellion term in Esther that is meant to be similar to קִשְׁר. When one begins with the story of David’s rise, it is not hard to see how this phrase becomes a synonym for rebellion in Esth 2. In two places within this book (Esth 2:21; 6:2), the word contextually becomes a word for a palace coup and specifically for a failed coup. The fact that the rebellion never materializes explains why the writer does not use קִשְׁר.

²⁴⁹ See also Ps 144:7.

In Esth 2:21, as Mordecai sits at the king's gate he hears of a plot to assassinate Ahasuerus. There is little doubt that what is taking place here is a conspiracy to rebel against and overthrow the king. The individuals involved in the coup, namely Bigthan and Teresh, are palace officials. They are eunuchs that guard the threshold or what is likely the king's private chambers.²⁵⁰ This is stated in Esth 2:21 which says, "שְׁנַי־סְרִיסֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁמַרְי הַסָּף", "two of the king's eunuchs who guarded the threshold." In most cases where a plot unfolds to kill the king the root קשר appears. As discussed above, this word narrates coups which result in the death of the king or where the reader might expect that result. That does not happen to Ahasuerus because Mordecai foils the plot prior to its inception. The phrase the text employs for the assassination attempt is not a form of קשר but rather is the phrase, לְשַׁלַּח יָד בַּמֶּלֶךְ, "to send forth a hand against the king" (Esth 2:21). In this example, the text is not simply talking about an act of violence one party perpetrates against another as this phrase typically indicates, but even more, a plot to assassinate the king.

That this is an organized attempt on the king's life is made clear by the context. It is an act, as the narrator indicates, that is premeditated. This is made clear when Mordecai uncovers the plans to kill the king (Esth 2:22). Further, the text uses a form of בקש, "to seek" which implies an element of planning. The text states, וַיִּבְקְשׁוּ לְשַׁלַּח יָד בַּמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ, "They sought to send forth a hand against king Ahasuerus." The same verb appears two verses later in Esth 2:23 to indicate an investigation וַיִּבְקַשׁ הַדָּבָר וַיִּמְצָא וַיִּתְּלוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם עַל-עֵץ, "The matter was investigated and found out and the two of them were hung on the gallows." The verb בקש indicates here an intentional program and likely does in 2:21 as well. More telling than these details is that while the Hebrew uses דבר, "thing, affair" to indicate the plan to "send forth a hand against the king"

²⁵⁰ Carey A. Moore, *Esther: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, AB 7 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 31.

in Esth 2:22, the LXX translates this using the word ἐπιβουλή, “plot.” Their choice of translation shows the reader that these ancient versions also saw this as a rebellion rather than an act of violence.²⁵¹

This one example does not mean that this phrase becomes a rebellion term; it rather shows that it could contextually describe a rebellion because of its usage to depict a violent act that could be perpetrated against the king. Elsewhere in the text of Esther, the phrase has nothing to do with a rebellion but is focused on Haman’s hostile act against Mordecai and the Jews. Esther 3:6 states, וַיִּבְזֶה בְּעֵינָיו לְשַׁלַּח יָד בְּמֹרְדֵכַי לְבַדּוֹ, “He despised the idea of sending forth a hand against Mordecai alone.” A similar usage occurs in Esth 8:7 and 9:2. The presence of this phrase elsewhere in Esther complicates our understanding of the phrase in Esth 2. Is the author using this phrase because he employs it frequently to indicate a violent act, or is he using it to avoid a term for rebellion such as קָשַׁר because Mordecai immediately foils the plot and there is never really a question of whether the king will die? Based on what the evidence suggests regarding the root קָשַׁר, “to conspire/rebel,” the latter is a distinct possibility.²⁵² It is also clear from this episode that what the book of Esther records in Esth 2 is a failed rebellion attempt.

Conclusion

²⁵¹ Jon Levenson in his commentary on Esther refers to this act as an assassination attempt. Jon Levenson, *Esther: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 64–65.

²⁵² In most of those cases discussed above, this phrase is employed not to describe an actual attack, but rather to describe an attack that does not take place. Joseph’s brothers do not kill him (Gen 37:22), Abraham does not kill Isaac (Gen 22:10–12), Saul’s servants are not willing to attack the priests of the Lord (1 Sam 22:17), David does not kill Saul (1 Sam 24:7, 10; 26:9, 11, 23), the man who found Absalom was not willing to send his hand against him when he was caught in the tree (2 Sam 18:12), an angel of the Lord is about to “send his hand against” Jerusalem to destroy it, but Yahweh relents and the angel does not destroy it (2 Sam 24:16), in Job the phrase “to stretch out a hand” does not record the actual attack, but rather the request for an attack,” (Job 1:11–12; 2:5), Haman is not successful in “sending a hand” against Mordecai or the Jews (Esth 3:6; 8:7). This does not explain every case. The Amalekite did kill Saul even if this phrase doesn’t record the attack. David says to him, “why were you not afraid to send your hand against the Lord’s anointed” (2 Sam 1:14). In Esth 9:2 the Jews gather to “send a hand against” those who plot to kill them. It has not taken place yet, but it appears it will. In other cases, it indicates that Yahweh will strike something. In Exod 9:15, Yahweh says he will stretch out his hand to strike Egypt, while in one sense this has not taken place, it will. This distribution only demonstrates that this phrase is at home in describing a failed attempt or a hypothetical attack because in most cases it describes an attack that does not take place.

This chapter has focused on three related phrases that on occasion narrate a rebellion. All three phrases employ a verb indicating movement, to raise (רָוַם, נִשָּׂא) in two cases and to send (שָׁלַח) in one case, along with the noun יָד, “hand” as the object. Each phrase in its normal usage does not indicate rebellion. The phrase “to raise a hand” with רָוַם focuses on the defiant attitude of a weaker party in a conflict, the phrase “to raise a hand” with נִשָּׂא focuses on the active hostile intervention of one party against the other, while “to send forth a hand against” (שָׁלַח יָד בְּ) indicates the violent act of one party against another. These occasionally overlapping meanings are easily adaptable to fit the context of rebellion. These phrases, therefore, appear in the context of rebellion due to the metaphorical or symbolic meaning of what raising or sending a hand toward a superior indicates. As we think about the phrases and their associations with a defiant attitude, a show of force, and a violent act, it seems clear that all three show the type of attitude and actions some ancient Israelites saw rebels as tending to engage in. Rebels need to act with arrogance and be willing to engage in violence to accomplish their objective.

In a few cases, these terms contextually describe rebellions. Remarkably, in each case, the rebellions associated with these phrases fail. Jeroboam’s initial attempt at rebellion fails; Absalom, while initially successful, ends up dead; Sheba is eventually beheaded; and the plot to overthrow Ahasuerus never materializes and ends with the hanging of the two perpetrators. In three of these cases, the stories switch between more direct rebellion terms (קָשַׁר, פִּשְׁעוּ) and the phrases analyzed in this chapter depending on where these terms appear in the story. The phrases with יָד, “hand” only appear at moments when the rebellions fail, while the technical rebellion terms appear when the rebellions are presented as successful. This alternation is only possible in the three cases when the rebellions went from failure to triumph, as occurred with the Israelites after Sheba and Jeroboam’s rebellion, or from succeeding to failing as happens with Absalom’s

rebellion. The alternation is not possible in the other rebellion that fails right from its inception. In that case, only a failed rebellion term is appropriate.

The alternation between terms provides evidence that two of the terms analyzed in the previous chapter, *פשע* and *קשר*, connect with successful rebellions. As noted above, Suriano says of *קשר*, “the *קָשָׁר* always results in the death of the king.”²⁵³ In some cases *קשר* is focused on the plot to kill the king while it is in progress, as occurs in the story of Absalom. The narrator might have wanted to create the expectation that as Absalom’s plot grew in strength the reigning king would die. A parallel to this occurs elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. In Amos 7, when Amaziah claims that Amos has “conspired” (*קשר*) against the king with a prophecy about the king’s death, *קשר* is appropriate because there is an expectation that the king will die. In contrast, whenever *קשר* is focused on the actual overthrow, the king dies and a new ruler takes the throne. If Suriano, in his description of *קשר*, is focused on the events when the conspiracy is in process, he is correct. Knierim claims something similar for *פשע* when he states that this verb, in the context of rebellion, indicates “an accomplished reality.”²⁵⁴ While the previous chapter noted this is an overstatement, it is noteworthy that in all cases in which *פשע* describes a regional rebellion, the party rebelling is always successful. Notably, *פשע* and *קשר* are the two rebellion terms that alternate with the three phrases presently under discussion.

The previous two paragraphs leave out one of the three rebellion terms discussed in the previous chapter, *גורד*, “to rebel.” The three phrases analyzed in this chapter do not appear to describe an imperial rebellion and therefore do not alternate with *גורד*. This is likely because the verb *גורד*, “to rebel,” in contrast to *פשע* and *קשר*, describes both successful and failed rebellions,

²⁵³ Matthew J. Suriano, *The Politics of Dead Kings: Dynastic Ancestors in the Book of Kings and Ancient Israel*, 87.

²⁵⁴ Knierim, *TLOT*, 2: 878. Knierim incorrectly contrasted this with the verb *גורד*, which, as we saw in the previous chapter, does not work. That word can indicate either a successful or failed rebellion and appears to have more to do with whom the rebels act against.

and is therefore not pertinent to this discussion. The phrase **יד רום** does appear in the Exodus story, but the word is not a rebellion term in the exodus event; in this episode, it is focused on the defiant attitude of the Israelites as they depart Egypt. This argument continues to support the idea that the phrases **יד ב רום**, **יד ב נשא** and **יד ב שלח**, in their admittedly limited usage as rebellion terms, appear to describe failed rebellions. The writers choose these phrases that are easily adaptable to a rebellion context to narrate these failed rebellions. It is not because they are always rebellion terms, but rather because they fit a rebellion context and provide the writer with a chance to avoid **קשר** and **פשע**.

Table 5. **יד ב שלח** and **יד ב נשא** - Expressions of Rebellion

Text	Rebel and Ruler	Form	Alternating Rebellion Term	What happens to the Rebel?	Result
1 Kgs 11:26 - 27	Jeroboam rebels against Solomon.	יָרָם יָד בַּמֶּלֶךְ הָרִים יָד בַּמֶּלֶךְ	פשע (1 Kgs 12:19)	Jeroboam fears for his life and flees to Egypt.	Failed rebellion, Solomon retains the throne
2 Sam 18:28	Absalom rebels against David.	נָשָׂא אֶת יָדָם בְּאַדְמִי	קשר (2 Sam 15:12, 31)	Absalom is killed.	Failed rebellion, David retains the throne
2 Sam 20:21	Sheba son of Bichri rebels against David.	נָשָׂא יָדוֹ בַּמֶּלֶךְ	פשע (1 Kgs 12:19)	Sheba loses his head.	Failed rebellion, David retains the throne
Esth 2:21; 6:2	Bigthan and Teresh rebel against Ahasuerus.	לְשַׁלַּח יָד בַּמֶּלֶךְ		The rebels are hanged.	Failed rebellion, Ahasuerus retains the throne

CHAPTER 4

REBELLION AS SALVATION

In contrast to the words and stories discussed in the previous chapters, the Hebrew Bible contains many stories of rebellion, or attempted overthrows of political authority, without directly referring to rebellion or even disobedience. The most common way biblical writers present a rebellion with non-rebellion words is by characterizing rebellion in terms of salvation or deliverance. This strategy is not unique to biblical authors. Presenting rebellions with positive, non-rebellion terms is common among rebel groups, who typically manipulate language to justify their cause, as we will see. In the biblical stories, however, the writers are only secondarily concerned with justifying corporate disobedience. They instead focus their presentation of rebellion on *ישע*, “to save” and *נצל*, “to deliver” for two primary purposes: (i) to glorify Yahweh by highlighting his role in the rebellion and (ii) to highlight the oppression from which he frees his people. The focus on liberation in the second point ultimately obscures the involvement of defiance in a rebellion. This obfuscation aids in justifying the action and provides a comparison with the *modus operandi* of other rebel groups. Advancing one of these objectives also often advances the other because if involved, Yahweh always receives the credit for liberating his people from their oppressors. Further, the second point is often overshadowed, because while the biblical writers do mention the presence of oppression, the writers prioritize the divine explanation by making Yahweh the cause of oppression.

The chapter will further demonstrate that the terms *ישע*, “to save” and *נצל*, “to deliver” are often employed in the biblical text as terms describing military intervention or liberation.²⁵⁵ In these rebellion stories, Yahweh and, as sometimes indicated, his human agents are the ones intervening or liberating the people. The authors intentionally avoid the more common technical

²⁵⁵ These events are often related—the liberator can either be someone from inside the oppressed state or it can be an external party liberating an ally from a foreign ruler.

rebellion terms (e.g. **פִּשְׁע**) and use language that fits into another category. Highlighting these rebellion stories as belonging to the category of military intervention demonstrates that these texts intentionally employ the language of one category while narrating events that fit within the concept of another, namely rebellion.

Stories that employ **יָשַׁע** and **נָצַל** in a rebellion context are concentrated in the book of Judges. However, for a more comprehensive understanding of the use of these terms in the narration of rebellions, this chapter also examines other biblical texts, as well as texts from elsewhere in the ancient Near East. It proceeds first with a brief discussion of the ways in which rebel groups manipulate language to justify their rebellious conduct. From this premise, the chapter next argues that the book of Judges indeed recounts a series of rebellions, even though no word for rebellion appears in this book or the related texts. Subsequently, this chapter analyzes the two primary reasons for the appearance of **יָשַׁע** and **נָצַל** in a rebellion context, briefly noted above. Finally, this chapter will discuss these rebellions in relation to analogous political events, namely intervention, and show how the writers intentionally play with the language they use in relation to the concept they are discussing.

Manipulating Language to Justify Rebellion

It is not surprising to find terms such as **יָשַׁע** and **נָצַל** employed as rebellion terms. The positive presentation of rebellion as liberation is a common human tendency. Describing rebellion in terms of salvation or as a war for liberation is characteristic of what the subordinate party will do in most rebellions, even while the other side presents the rebels as criminals.²⁵⁶ Consider, for

²⁵⁶ Political philosophers have repeatedly pointed out that both sides in political conflicts believe they are in the right and will always attempt to justify their actions. Henry Sidgwick cautioned that “we must treat both combatants on the assumption that each believes himself in the right.” Henry Sidgwick, *The Elements of Politics*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1897), 267. For a similar sentiment expressed by a more recent commentator, see R. B. Brandt, “Utilitarianism and the Rules of War,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 1 (1972): 153–154. Brandt observed, “The position of a nation in a serious war is such... that it considers overpowering the enemy to be absolutely vital to its interests (and possibly to those of civilized society generally) - so vital, indeed, that it is willing to risk its very existence to that end. It is doubtful that both sides can be well justified in such an appraisal of

example, the Declaration of Independence and the colonists' rebellion against Britain in the American Revolution. The Declaration of Independence justified the colonists' rebellion and focused the blame for the revolt on the king and his authoritarian form of government.²⁵⁷

Accordingly, the Declaration describes the rebels' exploits not as a rebellion, but in terms of a legitimate quest of independence, or as a necessary act of separation. For example, the text states, "They should declare the causes which impel them to the *separation*," and later, "and such is now the necessity which constrains them to *alter* their former systems of government."²⁵⁸

The authors of the Declaration of Independence knew that they could not call for an outright rebellion against the king of England. Therefore, they sought to justify their position as an independent state among the "powers of the earth."²⁵⁹ Because they had previously been ruled by Britain, the Declaration's authors first formulated their own philosophy of government. Once they established the need for a government based on natural rights, they could justifiably call themselves "free and independent states."²⁶⁰ The writers thus legitimized their rebellion without explicitly characterizing it as one.²⁶¹ This is just one of many cases highlighting how rebels

the state of affairs." See also Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, 5th ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 128.

²⁵⁷ For more on the Declaration of Independence as a justification for rebellion and as a representation of rebellion see Carl Becker, *The Declaration of Independence: A Study in the History of Political Ideas* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922), 6–8. See also Robert J. C. Young, "The Right to Resist," in *Experiences of Freedom in Postcolonial Literatures and Cultures*, ed. Annalisa Oboe and Shaul Bassi (New York: Routledge, 2011), 43–58. See especially pages 50–53.

²⁵⁸ The italics are added for emphasis.

²⁵⁹ This phrase appears explicitly in the Declaration of Independence and was likely directed at France and Spain. For a discussion of this see, David Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence: A Global History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 27–29.

²⁶⁰ For more on the Declaration and its appeal to natural rights in opposition to the British government, see Michael P. Zuckert, *Natural Rights and the New Republicanism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). See also the reference in the previous note.

²⁶¹ Some of the authors of the declaration recognized the legitimacy of rebellion in some circumstances. Thomas Jefferson said, "a little rebellion now and then is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical." This is from a letter to James Madison in 1787, quoted in Betsy Erkkila, *Whitman: The Political Poet*

favorably describe their actions.²⁶²

In the Hebrew Bible, while the writers' primary purpose of recasting rebellions in terms of salvation is to present Yahweh as controlling all of history, there is naturally a propagandistic aspect to this. The focus on liberation depicts the violent overthrow of the current authority in a more positive light. It further serves to legitimize Yahweh and his intervention within all political conflicts, both past and future. Presenting rebellion in this way suggests that the texts of the Hebrew Bible sometimes avoid terms for rebellion as prominently occurs in Judg 3:9.²⁶³ They do so because they recognize that rebellion words can undermine the intended message. This bolsters the claim of the introduction that writers sometimes feel a need to exercise caution when they discuss the topic of rebellion. They do not want to glorify rebellion, but neither can they condemn the overthrow of an authority. They must circumvent these complexities and do so through the adept use of terminology. The biblical writers describe episodes of rebellion using the language of intervention and liberation.

Establishing the Presence of Rebellion in Judges

Although no word for “rebellion” appears in Judges²⁶⁴ or the additional texts in 1 Samuel and

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 103. Jefferson does not make a specific reference to the American Revolution, but it would be hard to think that was not at least partially in view.

²⁶² For more examples of the intentional way actors involved in rebellions or other similar political events describe themselves see, Michael V. Bhatia, “Fighting Words: Naming Terrorists, Bandits, Rebels and Other Violent Actors,” *Third World Quarterly* 26 (2005): 5–22. See also James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). Scott famously spoke of hidden and public transcripts. He outlined the divergent ways that oppressed groups often spoke depending on their context in either a public or private setting.

²⁶³ See the discussion below on how this text avoids a rebellion term and inserts the word יָשַׁע instead.

²⁶⁴ The judges are inherently political actors but, as Yoder notes, very few works discuss the political events in the book of Judges. The claims made here support his suggestion, and further describe what type of political action the judges, and more specifically Yahweh, are involved in. John Yoder, *Power and Politics in the Book of Judges: Men and Women of Valor* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 2. Niditch does compare—albeit briefly—the judges to “social bandits” or “primitive rebels,” which is a phrase employed by the social historian Eric Hobsbawm to describe marginalized individuals who fight for the less fortunate against an oppressive government. Susan Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 3. For Hobsbawm's discussion of social bandits see, Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959).

Kings, that the Israelites are involved in a series of rebellions begins to become apparent after an analysis of the political situation serving as the background to the stories. All rebellions involve two steps. First, one party must establish their rule over the other and only after this can the subordinate party break the relationship or rebel.

To describe the Israelite servitude to these foreign oppressors, the book of Judges primarily uses three phrases: *ויעבדו בני־ישראל את*, “the Israelites served,”²⁶⁵ *וימכרם ביד*, “he sold them into the hand of,”²⁶⁶ and *ויתנם יהוה ביד*, “Yahweh gave them into the hand of.”²⁶⁷ The book varies in its use of these three phrases, sometimes using only one and sometimes pairing two together as in 2:14 and 3:8. The pairing of *ויעבדו את* and *וימכרם ביד* demonstrates the parallel, or perhaps complimentary, meaning of these two phrases. This is likely a situation of a hendiadys. The two phrases carry one idea with the second phrase demonstrating that it is Yahweh who is the driving force behind Israelite subjugation. Further, in 2:14 *וימכרם ביד* is parallel with *ויתנם ביד* implying a similar meaning among all three phrases. These phrases are employed consistently throughout the book to signify that the Israelites repeatedly become subject to a foreign ruler and are under the control of that foreign entity for a time.

The description of the political situations in the book of Judges has a marked similarity with political climates narrated elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. “Servanthood” language, for example, appears in the first of the three phrases, as it does elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.

²⁶⁵ See 3:8 and 3:14.

²⁶⁶ See 2:14; 3:8; 4:2; 10:7 for these occurrences. The phrase is also used on an individual level to show how Yahweh sold Sisera into the hand of a woman. This means that she had control over him.

²⁶⁷ See 2:14; 6:1, 13; 13:1 for times when the Israelites were given over to become servants of a foreign ruler. The same phrase also appears repeatedly in the text to describe the Israelites freeing themselves from foreign rule and taking the position of the dominant power. See 3:10, 28; 4:7, 14; 7:2, 7, 9, 14, 15; 8:3, 7; 11:21, 30, 32; 12:3; 18:10; 20:28 for these examples. This phrase is also used on an individual level with Samson being given over to the control of the Philistines in 16:23, 24. We also see the phrase outside of the book of Judges in 2 Kgs 17:20. Here it indicates that Yahweh forced the Israelites to become a vassal of the Assyrians. This last example helps confirm that if the subordinate nation breaks this relationship with the superior nation it is a rebellion. This will be discussed further in the following paragraphs.

Comparing the use of this language in Judges to the use of it elsewhere demonstrates that the political situations in the book of Judges are presented as identical to those narrated when Israel becomes a vassal of a foreign ruler. This is important to demonstrate because when these external texts talk about vassalage, they occasionally set up a story of rebellion when they proceed to describe a breach in the relationship. It follows that the book of Judges is acting accordingly if it also intends to describe a breach in a suzerain-vassal relationship.²⁶⁸

2 Kings 24:1 notes that *וַיְהִי־לִי יְהוֹיָכִים עֶבֶד שְׁלֹשׁ שָׁנִים*, “Jehoiakim was his servant for three years.” The key here is that Jehoiakim’s vassalage to the Babylonian king is described with the term *עבד*, “servant.” Another example of the root *עבד* describing vassalage occurs in Gen 14, which reads *וַיַּעֲבְדוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־כְּדֹרְלָאֵמֶר*, “They served Chedorlaomer for twelve years.” Many scholars have identified the use of the term *עבד* to describe vassalage.²⁶⁹

The writers of Judges use the same language to describe the political situation that contextualizes select rebellion stories. Judges 3:8 says, *וַיַּעֲבְדוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־כּוּשָׁן רִשְׁתַּיִם שְׁמֹנֶה שָׁנִים*, “The people of Israel served Cushan Rishataim for eight years.” Judges 3:14 remarks that *וַיַּעֲבְדוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־עִגְלוֹן מֶלֶךְ־מוֹאָב שְׁמוֹנָה עָשָׂר שָׁנָה*, “The people of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab for eighteen years.” Both passages employ the verb *עבד* along with a foreign king as the object in conjunction with the number of years of servitude. The construction reads as a formula to describe vassalage. For instance, in Gen 14:4 and Judg 3:8 the pattern is, *עבד את*

²⁶⁸ This naturally hinges on whether the text plans to indicate a future breach between the two parties.

²⁶⁹ Scholars have pointed out for quite some time that *עבד* can be a technical term for vassalage in the Hebrew Bible. For instance, see Ziony Zevit, “The Use of *עבד* as a Diplomatic Term in Jeremiah,” *JBL* 88 (1969): 74–77; Klaas A. D. Smelik, “My Servant Nebuchadnezzar: The Use of the Epithet ‘My servant for the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar in the Book of Jeremiah,’” *VT* 64 (2014): 109–134; Georg Fischer, “Mein Diener Nebukadnezar’: Zur Rolle von Fremden im AT,” in *Der Prophet wie Mose: Studien zum Jeremiabuch*, BZABR 15 (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011), 334–336; and R. de Hoop, “Perspective after the Exile: The King *עבד*, ‘My Servant’ in Jeremiah – Some Reflections on MT and LXX,” in *Exile and Suffering: A Selection of Papers read at the 50th Anniversary Meeting of the Old Testament Society of South Africa OTWSA/OTSSA, Pretoria August 2007*, ed. B. Becking and D. Human, *OtSt* 50 (Boston: Brill, 2008), 105–21.

(name) x שָׁנָיִם, “they served (name) for x years.” Although the grammar differs slightly in the form of the verb along with the placement of the number, the pattern is clear. The use of this term in Judges parallels its use in these external texts. Tellingly, both 2 Kgs 24:1 and Gen 14:4 are preparing to narrate a rebellion.

The phrase וַיִּתְּנֵם בְּיַד, “he gave them into the hand of” also appears outside of Judges to describe the same suzerain vassal relationship. 2 Kings 17:20, for example, describes the political situation between the Assyrians and the Northern kingdom of Israel in the second half of the eighth century by stating, וַיִּתְּנֵם בְּיַד־שָׁסָיִם, “He gave them into the hand of plunderers.”²⁷⁰ At this time, Israel was part of the Assyrian empire first as a vassal and then as a province. The Assyrians would have considered any attempt on the part of Israel to break this relationship a rebellion. This is precisely what 2 Kgs 17:4 narrates. Hoshea, who is described as an עֲבָדָה, “servant” of Shalmaneser V in 2 Kgs 17:3, withholds tribute and makes an alliance with Egypt. Considering this an act of rebellion, the Assyrians respond by imprisoning Hoshea and besieging Samaria (2 Kgs 17:5).

The same grammatical construction and precise wording—וַיִּתְּנֵם בְּיַד־שָׁסָיִם—“He gave them into the hand of plunderers”—appears in Judg 2:14 to describe the Israelites’ subordination to various foreign rulers. This indication of subordination also appears in Judg 6:13 and 13:5 to describe the superior power of the Midianites and the Philistines. It follows that the dominant nations in the book of Judges would consider the actions of the servient Israelites, as they attempt to break away, a rebellion just as the Assyrians do.²⁷¹ No dominant nation willingly allows a vassal to break away. This notion is confirmed when one considers that Sisera,

²⁷⁰ See also 2 Kgs 13:3 which also employs this phrase to describe vassalage. This text will be discussed later in this chapter. See also 2 Kgs 19:10 and 21:14.

²⁷¹ The discussion below will further demonstrate why these are episodes of rebellion. The point of this section is to confirm that the book of Judges does describe the Israelites’ vassalage to foreign rulers. This point needs to be established before determining that Judges describes a series of rebellions.

commander of the Canaanite forces, engages in battle with Israel after Deborah and Barak rebel against the Canaanites in the story of Judges 4 (Judg 4:13).

Another indication of vassalage to a foreign territory is the payment of tribute to the ruler. For example, in 2 Kgs 18, Hezekiah pays tribute to Sennacherib, the Assyrian king. And in 2 Kgs 3, Moab pays tribute as a vassal to Israel. Payment of tribute is present in many analogous cases as well.²⁷² In the book of Judges, the Israelites pay tribute to the foreign rulers whom they serve. This occurs, for instance, in Judg 3:15, 17 when Israel pays tribute to Eglon, the king of Moab: **וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּיָדוֹ מִנְחָה לְעֶגְלוֹן מֶלֶךְ מוֹאָב**, “The people of Israel sent tribute to Eglon the king of Moab by his hand.”

In addition to these phrases, the writers of Judges also employ the word **מִשַׁל**, “to rule” to describe the relationship between a foreign people and the Israelites (Judg 14:4; 15:11). This is the same word describing the relationship of a king to his subjects (Judg 8:22–23; 9:2). For example, the phrase in Judg 14:4 reads, **וּבָעֵת הַהִיא פְּלִשְׁתִּים מִשְׁלְּמוּ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל**, “At that time, the Philistines were ruling over Israel.”

Cumulatively, these instances demonstrate that the political situations in Judges parallel the political situations described in these other texts when either Israel or Judah becomes subordinate to foreign kingdoms. Each story involving one of the so-called major judges (Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson) contains one of the phrases discussed in this section as well as supplementary details indicating subordination to a foreign territory. Additionally, the summary statement in Judg 2:16–18 demonstrates that the writer/editor wants to present Israelite subordination as the prevailing political situation throughout the entire

²⁷² See also 2 Sam 8:2; 1 Chron 18:2; 2 Sam 8:6; 1 Chron 18:6; 2 Kgs 17:3; Hos 10:6; 2 Chron 17:11; 26:8.

book.²⁷³

Because these texts clearly describe rulership by one political entity over the Israelites, any attempt to break this relationship constitutes a rebellion, which is how the ruling party would have viewed the situation. In the books of Genesis and Kings, for instance, when the Israelites attempt to throw off the yoke of an empire to which they have become a servant, the writers describe the action with *מרד*, “to rebel.” This is the case with Jehoiakim, Hoshea, and the subordinate kings in Gen 14 mentioned above. In all of these cases, a specific word for rebellion appears to mark the break.²⁷⁴ Genesis 14:4 reads, *שָׁתַיִם עָשָׂרָה שָׁנָה עָבְדוּ אֶת־כְּדֻרְלַאֲמֹר וּשְׁלֹשׁ־עָשָׂרָה*, “For twelve years they served Chedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled.” Similarly, when Israel or Judah is portrayed as the dominant nation and subjugated their neighbors, the writers employ the word *פשע*, “to rebel” when the subordinate states attempt to break free from Israelite or Judahite rule.²⁷⁵ 2 Kings 1:1 for example states, *וַיִּפְשַׁע מוֹאָב בְּיָשָׁרְאֵל*, “Moab rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab.”

In marked contrast, in the books of Judges and Samuel when the Israelites violently throw off the yoke of the ruling power through assassinations, guerilla warfare, or even a

²⁷³ See the end of the chapter for a list of the phrases describing subordination. Not every one of these episodes recalls the same type of political situation. In Judg 6 the Midianites do not appear to rule over the Israelites in exactly the same way as Eglon does in Judg 3. The Midianites of Judg 6 are more like marauders, who enter and ransack Israelite territory. Regardless of the type of political situation behind the original, perhaps oral, stories, the editor(s) of Judges appear to describe them all in the same way using the same terminology. It is likely that the Deuteronomistic editors or redactors want the reader to think of all the political situations in the same way despite each situation possibly having a different background. They want to present the Israelites as subordinate so they can subsequently describe a situation of liberation in each case.

²⁷⁴ See Gen 14:4; 2 Kgs 17:4; 2 Kgs 24:1. The passage in 2 Kgs 17:4 does not use *מרד* but rather uses *קשר* because the text is narrated from the perspective of the Assyrian king rather than the narrator. The Assyrian king considered any rebellion to be taking place on a domestic level. Despite this difference, the text still contains a specific word for rebellion.

²⁷⁵ See 2 Kgs 3:5 for an example.

conventional battle, no specific word for rebellion is present.²⁷⁶ Instead, the book of Judges repeatedly employs a word from the root meaning “deliverance” or “salvation” יָשַׁע or, less often, נָצַל. This characterization is comparable to certain descriptions of the Exodus (e.g. Exod 14:13, 30). The writers’ use of these words demonstrates their intent that the rebellions described in Judges be viewed as wars of liberation or praiseworthy acts of salvation rather than morally disputable breaks that disrupt the existing political order. Although the political situations described in all the aforementioned cases are identical, the breach in the relationship is described in radically different ways.

Regardless of the word appearing in the text, any organized action in which a servant or subordinate party takes aim at the replacement of the ruling authority constitutes a rebellion according to most definitions, especially the definition forming the basis of this work.²⁷⁷ Therefore, any attempts by the Israelites to break the relationships outlined in Judges should be classified as rebellions. The Assyrians in the book of 2 Kings, as well as the other nations that establish their dominance over the Israelites in the book of Judges, would have viewed these actions as indicative of a rebellion. As expected, the Assyrian texts repeatedly use words for rebellion or words to indicate criminal activity rather than words for salvation to describe episodes of rebellion.²⁷⁸ Thus, even though the writers of Judges describe these insurrections

²⁷⁶ Additionally, no explicit term for “rebellion” is present in 1 Samuel, which essentially continues the narrative from the book of Judges with the Israelites subordinated to the Philistines until Samuel and Saul break this cycle of oppression with the establishment of the monarchy.

²⁷⁷ See the first chapter for more on the definition. Chapter six below also reiterates the definition in a discussion of protesting.

²⁷⁸ See for example in Sennacherib’s inscriptions, text 17: iv 65, text 22 V: 17; text 23: V. 9. A. Kirk Grayson and Jamie Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704-681) Part 1*, RINAP 3/1 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2012). Tiglath-pileser III’s inscriptions also record texts employing explicit terms for rebellion. See text 35 i: 21’–22’. The text says, “In my third *palû*, Matî’-il [the son of A]ttaršumqa (Attar-šumkī), fomented a rebellious insurrection against Assyria and violated (his loyalty oath).” The text uses both *bartu* and *nabalkatu* to indicate the rebellion. The ruling party would not be expected to employ a term for salvation to describe a rebellion. Hayim Tadmor and Shigeo Yamada, *The Royal Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III (744–722 BC) and Shalmaneser V (726–722 BC), Kings of Assyria*, 84. The following chapter discusses how the Assyrian texts describe those rebelling against them.

without rebellion terms, under ancient and contemporary understandings of political rebellion, the narratives provide sufficient detail to determine that these texts record multiple rebellions. The alternate descriptions of these rebellions depend on whose perspective the texts come from.

Comparisons between 2 Kgs 3 and another text from the ancient Near East (The Mesha Inscription), which narrates an episode of rebellion using identical terminology to the book of Judges, bolsters this point. The similarities between these texts will demonstrate that if the roles were reversed and the Israelites were the superior party, they would have presented the actions taken by the subordinate party in the book of Judges as a series of rebellions. The Mesha Inscription's analysis of the conflict between Israel and Moab in the 9th century provides an alternative narration to what appears in the book of 2 Kings. This comparison provides the opportunity to analyze a rebellion from the perspective of both the subordinate and the superior parties, giving further insight into how ancient Near Eastern writers employ *ישע*, "to save" in the context of rebellion.²⁷⁹ In the books of Judges and 1 Samuel, we have only the perspective of the subordinate group, Israel.

In this 9th century conflict, Israel is the superior party, having successfully subordinated the Moabites for a time and, as 2 Kgs 3:4 states, the Israelites force Mesha to pay tribute. The payment of tribute indicates that this is a relationship between a suzerain and vassal: *וּמִיִּשְׁעַ מְלֶכֶךְ*— *מִזָּאב תִּנְהָ נִקְרַ וְהַשִּׁיב לְמֶלֶךְ־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶת־אֶלְךָ כְּרִים וּמֵאֶת אֶלְךָ אֵילִים צֹמֵר*, "Mesha, the king of Moab was a sheep breeder and he brought to the king of Israel one hundred thousand lambs and the wool from one hundred thousand rams." The Moabite text also recognizes Moab's status as an

²⁷⁹ While these documents may not record precisely the same event, they both speak generally to the same historical situation in the 9th century. For more on the historicity of these texts see Joe M. Sprinkle, "2 Kings 3: History or Historical Fiction?" *BBR* 9 (1999): 247–70; Philip D. Stern, "Of Kings and Moabites: History and Theology in 2 Kings 3 and the Mesha Inscription," *HUCA* 64 (1993): 1–14; J. A. Emerton, "The Value of the Moabite Stone as an Historical Source," *VT* (2002): 483–92. For the contrasting position see, Thomas L. Thompson, *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology and the Myth of Israel* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 9-14; Thomas L. Thompson, "Mesha and Questions of Historicity," *SJOT* 21(2007): 241–60. The second entry by Thompson is more open to the possibility of military conflict existing between Israel and Moab.

Israelite vassal. Lines 4–5 of the Mesha Inscription read: עמרמי מלך ישראל ויענו את מאב ימן רבן
כי יאנה כמש בארצה, “Omri was king of Israel, he subjugated Moab for many days, for Chemosh
was angry with his land.”²⁸⁰ The text notes in line 8 that Omri and the Israelites had occupied
Moabite land for forty years. Further, the verb ענה, “to oppress/overpower” in line 5 of the
Mesha Inscription indicates the subordinate status of the Moabite people. The line just quoted
also makes clear that Chemosh’s anger is the driving force behind Moab’s subjection to the
Israelites. This is akin to Yahweh’s role in the book of Judges.²⁸¹ The presence of these details
demonstrates that the Moabites saw themselves as subject to the Israelites for a time.²⁸² In sum,
both the biblical and the Mesha texts recognize the superior status of Israel and the subordinate
status of the Moabites.

After the forty years of subjugation mentioned in the inscription, Mesha attempts to free
his nation from Israelite rule. The Hebrew Bible describes the action Mesha takes to break away
from Israel as a rebellion using a form of the verb כשע (2 Kgs 1:1; 3:5). The Mesha Inscription,
however, does not present the action as a rebellion, but in line with the presentation of rebellion
in the book of Judges, it presents it as salvation, or as a war of liberation through the impetus of
their deity Chemosh. The relevant section in line 4 says, כי השעני מכל המלכן, “For he saved me
from all kings.”²⁸³ Chemosh serves as the impetus for their rebellion/salvation. The deity is the

²⁸⁰ Scholars have also pointed out the similarity between this text and the Hebrew Bible in its description of the deity’s anger as the reason for subjugation. See Reinhard G. Kratz, “Chemosh’s Wrath and Yahweh’s No: Ideas of Divine Wrath in Moab and Israel,” in *Divine Wrath and Divine Mercy in the World of Antiquity*, ed. Reinhard G. Kratz and Hermann Spieckermann, FAT 33 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 92–121.

²⁸¹ See the discussion below starting on page 163 for more on this.

²⁸² Compare the use of this root in Gen 15:13.

²⁸³ There has been debate over whether this text reads שלכן or מלכן. I agree with the more recent commentators that this should be read as a *mem* not a *shin*. See Douglas J. Green, *I Undertook Great Works: The Ideology of Domestic Achievements in West Semitic Royal Inscriptions* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 100–01.

agent of the verb יִשַׁע, “to save.” The Moabites’ subsequent aggressive acts in furtherance of obtaining freedom ultimately unseat Israelite authority, thereby completing the rebellion.

There is little doubt that this episode constitutes a rebellion, as explicitly stated in 2 Kgs 3. The same series of events, described using the same terminology, occurs repeatedly in the book of Judges.²⁸⁴ While both the Mesha Inscription and 2 Kgs 3 discuss a rebellious overthrow of a foreign power, they narrate it differently. The dominant party describes the event in terms of rebellion, while the subordinate party employs terms of salvation or deliverance. Thus, the absence of a rebellion term throughout the book of Judges in no way suggests that the events described therein did not constitute rebellion or that the writers did not see it as such.

That no specific word for rebellion appears in Judges is quite significant and will aid in understanding the writers’ attitude towards rebellion as well as their understanding of the legitimacy of disavowing the ruling power. This absence confirms the comments made in the introduction and throughout the work related to the complications often associated with discussing rebellion. Subordinate parties do not deny that they engage in rebellion, but they are often careful with how they present it. Rebels often want to control the narrative and present themselves in a more positive light.²⁸⁵ The book of Judges provides a concrete example of an oppressed society positively depicting rebellion.

Examples of יִשַׁע (to save) and נָצַל (to deliver) in Rebellion Stories

²⁸⁴ See for example Judg 2:16, 18; 3:9, 31; 6:14–15, 31; 10:1. The repeated cases of oppression are due to the writer’s intentions of portraying history in a cyclical fashion. Most commentators have realized that the book of Judges has a cyclical view of history and within the book, it is even better described as a downward cyclical view of history. The cycle consists of four parts: sin, oppression, crying out, and deliverance. For more on the cyclical aspect of Judges see Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History 2nd ed.*, JSOTSup 15 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 19; Jan Fokkelmon, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide* (Louisville: Deo Publishing, 1999), 137; Yaira Amit, *The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing* (Boston: Brill, 1999), 35–45; Robin Baker, *Hollow Men, Strange Women: Riddles, Codes and Otherness in the Book of Judges* (Boston: Brill, 2016), 25, 62, 123, 195–196.

²⁸⁵ One could think of the common cliché, ‘One man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter.’ As the Moabites experience salvation, the Israelites experience a group disobeying their authority and rebelling against them.

Before explaining the reasons for the employment of *ישע*, “to save” and *נצל*, “to deliver” to describe rebellion, it will be helpful to observe a few examples of this phenomenon and to document where they appear. The following passages are representative of the characterization of rebellion as salvation. Judges 2:16 reads, *וַיָּקָם יְהוָה שְׁפָטִים וַיְהִי עִם־הַשֹּׁפְטִים וְהוֹשִׁיעוּם מִיַּד שְׂטֵינֵיהֶם*, “Then Yahweh raised up Judges, who *saved* them out of the hand of those who plundered them.” A similar passage, which is programmatic for the entire book, appears a couple verses later in Judg 2:18. Here, the text reads, *וְכִי־הָקִים יְהוָה לָהֶם שְׁפָטִים וְהָיָה יְהוָה עִם־הַשֹּׁפְטִים וְהוֹשִׁיעֵם מִיַּד אֹיְבֵיהֶם כָּל יְמֵי יְהוָה*, “Whenever Yahweh raised up judges for them, Yahweh was with the judge, and he *saved* them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for Yahweh relented because of their groaning before their oppressors and those who persecuted them.”²⁸⁶ Another representative example is in Judg 6:14: *וַיִּפֶן אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר לָדָּךְ*, “Yahweh turned to him and said, go in this strength of yours and *save* Israel from the hand of Midian; have I not commissioned you?”²⁸⁷

In Judg 10:15 the verb *נצל*, “to deliver” appears and parallels *ישע*, “to save,” which is mentioned a few times in the previous verses. Judges 10:14 states, *לָכוּ וְזַעֲקוּ אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר* *בָּחַרְתֶּם בָּם הַמָּוָה יוֹשִׁיעוּ לָכֶם בְּעֵת צָרַתְכֶם*, “Go and cry out to the gods whom you have chosen; let them *save* you in the time of your distress.” The narrator, likely for variation in word choice, selects *נצל* in Judg 10:15 noting, *אָךְ הַצִּילֵנוּ הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה*, “Only *deliver* us today.” There is a change in speaker from 10:14 to 10:15, which further suggests a literary reason for the word

²⁸⁶ Many scholars have pointed out that this passage is part of the framework of the book and is representative of many of the stories in the book. See for example, Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher, “Framework and Discourse in the Book of Judges,” *JBL* 128 (2009): 687–702. Gillmayr-Bucher observes that Judg 2:11–19 has a “sequence of events” that “corresponds approximately, to the structure of the individual stories. Some elements of this preface are repeated to frame these stories, connecting the preface and its perspective to the stories of the judges.” See pgs. 688–89 for these specific examples. See also Greenspahn, “The Theology of the Framework of Judges,” 385–96; and Susan Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary*, 11. Niditch notes the similarity of these passages to the language of Deuteronomy.

²⁸⁷ See also Judg 3:9, 31; 6:36–37; 7:2, 7; 8:22; 10:1, 12–15 for more examples of the root *ישע* in a rebellion story.

change rather than a different meaning. **ישע** and **נצל** are also parallel in Ps 59:3 and Ps 71:2. This would demonstrate that the narrator saw these terms as representative of the same action in this context.²⁸⁸ In Judg 6:9 and 8:34 the verb **נצל** appears again to indicate Yahweh’s role in freeing the Israelites from their Egyptian and foreign oppressors. These examples show that the biblical writers repeatedly depict the breaking of the relationship between Israel and their respective overlords as salvation, often utilizing the verb **ישע**, “to save” but occasionally **נצל**, “to deliver.”

When the Israelites break away from the foreign oppressor, or when Yahweh commissions the Judge to break away, the text could have described the action as one of rebellion. As observed in the prior discussion of 2 Kgs 3 and the Mesha Inscription, this is how the Israelites describe insurrections when the roles are reversed. Thus, the writer in Judges could have used **פשע**, “to rebel” to describe the Israelites breaking the political arrangement established by the dominant power. This is especially so because the political situations outlined in the book of Judges parallel those in which the Hebrew Bible elsewhere uses **פשע**.²⁸⁹ However, the fact that the writers use **ישע** and **נצל** to describe these situations shows their desire to present these rebellions in a more positive light.

Two Primary Reasons to Describe Rebellion as Salvation

Reason I: Describing Rebellion as Salvation to Glorify Yahweh

Understanding the reasons for describing rebellion in this way requires examination of the words **ישע** and **נצל** in a rebellion context. The root **ישע**, “to save” appears twenty-two times in the book

²⁸⁸ This does not indicate that the words are always identical. **נצל** has more of a connection to snatching away, and secondarily becomes a term indicating deliverance. It indicates that one side snatches the object from elsewhere (cf. 1 Sam 30:18; Amos 3:12; 4:11). This meaning explains why this is the root to describe the Israelites’ plundering of the Egyptians in Exod 12:36, they are snatching away their goods. When one party draws the other party out from a difficult situation, the root indicates deliverance. In contrast, **ישע** is originally connected to helping one who cries for help in a difficult situation. The only aspect of these verses that might suggest a slight difference in meaning is that in 10:14 the deliverance of **ישע** is in response to a cry for help, which is not the case with **נצל** in 10:15.

²⁸⁹ See the discussion in chapter two for these examples.

of Judges,²⁹⁰ while the root נצַל “to deliver” appears six times.²⁹¹ In this book, these words have the core meaning of the deliverance of an individual or group from an oppressive situation. The writers present the circumstances as particularly grave, demonstrating that the oppressed Israelites could do little to remedy the situation themselves. Because of their feebleness, they could not foment a rebellion on their own and were forced to rely on intervention by Yahweh if they were going to gain freedom. In many cases, the Israelites’ inability “to save” themselves from foreign oppression is expressed by the action of crying out (זעק) in despair to Yahweh.²⁹²

An example of this is found in the Israelites’ outcry (זעק) to Yahweh for emancipation from Cushan Rishataim after eight years of subordination (Judg 3:8). At a later time, the Midianites force the Israelites into a lowly (רלל) position (Judg 6:6). These foreigners enter Israelite territory, ransack their crops, and drive them to hide in the caves and mountains, allowing Midian to rule over the tribes of Israel (Judg 6:2).²⁹³ The Israelites, helpless to save themselves, again cry out (זעק) to Yahweh in hopes that he would liberate them.

Their cries for help are a call for military intervention from a more powerful actor. Accordingly, following such calls for help, Yahweh often responds to their cry by raising a מושיע, “a savior,” who would הושיעם, “save them.” This deliverer, in each instance, would become the leader of a rebellion, who is temporarily successful in pushing the Israelites to acquire independence from an oppressive power.

²⁹⁰ This figure includes ישע eighteen times, the nominal form מושיע three times, and תשועה once in Judg 15:18.

²⁹¹ The root נצַל appears in Judg 6:9; 8:34; 9:17; 10:15; 11:26; 18:28. The occurrences in 11:26 and 18:28 are not in the context of rebellion, but describe outside intervention to rescue either cities lost to another territory (Judg 11:26) or a city under siege (Judg 18:28). These two examples help confirm that this word is used to represent outside military intervention in a conflict, as we will discuss below.

²⁹² For these examples see Judg 3:9, 15; 6:6–7; 10:10.

²⁹³ Aster has shown how the motif of the dominant party forcing a group to hide in caves is an indication of their sovereignty. He notes this trope in Isa 2 as well as the Assyrian royal inscriptions. Aster, *Reflections of Empire in Isaiah 1–39: Responses to Assyrian Ideology*, 306.

The significance of this outcry-intervention sequence should not be underestimated. Narrating the events in this way was not so much due to the Israelites' desire to justify their conduct, though this may have had something to do with it, but stemmed from their primary interest in ascribing their deliverance, through rebellion, to Yahweh. In nearly every case the word *ישע* is found in the book of Judges, Yahweh is either the subject of the verb or the force behind the judge who leads the people in the rebellion.²⁹⁴ The cases begin with the programmatic passage in Judg 2:16—*וַיִּשְׁעוּם יְהוָה שְׂפָטִים*, “Yahweh raised up Judges who saved them” — and continues throughout the book.²⁹⁵

The most telling example occurs in Judg 7:2. Here, in a discussion with Gideon, who will lead Israel in rebellion against Midian, Yahweh says, *פֶּן יתְפַאֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל עָלַי לְאֵמֹר יָדִי הוֹשִׁיעָה לִּי*, “Lest Israel boast at my expense, saying, ‘my hand saved me.’” In this story, Yahweh limits the size of the Israelite army to three hundred to ensure that they or their rebel leader Gideon cannot take credit for the rebellion. The text establishes the point that it would be impossible without outside intervention for three hundred men to throw off the yoke of a foreign nation.²⁹⁶ Moreover, earlier in Judg 6:15, the writers note that Gideon is from the smallest tribe in Israel and is the

²⁹⁴ There are only a few exceptions. One case is Judg 9:17, in which the verb is placed within the mouth of Jotham in a discussion of his father Gideon. Jotham says, “my father delivered (*נצל*) you from the hand of Midian.” In this speech Jotham does not give credit to Yahweh, but to his father. The reason could be that Jotham is emphasizing, for rhetorical purposes, what his father did. Jotham, as the son of Gideon, wants to defend his father and prove his merits to those who have now made Abimelech king. Earlier in the text, it is clear that it was not Gideon, but Yahweh leading the rebellion (Judg 7:2). A second case, or pair of cases, in which Yahweh is not given credit for a war of independence involves Judg 3:31; 10:1. Here, the texts credit only the “minor” judges involved as the driving forces behind “saving Israel.” In both cases, the word *ישע* describes a war of independence and does not focus on the outside actor, but instead focuses on the leader of the Israelite rebellion.

²⁹⁵ For similar passages describing Yahweh as the force behind the salvation see also Judg 2:18; 3:9; 6:14–15; 6:36–37; 7:2, 7; 10:12. Yahweh also seems to be the driving force behind Samson’s birth and his future actions to lead the people out of oppression as narrated in Judg 13.

²⁹⁶ Niditch comments, “The outcome of the battle depends not upon Israelite expertise, but upon the prowess and goodwill of the divine warrior, protector of Israel. The fewer the number of human soldiers, the greater the victory of God.” Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary*, 97. If one were to think strictly in military terms, the ability of a small “delta” force to be effective would depend on the size and organization of the opponent, along with the stated objective. This however, does not appear to be what the text has in mind.

weakest in his family. Inclusion of these details make clear that one reason to portray the rebellion this way is to illustrate for the people that Yahweh—not the judge or anyone else—deserves credit for the rebellion.

Significantly, all the major judges, besides Othniel, are marginal within their own social structures. For example, Jephthah is an illegitimate son of a prostitute; Deborah is a woman; and Ehud is left handed.²⁹⁷ The marginal character of these judges serves to place emphasis on Yahweh and his ability to save. The theme of a marginalized leader empowered by the mighty God recurs throughout the book of Judges. In Judg 3:12–30, even though Ehud is the one who assassinates Eglon in his private chambers and leads the Israelites in rebellion against the Moabites, Yahweh is given credit for the rebellion. Judges 3:15, 28 make this explicit by recording, וַיִּקַּם יְהוָה מוֹשִׁיעַ לָהֶם אֶת-אֶהוּד בֶּן-גֵּרָא, “Yahweh raised a savior for them, Ehud the son of Gera,” and” כִּי-נָתַן יְהוָה אֶת-אֹיְבֵיכֶם אֶת-מוֹאָב בְּיַדְכֶם, “For Yahweh has given your enemies, the Moabites, into your hand.” Stating that Yahweh saved Ehud’s people is equivalent to saying that Ehud led a successful rebellion against the Moabites. The difference lies in how the writer chooses to describe it.

Additional texts in Judges contain similar ideas. Samson is set apart by Yahweh from birth and raised to be a rebel leader (Judg 13:5). Significantly, in the Samson cycle the verb יָשַׁע appears just once when the messenger of Yahweh announces the child’s birth to his parents (Judg 13:5).²⁹⁸ It appears here because the focus is on Yahweh’s role in Samson’s birth and future rebellion. Yahweh designates Samson as a נַזִּיר אֱלֹהִים, “nazirite to God” (Judg 13:5), which endows him with a special status and in this case supernatural abilities granted by the deity. The

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 4.

²⁹⁸ See also Judg 15:18, which describes Samson’s victory over 1,000 Philistines with the nominal form תִּשְׁרַעָה. In Judg 15:16, as Samson sings a victory song, he takes credit for the action stating that he killed 1,000 men. Subsequently in 15:18 as Samson is dying of thirst he gives credit to Yahweh for the victory.

verb *ישע* indicates that Samson will begin the process of throwing off the yoke of the Philistines. The text, however, recognizes that the rebellion will not materialize. This is the reason for which Judg 13:5 states that Samson will only begin (*הלל*) to save the Israelites.

Judges 10, which contains a Deuteronomistic summary of the book,²⁹⁹ contrasts the ability of Yahweh to save with the inability of the false gods to whom the Israelites turn. Judges 10:14 records Yahweh's initial dismissal of the Israelites' cry for help: *לכו ונעקו אל-האלהים אשר*: *בחרתם בהם תקוה יושעו לכם בעת צרתכם*, "Go and cry to the gods whom you have chosen; let them save you in the time of your distress." The point here is that no judge or foreign god possesses the ability to aid Israel's rebellion; Yahweh is the only one with that power. The Israelites recognize this in the following verse (Judg 10:15) when they cry out to Yahweh to deliver (*נצל*) them. Highlighting the inability of the foreign gods to save is another way to focus the text on the power of Yahweh and downplay the role of anyone outside of the deity. The focus on Yahweh's role in the rebellions in Judges is consistent with the overall narrative, which disregards any characterization of the individual judges outside of his or her military capacity. As Gillmayr-Bucher says, "The specific role of a judge is only hinted at ... The personality of the judges does not come into focus, nor does their faith or their loyalty to YHWH, or their individual contributions. The focus lies yet again on God."³⁰⁰

Reason II: A Concern for Justifying Rebellion

The second main reason for which the book of Judges employs both *ישע* and *נצל* to describe rebellion is the writers' intention to portray these episodes as rebellions involving liberation.³⁰¹

²⁹⁹ Gillmayr-Bucher, "Framework and Discourse in the Book of Judges," 696. She says Judges 10 is in many ways parallel with Judges 2. The latter serves as a preface to the book.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 690.

³⁰¹ This statement is not meant to connect to liberation readings of the texts, but only a comment noting that liberation is involved in these episodes of rebellion. Even scholars who have criticized liberation readings recognize its presence. Jon Levenson is one such scholar. He states, "the exodus as described in the biblical text is not an

In particular, the subordinate party avoids words for disobedience since they describe their act of aggression as freedom from oppression. The focus on liberation and oppression demonstrates that these writers are cognizant of what political and social scientists refer to as humanitarian issues.³⁰² They are concerned with mentioning the suffering their group experienced. In some ways, the secondary focus on oppression appears in these texts to justify the rebellions by focusing on human concerns.³⁰³ If we look behind the overtly theological agenda of the Hebrew Bible, this reason stands out far more.

No rebel group wants to be viewed as a criminal aggressor. A modern commentator said, “no state can admit to fighting an aggressive war and then defend its actions.”³⁰⁴ Focusing on the oppressive actions of the overlord allows one to justify the overthrow of the ruling party. The writers of Judges are not concerned with just war theory in the same way as modern theorists are, but the focus on oppression as a reason for the rebellions suggests at least a concern for similar issues.³⁰⁵ As Bederman has shown in a discussion of international law in antiquity, the political

instance of liberation in the sense of a social revolution in pursuit of equality and solidarity. Whatever one may wish to speculate about the Moses of *history*... the Moses of the *text* is not appropriately compared to Lenin and others in the Marxist revolutionary tradition. But this does not mean that the exodus is not about liberation. The liberation of which the exodus is the paradigmatic instance is a liberation from degrading bondage for the endless service of the God who remembers his covenant, redeems from exile and oppression...” Jon D. Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 159. This article also appears in Jon Levenson, “Liberation Theology and the Exodus,” in *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 215–30. There is far more to discuss with liberation criticism than the present project has time for. For a summary, and brief history of liberation readings of the exodus and comparable situations, see Jorge Pixley, “Liberation Criticism,” in *Methods for Exodus*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 131–62.

³⁰² A reader also needs to caution against seeing a direct modern parallel in what people view as oppression. Ancient and modern ideas of oppression may be quite different. As Scott said, liberation readings of these types of texts need to refrain from “adopting wholesale” biblical ideas of justice and oppression.” Scott M. Langston, *Exodus Through the Centuries* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 6.

³⁰³ This begs the question of who the audience was and to whom these writers felt the need to justify rebellion. I will return to this issue in the conclusion to this chapter.

³⁰⁴ Walzer calls aggression “the crime of war” and “the only crime that states can commit against other states.” Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 51. For the quotes see pgs. 86, 74 respectively.

³⁰⁵ Postcolonial critics have recognized the attempt to justify behavior in Judges in alternative ways. Uriah Kim discusses the presence of an anticonquest ideology in Judges and touches on justifying military action. See Uriah

thought of the ancient writers did not center entirely on religious explanations, which was the focus of the preceding section.³⁰⁶ Bederman’s statement that “other intellectual phenomena including elemental notions of custom and sharpened instincts for rhetoric, also had an impact on state behavior”³⁰⁷ applies to a discussion of rebellion. The focus on oppression in these rebellion stories demonstrates that ancient writers, and oppressed people groups, were concerned with more than just the divine explanation as the cause of some rebellions. These details demonstrate that in circumstances of oppression some ancient writers understood rebellion to be legitimate and to serve as the impetus for rebellion.

The mention of oppression is what precipitates the cry to Yahweh to intervene and aid the many rebellions narrated in the book. A form of *לָחַץ*, “to oppress” occurs in Judg 2:18; 4:3; 6:9; 10:12. In these cases, Yahweh moves to save the Israelites because of their current situation. He is not acting without cause, but intervenes as response to the experience of oppression. As Judg 2:18 notes, he saves them *כִּי־יִנָּחֵם יְהוָה מִנְּאֻקָּתָם מִפְּנֵי לַחְצֵיהֶם וְרַחֲמֵיהֶם*, “Because Yahweh would relent on account of their groaning before their oppressors and those who persecuted them.”³⁰⁸

Later in Judges, Gideon arrives because the Midianites are destroying the crops and land of the Israelites. As a result, the people experience deprivation (Judg 6:6). Elsewhere, Judg 10:8 uses both *רָעַץ* and *רָצַץ*, “to oppress” as another way to describe the experience from which Yahweh will deliver the Israelites. Yahweh also did not give the Israelites “into the hand of” a foreign ruler, but he “gave them into the hand of” *שֹׁבְתִים*, “plunderers” (Judg 2:14). This is a by-

Kim, “Is There an ‘Anticonquest’ Ideology in the Book of Judges?,” in *Postcolonialism and the Hebrew Bible: The Next Step*, ed. Roland Boer (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 111.

³⁰⁶ David J. Bederman, *International Law in Antiquity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 50. See also David Elgavish, “Justification for War in the Ancient Near East and the Bible,” *Jewish Law Association Studies* 18 (2008): 37–69.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ The *yiqtol* verb (*יִנָּחֵם*) indicates in this case a repeated action in the past.

form of the word **שׁוּב**, which also appears in Judg 2:14. Both words, indicating the seizure of goods, are connected to violent action.³⁰⁹ The presence of these words indicates that not only were the Israelites going to be subject to a foreign ruler, but also that this ruler would inflict harm on them. This sampling is sufficient to demonstrate the importance of oppression as a precipitating factor in the biblical descriptions of rebellion described as liberation.³¹⁰

There is also another clue in the book of Judges that suggests that the writers of Judges are concerned with defending themselves against the charge of aggression. This clue appears in the dialogue between Jephthah and the king of Ammon in Judg 11, and it concerns military action over disputed territory. Jephthah argues that Israel is not an aggressor and that his side had previously fought only because they were provoked.

The history being recounted in this dialogue is complex, so it is necessary to highlight some of the details to set the stage for an explanation of the dispute. Jephthah declares that the Israelites took land from Sihon, an Amorite, at the time of the Exodus. The land they took stood between the Israelites and Canaan as the Israelites attempted to end their wilderness journey and arrive in Canaan. Many biblical texts agree that Sihon possessed the land at that point (Num 21:22–24, 33–35; 32:33; Deut 2:26, 30; 3:8; Josh 2:10; 9:10). The exact relationship between Sihon, the Amorite, and the Ammonite king in Judges 11 is not clear. Despite the declaration that the Amorites had possessed the land earlier, the Ammonite king believes that his people are the rightful owners of the land. Deuteronomy 2:19, 37 provide some evidence for this, accepting that the Ammonites had at some point successfully expanded their territory.³¹¹ Alternatively, this text

³⁰⁹ See 1 Sam 14:48; 17:53; 23:1; Isa 13:16; 17:14; 42:14; Hab 2:8; Ps. 44:10.

³¹⁰ Similar reasons for rebellion also appear elsewhere. In 1 Kgs 12:20 oppressive taxes play a role in the secession of Israel from Judah. See also 2 Kgs 13.

³¹¹ Complication arises because Deut 2:9 declares that Yahweh had given the land Ar along the Arnon to Moab, which is the land the dispute is over. It is also possible that Judg 11 conflates Ammon and Moab, focusing on Ammon due to a similarity between Ammonite and Amorite. There are many details in this text that are difficult to untangle. For a discussion of the complications and for the debate over the date of the conflict and date of the text

might be conflating the Amorites with the Ammonites. Although there is no easy resolution, the most important point to grasp is that both sides claim that they are the rightful owners of the disputed land.

As he begins the discussion with this king, Jephthah immediately defends his people from the charge of aggressive seizure of land: לְאֶלְקָהּ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-אֲרֶזְן מוֹאָב וְאֶת-אֲרֶזְן בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן, “Israel did not take the land of Moab or the land of the Ammonites” (Judg 11:15). Jephthah subsequently explains to the Ammonite king that he and his people had asked for safe passage through the lands of Edom and Moab, but both kings refused them entry. Israel acquiesced and did not enter Moabite territory, which the text makes abundantly clear in Judg 11:18. Israel subsequently asks for safe passage through Amorite territory, but their king, Sihon, also refused. Sihon, instead of leaving Israel alone, decides to attack Israel. The text specifies that Sihon is the aggressor and Israel fights only a defensive war in response to Sihon’s aggression. With Israel’s victory over king Sihon, they now have rights to the land formally belonging to this aggressor king and the Amorites because Yahweh had granted them the victory. Jephthah thus makes the point that Israel did not engage in an aggressive war, but only a defensive war, and that their victory makes them legitimate owners of the land they now possess. The dialogue in this text demonstrates a concern for identifying who the aggressor is and for defending one’s group against the charge of aggression. Rebellion always involves aggression.

The point of identifying the aggressor harkens back to Judg 11:10 and Jephthah’s question to the king of the Ammonites: מַה-לִּי וְלָךְ כִּי-בָאתָ אֵלַי לְהִלָּחֵם בְּאֶרֶץִי, “What is there between me and you that you have come to me to fight against my land?” Jephthah believes that the Israelites had broken no “international law.” He accuses the Ammonite king of aggression

see, Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, “A Stratified Account of Jephthah’s Negotiations and Battle: Judges 11:12–33 from an Archaeological Perspective,” *JBL* 134 (2015): 291–311; Amnon Altman, “Claim of Possession over Occupied or Conquered Territory in the Bible and in the Ancient Near East,” *ZABR* 7 (2001): 332–52.

because he had no legitimate reason to attack. Based on a comment such as this, the reader can surmise that at least some in ancient Israel believed that a nation needed a legitimate reason to attack another nation. The focus on the justification for Israel’s previous military activity against Sihon in Judg 11, along with the charge of aggression in the text just quoted, makes it more likely that there is some concern with the justification of aggressive military action and therefore rebellion elsewhere. The author(s) of Judges justifies these rebellions by focusing on deliverance from an unjust situation, while at the same time deflecting the possible charge of aggression. This strategy could help the writers present their party, the ones rebelling, as innocent.³¹²

Justification of rebellion could have been the reason for the employment of *ישע* in passages that do not mention Yahweh as the actor behind the salvation. This is a possibility with the mention of some of the minor judges, who also “save” Israel (Judg 3:31; 10:1). Judg 3:31 states, *וְאַחֲרָיו הָיָה שָׁמְגָר בֶּן־עֲנָת בִּיַד אֶת־פְּלִשְׁתִּים שֵׁשׁ־מֵאוֹת אִישׁ בְּמִלְכָּם הִבָּקֵר נִישַׁע גַּם־הוּא אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל*, “After him came Shamgar the son of Anat, he struck down six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad. He too saved Israel.” Since there is no explicit mention of Yahweh, one might be tempted to think that this text focuses solely on the freedom from an oppressive situation. However, these verses need to be read while considering the larger context of the book of Judges. Both Marc Brettler and Mark Smith note that the stories of the minor judges have been influenced by the other stories in Judges.³¹³ The language and concepts, therefore, derive from

³¹² Complication arises at this point because this depends on the audience and at what level of the compositional history these ideas appear. This is an issue the chapter will turn to in the conclusion, when it addresses the issues of compositional history and potential audience.

³¹³ The language in the texts focused on the minor Judges has been influenced by the other stories in the book, which also may explain why words for salvation appear without reference to Yahweh. Brettler discusses how the Shamgar story developed out of texts in the book of Judges that were already in existence. It is likely that the language also comes directly from these texts. Marc Brettler, *The Book of Judges* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 23-25. Mark Smith believes the brief discussion of Shamgar is a later addition and that the Shamgar episode is modeled on the other minor judges as well as “the other leaders in the book.” Significantly, Smith notes that the Shamgar story, which employs a word for salvation without focusing on Yahweh, is a later addition and post-Deuteronomistic. This would suggest that the focus on Yahweh in these rebellion stories is a result of a deuteronomistic redactor and that

the surrounding context. The absence of the deity and an explicit mention of oppression are implied based on their frequent mention elsewhere in Judges.

Merging the Two Causes and Obscuring the Second

The two causes just outlined for why words for salvation appear to describe rebellion are often merged with the second cause being obscured. This section will demonstrate how the writers prioritize the first explanation—the religious—and obscure the second—the human. The stories in Judges repeatedly make clear that oppression of the Israelites is rooted in their abandonment of Yahweh and, according to Judg 2:13, their worship of Baal and other foreign deities. In response to this abandonment, Yahweh delivers them into the hand of alien oppressors.

Judges 2:15 describes the oppression as Yahweh’s hand being against them to bring harm (יְרִיבוֹתָהֶם הַיְהוָה בְּבָרְכָם לְרָעָה). In Judg 3:8, Cushan Rishataim’s oppression of the Israelites is due to Yahweh’s selling them into the foreign king’s hand. As the programmatic passage in Judg 2 indicates, this sequence recurs throughout the book. In each case, Yahweh actively directs the foreigners to oppress the Israelites.³¹⁴

There are three additional phrases that describe the Israelites’ servitude to these foreign nations. Two of them give Yahweh an active role in subordinating the Israelites to the foreigners. Only the phrase בְּגִי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵת, “the Israelites served,” which indicates subordination, does not mention Yahweh and is purely descriptive. This phrase, however, in one of its two occurrences in the book of Judges (Judg 3:8), appears after another phrase showing that Yahweh is the driving force behind Israelite oppression. In the other case (Judg 3:14), the same idea is present a couple verses earlier: וַיַּחֲזַק יְהוָה אֶת-עֲגִלּוֹן מֶלֶךְ-מוֹאָב עַל-יִשְׂרָאֵל, “Yahweh strengthened Eglon, the king of Moab, over Israel” (Judg 3:12).

this later redactor may not have had the same focus. See the conclusion for more on this argument. See also Mark Smith, “‘Midrash’ in the Book of Judges: The Cases of Judges 3:31 and 6:7-10,” *CBQ* 78 (2016): 264–65.

³¹⁴ See also Judg 3:12; 4:2; 6:1, 13; 10:7; 13:1, which also describe the oppression as a result of Yahweh’s actions.

By presenting oppression in this way, the writers are making a distinct theological point: Yahweh controls history and will punish those who are disobedient to him. It follows that if Yahweh causes the oppression, the only way to escape it is for Yahweh to act again and liberate them. This sequence of events is precisely what happens throughout the book of Judges. For example, in Judg 3:12 “Yahweh first “strengthens” (וַיַּחֲזֶק יְהוָה) Eglon over Israel. Subsequently, after a period of servitude to this foreign ruler, “Yahweh raises a deliverer for them” (וַיִּקַּם יְהוָה לָהֶם מוֹשִׁיעַ) in Judges 3:14. The co-ordination of these linguistic expressions demonstrates that it is indeed Yahweh’s actions that first cause the oppression and subsequently lead to a period of freedom from oppression via rebellion. These ancient writers recognize oppression as one human and universal cause of rebellion, but choose to obscure its presence due to their ultimate goal to teach dependence on Yahweh and show how he acts within history.

Additional Reasons for Describing Rebellion as Salvation

Additionally, there are notable contextual differences that explain why some biblical texts employ explicit words for rebellion while the book of Judges does not. Most important of them is the message which the writer or editor of Judges intends to offer about Yahweh’s control of history. It also depends on the outcome of the rebellion and how the writer wants the reader to view the rebellion and/or rebel. It will help to compare briefly a few other episodes of rebellion in the Hebrew Bible to see why these narrations employ a word for rebellion rather than salvation, despite the stories describing the same political event.

First, in the context of 2 Kgs 18 and Hezekiah’s rebellion against Assyria, the writer emphasizes Hezekiah’s piety. Part of this piety manifests itself in his refusal “to serve” (עבד) the king of Assyria.³¹⁵ The rebellion narrated in 2 Kgs 18:7 is part of this piety, and so Hezekiah

³¹⁵ See chapter two for more on this episode. One of the primary means by which the reader can judge this episode is based on a comparison between Hezekiah and Ahaz. The text of Isaiah condemns Ahaz (Isa 7–8) for allying with Assyria and praises Hezekiah, in part, because he refuses to do so. See also Scott M. Thomas, “Isaiah’s Vision of

must be the subject of the verb marking his refusal to serve the Assyrian king. By rebelling against the Assyrian king, Hezekiah remains loyal to Yahweh. Further, it is clear that in this context the writers are not focused on describing any oppression the Judahites experienced from which the king could “save them.” Therefore, the writers describe the break with the foreign power using a term for rebellion rather than salvation.

This is also true in many other cases of rebellion, especially those using **פִּשְׁע**. In these cases, the focus is not on freedom from oppression, as in the book of Judges, but on breaking the existing political relationship between two parties.³¹⁶ Specifically, when **פִּשְׁע** appears in the context of rebellion, other nations are depicted as breaking the relationship with Judah or Israel. When the writer wants the text to focus on the break in relationship, a term for rebellion rather than salvation appears. In contrast, when the writer describes an event in which his party broke from the superior nation, the writer often eschews a discussion of disobedience and focuses on the positive result. Thus, a word for salvation appears in this context.

In other cases, the writers employ a word for rebellion rather than salvation because of the eventual outcome and how they intend to portray the individual who is rebelling. In cases where the rebellion fails and the writers want to emphasize the negative aspects of disobedience, a word for salvation would be illogical. **יִשַׁע** focuses on the positive result of a rebellion, the deliverance from oppression, and the agent who brings that to fruition.

The most pertinent example of this strategy appears in 2 Kgs 24:1–3. At the time of this story, the Babylonians are asserting their authority over the Israelites. Further, Yahweh is viewed as the reason for the Babylonian oppression as stated in 2 Kgs 24:3: **אֲנִי אֶל־פִּי יְהוָה הִיטַתָּ בְּיַהוּדָה**,

Human Security: Virtue Ethics and International Politics,” *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 4 (2006): 21–29. Scott focuses on the distinction between these kings and demonstrates what the ancient authors prized in judging kings.

³¹⁶ See above for the specific discussions related to rebellions described with this word. For the specific texts, see 1 Kgs 12:19; 2 Kgs 1:1; 3:5, 7; 8:20, 22.

“Surely this happened to Judah because of the command of Yahweh.” These details demonstrate a similarity with what appears in the book of Judges. The Israelites are being oppressed by a foreign ruler because of Yahweh’s actions. However, unlike Yahweh had done time and time again in Judges, he is not willing to free Judah from oppression in this instance. It says in 2 Kgs 24:4, וְלֹא־אָבָה יְהוָה לְסָלֵחַ, “Yahweh was not willing to forgive.” Consequently, Jehoiakim’s efforts to break the Babylonian yoke and sever this subordinate status are not sanctioned or spearheaded by Yahweh. They are destined to fail. The idea that Yahweh’s willingness could be blunted and defeated could not be allowed by the biblical writers. Thus, the author presents Jehoiakim’s rebellion in a negative light (2 Kgs 24:2). If Yahweh had been willing to aid in assuaging the foreign attack—in which case, his willingness would have been represented as an eventual victory over the Babylonians—perhaps the author would have used a word for salvation instead of a descriptive term (מַרְדָּ) for rebellion.

Rebellion as Salvation Outside of Judges

Rebellion in 1 Samuel

The notion of rebellion as salvation is not limited to the book of Judges. It also appears in the first half of 1 Samuel. The narrative in these chapters (1 Sam 1–7, 13–14) essentially continues the story from the book of Judges until Samuel and Saul break the cycle of oppression and rebellion (salvation) so prevalent in Judges. As the story of Samuel and the Philistines begins, the writer labels the Israelites as servants (עַבְדֵי) of the Philistines in 1 Sam 4:9. This is a familiar term marking political subjugation also employed in Judg 3:8, 14. Further, in 1 Sam 7:8, the text employs the exact word pair found in the book of Judges – the verb יָצַק, “to cry out” preceding the word יָשַׁע, “to save” (cf. Judg 3:9; 10:14). This co-ordination indicates that the Israelites are once again in a position where they are subordinated to a foreign ruler, the Philistines, and cannot foment a rebellion on their own. Foreign control of Israel is also evident in the presence

of Philistine garrisons in Israelite territory (1 Sam 13:3). This makes it unmistakable that the narrator’s intention is to present the Philistines as the rulers of portions of the central hill country that Israel previously owned. Consequently, any attempt by an Israelite to evict the occupying Philistines would constitute a rebellion.³¹⁷ Rainey demonstrates that the Philistines did view Saul’s efforts to gather at Gilgal (1 Sam 13:4) as a rebellion. He notes, “the Philistine response (to Saul’s gathering at Gilgal) was to send an expeditionary force to the area to restore order and to discourage any Hebrew efforts to rebel.”³¹⁸

As for their subjugation to the Philistines, the Israelites hope—indicated by the writers’ use of נצִל and יִשַׁע—that Yahweh will help them throw off the yoke of their rulers. The Israelites plead with Samuel to cry (זַעַק) to Yahweh on their behalf so that he will save (יִשַׁע) them from the hand of the Philistines (1 Sam 7:8). The verb יִשַׁע, akin to its function in Judges, exists to mark the break in the relationship with a suzerain. This hope for intervention begins to come to fruition when Samuel urges the people to put away their foreign gods and turn to Yahweh. Samuel declares that if they do so Yahweh will נצִל, “deliver” them from the Philistines (1 Sam 7:3). The verb נצִל again indicates the breaking of a relationship with the suzerain and therefore a rebellion. It appears the Israelites endeavor to listen to Samuel by turning to Yahweh. Nevertheless, 1 Sam 7:12–13 suggests that the Israelites enjoy only ephemeral success. The Philistines regain authority over the Israelites, as is apparent a few chapters later (1 Sam 13–14).

³¹⁷ Interestingly, the LXX views this as a rebellion as it reads λέγων ἠθετήκασιν οἱ δοῦλοι, which may be retroverted into Hebrew as לְאִמֵּר פִּשְׁעוּ הָעִבְרִיִּים, “the Hebrews rebelled.” Part of the difficulty of this variant is that עִבְרִיִּים, “Hebrews” is never placed in the mouth of an Israelite; it always comes from a foreigner. The word פִּשְׁעוּ fits here with the idea of regional rebellion, but it is predominantly used when other nations rebel against Israel or Judah, not when Israel or Judah rebels against another nation. See chapter two for more on the word פִּשְׁעוּ as a rebellion term. While we do not view the emendation based on the LXX as convincing, it helps to confirm that we are dealing with a rebellion.

³¹⁸ Rainey, *The Sacred Bridge*, 146. See 1 Sam 13:4 for the text mentioning Saul’s role in gathering the army at Gilgal as he stages the rebellion.

This, however, will change with the arrival of Saul. In response to the people’s continued outcry, Yahweh sends Saul to Samuel to finally lead a rebellion and save the Israelites from their subjugation. The text states, אֲשַׁלְּחֶנּוּ אֵלֶיךָ אִישׁ...וְהוֹשִׁיעַ אֶת־עַמּוֹ מִיַּד פְּלִשְׁתִּים, “I will send you a man...and he will save my people from the hand of the Philistines” (1 Sam 9:16). It is thus Yahweh who initiates the action and places Saul on the throne to lead the people in a rebellion against the Philistines.

The details of the story demonstrate that Yahweh is the driving force behind Israel’s success. Yahweh’s role in the rebellion is confirmed in the text noted above and in Jonathan’s comments. As Jonathan engages in rebellion and looks to attack the Philistine garrison, he recognizes that it is Yahweh who will help him rebel. He says in 1 Sam 14:6, כִּי אֵין לַיהוָה מַעְצוֹר, “For nothing will prevent Yahweh from saving by many or by few.”³¹⁹ He further engages in a form of divination, as he makes Yahweh provide a sign on his (Yahweh’s) preferred choice of action (1 Sam 14:9–10). The text also says in 1 Sam 14:23, וַיֹּשֶׁעַ יְהוָה בַּיּוֹם, “Yahweh saved Israel on that day.” The text labors to make this point. The reader knows from earlier comments that the Philistines had taken away Israel’s ability to make weapons (1 Sam 13:19–22); and as these verses mention, none of the Israelites outside of Saul and Jonathan had a sword or spear. This contrasts with the Philistines who possess “thirty thousand chariots, six thousand horsemen and people (troops) like the sand of the seashore” (1 Sam 13:5). This inequity between the two sides reminds the reader of the mere 300 troops under Gideon’s command in Judg 6. The narrators demonstrate that the Israelites are severely disadvantaged in both cases and must rely on their God to aid their rebellion.

This brief discussion of 1 Samuel confirms that the first half of this book continues the

³¹⁹ Jonathan is the aggressor and leads the party on the offensive. He is not being directly attacked, which indicates that ישע “to save” refers specifically to the breach in relationship with the Philistines rather than to deliverance from an attack. This helps to establish the connection to the rebellion.

discussion from the book of Judges. It further corroborates the reasons mentioned above regarding the purpose for the use of *שׁע* in the context of rebellion. Yahweh intervenes on behalf of Israel by placing a king on the throne who can lead a rebellion against the Philistines.³²⁰ The details presented above indicate that the Israelites are not capable of freeing themselves from oppression and thus Yahweh receives the credit.

The Exodus as a Rebellion

Another illustration of a political rebellion described in terms of salvation appears in the book of Exodus. The Israelites' rebellion against Pharaoh and the Egyptians during the exodus is also presented as a war of liberation.³²¹ The two words employed for the Israelites' disavowal of the Pharaoh and Egypt in this context are *נצַל*, "to deliver," as in Exod 3:8; 5:23; 6:6; 18:8–10, or a form of the root *שׁע*, "to save," as in Exod 14:30. In the well-known Exodus story, the Israelites are slaves to the oppressive Pharaoh. Their rejection of him and subsequent flight has all the characteristics of a slave rebellion. Despite this reality, outside of the phrase *בְּיַד רָמָה*, "with a raised hand" in Exod 14:8, which highlights their defiant attitude as they leave Egypt,³²² no words for rebellion appear. Just as the writers of Judges paint each episode of Israelite rebellion in an admirable light, so too does the writer of Exodus characterize what could be described as a slave uprising as an episode of divine deliverance. The writers take the emphasis off disobeying a superior authority figure, the Pharaoh, and focus it on the role of Yahweh and his actions. In fact, the stated purpose of the Exodus is that all will know who Yahweh is and what he can do.³²³

Details in the exodus story also bolster the second reason noted above for why the writers

³²⁰ Yahweh's action to put Saul on the throne demonstrates that the human king is Yahweh's agent and keeps this position as long as he does the bidding of the deity. This is why Saul loses this position in 1 Sam 13–15 and Yahweh chooses a new agent, one after his own heart, David.

³²¹ See the previous chapter for a more complete defense of the Exodus as a rebellion.

³²² See the discussion in the previous chapter for more on this phrase and the defiant attitude behind the phrase.

³²³ See Exod 6:7; 7:5, 17; 10:2; 14:4; 14:18.

of Judges describe acts of aggression in terms of salvation rather than rebellion. There is a marked focus on the oppression of the Israelites at the hand of the Pharaoh and the Egyptians in the book of Exodus. Yahweh’s intervention and call of Moses take place because the deity hears the cry of the Israelites as they suffer at the hands of the Egyptians. Exodus 3:9 states, וַעֲתָה הִנֵּה וַעֲתָה הִנֵּה, “Now, the cry of the Israelites has come to me and I have seen how the Egyptians are oppressing them.” The Egyptians’ harsh treatment of the Israelites is illustrated in several cases. For example, Moses lashes out only after he sees an Egyptian killing an Israelite slave (Exod 2:11). This unjust killing sparks Moses’ involvement in the rebellion. In Exod 5, the Israelites are forced to build the same number of bricks as previously required without being given straw. When the Israelite slaves cannot fulfill the task, the Egyptian מְנַשִּׂים, “overseers/oppressors,” beat them (Exod 5:14). These details demonstrate that the book of Exodus, just as was the case in Judges, makes a concerted effort to highlight the oppressive situation that leads to the episode of rebellion described as salvation.³²⁴ In contrast, in the episodes of rebellion described with מִרְדָּה, פֶּשַׁע, or קִשְׁרָה, the writers are not concerned with oppression.³²⁵

There can be little doubt that under oppressive circumstances disobedience to the earthly authority figure—in other words rebellion—can be legitimate. This is one reason that these texts employ terms for salvation to describe these events. If a writer wanted to describe the exodus by focusing on the actions of the Israelites apart from the oppression and apart from their deity, he or she could describe it as a slaves’ rebellion. This parallel demonstrates that the manipulation of language to describe rebellion as salvation in the book of Judges is not an isolated instance in the

³²⁴ See also Exod 1:13–14.

³²⁵ One exception to this could be the excessive taxes that Solomon places on the northern tribes that helps set the stage for Jeroboam’s rebellion (1 Kgs 11–12).

Deuteronomistic History.³²⁶

Focus on Military Intervention in the Rebellion

Now that the above analysis has demonstrated that the books of Judges and Samuel are discussing a series of rebellions and further analyzed the reasons for the use of the roots נָצַל and יָשַׁע in these texts, the chapter can discuss the conceptual category into which these terms fit. The terms describe rebellions, but in describing a rebellion a writer can focus on different aspects of it. The writer could focus on the breach, on the ruling power's view of the disobedient subordinate, or on the role of the actors who lead or support the rebels. In some cases, this is a charismatic figure within the rebel's society, while in other cases it is an external actor who arrives to support the rebels.

The situation in the book of Judges has parallels with both points, though more so with the latter.³²⁷ Tellingly, the term יָשַׁע often describes military intervention. The focus on intervention is necessary, at least in some cases, because Yahweh is presented as the primary actor in most of these rebellions. The nature and definition of rebellion entail that there are two parties present, a superior and an inferior party. The Israelites are politically the inferior group throughout the book of Judges and in the early chapters of 1 Samuel, but this cannot be the case for Yahweh. Israel's deity would never be portrayed as the weaker or subordinate member in any relationship.³²⁸ Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, Yahweh even controls the powerful Assyrian

³²⁶ In the Exodus, the reason for the Israelites oppression is not due to their sin and Yahweh placing them under foreign rule. Nevertheless, Yahweh still acts because they are experiencing oppression as we read in Exod 1:11–14.

³²⁷ The judges who save Israel cannot be outside actors and when they are the only ones mentioned, the texts and words emphasize their role in freeing the Israelites from oppression. Nevertheless, the texts prioritize Yahweh's role in aiding these judges and bringing deliverance. There is a sense in which there are both internal and external actors involved in these episodes of liberation.

³²⁸ Jon Levenson has shown that there are places within the Hebrew Bible, as in the Psalms, where it depicts Yahweh as not acting with omnipotence. This explains the persistence of evil in the world. The point of these Psalms is to urge Yahweh to act, as he did at creation when he defeated the forces of chaos. This could also explain why other nations rule over Israel at times. This does not, however, indicate that Yahweh is the weaker member in a relationship and does not apply directly to the situation in Judges, because Yahweh is the driving force for Israel's

empire (Isa 10:5–19). Using a specific word for rebellion when Yahweh is the subject would be inappropriate; it would imply that another nation, and therefore their deity, has established dominance over Yahweh. The point of the book of Judges in portraying rebellion as salvation is patently the opposite; it demonstrates that both the subordination and the salvation the Israelites experience originate with Yahweh. What the writers do in many cases is describe Yahweh's actions in terms of military intervention. The deity intervenes on behalf of his ally, Israel.

In the realm of international politics, weak states often “cry out” for outside assistance when they recognize that they are not formidable enough to throw off the yoke of an oppressor on their own. This is a common practice in political conflicts both in the present and the ancient Near East. For instance, international actors often intervene in rebellions taking place outside of their domestic sphere.³²⁹ Further, intervention often occurs for what political scientists would call humanitarian reasons, or because the international community feels oppression and persecution are taking place warranting action from the outside. In the ancient world, this would have been connected to the presence of a covenant. These covenants often stipulated that the subordinate had the right to appeal to his patron if he was suffering. In this way, the point of this paragraph

subjugation. See Psalm 44 for an example. Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

³²⁹ This is evident in the Hittite treaties which spend a significant portion of time noting the overlord's commitment to aid his vassal in times of need. Moshe Weinfeld, “Covenant Making in Anatolia and Mesopotamia,” *JANES* 22 (1993): 135–36. The background of Tiglath-pileser III's involvement in the Syro-Ephraimite war narrated in 2 Kgs 16 and Isa 7 may be because of rebellions taking place in Judah. The outside parties of Israel and Damascus are attacking Judah, but they are doing so to help someone else, Ben-Tabel (Isa 7), rebel and take the throne. Ahaz was in danger of losing the kingship to a rebellion and so appeals for help. Elsewhere, as Parker has shown, the background of the Assyrian intervention in the event behind the Panamuwa inscription is at least described as an internal revolt. Simon B. Parker, “Appeals for Military Intervention: Stories from Zinjirli and the Bible,” *BA* 59 (1996): 217. The 701 rebellion involving Hezekiah, Ekron, and the Assyrians involves foreign intervention on two levels. First, the Ekronites call on the Egyptians to intervene and aid their rebellion against the Assyrians, while from the other side, once Sennacherib subdues the rebellion against him, he intervenes in Ekronite affairs and restores the deposed king, Padi. For more on the call for Egypt to intervene in the rebellion see, James K. Hoffmeir, “Egypt's Role in the Events of 701 B.C. in Jerusalem,” in *Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology: The First Temple Period*, ed. Andrew G. Vaughn and Ann E. Killebrew (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 220. For a focus on Sennacherib and Padi see K. Lawson Younger Jr., “Assyrian Involvement in the Southern Levant at the End of the Eighth Century B.C.E.,” in *Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology: The First Temple Period*, ed. Andrew G. Vaughn and Ann E. Killebrew (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 235–54.

and that made in the previous section discussing oppression are linked.³³⁰

Various ancient Near Eastern texts demonstrate that military intervention is a common topic. A Hittite treaty involving Paddatissu of Kizzuwatna states the following: “if some land begins war against His Majesty, that land is covered by Sunashshura’s oath. His Majesty will request military assistance from Sunashshura, and Sunashshura must provide it to him.”³³¹ The Amarna letters of the Late Bronze Age repeatedly record Egyptian vassals crying out for military intervention. Liverani states that intervention “is the very essence of the political relations in Syria-Palestine.”³³² The Pharaoh often did not respond, but the vassals repeatedly request his assistance. The Assyrian treaties do not often mention their obligation to come to the aid of a besieged subordinate, but the presence of a treaty implies that the Assyrians would protect loyal vassals. One example of Assyrian intervention, further discussed below, is when Shalmaneser III aids Kilamuwa of Sam’al after he cries for help. Elsewhere, Esarhaddon’s inscriptions record an episode when he comes to the aid of several Median kings. The inscription states, “Because of the chieftains who had threatened them, they implored my lordship and begged me for help. I sent my officials, the governors of the boundary areas of their land, with them and they trampled the people living in those cities and made (them) bow down at their feet.”³³³

³³⁰ This does not indicate that these ancient polities were acting with benevolence. They often acted or intervened out of self-interest. This was the case with the Assyrians, even if they presented themselves as coming to the aid of their vassals and “protecting them from an unjust attack.” Oded also notes that the Assyrian king often presents himself as fighting against the aggressor. Bustenay Oded, *War, Peace and Empire: Justifications for War in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions* (Weisbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1992), 61.

³³¹ Gary Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, SBLWAW 7 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 17. See also pgs. 18, 34, 51–52.

³³² Mario Liverani, *International Relations in the Ancient Near East 1600-1100 BC* (New York: Palgrave, 2001) 133. See EA 64, 70, 72, 74. For an edition of the El Amarna texts see, Anson Rainey, *The El-Amarna Correspondence: A New Edition of the Cuneiform Letters from the Site of El-Amarna based on Collations of all Extant Tablets Vol. 1*, HdO 110 (Boston: Brill, 2015). The important translation is William Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

³³³ Leichty, RINAP 4, 32. The text is Esarhaddon 2 iv: 10–18. Oded further mentions a case of intervention involving Adad-nirari II coming to the assistance of the city of Kumme, along with Shalmaneser III’s role in aiding

The writers of the Hebrew Bible often depict Yahweh as engaging in military intervention similar to these ancient Near Eastern suzerains. Yahweh’s intervention is quite apparent in one case in the book of Joshua. Immediately preceding the battle of Jericho, a “man” (שׂר), who stands in as Yahweh’s military commander, appears before Joshua with a drawn sword (Josh 5:13-14). Joshua asks the man if he is on Israel’s side or the side of their adversaries. The “man” responds by saying, שׂר, “neither one.”³³⁴ In this case, Yahweh and his army stand outside of the conflict, rather than as a member of either side and intervene as they see fit. Likewise, in Judges Yahweh sends messengers to spark some of the rebellions. Yoder says, “the messengers of Yhwh in Exodus and Judges appear to have been peripatetic agitators who dealt with strong, but marginalized, individuals, motivating and mobilizing them to strike out against political and ethnic enemies of the Hebrew people.”³³⁵ These messengers in the stories of Gideon and Samson serve as mysterious outside catalysts aiding the rebellions.³³⁶

Elsewhere in Judges, Yahweh and “his army” intervene from outside. In the conflict between Deborah and Barak versus the Canaanites, Yahweh intervenes and fights on behalf of Israel. Unlike in many other episodes where Yahweh empowers an agent to lead the rebellion, in this epic poetic text, he involves himself directly.³³⁷ In this case, Yahweh fights from heaven to secure the victory for Israel (Judg 5:20). Elsewhere in this chapter the writer describes Yahweh

Marduk-zakir-shumi, as well as Sargon II’s role in helping Dalta of Ellipi. Oded, *War, Peace, and Empire: Justifications for War in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions*, 66.

³³⁴ Boling argues for this reading and says, “This sense of the negative is rare but not impossible.” Robert Boling, *Joshua: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary*, AB6 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 197. See Gen 18:15; 19:2 for comparable examples.

³³⁵ Yoder, *Power and Politics in the Book of Judges: Men and Women of Valor*, 40.

³³⁶ For more on the identity of the messenger see, René A. López, “Identifying the “Angel of the Lord” in the Book of Judges: A Model for Reconsidering the Referent in Other Old Testament Loci,” *BBR* 20 (2010): 1–18. Elisha acts in a similar way as he engages in the Aramean wars narrated in 2 Kgs 8:7–15. The text quoted above from Esarhaddon’s royal inscriptions mentions that the Assyrian king sent his officials to deal with the situation.

³³⁷ The genre of Judg 5 explains why this is the case. Yahweh also uses the natural forces to fight against the Egyptians in Exod 15.

as a divine warrior fighting as an ally of Israel. This is explicit in Judg 5:31: כֵּן יִאבְדוּ כָל-אֹיְבֵיָהּ, “May all the enemies of Yahweh perish, but may his allies go forth like the sun in its might.”³³⁸ While Yahweh and Israel are on the same side, there is a sense in which Yahweh is not Israel and Israel is not Yahweh. They are separate. Yahweh is similar to a suzerain who chooses to fight on behalf of an oppressed vassal.

The view of Yahweh as an external actor is consistent with the depiction of him as Israel’s suzerain. The great powers of the ancient Near East often conquered various foreign territories. Once they did, there is a sense that they became one unit.³³⁹ But despite this new relationship, the vassals of a great power remain politically distinct from their overlord. If a suzerain involves himself in the affairs of two vassals who are fighting, the overlord would be intervening in an external conflict. This scenario occurred often during the Neo-Assyrian period.³⁴⁰ The presence of a treaty between the two parties further suggests a political distinction

³³⁸ The text appears to read, “your enemies” and “those who love him.” This is likely not the case due to what would be the contrast between the 2ms pronominal suffix “your” on אִיבֵי and the 3ms suffix “his” on אֹיְבֵי. It is likely the *kaph* on the former is an archaic form of the enclitic *kaph*. This is what Boling suggests. Robert G. Boling, *Judges: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, AB6a (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 116. Compare this to Ps 24:6. The language appearing in this passage connects to the terminology of ancient Near Eastern treaties. Moran was one of the first to discuss this. See William L. Moran, “The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy,” *CBQ* 25 (1963): 77–87.

³³⁹ The language of diplomacy often employed familial terminology suggesting an insider relationship. Despite the presence of this language, the two parties remained at least to a certain extent distinct. Liverani states, the familial language “is just a sign of personal respect with no political implications.” Liverani, *International Relations in the Ancient Near East, 1600–1100 BC*, 136.

³⁴⁰ The Assyrians often monitored the behavior of their vassals and intervened when they saw conflicts. Galil notes the following occasions when this happened: the conflict between the kings of Tabal during the time of Sargon, a boundary issue in Gurgum during the time of Adad-nirari III, a conflict between Hamath and Arpad also during the time of Adad-nirari III, as well as one between Joash and Bar Hadad in the same period. The Assyrians also intervened in the time of Tiglath-pileser III during the Syro-Ephraimite war and in the conflict between Israel and Moab in the 8th century. Sennacherib also intervenes on behalf of his Ekronite vassal Padi when Hezekiah attacks him as he rebels against Assyria at the end of the 8th century. Galil talks about these as episodes of intervention suggesting that the two sides are separate parties. Gershon Galil, “Conflicts Between Assyrian Vassals,” *SAAB* VI (1992): 55–63. Other Assyrian kings chose not to intervene in the affairs of their vassals. This appears to be the case with Shalmaneser III. Yamada states, “It appears that Shalmaneser usually did not intervene in the internal political affairs of his vassal states.” Shigeo Yamada, *The Construction of the Assyrian Empire: A Historical Study of the Inscriptions of Shalmaneser III (859–824 BC) Relating to His Campaigns to the West*, CHANE 3 (Boston: Brill, 2000), 308.

between vassal and suzerain. The treaty is necessary because there are two separate entities who are creating a document to outline and control a relationship. These treaties often demand intervention and military aid, as mentioned above.³⁴¹

In those cases when Yahweh is acting like an ancient Near Eastern suzerain, the words *ישע* and *נצל* indicate that Yahweh is taking steps to intervene on behalf of an oppressed ally. He acts like a suzerain aiding one of his vassals facing a crisis. He intervenes most often by establishing and empowering a leader, a Judge, who is militarily capable of leading the rebellion. Yahweh is, metaphorically speaking, arming the rebels with his agents. He commissions these individuals to serve as his agents by clothing them with his spirit (*רוח*). One specific example occurs in Judges 13–16 in which he arms Israel with a superhuman actor, Samson, to lead the rebellion and “save” Israel. When the Israelites are oppressed by the Midianites in Judg 6, Yahweh empowers the leader, Gideon (Judg 6:38), with his spirit³⁴² and hand-selects three hundred soldiers (Judg 7:1–7). He then acts as an advisor and helps provide the military “strategy” that leads to a successful rebellion (Judg 7:8–15). In the first half of 1 Samuel, Yahweh places a king on the throne who will lead a rebellion against the oppressive Philistines. He commissions Saul as his agent and endows him with his spirit just as he does with the judges (1 Sam 10:6). As Yoder says, “Yahweh is treated like a suzerain receiving gifts and sacrifices from his clients just like the other warriors in Judges. He responds by giving victories to his

³⁴¹ This is most apparent from the Hittite treaties discussed above. The Assyrian texts demand that their vassals intervene in any case where someone acts against Assyrian interests. Intervention demands two parties be present. The succession treaties of Esarhaddon repeatedly state the requirements of their vassals to intervene on behalf of Ashurbanipal. For these texts see Simo Parpola and Kazuko Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths*, SAA II (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1988). See specifically Text 6 lines 162–172: “If an Assyrian or a vassal of Assyria... or any living being at all besieges Assurbanipal, the great crown prince designate, in country or in town, and carries out rebellion and insurrection, you shall take your stand with and protect Assurbanipal, the great crown prince designate, wholeheartedly defeat the men who revolted against him, and rescue Assurbanipal.”

³⁴² Yahweh’s spirit also empowers several other Judges. See Judg 3:10; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14.

clients.”³⁴³

יָשַׁע and נָצַל as Terms for Military Intervention

There are many details in the Hebrew Bible that will help prove that these “rebellion” terms fit within the conceptual idea of military intervention. The core of this section will focus on several texts in the Hebrew Bible that demonstrate that intervention is the type of political action that יָשַׁע, “to save” often refers to in passages that feature military activity. Furthermore, an analysis of a few texts from the non-biblical ancient Near East will help bring the two parts of this chapter together. Bringing the two parts together will help confirm that the purpose of employing the language of a related concept, namely intervention, to describe rebellion is to give credit to Yahweh rather than the earthly leader. When outside actors intervene in a foreign military affair, such as a rebellion, they often receive the credit and are praised by the subordinate for the intervention or the possibility of such.

There are cases of יָשַׁע indicating military intervention that do not occur with Yahweh as the subject. In 2 Sam 10:19, David and the Israelites successfully defeat the army of Hadadezer. As a result of this victory, David subdues the now dead king’s former satellites and makes them servants, or as the text says, the defeated territories *וַיַּעַבְדוּם*, “served them.” The use of the verb *עָבַד*, “to serve” indicates political subordination. Now that the Israelites have successfully subdued these polities, the Arameans are afraid to overthrow the suzerain. The text employs יָשַׁע to describe the actions the Arameans would have to engage in to overthrow David and the Israelites on behalf of their allies. The text reads, *וַיִּירָאוּ אֲרָם לְהוֹשִׁיעַ עוֹד אֶת-בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן*, “The Arameans were afraid to save the Ammonites again.” The outside party is afraid to intervene and help their allies rebel against their new overlords. This demonstrates that when it was an outside entity that would help the subordinate group rebel against the authority, the word יָשַׁע could

³⁴³ Yoder, *Power and Politics in the Book of Judges: Men and Women of Valor*, 195.

appear. *ישע*, therefore, does not always appear in the context of a rebellion involving the Israelite deity. It appears in this case because the outside entity is not rebelling against the dominant power and so a word for rebellion does not fit the presentation of the action. In the book of Judges, Yahweh is the intervening force behind these episodes of salvation, whereas here it is a foreign state.³⁴⁴

This text forces the reader to think about the implications of regional rebellion and the role of the international community. The text of 2 Sam 10 speaks to this issue. Once David subdues Hadadezer, he must be concerned with the response of the territory he now rules in addition to the surrounding territories. The neighboring states may want to intervene and aid a subjugated territory to maintain the balance of power or to make sure the now dominant state does not attempt to continue its expansion and conquer them as well. In this case, the Arameans are afraid to intervene (*ישע*) presumably because of the strength of Israel's military. The text of 2 Sam 10 helps demonstrate how the term *ישע* is often employed to describe outside actors intervening in foreign affairs, in this case a potential foreign rebellion.³⁴⁵

Another text that highlights the use of the root *ישע*, “to save” and its focus on military intervention is 2 Kgs 13:1–9. This text parallels in many ways what appears in the book of

³⁴⁴ There are a handful of passages that contain a similar meaning. In these cases, we are not dealing with a rebellion, but the recovery of lost territory. In Judg 11:26 and 1 Sam 7:4; 23:2, 5 the use of the word *נצל*, “to deliver, liberate” centers on an outside entity going to battle to regain lost territory. There is a connection to rebellion, because the ruling power is losing territory they now rule. In a sense, the outside party is aiding a rebellion as they intervene to help a city liberate themselves. It is just described in terms of recovery.

³⁴⁵ A comparison with a modern example may help demonstrate this. If western powers had sent troops to aid anti Assad rebels in toppling the Assad regime, one could not describe this as a rebellion of the west against the Syrian government. If that happened and depending on the perspective, a commentator could say the west helped to liberate the Syrian people from an oppressive government as they aided in their rebellion. Or, in the language of the Hebrew Bible, the western powers “saved” the oppressed people.

The outside powers often first look to justify their actions and do not describe their own behavior as a rebellion. Van der Vyver, speaking about a statement from the British Prime Minister, said, “Describing the Syrian action as ‘morally indefensible’, and promising to ‘put an end to human rights atrocities in Syria’, British Prime Minister David Cameron seemed to justify an armed intervention to aid the rebels on the basis of humanitarian intervention.” These are of course not exact parallels. Yahweh and Israel have a closer relationship than the British and the Syrian rebels, but the idea of intervention stands out in both. Johan D van der Vyver, “Military Intervention in Syria: The American, British and French Alternatives and the Russian Option,” *De Jure* 48 (2015): 38.

Judges with nearly identical language and identical intentions. The emphasis is yet again on Yahweh’s role in a rebellion described as liberation from oppression.³⁴⁶ The first similarity that occurs between 2 Kgs 13:1–9 and the book of Judges is in the description of Israelite vassalage to a foreign power described with the phrase *וַיִּתְּנֵם בְּיַד*, “he gave them into the hand of” (2 Kgs 13:3). This is identical to one of the phrases in Judges that describes the relationship between the Israelites and their oppressors. In 2 Kgs 13, the Israelites repeatedly *כָּל-הַיָּמִים*, “all the days,” become a vassal to the Arameans.³⁴⁷ After their subjugation, Jehoahaz entreats Yahweh, which means he cries for help. In response to this entreaty, Yahweh provides a *מוֹשִׁיעַ*, “savior” to help Israel regain her independence from the Arameans: *וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל מוֹשִׁיעַ וַיִּנְצְאוּ מִתַּחַת יַד-אַרָּם*, “So Yahweh gave Israel a savior and they came out from under the hand of Aram” (2 Kgs 13:5).³⁴⁸

What is important to notice is that the identity of the individual or state referred to as the “savior” is conspicuously absent. The reason for leaving the name out could be to give credit to Yahweh by making him the agent who brings the “savior.” It is to be expected that the authors of the Hebrew Bible would eschew labeling the Assyrian king as the savior if they wanted to acclaim Yahweh. As the discussion below will indicate, there are ancient Near Eastern kings

³⁴⁶ Just as was the case in the book of Judges, this text also mentions the oppression of the foreign power. The word *לְהִיךְ*, “to oppress” occurs here as it does often in Judges. This again serves to justify the reason for the rebellion. See 2 Kgs 13:4.

³⁴⁷ For more on this as the historical reality at the time of this conflict see K. Lawson Younger Jr., *A Political History of the Arameans: From Their Origins to the End of Their Polities* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 635–40.

³⁴⁸ Scholars have debated the identity of the “savior,” but it is likely it is an outside actor, namely, Adad-nirari III. Michael Astour says, “Jehoahaz (814-798) was rescued from the Aramean oppression by a “savior” (II Kings 13:5), in whom modern scholars have correctly recognized Adad-nirari III.” Michael Astour, “The First Assyrian Invasion of Israel, *JAOS* 91(1971): 388. Admittedly, as Younger has shown, scholars have made various suggestions as to who this is, and it is possible it is not Adad-Nirari III. The most likely options outside of Adad-nirari III, are Jehoash, Jeroboam II, Elisha, or Zakkur. Younger, *A Political History of the Arameans*, 639. See this source for bibliographic references to the various scholars who have proposed these options. Siddall suggests that it is impossible to determine who the savior is without more evidence, but he does mention this text in his work on the reign of Adad-nirari III. Luis Robert Siddall, *The Reign of Adad-nirāri III: An Historical and Ideological Analysis of An Assyrian King and His Times*, CM 45 (Boston: Brill, 2013), 5–6.

who found ways to glorify themselves and their role in bringing an outside actor to intervene, but this is not the case in this episode. This text leaves out the name of the savior, understood to be an outside actor, to make sure that Yahweh receives the credit for aiding Israel's rebellion.³⁴⁹ Yahweh brings the outside actor against Israel's oppressor, and a form of the verb *ישע*, "to save" describes the intervention. The intervention results in Israel's successful rebellion, a rebellion they cannot claim as their own.

2 Kings 16 records another text where there is no doubt that the term *ישע*, "to save" focuses on the role of an outside military actor. During what many scholars have referred to as the Syro-Ephraimite war, Rezin of Aram and Pekah of Israel attack Jerusalem in an attempt to replace the Judahite king with an individual who will be more receptive to their foreign policy choices (Isa 7:6).³⁵⁰ Israel and Damascus are not rebelling; this is rather a military conflict in which one actor fears defeat and calls on an external actor to intervene on his behalf. Ahaz, the king of Judah, fears defeat at the hands of Rezin and Pekah and requests outside assistance, specifically from the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III. Ahaz says, *עבדך וּבְנֵךְ אֲנִי עָלָה וְהוֹשִׁיעֵנִי מִכַּףּ*, "I am your son and your servant; come up and save me from the hand of the king of Aram and from the hand of the king of Israel, who are rising against

³⁴⁹ A similar case appears in Isa 19:20. In this example, the people of Israel will cry to Yahweh and he will again send a *מושיע* "savior." While the savior is not specified in this case, it is possible that it is also an outside actor who will help Israel throw off a foreign oppressor. The name of the savior is again left out to emphasize Yahweh's role in the intervention.

³⁵⁰ Many who have studied this event have suggested that Israel and Damascus were attempting to create an anti-Assyrian league and were pressuring Ahaz into joining it. It is unclear if they were creating an anti-Assyrian coalition or if Rezin of Damascus was taking advantage of Assyria's absence and trying to establish his own dominance. For a few scholars who have discussed this issue see, Bustenay Oded, "The Historical Background of the Syro-Ephraimite War Reconsidered," *CBQ* 34 (1972): 153–65; Stuart A. Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis*, SBLDs 123 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990); Michael E. W. Thompson, *Situation and Theology: Old Testament Interpretations of the Syro-Ephraimite War* (London: The Almond Press, 1982); Nadav Na'aman, "Tiglath-pileser III's Campaigns Against Tyre and Israel (734–732 BCE)," *TA* 22 (1995): 268–78; Peter Dubovsky, "Tiglath-pileser III's Campaigns in 734–732 B.C. Historical Background of Isa 7, 2 Kings 15–16 and 2 Chr 27–28," *Biblica* 87 (2006): 153–70. Joachim Begrich, "Der Syrisch-Ephraimitische Krieg und seine weltpolitischen Zusammenhänge," *ZDMG* 83 (1929): 213–37; Nadav Na'aman, "Forced Participation in Alliances in the Course of the Assyrian Campaigns to the West," M. Cogan and I. Eph'al eds., *Ah, Assyria... Studies in Assyrian History and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography Presented to Hayim Tadmor*, *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 33 (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1991), 80–98.

me.” In this appeal to an outside ally, Ahaz uses the term **ישע** to make this request.

The use of **ישע** in 2 Kgs 16 is not identical to the use of **ישע** in a rebellion context. At the moment Ahaz cries for help, Israel and Aram are not ruling over Israel. Despite the minor difference, the events are quite similar. One party is being attacked in this case rather than oppressed, and in response to the attack they cry for help to an external party. The intervention from the outside party is phrased in terms of salvation.

The employment of **ישע** in 2 Kgs 16 is rhetorical. The statement that the writers place in the mouth of Ahaz is self-abnegating for the Judahite king, even as it honors the Assyrian king, Tiglath-pileser III. The narrator of 2 Kgs 16 employs direct speech to represent the viewpoints of Ahaz and Tiglath-pileser III. From the perspective of Ahaz, the term **ישע** helps to elevate the Assyrian king by referring to him as the “savior.” The parallel to Judges is clear in that **ישע** focuses on intervention, and it gives credit to the one intervening. In both cases, the writers phrase the intervention from the outside party in terms of salvation. It should be noted, however, that from the perspective of the biblical writer, this text criticizes Ahaz for imploring the foreign king to be his savior rather than Yahweh.

The root **נצל** also appears in the Hebrew Bible to describe outside intervention in a military conflict. Judges 18 records a story of the Danites’ attempt to secure a portion of land for their tribe. The Danites had, until this point in the book, been without a permanent possession within Israel and aimed to attack the foreign city of Laish to find that possession. The narrator describes Laish as a remote city (Judg 18:7, 27–28). Specifically, the text states, **וְאֵין מְצִיל כִּי**, “There was no one to deliver, because it was far from Sidon and they had no interaction with Aram.” The point of these statements is to declare that Laish had no potential allies. As the Danites attack the people of Laish and burn their city (Judg 18:27), the narrator declares **אֵין מְצִיל**, “there was no deliverer.” The Danites could attack without

fear that an outside party, a **מַצִּיל**, would intervene and stall their efforts to secure the land. This shows that **נִצַּל** can function analogously to **יָשַׁע** to indicate outside military intervention.³⁵¹

Alternative Descriptions of Military Intervention

The request for outside intervention (**יָשַׁע**) that occurs in 2 Kgs 16 is commonplace, but such calls are not exclusively phrased in terms of salvation or deliverance. Some ancient Near Eastern texts focus on one party's action to pay a more powerful entity to come to their aid. In these cases, the term the writers use can help to glorify the king or entity making the request by framing the individual receiving help as the agent of the action. One common word these texts employ to highlight the request for intervention is **שָׂכַר**, “to hire.” Contrasting the employment of **שָׂכַר** on the one hand, and **יָשַׁע** and **נִצַּל** on the other, will demonstrate that the use of terms for salvation—**יָשַׁע** or **נִצַּל**—often provides the writer with an intentional way to glorify the savior or the one who brings the savior.

One such text that employs the verb **שָׂכַר**, “to hire” in the context of intervention is Isa 7:20, which touches on Ahaz and the predicament he finds himself in during the Syro-Ephraimite war mentioned above. Here we read, **יְגַלַּח אֶרְנֵי בְּתַעַר הַשְּׂכִירָה בְּעַבְרֵי נָהָר בְּמַלְךְ אַשּׁוּר**, “Yahweh will shave with a razor hired beyond the river, with the king of Assyria.” In this passage, it is unclear whom Yahweh plans to attack, which is the meaning of **גַּלַּח**, “to shave” in this context, but it is clear that an outside actor is intervening in foreign affairs because he is “hired.” The outside actor whom Yahweh hires (**שָׂכַר**) is the Assyrian king. As we will see below, this is a common means to express foreign intervention, but in this case the focus is on the one who hires the outside party rather than the one intervening. In Isa 7:20, Yahweh is the agent, which emphasizes his control over the outside actor. This serves to elevate Yahweh and simultaneously downplay the role of the Assyrian king, who is merely a pawn. It thus contrasts with 2 Kgs 16, which,

³⁵¹ See also Judg 11:26.

engaging the perspective of Ahaz, gives credit to the Assyrian ruler by having the Judahite king implore him to play the role of the savior. If we had a different genre, such as a royal inscription, and if Ahaz wanted to boast of his actions, he would have likely used a word similar to what Yahweh utters in Isa 7:20. Ahaz perhaps would have said, “I hired the king of Assyria to do my bidding.” By speaking thusly, the Judahite king would have taken the emphasis off the outside party and placed it on himself.

In the inscription of Kilamuwa (*KAI 24*) found at Zinjirli, this is precisely what happens. The king boasts of his efforts to gain economic success for his city by hiring a foreign power to intervene. In the first half of the Kilamuwa Inscription, the king criticizes his predecessors, saying that they did nothing for Yaudi, and from here goes on to boast of his accomplishments. Kilamuwa’s major accomplishment is in bringing economic success to his city. This success, however, comes only after his appeal to the Assyrians for military intervention against the Danunians, who were oppressing Kilamuwa and his people.

In the inscription, Kilamuwa first admits his subject status. The inscription says, “And the king of the Danunians was more powerful than I.”³⁵² After admitting his subject status, he proceeds to say, “so I *hired* against him the king of Assyria.” The word “hired” is from the same root (שָׂכַר) as in Isa 7:20.³⁵³ This phrasing does not serve to elevate the Assyrian king, as we read in 2 Kgs 16 when Ahaz says, “I am your son and your servant, come up and save me.” As Parker says, “The word ‘hired’ subsumes a range of activities: a request and gifts to the Assyrian king, the king’s agreement to intervene, and his subsequent invasion of the Danunians. But it gives the

³⁵² For an edition of the text see, Herbert Donner and Wolfgang Röllig, *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften. Band 1, 5th ed.* (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2002), 5. For a translation and discussion of the text see, Green, *I Undertook Great Works: The Ideology of Domestic Achievements in West Semitic Royal Inscriptions*, 138–42.

³⁵³ The word שָׂכַר is also used elsewhere to indicate the hiring of mercenaries by a king to fight alongside his army. See 2 Kgs 7:6 for an example.

Assyrian no credit for his actions. Kilamuwa himself is the sole subject: ‘I hired.’³⁵⁴ From here the text immediately moves to discuss the profound economic benefit that Kilamuwa’s actions bring for his people. The role that the Assyrians play, as outside actors, is left out. Using a form of שכר, “to hire” emphasizes the agent of the verb rather than the external actor who is “saving.”³⁵⁵ In the book of Judges, Yahweh is the one who saves, and he gets the credit rather than the people who cry for help or the judge. In contrast, in this inscription it is Kilamuwa who is the subject of the action that brings the intervention. This distinction suggests that the word ישע, “to save” focuses on military intervention and is often designed to highlight the savior.

There is one more ancient Near Eastern text that fits within this discussion—the Panamuwa Inscription (*KAI 215*)—and it appears to be neutral in its description of intervention. It is neutral because it avoids both ישע and שכר and does not emphasize either the savior or the local king’s actions in a case of military intervention, but instead employs alternative words. As Parker says of this inscription, “the historical background... is an internal revolt against the reigning dynasty and an oppressive rule by a rival protagonist. Panamuwa fled the country and won the support of the Assyrian king, who destroyed the incumbent and put Panamuwa on the throne as his vassal.”³⁵⁶ The image is not that of the subordinate fawning before the king who he hopes will help him, as in 2 Kgs 16, when Ahaz directly petitions Tiglath-pileser III. The Panamuwa text also does not take the perspective of a king boasting of his accomplishments as Kilamuwa does in his royal inscription. Instead, the perspective is that of Panamuwa’s son and successor (Bar-Rakkab) reflecting on his father and predecessor. In the description of the

³⁵⁴ Parker, “Appeals for Military Intervention: Stories from Zinjirli and the Bible,” 215.

³⁵⁵ Use of the two words can be similar when the name of the savior is omitted as in 2 Kgs 13. In this case it is Yahweh who brought the savior and since he is the agent, he receives the credit. The point of that text, however, was to take credit away from the Israelite king. If the Israelite king wanted to boast about how he saved Israel, while all knew it was the Assyrians, he perhaps would have emphasized his role in “hiring” the Assyrians.

³⁵⁶ Parker, “Appeals for Military Intervention: Stories from Zinjirli and the Bible,” 217.

intervention, the text comes across as if it is from a neutral outside party rather than a king boasting of his deeds, or a king pleading for aid from his potential savior.

The part of the text that focuses on the request for outside intervention appears in lines 6–8: “Then my father Panamuwa, son of Birsur, brought a present to the king of Assyria who made him king over his father’s house and killed the stone of destruction from his father’s house.”³⁵⁷ This compares to 2 Kgs 16 and the gift that Ahaz gives to Tiglath-pileser III. The difference is that this text does not refer to the Assyrian king as “savior,” or alternatively boast about the subordinate king hiring the foreign power as his mercenary. Based on the genre and historical context, Parker notes that this text might have been seen by Assyrian ambassadors, which explains why it does not give all the credit to the local king in its presentation of the foreign intervention.³⁵⁸ Panamuwa gives credit to the Assyrian king for placing both him and his father on the throne, while at the same time refraining from presenting himself as inferior by suggesting he needed a savior. The description of the request for intervention appears neutral in this section of the Panamuwa inscription.

This is not, however, the only comment on the matter. The text begins in a way quite reminiscent of what we read in Judges. It says in lines 1–2, “the gods of Sam’al delivered my father Panamuwa from the destruction that occurred in his father’s house, and Hadad stood by him.”³⁵⁹ This statement does not appear immediately before the section discussing the intervention of Assyria, and so does not take all credit away from Assyria. The verb which appears is not a form of *ישע*, “to save,” but the root *בלט*, “to deliver,” which has a similar

³⁵⁷ Ibid. The “stone of destruction” referred to in the text must be a reference to the usurper who took the throne in place of Panamuwa. This is the individual that the Assyrian king kills. See the discussion in Green, *I Undertook Great Works: The Ideology of Domestic Achievements in West Semitic Royal Inscriptions*, 195.

³⁵⁸ Parker, “Appeals for Military Intervention,” 217

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 218.

meaning. The text is ultimately trying to ascribe credit to Panamuwa's gods, akin to what we have in Judges, while still recognizing the role of the Assyrian king. It does so by separating the statements that comment on the intervention. The structure of this text further sheds light on the various ways in which writers in the ancient Near East spoke of intervention in a rebellion. With the avoidance of any term for deliverance in the immediate description of the intervention, it presents a more mediating position. This demonstrates that Judges and the Kilamuwa inscription are not neutral in their presentation and desire to give credit to either Yahweh in Judges or Kilamuwa in his inscription.³⁶⁰

Conclusion

The present chapter continues to highlight the variety of ways in which the Hebrew Bible and ancient societies describe rebellion. It brings the discussion back to the ambivalence of rebellion and the delicate way in which societies approach it depending on their position. The presentation of rebellion as liberation is quite common among subordinate groups who often manipulate language to justify rebellion. This is the case in the book of Judges as well as in the American Declaration of Independence discussed earlier in this chapter. Rebels will often justify their actions by describing it as a war for liberation to gain support from their society or from outside parties. The message is unequivocally positive when a writer presents the action as a war of freedom or salvation from an oppressive regime that, from the subordinate's perspective, never deserved to rule. In the modern world, if an outside actor believes a foreign conflict is a legitimate war of liberation due to an oppressive ruler, that actor is more likely to intervene. The opposite would be true if the outside actors view the aggression as an illegal attempt to overthrow a legitimate ruler. When Yahweh intervenes, he is doing so to eradicate the suffering of the Israelites at the hands of cruel oppressors.

³⁶⁰ The decision of the writer on which way to describe the intervention concerns the type of text and the purpose of the text. Royal inscriptions are designed to glorify the ruler, while display inscriptions and the texts in the Hebrew Bible have various purposes.

The book of Judges (and the Mesha Inscription) eschew the more common rebellion words by employing terms for salvation to describe rebellion. Furthermore, these texts not only avoid rebellion terms as they focus on Yahweh, but they also focus on the connection between rebellion and oppression.³⁶¹ The focus on the oppressive actions of the foreign entity is common among subordinate groups who plan to engage in rebellion. This provides them a mechanism through which they can justify their action. Two modern theorists have said,

“liberation, on the other hand, is a perennial dream and impulse situated universally, being embedded in the human psyche, and manifested in the drive for freedom from any or all structures of power and oppression... As such, liberation is a trans-historical reality.”³⁶²

Liberation often comes through rebellion and the Israelites felt that they had the right to break the shackles of those ruling them. Likewise, in the Declaration of Independence the American colonists focused on the oppression of the king and parliament. For them, the focus on injustice served to demonize their opponents and legitimize their actions. In these cases, the urge to rebel emerges out of oppression. The situation is more complicated in the book of Judges, which states that it is the people’s own sin and Yahweh’s actions which cause the oppression,³⁶³ but regardless of where the oppression comes from, the desire to eradicate it through a rebellion is still there.

While, as noted in the previous chapters, there are some neutral Hebrew terms for rebellion (e.g. מרד and קשר), there are some that can appear in negative contexts and therefore

³⁶¹ As discussed above, words for oppression are quite common in the book of Judges. A form of לָחַץ, “to oppress” occurs in Judg 2:18; 4:3; 6:9; 10:12. It is also part of the reason for the Exodus from Egypt, Exod 3:9; 1 Sam 10:18. The reason for the arrival of Gideon is because the Midianites are destroying the crops and land of the Israelites and they become impoverished Judg 6:6. Judg 10:8 uses both רָעַץ and רָצַץ meaning to oppress.

³⁶² Barry K. Gills and Kevin Gray, “Introduction: People Power in the Era of Global Crisis: Rebellion, Resistance, and Liberation,” in *People Power in an Era of Global Crisis: Rebellion, Resistance, and Liberation*, ed. Barry K. Gills and Kevin Gray (New York: Routledge, 2013), 4. See also the work of Ted Gurr, who is a proponent of the theory of relative deprivation as a major reason behind why groups engage in rebellion and other forms of violent collective action. Ted Gurr, *Why Men Rebel: Fortieth Anniversary Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2011). See also his other book which is a collection of his articles. Ted Robert Gurr, *Political Rebellion: Causes, Outcomes and Alternatives* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

³⁶³ Yahweh is not depicted as the cause of the oppression the Israelites suffer in Egypt prior to the Exodus. Nevertheless, the oppression is still the reason Yahweh intervenes and aids the rebellion.

have the potential to carry negative connotations (e.g. פִּשְׁעֵי). Presenting an episode of rebellion as a war for liberation with the aid of a deity guarantees a positive outlook of the story and leaves no doubt regarding its legitimacy. Furthermore, in the context of the Hebrew Bible the use of יָשַׁע helps to show the Israelites that their deity is in control despite their subordinate status. There is a hint of propaganda involved in a portrayal such as this. The writers hope that the people will respond to these documents in a certain way, and the focus on “deliverance” rather than “rebellion” is part of their rhetorical strategy.

As one reads this discussion, the potential exists to over-accentuate the obfuscation of rebellion terms. Avoidance of a rebellion term is not a full-throated condemnation of rebellion, but it does suggest that there could be some negativity associated with the idea. The negativity often associated with rebellion has the potential to arise from the fact that a sovereign state would never wish for rebellion against itself, and will therefore be careful in discussing rebellion. As a ruler or an elite of a small nation often oppressed by foreign powers, one also cannot condemn all forms of rebellion as there will be many times when one would be forced to rebel to gain freedom. This is precisely the situation Israel and Judah often found themselves in. This chapter, however, suggests that there were times that writers believed it was better to avoid terms for rebellion suggesting that some could perceive rebellion to be negative.

The last few paragraphs, which hint at the propagandistic and rhetorical purposes of Judges, beg the question of the audience and the date of these texts. If the texts are intended to be rhetorical, whom were the texts directed at? The problems with identifying and dating the various redactional layers present in the final form of Judges are well known. For the purposes of the present argument, it will suffice to begin by speaking more generally about the potential political context of the audience. All the possible dates assigned to the hypothesized layers in Judges stem from similar sociopolitical contexts. Regardless whether a text came from Noth's

Deuteronomist in the Exilic period,³⁶⁴ or Cross' Deuteronomic redaction in the 7th century,³⁶⁵ or DtrN or DtrP following Smend³⁶⁶ and his academic disciples, Dietrich³⁶⁷ and Veijola,³⁶⁸ the writers or editors are coming from the perspective of a nation grappling with subjection to an empire. They are either living under Assyrian rule in the second half of the 8th century and for most of the 7th century, Babylonian rule in the exilic period, or Persian rule if in the post-exilic period. Römer, in his work on the Deuteronomistic history, also identified three successive periods for the development of this document, which includes the book of Judges. The three periods correspond to the three imperial contexts mentioned above.³⁶⁹ As those in Judah debated whether to rebel or submit to these foreign rulers, these rebellion stories had a message. First, rebellion is an acceptable option if the people are following Yahweh, and second, any freedom or deliverance they might experience will not come from their king rising in armed rebellion, but it will come through the intervention of their deity.

Richter's argument about the existence of an earlier "book of saviors" does not alter the

³⁶⁴ Martin Noth, *Schriften der Königsberger Gelehrten-Gesellschaft*, Geistes-wissenschaftliche Klasse 18 (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1943), 43–266. For the English translation see Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, 2nd ed., JSOTSup 15 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991).

³⁶⁵ F. M. Cross, "The Structure of the Deuteronomic History," in *Perspectives in Jewish Learning*, ACJS 3 (Chicago: College of Jewish Studies, 1968), 9–24. This article also appears in a revised form in F. M. Cross, "The Themes of the Book of Kings and the Structure of the Deuteronomistic History," in *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 274–89. See also Richard D. Nelson, *The Double Redaction of the Deuteronomistic History*, JSOTSup 18 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981).

³⁶⁶ Rudolf Smend, "Das Gesetz und die Völker: Ein Beitrag zur deuteronomistischen Redaktionsgeschichte," in *Probleme biblischer Theologie: Gerhard von Rad zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. H. W. Wolff (Munich: Kaiser, 1971), 494–509.

³⁶⁷ Walter Dietrich, *Prophetie und Geschichte: Eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerk*, FRLANT 108 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977); Walter Dietrich, "Martin Noth and the Future of the Deuteronomistic History," in *The History of Israel's Traditions: The Heritage of Martin Noth*, JSOTSup 182 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 153–75.

³⁶⁸ Timo Veijola, *Das Königtum in der Beurteilung der deuteronomistischen Historiographie: Eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedakatemia, 1977).

³⁶⁹ Thomas C. Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History: A Sociological, Historical and Literary Introduction* (New York: T & T Clark, 2005). See chapter four for a discussion of deuteronomistic editing in the Assyrian Period, chapter five for activity in the Neo-Babylonian period, and chapter six for editing in the Persian period.

present argument.³⁷⁰ Richter, working from Noth's hypothesis, argued convincingly that the core of Judg 3–9 was earlier than the Deuteronomistic History. He suggests a date in the second half of the ninth century. The stories that now make up this section of Judges existed independently before (Deuteronomistic) editors collected them and placed them into their current framework.³⁷¹ It is likely that as these stories were collected and redacted, the editors took the emphasis off the human "saviors" and added the theological elements by focusing the stories on Yahweh and his role in freeing the Israelites from oppression. As a result, the points made above are focused on the present form of the book, and specifically the Deuteronomistic redaction(s), rather than the individual stories that made up Richter's book of saviors.³⁷² The words for salvation could have originally been applied to the individual military heroes and, in that case, the focus might have originally been on them and the experience of oppression. This, however, is no longer the case.

Both Knauf and Schmid suggest that the most likely date for when a redactor collected these stories, and therefore added the theological elements, was in the Assyrian period.³⁷³ The analysis above does not contradict this suggestion and perhaps supports it. The presentation of these stories in this way, and a discussion of saviors where the focus is on Yahweh, fits best at a time when Israel and Judah lived under the domination of an empire and were grappling with the

³⁷⁰ Walter Richter, *Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zum Richterbuch*, 2nd ed. (Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1966).

³⁷¹ Ibid. 336–343. Richter argued that the theological elements were added later. He saw this as taking place throughout the course of three redactions. These redactions increasingly took the focus off of the individual saviors and focused on the sin of the people and the role of Yahweh in delivering the people.

³⁷² That the theological focus on Yahweh as the one receiving credit for these rebellions is Deuteronomistic, is confirmed if we look at Mark Smith's comments on the Shamgar episode in Judg 3:31. In this story, Shamgar is said to have "delivered" Israel and the focus is not directly on Yahweh. He is not mentioned. Smith first notes that this is an addition and second, that it is post-Deuteronomistic. This explains the reason why there is a term for salvation that does not focus on Yahweh. Smith, "'Midrash' in the Book of Judges: The Cases of Judges 3:31 and 6:7–10," 264.

³⁷³ Ernst A. Knauf, "History in Judges," in *Israel in Transition 2: From Late Bronze II to Iron IIA (C. 1250–850 BCE)*, *The Texts* (New York: T & T Clark, 2010) 140–49; Konrad Schmid, *The Old Testament: A Literary History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 79. Richter (see footnote 370 and 371 above) saw this as taking place earlier, at some time in the second half of the ninth century, while Finkelstein saw it as taking place in the first half of the eighth century. Israel Finkelstein, "Major Saviors, Minor Judges: The Historical Background of the Northern Accounts in the Book of Judges," *JSOT* 41 (2017): 431–49.

best way to deal with this. The Hebrew Bible suggests that Israel and Judah rebelled, or considered rebelling, more often in the Assyrian period than during the Persian period.³⁷⁴ While multiple Judahite kings also rebelled against the Babylonians, various texts within the Hebrew Bible speak negatively of these rebellions (e.g. Ezek 17; Jer 27–28; 2 Chron 36:13). The presentation of rebellion as salvation clashes with these texts. The opposite is true regarding Hezekiah’s rebellion against the Assyrians, which is evaluated positively by the Deuteronomistic writer of 2 Kgs 18:7.³⁷⁵ Moreover, while this must remain speculation, it is also likely that individuals within Judah would have had a more positive view of rebellion as the Assyrians began to lose power in the second half of the 7th century due to the higher probability of success. This would have been the case under Josiah.³⁷⁶ Thus, while the view of rebellion as salvation could potentially fit in any of these imperial contexts, it fits best in the Assyrian period.

In summary, this chapter has demonstrated that the Hebrew Bible often employs words for deliverance or salvation in the context of rebellion. The language describing the political situations in the book of Judges and in parts of Samuel demonstrates that these texts are dealing with episodes of subjugation followed by rebellion. The words *ישע* and *נצל* are employed because the writers focus not on rebellion as disobedience, but on rebellion as liberation. In a few cases, this salvation comes through the judges, but in almost all cases, it comes through the intervention of Yahweh. The texts employ *ישע* and *נצל* primarily to acclaim Yahweh.

³⁷⁴ Israel engaged in rebellion in the mid 730’s during the Syro-Ephraimite war, and again during the reign of Shalmaneser III, and after his death as Sargon II takes over (cf. 2 Kgs 17). Judah also contemplated revolt in 714 as they sought to join Yamani in his revolt against the Assyrians. Hezekiah of course rebels against Assyria in 701, as 2 Kgs 18–20 discuss. For more on rebellion of Yamani and Judah’s role in this see, Aster, *Reflections of Empire in Isaiah 1–39: Responses to Assyrian Ideology*, 160. Nehemiah 2:19 records some foreign groups as suggesting the Judahites were planning to rebel during Persian rule; there is, however, little evidence to suggest this was the case.

³⁷⁵ See Isa 31:5, which suggests that Yahweh will defend and deliver (*נצל*) Jerusalem.

³⁷⁶ Cross and Freedman discuss how Josiah gained power and rebelled as Assyrian power faded. Cross and Freedman, *Josiah’s Revolt against Assyria*, 56–58. Further, as noted above, Cross and others see the reign of Josiah as a time during which the Deuteronomistic writers were active. Cross convincingly argued that the Deuteronomistic writings provided support for Josiah’s reform, which supports the position presented here. Cross, “The Themes of the Book of Kings and the Structure of the Deuteronomistic History,” 274–89. Also see footnote 365 above.

Table 6. נצלה וישע – Rebellion as Salvation

Text and Word	Rebel and Ruler	Political Situation	Note of servitude	Type of Rebellion	Cause of the Rebellion	Result of the Rebellion
Exod 3:8 לְהַצִּילָךְ Exod 6:6 וְהַצִּילְתִּי (cf. Exod 5:23; 18:4, 8, 9, 10), Exod 14:30 בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא בָּרַחְתָּ מִיָּדָי	Israel (Moses) vs. Pharaoh and the Egyptians	A nation forcing others into slavery	וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ מִצְרַיִם אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (Exod 1:13) אֲשֶׁר מִצְרַיִם מַעֲבָדִים אֹתָם (Exod 1:14)	Slave rebellion	The Egyptians are oppressing the Israelites (Exod 1:11–14; 3:9).	Yahweh liberates the Israelites from oppression
Judg 2:16 וְהוֹשִׁיעֵנִי Judg 2:18 הוֹשִׁיעָם	Israel vs. plunderers, summary of the book	Israel is dominated by foreign rulers, the rulers are not specified in this summary text	וַיִּתְּנֵם בְּיַד־שָׂטָיִם (Judg 2:14)	Regional secession	Israel is experiencing misfortune and great distress (Judg 2:15–16), they are being persecuted and oppressed (Judg 2:18) Yahweh pities them	Yahweh raises Judges who are successful in saving them from plunderers or enemies
Judg 3:9 וַיִּזְעַקוּ מִדֹּשֶׁת	Israel vs. Chushan-rishathaim of Aram-naharaim	Israel becomes subject to the king of Aram, Regional situation	וַיִּמְכְּרוּם בְּיַד (Judg 3:8) וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ אֹתָהּ (Judg 3:8)	Regional secession	The Israelites cry out to Yahweh because they are forced to serve the foreign king for eight years	Yahweh raises a savior who is successful in throwing off foreign rule
Judg 3:15 מִדֹּשֶׁת	Israel (Ehud) vs. Eglon of Moab	Israel is subject to the king of Moab, regional situation	וַיִּתְּנֵם יְהוָה אֶת־עֲגֹלֹן עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל (Judg 3:12) וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֹתָהּ (Judg 3:14)	Regional secession	Israel serves Moab for eighteen years and eventually cries out due to their servitude	Yahweh raises a savior and delivers the enemies to Israel

Table 6 (Continued).

Judg 4 - No word for salvation, but a reversal of the subordination language in Judg 4:14 נָתַן יְהוָה אֶת־ סִסְרָא בְיַד־ (cf. Judg 4:23) 1 Sam 12:11 refers to Barak's activity with נצח.	Israel vs. Yabin, Sisera, Canaanites	Israel is oppressed by the Canaanite king (Judg 4:3).	וַיִּמְסְרֵם יְהוָה בְּיַד־זִמְרֹן מֶלֶךְ־כְּנָעַן (Judg 4:2)	Regional secession	Yabin had oppressed the Israelites for twenty years (Judg 4:3).	Jael kills the foreign ruler; Deborah and Barak win a military victory; Yahweh fights for Israel in Judges 5.
Judg 6:9 (cf. 8:34) וַאֲפִלֵּי	Israel vs. Egypt and other oppressors	The Israelites are enslaved or oppressed by a foreign power.	This is a recollection of a previous event, so the note of subordination is not stated.	Slave rebellion	Oppression (Judg 6:9)	Yahweh is successful in delivering the Israelites out of Egypt.
Judg 6:14 וְהוֹשִׁיעַתָּה Judg 6:15; 7:7 אוֹשִׁיעַ Judg 6:36 מוֹשִׁיעַ Judg 9:17 וַיִּצַּל	Israel (Gideon) vs. Midian	Israel is oppressed by Midian, a regional neighbor.	וַיִּמְסְרֵם יְהוָה בְּיַד־מִדְיָן (Judg 6:1) וַתָּעַז יִרְמֵיָן עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל (Judg 6:2) וַיִּתְּנֵנִי בְּכַף־מִדְיָן (Judg 6:13)	Regional secession	Israel becomes extremely impoverished due to Midian (Judg 6:6); The Midianites destroy Israel's crops and livestock (Judg 6:4).	Yahweh sends Gideon, who is successful in "saving" Israel, Judg 6:14; 8:22.
Judg 10:1 לְהוֹשִׁיעַ	Israel (Tola) vs. unknown	Not stated	Not stated	Not clear	Not stated	The judge saves Israel

Table 6 (Continued).

<p>Judg 10:12-13 וְאִשְׁרָעָה לְהוֹשִׁיעַ Judg 10:15 הַצִּילָנוּ A word for salvation does not appear when Jephthah defeats the Ammonites</p>	<p>Israel (Jephthah) vs. Philistines and Ammonites</p>	<p>The Philistines and Ammonites are ruling Israel, regional situation</p>	<p>וַיִּמְכְרֵם בְּיַד פְּלִשְׁתִּים וּבְיַד בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן (Judg 10:7)</p>	<p>Regional secession</p>	<p>The foreigners crush and oppress the Israelites for eighteen years (Judg. 10:8); foreigners fight Israel and they are in great distress (Judg 10:9)</p>	<p>When Yahweh can no longer bear to watch Israel suffer, Jephthah appears on the scene (Judg 10:16); he succeeds.</p>
<p>Judg 13:5 לְהוֹשִׁיעַ</p>	<p>Israel (Samson) vs. Philistines</p>	<p>The Philistines are ruling over Israel, regional situation</p>	<p>וַיִּתְּנֵם יְהוָה בְּיַד פְּלִשְׁתִּים אֲרָבָעִים שָׁנָה (Judg 13:1) וּבָעֵת הַהִיא מוֹשְׁלִים פְּלִשְׁתִּים בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל (Judg 14:4)</p>	<p>Regional secession, never comes to fruition,</p>	<p>Samson burns fields because the Philistines took his wife (Judg 15:1-5); Samson takes revenge on the Philistines for plucking out his eyes (Judg 16:28).</p>	<p>The spirit of Yahweh empowers Samson to take revenge on the Philistines, but he only begins to “save” Israel. Judg (13:5)</p>
<p>1 Sam 7:3 וַיִּצְלַח (1 Sam 12:10; 14:48) 1 Sam 9:16 וְהוֹשִׁיעַ (cf. 1 Sam 4:3; 7:8; 10:27; 14:6, 23, 39)</p>	<p>Israel (Samuel, Saul) vs. Philistines</p>	<p>Philistines are ruling over Israel, regional neighbors</p>	<p>עָבְדוּ לָבָם (1 Sam 4:9)</p>	<p>Regional secession</p>	<p>Israel cries out to Yahweh because they are under the hand of the Philistines.</p>	<p>Yahweh saves Israel.</p>

CHAPTER 5

REBELLION AND TERMS FOR SIN

There are a handful of additional words that are relevant to the topic of political rebellion in the Hebrew Bible, and to these we will now turn. As a threshold matter, it is important to recognize that these words are connected to words for “sin/offense.” The Hebrew Bible has, as Cover says, over fifty words related to sin³⁷⁷ and this chapter will focus on those that describe rebellion. The most prominent is **חטא**, “to miss/to sin.”³⁷⁸ Because words for sin appear in the context of political rebellion, some scholars suggest that the writers of the Hebrew Bible equate rebellion and sin.³⁷⁹ The following discussion of these words and their meaning in a rebellion context highlights two primary reasons why this is not the case. The focus of the chapter is on the initial point.

First, a connection between rebellion and sin is organic and inevitable because in every episode of rebellion one party—i.e., the ruling party—always views rebellion as a “crime.” As a result of their success and position as potentate, a dominant party would naturally believe a subordinate party’s political rebellion to be illegitimate and to constitute a crime against their deity. In a handful of episodes, the narrator’s choice to engage the view of the dominant party led to the use of words for “sin/offense” to describe select rebellions. In these episodes, the description of rebellion serves a rhetorical purpose within the narrative (i.e. to demonstrate what the ruling party thought), and we do not have to infer from this that rebellion is, for the biblical writers, categorically wrong. A character in a story can present a position on a topic without this

³⁷⁷ Robin Cover, “Sin, Sinners (Old Testament),” *ABD* 6:31.

³⁷⁸ This includes the words **מרד** and **פשע** mentioned above, which are also used for sin in some contexts. These words have alternate meanings when they appear to describe rebellion, which is not the case with the words in this chapter. This is the reason to place the analysis of **מרד** and **פשע** in a separate chapter.

³⁷⁹ Carroll, “Rebellion and Dissent in Ancient Israelite Society,” 181. See below for some of Carroll’s specific comments.

position being true for the writer.

Second, some words that often describe sinful behavior, such as *מרה*, *סדר*, and *מעל*, are occasionally translated with a form of “to rebel,” but are, in fact, overwhelmingly focused on non-political rebellious action or action taken against Yahweh. This latter group, therefore, adds little and potentially misleading information to the understanding of the ancient Israelites’ view of political rebellions against human authorities. This is the case despite scholarly suggestions to the contrary, as we will see.

The core of this chapter focuses on the examples of *חטא*, “to sin/commit an offense” in a rebellion context.³⁸⁰ The biblical writers employ this word for sin in the context of political rebellions in which the rebel addresses a sovereign or, in one case, when Yahweh/Moses describe the individuals disobeying them. In these situations, the word *חטא* retains its meaning associated with errant behavior and the writer employs it to introduce the issue of illegitimacy in the rebellion. This does not, however, demand that rebellion is always illegitimate from the perspective of the biblical writer, even if this is sometimes the case. That is a separate question. The writer merely employs *חטא* instead of a rebellion term to describe how rebels in the Bible and the wider ancient Near East attempt to curry favor from a sovereign after an unsuccessful rebellion. The failed rebels confess or admit to wrongdoing only after they realize they are going to be killed or punished because of their actions. Consequently, the examples discussed below speak to natural and expected human behavior. These texts never categorically condemn all rebels or rebellion in general.

“To sin/commit an offense” (*חטא*) is the most important word in this chapter, not because

³⁸⁰ It is admittedly difficult to determine if *חטא*, “to sin/commit an offense” in these limited examples takes on a new meaning associated with political rebellion, or if it retains its basic meaning associated with offense. The latter situation, however, prevails. This is also what occurs in 1 Sam 24:12 when David cuts off Saul’s garment and declares that there is no *פושע* in his hand. Here it is the noun *פושע* appearing in the context of rebellion, but the word retains the basic meaning of an offense committed against another party. This chapter discusses other instances where the same situation appears with additional words indicating sin or wrongdoing. The appearance of a word often connected to sin does not always entail that the action is criminal.

it appears often in the Hebrew Bible in the context of political rebellion, but because it is the only word in this section to appear on multiple occasions in the context of political rebellion. It is further a cognate with Akkadian *ḥaṭû*, a word that appears prominently in the Assyrian royal inscriptions to describe rebels. This connection provides an important point of comparison between the dominant ways the two cultures present rebellion, which ultimately helps demonstrate how the Hebrew Bible uses אָזַח as a rebellion term. Prior to examining the few occasions where אָזַח appears in the Hebrew Bible in the context of rebellion, as well as its use in the Assyrian royal inscriptions, a brief discussion of the basic meaning of אָזַח will help set the foundation for further reflection.

The Original and Dominant Meaning of אָזַח

Some scholars who have analyzed אָזַח have suggested that the original meaning of the word is “to miss/fall short.”³⁸¹ They derive this meaning from texts such as Judg 20:16, which suggests that left-handed stone slingers could throw their stones at a hair and not miss (אָזַח). A similar meaning is evident in Prov 19:2, which describes the feet of a hasty person “missing” the road, and to a lesser extent in Job 5:24, which describes a situation when one has nothing “missing” among their property.³⁸² The meaning of the first two examples, Judg 20:16 and Prov 19:2, is clear in describing instances that suggest there is a target and that when one misses the target this action is expressed by the word אָזַח. The example of Job 5:24 (cf. Isa 65:20) describes a sub-category of missing, a falling short.³⁸³ From such texts, scholars theorize that this must be the

³⁸¹ Cover, “Sin, Sinners,” 32; R. Knierim, *Die Hauptbegriffe für Sünde im Alten Testament* (Gütersloher: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1965. Knierim “אָזַח,” *TLOT I:406*.

³⁸² Cover, “Sin, Sinners,” 32.

³⁸³ Lam sees “to fail to reach” as a sub category of missing and as the “etymological origin of the ‘sin’ usage.” Joseph Lam, *Patterns of Sin in the Hebrew Bible: Metaphor, Culture, and the Making of a Religious Concept* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 2–3. See especially note 12.

original meaning of the word. It is easy to see how the usage could be extended from a meaning related to a failure to hit the mark to a meaning related to errant behavior. But it is harder to see the word moving in the opposite direction, from a metaphorical “missing” related to behavior to the more literal missing of a concrete target.³⁸⁴ More pertinent to the present discussion than the basic meaning of the word, however, is that **חטא** is more prevalently used to describe wrongdoing or, as is often the translation, “to sin.”³⁸⁵

It is noteworthy that the meaning related to errant behavior is unequivocally the predominant usage of **חטא**.³⁸⁶ When biblical authors use **חטא**, they most often do not describe a missed target but simply an occasion in which one commits an offense.³⁸⁷ The described behavior has metaphorically missed the mark and offended another party. It is in this usage that the well-known translation “sin” appears. By sin we are talking about an act considered to have transgressed the law of the divine authority. These contexts deal with cultic, legal, and political situations. The cultic, and more broadly, the religious contexts, however, prevail.³⁸⁸ Religious contexts are those in which an individual fails to heed cultic obligations, or those that describe

³⁸⁴ Based on the predominant usage of **חטא** to describe errant behavior, some have suggested the original meaning connects to errant behavior rather than the missing of a target. Koch, **חטא**, *TDOT* 4:311. This position is, however, hard to sustain.

³⁸⁵ While the rendering of this word with the English word “to sin” predominates among the translations, some scholars have recently questioned the validity of this translation due at least in part to the general meaning the term “sin” has acquired. Nobuyoshi Kiuchi says, “the English equivalents have become too vague ... Moreover, the use of the term ‘sin’ seems to have been used mostly in reference to a ‘violation of the commandment,’ that is, conduct of a person. It is dubious if this conduct oriented understanding of “sin” does justice to the Biblical data on the use of *hātā*’.” Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, *A Study of Hata and Hatta 't in Leviticus 4–5*” (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 2. For a general discussion of sin, see Mark J. Boda, *A Severe Mercy: Sin and its Remedy in the Old Testament* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009).

³⁸⁶ See Knierim for the breakdown of the occurrences. Knierim, “**חטא** *ḥṭ*’ to miss,” *TLOT* I: 406–08.

³⁸⁷ Lam says, “the verb *hātā*’ has simply been lexicalized with the meaning of “to commit an offense,” and its usage in the Hebrew Bible reflects this.” Lam, *Patterns of Sin in the Hebrew Bible: Metaphor, Culture, and the Making of a Religious Concept*, 6.

³⁸⁸ The root appears repeatedly in Leviticus, Numbers, and in prophetic texts, specifically Ezekiel. This distribution demonstrates an affinity for priestly concerns as a significant part of the religious meaning. The root appears 116 times in Leviticus, 67 times in Numbers and 41 times in Ezekiel. It also appears often in the Psalms in the context of individual or corporate confession and laments over sin or actions described with **חטא**.

any behavior that affronts a deity. For the biblical writers this is always action taken against Yahweh.³⁸⁹ (These are the contexts where the translation of “sin” is most appropriate due to the theological baggage it now carries).³⁹⁰ There is a range of behavior that is included in these offenses against Yahweh that are encapsulated by **חַטָּאת**, for example idolatry (e.g., Exod 32:30–34; Jer 14:7; 16:10), or other cultic actions occurring at a high place (e.g., Hos 10:8), or willful disobedience to Yahweh’s commands (e.g., Jer 2:35; 40:3). The word **חַטָּאת** also indicates that the person who committed the act was guilty and deserving of punishment. The word is thus connected not only to the act, but also to the consequences.³⁹¹ The individual responsible for the act must metaphorically bear punishment unless it is avoided by performing a cultic action, often a sacrifice, or by the offended party forgiving the offense (e.g., Gen 50:17). The latter idea is present in Exod 32:30 which says, “On the next day, Moses said to the people, you have committed a great sin (**חַטָּאת**), so now I will go up to Yahweh; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin (**חַטָּאת**).” In this case, Moses will either offer a sacrifice on behalf of the people or convince Yahweh to forgive them, or they will be punished for their sinful acts.

חַטָּאת in the Context of Political Rebellion

Similar to the contexts that use **חַטָּאת** to describe a disobedient act committed against Yahweh, the word also appears to indicate conduct committed against an earthly figure (e.g. Gen 43:9; Judg

³⁸⁹ For many of these cultic violations, see Lev 4–5, and see Exod 10:17; 32:30-34; Deut 9:16–18; 1 Sam 14:33; 15:23–24; Ps 32; 51; Mic 3:8; Jer 14:7 for occasions when this word is used to describe an act or sin committed against Yahweh. It is important to note that these distinctions are often not clear in the ancient world. Political actions had religious implications. To disobey a king often entailed disobedience against a deity. What we will see, however, is that the writers often intentionally leave this out.

³⁹⁰ One could construct a scheme of development in three stages: (i) to miss a physical target, (ii) to commit an offense, (iii) to sin. In this schema, the term sin always has religious implications.

³⁹¹ Koch, “חַטָּאת,” *TDOT* 4:312. See also the discussion in Lam, *Patterns of Sin in the Hebrew Bible: Metaphor, Culture, and the Making of a Religious Concept*, 16-86.

11:27).³⁹² Some of these cases involve action against an earthly ruler. In these cases, it is not a cultic act; it is a rebellion.³⁹³ Because **נשׂה** overwhelmingly appears to describe errant behavior, when rebellion narratives employ this word, the temptation exists for scholars to assume that the rebellion is therefore illegitimate from the writer’s perspective. It is imperative to note, however, that the biblical writers do not always make this assumption. It is the subordinate’s engagement of the ruling or offended party in the story that provides the *raison d’être* for the employment of the term **נשׂה** in the narrative. Thus, the Hebrew Bible itself does not, merely in employing **נשׂה**, pass a moral judgment on rebellion as a general category. Subsequently, scholars need to be very careful in equating rebellion and “sin” on the basis that the text uses the word **נשׂה**.³⁹⁴

There are eight episodes containing eleven occurrences in which the Hebrew Bible employs **נשׂה** in the context of political rebellion or similar forms of collective action (Gen 40:1–2; 41:9; Num 12:11; 14:39; 16:22, 26; 17:3; 21:7; 1 Sam 24:12; 1 Kgs 1:21; 2 Kgs 18:14).³⁹⁵ Five of these episodes discuss full-scale political rebellions, and three involve rebellious conduct

³⁹² Knierim states, “The use of the word in the so-called profane-legal sphere is also significant, e.g., in Hezekiah’s confession of rebellion (2 Kgs 18:14)... Beside the known impossibility of strictly distinguishing between the profane and the sacral realms, these usages of the term indicate that the discussion of “sin” applies to all areas of life and was in no way limited only to the religious sector.” Knierim, “**נשׂה** *ht’* to miss,” *TLOT*, I: 409. We should not assume that if the word **נשׂה** appears that the writer wanted to suggest the action entailed an action against the deity.

³⁹³ In the following discussion of these circumstances it will prove better to avoid the translation of “to sin” for actions directed against an earthly king. For many people, the idea of “sin” entails action primarily against the deity. While some of these rebellions against earthly kings explicitly involve the deity, some of them do not and the connection is at most implicit. Using the word “sin” might lead some to think the action always entails an offense against Yahweh. The writers, at times, intentionally avoid connecting these rebellions to action against the deity to avoid condemning the king. In the discussion that follows, we will use the word offense when the action is directed at the earthly king. Context will determine whether or not the action also entails a sin in the sense of action against Yahweh.

³⁹⁴ As the discussion below will indicate, this is something that scholars have done. See specifically the discussion of Hezekiah’s rebellion below.

³⁹⁵ The Joseph story employs **נשׂה** twice to discuss the rebellion in that story, while Num 16-17 employs **נשׂה** three times in the discussion of the protest outlined there.

that does not quite rise to that level.³⁹⁶ In these accounts, the subordinates either threaten the ruler, or the ruler perceives a threat from them. Significantly, all the episodes record the speech of a subordinate as he or she engages the sovereign. When the subordinates employ אָחַז, they do so in an admission to the ruler that their previous actions amount to a criminal rebellion (likely in efforts to mitigate punishment). Overall, in a rebellion context אָחַז appears in connection with attempted coups as well as in the context of colonial secessions. Following a discussion of these episodes, this chapter draws out the implications of this analysis for understanding attitudes toward rebellion among the writers of the Hebrew Bible. The following discussion proceeds in the canonical order of the biblical books, beginning with the example in Genesis.³⁹⁷

אָחַז in Genesis 40–41

The first example(s) occurs in Gen 40–41. While the plotline of rebellion in this text is subordinate to the main point of the larger Joseph story,³⁹⁸ it is nevertheless an illuminating case regarding the use of אָחַז in the context of rebellion. In Gen 41:9 the Pharaoh’s cupbearer, who appears to be an advisor within the Pharaoh’s court, recalls the events that led to his imprisonment. As he speaks to the Pharaoh, he states, אֶת־הַתְּשׁוּבָה אֲנִי מְזַכֵּר הַיּוֹם, “I recall my offenses today.” Here, the cupbearer refers to the proceedings narrated in Gen 40:1–2 stating that he and the baker committed an “offense” against the Pharaoh. Genesis 40:1 reads, תְּשׁוּבָה מִשְׁקָה, מִלְּךְ מִצְרָיִם וְהַאֲפָה לְאֲדֹנָיהֶם לְמֶלֶךְ מִצְרָיִם, “The cupbearer of the king of Egypt and the baker committed an offense against their Lord, the king of Egypt.” In both cases, the narrator employs

³⁹⁶ The distinction between a rebellion and rebellious action will be further explored in the discussion below and in chapter six on protesting. Many of the events in Numbers do not rise to the level of rebellion but the action is comparable in the sense that it is a form of collective action that provides a challenge to the leader. These stories thus fit within this discussion.

³⁹⁷ This is a reference to the order of the books in the Hebrew Bible, the MT, rather than the LXX and many modern English versions, which follow the Greek ordering of books.

³⁹⁸ The focus of the Joseph story is on explaining how the Israelites end up in Egypt and to connect the patriarchal stories with the exodus event.

a form of אָפֶּשֶׁת, “to commit an offense” to describe the action taken against the Pharaoh. The evidence for determining exactly what act the narrator has in mind is admittedly scant, but there is enough to suggest that the text presents these two officials as involved in a failed palace coup against the Pharaoh.³⁹⁹

The first piece of evidence to suggest a coup is the Pharaoh’s response to the officials’ actions: immediate imprisonment (Gen 40:1–3). The two officials suffered in jail until the Pharaoh presumably had enough time to assess their respective culpabilities. After this period of investigation, the Pharaoh restored the chief cupbearer to his previous position but had the baker executed for his crimes. The severity of the baker’s punishment—capital punishment—suggests that the crime he committed was serious, and so it is plausible the narrator intended the reader to think that these two officials were involved in a rebellion, treason, or more specifically a palace coup.⁴⁰⁰ Because treason disrupted the proper order of the world, or *ma’at* in ancient Egypt it was punished by death.⁴⁰¹ Death was also the fate of many who conspired against the throne elsewhere in the ancient Near East. The Hebrew Bible itself records multiple cases of rebels’ being killed for their actions (e.g. Saul attempts to kill David for what he perceives to be a coup, David’s entourage kills Absalom, and Solomon has Adonijah killed).⁴⁰² Consequently, the most likely explanation is that the Pharaoh executed his official for his involvement in a palace coup.

The second piece of evidence, admittedly circumstantial, to suggest that this was an

³⁹⁹ That the narrator could use an episode like this to advance the narrative without explanation suggests these types of events were common and that it would have evoked an image or event in the reader’s mind. For this reason, it is appropriate to speculate on what exactly the writer had in mind in recounting the episode of the cupbearer and baker’s “offense.”

⁴⁰⁰ This does not prove that this was a palace coup. Death was also the punishment for other crimes within ancient Egypt although not many. Some of the crimes punishable by death were royal grave robbing and desertion. See Renate Müller-Wollermann, “Crime and Punishment in Pharaonic Egypt,” *NEA* 78 (2015): 228–35.

⁴⁰¹ David Lorton, “The Treatment of Criminals in Ancient Egypt,” *JESHO* 20 (1977): 15–18.

⁴⁰² For these texts see 1 Sam 19; 2 Sam 18; 1 Kgs 2. See also the paragraph below for a discussion of a palace coup at the court in Egypt.

attempted conspiracy against the Pharaoh concerns the titles of the officials. The title of cupbearer, or chief cupbearer in some cases (cf. Gen 40:2), suggests that the individuals involved in this plot were high-ranking officials with power and access to the royal court. Cupbearer is a well-known title for officials in biblical and other ancient Near Eastern texts. For example, the *Rab-šāqê* is mentioned as one of Sennacherib's ranking officials in 2 Kgs 18–20, and Nehemiah is also labeled a cupbearer in Neh 1:11. Cupbearers had a certain amount of power and in many cases a significant amount of land and influence, as many Assyrian texts demonstrate.⁴⁰³

These officials are also mentioned in Egyptian texts and, significantly, in one discussion of a plot against the Pharaoh. *The Judicial Papyrus of Turin* outlines a plot against Ramses III by a cupbearer and other Egyptian officials. This document lists the parties involved, along with the punishments they received, which included death in many cases. In this conspiracy against Ramses III, known as the Harem Conspiracy, these officials—including a cupbearer—are initially captured and imprisoned until they are brought in for sentencing. When they are sentenced, the Pharaoh has the guilty killed or punished in other ways as outlined in this papyrus.⁴⁰⁴ The broad parallel with the episode in Gen 40–41 involving a cupbearer going to prison along with the later execution of the guilty parties demonstrates this would have been a familiar scenario. It was not uncommon for royal officials to plot against the king, and for the king, upon discovery of the matter, to put the responsible individuals in jail and later carry out

⁴⁰³ For more on the cupbearer as a high-ranking official within ancient Near Eastern society see Gojko Barjamovic, "Pride, Pomp and Circumstance: Palace, Court and Household in Assyria 879–612 BCE," in *Royal Courts in Dynastic States and Empires: A Global Perspective*, ed. Jeroen Duindam, Tülay Artan and Metin Kunt (Boston: Brill, 2011), 42.; A. Kirk Grayson, "Assyrian Officials and Power in the Ninth and Eighth Centuries," *SAAB* 7 (1993): 19–52; Raija Mattila, *The King's Magnates: A Study of the Highest Officials of the Neo-Assyrian Empire*, SAAS XI (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2000). See especially the section beginning on page 45. It is worth noting that not all cupbearers actually bore cups in their service. While this may have been the case originally, it became, it appears, a conventional title that did not always preserve, or at least emphasize, the original function.

⁴⁰⁴ For more on the Harem Conspiracy see Pascal Vernus, *Affairs and Scandals in Ancient Egypt*, trans. David Lorton (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 108–20. Vernus notes that the Pharaoh had a cupbearer killed for his role in this conspiracy. For a book dedicated to this event see, Susan Redford, *The Harem Conspiracy: The Murder of Ramesses III* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002).

their execution. This occurs in *The Judicial Papyrus of Turin* and often in the Hebrew Bible: see the examples of David, Absalom, and Adonijah noted above and also in chapter two on קִשָּׁר.⁴⁰⁵

Finally, as some scholars have indicated, the Joseph story has many connections to the book of Esther. The storyline of Esther parallels that of the Joseph story, and the narration of the assassination attempt on the king in Esth 2 connects to the plot against the Pharaoh in the Joseph story. Both episodes serve to elevate the hero of the story. The king honors Mordecai because he uncovers the assassination plot in Esther, and Joseph is elevated because he correctly interprets the fates of those accused of capital crimes against the Pharaoh in Gen 37–50. Further, each story records the deaths of those who are guilty of plotting against the king (cf. Gen 40:22; Esth 2:23). These deliberate parallels suggest that the author of Esther viewed the episode of the baker and the cupbearer, narrated with the term for offense (חַטָּא), as a political rebellion.⁴⁰⁶

With this backdrop, the reasons that Gen 40–41 employ the word חַטָּא become more evident. The most significant point to note is that in Gen 41:9 the cupbearer, while speaking directly to the Pharaoh, admits to the Pharaoh that he was involved in this coup by saying, אָהָרָא אֲנִי מְזַכֵּר הַיּוֹם

⁴⁰⁵ See the discussion of קִשָּׁר, “to conspire/rebel” in chapter two for a discussion of these examples.

⁴⁰⁶ For some literature on scholars who have connected these stories see, Arndt Meinhold, “Die Gattung der Josephsgeschichte und des Estherbuches: Diasporanovelle Part I,” *ZAW* 87 (1975): 306–24; and “Arndt Meinhold, “Die Gattung der Josephsgeschichte und des Estherbuches: Diasporanovelle Part II,” *ZAW* 88 (1976): 72–93. Meinhold, in these articles draws out the similar plot developments. He does not focus on the one mentioned here, but he certainly establishes the connection and perhaps the connections go beyond what he suggests. See also Gabriel Hornung, “The Nature and Import of the Relationship Between the Joseph Story in Genesis and the Book of Esther” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2016); Shemaryahu Talmon, “Wisdom in the Book of Esther,” *VT* 13 (1963): 419–55.

⁴⁰⁷ Some might suggest that what the cupbearer has in mind is his forgetting of Joseph’s request to remember him before the Pharaoh. The details of this text, however, support the argument that it is a reference to the previous coup. The linguistic data supports this position as both Gen 40:1–2 and 41:7 use the verb חַטָּא. This is not a common word within the Hebrew Bible to refer to a palace coup. Further, immediately after the official recalls his “offenses,” he makes a reference to the coup, not to Joseph’s request that he remember him. He says in Gen 41:10, “Pharaoh was angry with his servants.” This is a reference to the coup that led to the Pharaoh throwing the officials in jail, which he also mentions in Gen 41:10. There is never a reference to the cupbearer wronging Joseph by forgetting him. While we think a reference to the rebellion is the most likely explanation, there is another possibility that would not discount the above argument. The word the cupbearer employs, חַטָּאֵי “my sins,” is plural. It is possible this is a

king—the political authority that the cupbearer had aggrieved—demands that he admit that he was in the wrong. His employment of אָשָׁם presents that message to the ruler in a way that another word could not. From the perspective of the Pharaoh, any action taken against him was decidedly wrong and incapable of being justified. A ruler sees rebels not as individuals vying for power as an objective observer or chronicler would, but rather as those illegitimately seeking the throne at his expense. It is thus fitting that the subordinate admits the criminal nature of his act by declaring not that it was a coup or a rebellion, but that it was an “offense” (אָשָׁם). This admission serves to elevate the ruler at the expense of the subordinate. The grammatical construction of this statement further bears this out. The cupbearer, in his speech, fronts the object and thereby emphasizes his crimes. The perspective of the subordinate speaking to the ruler provides a rhetorical reason for the use of אָשָׁם in this rebellion context and explains why it appears earlier in Gen 40:1.

This usage of אָשָׁם falls into the pattern of confession. Individuals often utter a confession after another party accuses them of wrongdoing.⁴⁰⁸ Knierim notes that these can be either sacral or profane contexts.⁴⁰⁹ The context of Gen 40–41 does not indicate that the crime committed involved any action against the deity, which in this context would have been an Egyptian deity. This is a point we would not expect the biblical author to highlight. The Pharaoh would have believed this to be the case, but the biblical writer chooses not to emphasize this. In this case, the

reference to both the coup against the Pharaoh and to the forgetting of Joseph. This is what Sarna suggests. “He speaks of his “offenses” in the plural, that is, against Pharaoh and against Joseph.” Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 282.

⁴⁰⁸ For the employment of אָשָׁם in the context of confession see Josh 7:20; 1 Sam 15:24; 2 Sam 19:21; 24:10; Ps 41:5; 51:6; Judg 10:10, 15; 1 Sam 7:6; 12:10; Jer 3:25. For a complete discussion of the confession formula, including many of these examples see Pietro Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice: Legal Terms, Concepts and Procedures in the Hebrew Bible*, trans. Michael J. Smith, JSOTSup 105 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 93–119.

⁴⁰⁹ Knierim, *TLOT I*: 406–08. The Pharaoh would have believed that this entailed an offense against his deity, but this does not entail that the biblical writer believed this.

official confesses that he had previously committed a crime against the Pharaoh. The following examples will further demonstrate that this is how biblical writers employ נשׁתּוּב in a rebellion context.

נשׁתּוּב in Numbers

The next incidents involving נשׁתּוּב in a rebellion narrative appear in the book of Numbers. There are four examples in Numbers that are pertinent to this discussion. In three of the four cases, the account involves not a well-developed rebellion, but incipient rebellions or even just protests. Despite a slightly different event in three of the cases in the book (Num 12, 16, and 21), the pattern present in these examples helps demonstrate how the biblical writers employ נשׁתּוּב in a rebellion context. These examples do so because these stories present those involved in aggressive collective action employing נשׁתּוּב in speech or a confession to a ruler after their action fails.⁴¹⁰ Similar to the case in Genesis, these are all stories involving punishment in response to belligerent collective action directed at the ruler. Further, the fourth example in this book parallels these other stories and presents an explicit situation of rebellion recording the rebels as using נשׁתּוּב after punishment in response to their action. This occurs in Num 14. These examples further help establish that there is a rhetorical reason for the employment of נשׁתּוּב in rebellion stories. The writer demonstrates that the subordinate individuals in these stories want to present their rebellions as illegitimate. The texts in Numbers do record illegitimate events, but, as we will see, this is because of whom the protestors attack rather than hinging on the very specific use of נשׁתּוּב in direct speech.

נשׁתּוּב in Numbers 12

Numbers 12 records a situation in which Miriam and Aaron challenge Moses' authority, or, as

⁴¹⁰ These examples also deal with violent collective action that have often been confused with rebellion. See chapter six for a full discussion of the confusion between protest and rebellion.

the text says, they (literally she) **וַתִּדְבֹר־בְּךָ**, “spoke against” Moses regarding his Cushite wife (Num 12:1). These two secondary leaders thus try to undermine Moses based on a perceived illegitimacy with his marriage.⁴¹¹ Once God intervenes and affirms Moses’ superior status, the rhetoric of their offense is elevated from merely “speaking against” Moses, as it is described initially, to Aaron now declaring, **אָשָׁר נִזְאַלְנוּ וְאִשָּׁר הִתְטַאֲנוּ**, “We have been foolish and committed an offense” (Num 12:11). Similar to Gen 41, the subordinate, Aaron, equates his action of “speaking against” Moses to **הִטָּא** once his protest efforts have failed. The two subordinates are now in a position where they need to ingratiate themselves with the ruler due to fear of further reprisal. Yahweh, acting on Moses’ behalf, had inflicted Miriam with a skin disease as punishment for her and Aaron’s protest (Num 12:10). To ameliorate the punishment, the recalcitrant individuals now confess that their challenge to Moses’ rule was wrong. They admit this by using the word **הִטָּא**. The reader can surmise that when they began to engage in the challenge, they had a different view and considered their claim legitimate. Therefore, the narrator initially employs the phrase “to speak against” in Num 12:1, 8. Their failure and audience before the ruler, however, forces them to change their position and subsequently declare their actions a punishable offense. The employment of **הִטָּא** in the context of violent collective action is again rhetorical. These individuals want to convince the ruler that they now understand the action to be illegitimate.⁴¹² As mentioned, this episode is illegitimate. The illegitimacy, however, hinges on whom the actors affront rather than on the use of **הִטָּא** in Aaron’s speech.

הִטָּא in Numbers 21

The same pattern appears in Num 21. The text begins in Num 21:5 with the identical phrase that

⁴¹¹ See chapter six for an analysis of Num 12 along with notes on the reason for Miriam and Aaron’s challenge.

⁴¹² In this episode the action is sinful because it involves a challenge to Yahweh. However, this does not hinge on the employment of the word **הִטָּא**. The pattern present suggests that its usage is rhetorical, or driven by the literary context, and that the term changes when the individual speaks to the ruler.

occurs in Num 12:1, וַיְדַבְּרוּ בָּ, “and they (the people) spoke against...” This parallel provides the reason to look at this example next. As already evident from our discussion of Num 12, the phrase indicates a form of belligerent collective action. As the following chapter will demonstrate, it is a protest over a lack of resources. The people believe the rulers should provide them with food and water. When the people see this lacking, they “speak against” the rulers and challenge them to act. As Num 21:6 describes, Yahweh deems the event illegitimate and punishes the people for this recalcitrant action with death. This corresponds to the punishment Miriam receives for her attack on Moses in Num 12.⁴¹³

Also similar to Num 12 is the response of the people once their efforts have failed and they are left to pander to the ruler to mitigate their punishment. They do so by again speaking the word הָטָא in the phrase, וַיֹּאמְרוּ הָטָאנוּ, “They said, we have committed an offense” (Num 21:7). The subordinates, now being punished for their behavior, thereby confess to the ruler that they are in the wrong, which is naturally how the ruler views the situation. There is no objectivity when the story presents the rebellious action from the ruler’s perspective. In both cases in Numbers, the stories began with the narrator describing these events using the generic phrase בָּ דַבְּרָה, “to speak against.” However, in both instances, once the people have been punished, the texts move to describing their response to the punishments. In each text, as the protestors speak to the ruler in a confession, the rhetoric is elevated to indicate unequivocal wrongdoing. This description of the subordinates using הָטָא in the context of direct speech or a confession to the ruler is what has now occurred in the three cases discussed thus far.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹³ The punishment is more severe in Num 21 likely due to added details. Numbers 21:5 indicates that not only did they speak against Moses, but that they also spoke against God. This verse also records the statement that they detest this miserable food. See chapter six for more on why this protest is illegitimate.

⁴¹⁴ This episode is again linked to actual sin, but this is not necessarily connected to the employment of the verb הָטָא, at least in Num 16:22. It is actual sin because the people are challenging Yahweh and have been continuing their protests despite repeated provision. See chapter six below for more on this episode.

אָמַת in Numbers 16–17

The episode(s)⁴¹⁵ in Num 16–17 involving Korah and other agitators also employs אָמַת in the narration of a series of aggressive protests. The root אָמַת, in various forms, appears three times in these chapters, specifically in Num 16:22, 26 and 17:3 (Eng. 16:38). In Num 16:22, the word again appears to describe the misgivings of individuals attempting to mitigate punishment for aggressive collective action, in this case a severe protest. The usage of אָמַת is again rhetorical, showing the reader how the failed protesters change course and attempt to avoid punishment once their protest has failed. They do so through persuasive speech.

The narrator begins the chapter with various phrases that indicate protesting. Numbers 16:3 states, וַיִּקְרְבוּ לוֹ עַל-בְּנֵי־אֶהֱרָא, “They assembled against Moses.” Moses later speaks of the people’s conduct asking, why they are הַמְנַעְרִים עַל-יְהוָה, “assembling against Yahweh” and תִּלְוֵנוּ עָלָיו, “complaining about him (Aaron)” in Num 16:11. The Levites are upset about the structure of society and specifically about their role in it. Thus, they attempt to change this by protesting to Moses and Aaron claiming that they deserve a more significant priestly position (Num 16:3). This is what the phrases mentioned above are focused on changing. The authorities respond to these protests with a show of legitimation in which they require the protesters to approach Yahweh with incense in their censors (Num 16:16–17).⁴¹⁶ After this the text makes clear in Num 16:21 that Yahweh plans to punish this challenge to his authority with destruction: וְאַכְלָה אֹתָם כְּרִגְעָה, “I will destroy them at once.” Immediately, and in direct response to the leveling of this

⁴¹⁵ There are multiple individuals and groups mentioned in this chapter as part of the protests. Most scholars see this as an indication of multiple sources making up Num 16–17. The next chapter will have a more complete analysis of these episodes. See Joel Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 158–59. See also Baruch Levine, *Numbers 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 4a (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 412; and David Frankel, *The Murmuring Stories of the Priestly School: A Retrieval of Ancient Sacredotal Lore*, VTSup 89 (Boston: Brill, 2002), 206–07.

⁴¹⁶ There are other details in this chapter that discuss another protest in verses 13–14 and we are not dealing with this protest as it does not employ the term אָמַת. See Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis*, 158–59 for notes on the differing protests.

punishment, some of the Israelites plead with Moses, **הַאִישׁ אֶחָד יִחַטֵּא וְעַל כָּל־הָעֵדָה תִּקְצָף**, “Shall one man commit an offense and you be angry at the entire congregation” (Num 16:22)? Once the sentence has been announced, the people, in their speech, concede that what the protester(s) did was wrong.⁴¹⁷ They thus attempt to shift blame and distance themselves from the action by condemning it with the word **חַטָּא**. The change in terminology from the words **לֹא**, **קָהַל**, and **יָעַד** that began the chapter to **חַטָּא** helps demonstrate that characterization of the event as an offense comes about as an attempt to assuage the ruler and mitigate punishment. The narrator is not making a categorical statement about collective action and errant behavior, but outlining how people behave when facing punishment. They attempt to condemn the action with the term **חַטָּא** and to further distance themselves from it and the punishment associated with it. The narrator indeed believes the action to be illegitimate, but this does not hinge on the particular use of **חַטָּא**.

Later in the chapter, **חַטָּא** appears again twice, this time not from the rebels’ own admission that their attack on the leaders was wrong, but from the perspective of the ruler (16:26; 17:3 (Eng. 16:38)). In these instances, the ruler is God. And it is this crucial distinction which sets these occurrences apart from other instances in which the protestors/rebels label their own conduct as sinful. When Yahweh’s leadership is attacked, it is a grave offense, a true sin. This is not a point that needs elaboration. The use of **חַטָּא** provides the leadership with credibility and undermines the protestors as the group in the wrong.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁷ The reference to the “one man” in this statement is likely a reference to Korah as the leading figure mentioned in this chapter. In Num 16:19 Korah is mentioned as “assembling” the entire congregation against Moses. The rest of the group is trying to distance themselves from Korah by confessing that what he did was wrong and distancing themselves from his action.

⁴¹⁸ There is also a cultic offense present in Num 17:3. This chapter describes a situation where the offenders have illegally offered incense. The offering of incense is a cultic action suggesting the behavior deemed as wrong by the use of **חַטָּאִים** in this verse may not be referring solely to the attack on the leadership. It also may refer to their illicit offering of incense. This action is a serious cultic offense in Lev 10 when Nadab and Abihu bring their fire before Yahweh and are killed for it. The presence of the cultic sin, however, does not take away from the connection between **חַטָּא** and the protests, they are intertwined and so the discussion still fits here.

חטא in Numbers 14

A similar situation occurs in Num 14. This is the only time in the book of Numbers where a word for rebellion—*מרד*, “to rebel” in Num 14:9—appears. As the subsequent chapter will argue, *מרד* appears because it is the only episode in the book where the people attempt to replace the ruler, and so it is the only episode in the book that rises to the level of outright rebellion. Regardless of exactly how the collective action is classified, the same pattern occurs. The chapter begins in Num 14:1–2 with the statement that the people are weeping and protesting to Moses over their situation. In particular, the narrator employs the word *לון* in the phrase *וַיִּלְנוּ עַל-מוֹשֶׁה*, “They complained against Moses” to begin the chapter. From here the protestors ask to return to Egypt and even suggest choosing a new leader in Num 14:4. Eventually, they move to stone Moses, as narrated in Num 14:10. Because of this sequence of events, Num 14:9 employs the word *מרד*, “to rebel” to describe a protest that had risen to the level of a rebellion.

Yahweh responds to this rebellion with the most severe punishment in the book. He sentences the Israelites to die in the wilderness. (This was after Yahweh first said he would strike the people with pestilence and disinherit them, but Moses had interceded for the people and temporarily⁴¹⁹ saved their lives). With their sentence leveled, the people try to make amends by mourning, saying *וַעֲלֵינוּ אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר-אָמַר יְהוָה כִּי חָטֵאנוּ*, “We will go up to the place Yahweh had spoken of, for we have committed an offense” (Num 14:39–40). This is an attempt to reverse direction, since they now admit wrongdoing and attempt to obey what Yahweh had initially requested. Their reversal is, however, too late.

It is yet again only after a failed rebellion or protest that the word for the collective action changes to the word for an offense *חטא*. In Num 14:39 the text states that *וַיְדַבֵּר מוֹשֶׁה אֶת-הַדְּבָרִים* *הָאֵלֶּה אֶל-כָּל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל*, “Moses spoke these words to all the Israelites.” This is a reference to

⁴¹⁹ Yahweh allows the Israelites to wander in the wilderness, where he says in Num 14:29, 32–35 your corpses shall fall.

Yahweh’s death sentence on them, noted earlier. In the following verse, in their immediate response to the announcement of their punishment, they do not describe the action with a descriptive word for protesting or rebellion, but state that they had committed an offense (אָשָׁם). It is no longer just a rebellion or a protest as the narrator had characterized it earlier in the chapter, but as the rebels attempt to curry favor with the ruler, they personally declare it a crime or offense. This is the same pattern appearing in the episodes in Numbers discussed above. When the agitators speak directly to the ruler, this is when the word אָשָׁם appears in the context of disruptive collective action. The subordinates now want to present the rebellion as illegitimate. While this episode of rebellion is “sinful” because it is directed at Yahweh, its sinful quality does not hinge on the use of אָשָׁם in the context of this confession. Placing אָשָׁם in the speech of the people is part of the narrator’s strategy to show how they attempt to reverse course once their failure becomes evident. This is natural human behavior and the narrator capitalizes on this.

אָשָׁם in 1 Samuel 24

The next incident where the word אָשָׁם appears in the context of rebellion is in 1 Sam 24:12.⁴²⁰ This episode involves Saul, the king of Israel, and David, who is a leading figure in Saul’s army. The background of this story has Saul believing that David is seeking to usurp his throne. He believes so because David has married into the royal family (1 Sam 18), gained popularity through his military exploits (1 Sam 17–18), and fled Judah to live with Israel’s enemies, the Philistines (1 Sam 27:1–12). With David as a threat to his throne, it is not surprising that Saul attempts to kill him on multiple occasions.

David, in 1 Sam 24, has a chance to confront Saul over his aggressive pursuit to eliminate him. But David chooses not to kill Saul when the opportunity arises when the two are in a cave

⁴²⁰ The discussion in this section will elaborate on the discussion from chapter two in the analysis of the word פֶּשַׁע. This is because in this case the two words פֶּשַׁע and אָשָׁם are parallel. The word פֶּשַׁע in this context is not a rebellion term. It appears to help David convince Saul that he is innocent and not attempting a coup.

and Saul is without military protection. This magnanimous act, in David’s mind, should prove to Saul that David is not seeking the throne. Indeed, the Hebrew Bible is full of stories about rebels who conspire to take the throne and kill the reigning king. The key word in these stories is קשר, “conspire”⁴²¹ and this is precisely the word Saul employs to describe David’s actions. Saul’s word choice is a clear indication that he believes David is rebelling against him (1 Sam 22:8, 13).

However, the narrative wants to declare that this is not the case and that David is not attempting a coup.⁴²² If he were, he would have killed Saul and ruled in his stead when the opportunity presented itself. That does not happen according to the narrative. After Saul vacates the cave and David is clear of Saul’s men, David addresses Saul directly. It is yet again in the context of a subordinate fawning to a ruler as he attempts to avoid punishment for a rebellion that the word חטא appears in a rebellion story. David says, וְלֹא־חָטָאתִי לָךְ, “I have not committed an offense against you” (1 Sam 24:12). The subordinate wants to acknowledge through his confession that the leader is in the right and to further distance himself from the accusation of rebellion. A close look at the narrator’s word choice demonstrates that the word for the rebellion switches from קשר, “to conspire/rebel,” as Saul describes it earlier, to חטא, “to commit an offense” for rhetorical reasons. Saul states in 1 Sam 22:13 לָמָּה קִשְׁרִיתָם עָלַי אַתָּה וּבֶן־יֵשׁוּעַ, “Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse?” This contrasts with David’s statement וְלֹא־חָטָאתִי לָךְ, “I have not committed an offense against you” (1 Sam 24:12).

Using חטא introduces the issue of illicit behavior as it legitimizes the leader, Saul in this

⁴²¹ See chapter two for a full list and analysis of these texts.

⁴²² This is likely a historical issue. The southern authors or editors want to defend David against the charge of rebellion and so they attempt to prove that he was not seeking Saul’s throne and thus create an apologetic text. Many scholars have discussed the apologetic nature of the story. See Robert P. Gordon, “David’s Rise and Saul’s Demise: Narrative Analogy in 1 Samuel 24–26,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 31 (1980): 37–64; P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., “The Apology of David,” *JBL* 99 (1980): 489–504; Baruch Halpern, *David’s Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); Joel Baden, *The Historical David: The Real Life of an Invented Hero* (New York: Harper One, 2013); Steven L. Mckenzie, *King David a Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Andrew Knapp, *Royal Apologetic in the Ancient Near East*, *WAWSup* 4 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 161–243.

case, and undermines the subordinate. This occurs because the narrator recognizes those in power view all rebellions against them as wrong.⁴²³ David, being politically astute, confesses to Saul that if he were seeking Saul's throne it would be treason. This is what Saul would have believed and David presents himself in agreement with this position. After David's speech, Saul realizes his error and relinquishes his pursuit to kill David. David's rhetoric is enough to convince Saul of his innocence (1 Sam 24:17–19). The narrator is not presenting his position on rebellion; quite the contrary, he is rather being intentional in his use of terminology to create a compelling and realistic narrative and to demonstrate the position of the individuals in the story.

נצח in 1 Kings 1:21

The next occurrence of נצח in the context of rebellion occurs in 1 Kgs 1:21. This text describes the difficulties that ensue over the succession to the throne of David. With David being old and powerless and unable to rule as indicated in 1 Kgs 1:1–4,⁴²⁴ his son Adonijah is the first to attempt to arrogate the throne. Adonijah's attempt at the throne leaves his brothers, who could also potentially make a claim to the throne, in a precarious position. As many newly crowned monarchs do, Adonijah may want to eliminate any threat to his power.⁴²⁵ This would include his

⁴²³ The narrator of course does not view this rebellion as wrong. The reader knows that God has already rejected Saul from being king over Israel (1 Sam 15:26; 16:1) and anointed David as king of Israel (1 Sam 16:1, 13). The narrator understands that some in the society might view it as wrong and so does not directly characterize it as a rebellion, but has labored to legitimize the rebellion throughout the story. See the footnote immediately above for more on this.

⁴²⁴ Exactly what these verses mean has been debated for quite some time. Many have argued that David's inability to have sexual relations with Abishag indicates his inability to rule. Sweeney notes that it is the absence of sexual relations that provides the basis for Adonijah's pursuit of the throne. Marvin A. Sweeney, *I and II Kings*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 53. See also Mulder who holds a similar position. M. J. Mulder, *I Kings. Volume 1 / I Kings 1–11*, HCOT (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 34–37. Hess differs only slightly; he does not think it has to do with David's impotence, but rather that these verses, and more specifically the terms used in these verses, suggest "that Israel's problem in vv. 1–4 is not David's impotence or senility. Rather, this is a sign of a greater malaise, the ebbing away of the king's life and the threat it poses to the continuation of the dynasty of David in Jerusalem." Richard Hess, "David and Abishag: The Purpose of 1 Kings 1:1–4," in *Homeland and Exile: Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honour of Bustenay Oded*, ed. Gershon Galil, Mark Gellar and Alan Millard (Boston: Brill, 2009), 437.

⁴²⁵ This is one of many examples of problems that ensue when there are many possible candidates who are seeking the throne. The story of Abimelech in Judges 9 records an episode of his killing seventy of his brothers so he could

brother Solomon.

This situation leads Bathsheba to fear for her safety and the safety of her son Solomon. With the support of Nathan, one of David's advisors, she proceeds to speak to David about Adonijah's aspirations to the throne and how Adonijah would perceive Solomon if he were to be successful at appropriating the throne. She says in 1 Kgs 1:21, וְהָיָה כִּשְׁכַב אֲדֹנִי-הַמֶּלֶךְ עִם-אֲבוֹתָיו, "When my Lord the king sleeps with his ancestors, my son Solomon and I will be considered offenders (rebels)." The text, thus, presents the situation from the perspective of Adonijah as potential ruler. Bathsheba declares to David that Adonijah will view her and her son as חַטָּאִים (offenders/rebels), i.e., as those seeking the throne. In all of the cases described above, this has the potential to lead to the death of those who declare themselves חַטָּאִים, "offenders" because of their previous rebellion. It does so because the ruler views those who seek his throne as criminals worthy of death. The use of חַטָּא elevates the seriousness of the situation, which Bathsheba hopes will provide the catalyst for David to intervene. He of course does and helps to establish Solomon as his successor.

It is noteworthy that the use of חַטָּא in a rebellion context again comes in the case of direct speech from the subordinate. It is not a threat to the position of the actual ruler, here David, but a threat to a potential future ruler and successor, Adonijah. The use of חַטָּא in a rebellion context is again rhetorical and not a statement that the ancient Israelites thought of all rebellion as wrong. It is designed to show how an individual perceived as a rebellious subordinate sought to avoid future death or punishment. It would be difficult to argue that Bathsheba, or the biblical author who knew Solomon would be king, would consider herself or her son a "criminal" if Adonijah were to appropriate the throne. She, however, recognizes that

rule over Shechem. Esarhaddon's succession to the throne in Assyria was also fraught with conflict between him and his brothers. For more on the latter episode and the conflict between brothers attempting to gain the throne see, Karen Radner, "The Trials of Esarhaddon: The Conspiracy of 670 BC," *Isimu* 6 (2003): 165–84.

this is how Adonijah, and perhaps others in society, would view the situation.

חטא in 2 Kings 18

The final case of the Hebrew Bible using חטא in the context of rebellion appears in 2 Kgs 18:14. Here, there is an alternation between the word גורד, “to rebel” and חטא, “to offend” to describe the same action. Similar to the cases described above, this passage records חטא in the context of a subordinate speaking directly to the ruler admitting, or at least feigning, that his previous rebellion was wrong. This text narrates a well-known historical event that the Assyrian sources also record.⁴²⁶

At this point in history, both the biblical and the Assyrian sources agree that Judah had become a vassal of the Assyrian empire. Judah entered into this position under Ahaz around the time of the Syro-Ephraimite war in the mid 730s. Judah remained a relatively loyal vassal for just over twenty-five years. However, shortly after Sargon II died in 705, Hezekiah attempted to free Judah from Assyrian hegemony and stopped paying tribute. In the mind of the Assyrians, this was a rebellion against their legitimate rule. This was not uncommon in the Neo-Assyrian empire. One of Sargon’s summary inscriptions records that Azuri, king of Ashdod, refused to

⁴²⁶ The two cultures agree in the general outline of events, but, as expected, there are differences in what they narrate. This is an episode that has received extensive attention with a significant number of monographs and articles appearing to discuss the problems related to reconstructing the details. For the primary source material relating to the Assyrian account see Grayson and Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704-681)*, 55-69. The text cited is commonly referred to as the Rassam Cylinder, which is the oldest attested inscription recording Sennacherib’s third campaign (around 690). For a good overview of the topic see, Lester L. Grabbe, ed., *Like a Bird in a Cage: The Invasion of Sennacherib in 701 BCE*, JSOTSup 363 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003); Isaac Kalimi and Seth Richardson, *Sennacherib at the Gates of Jerusalem: Story, History and Historiography*, CHANE 71 (Boston: Brill, 2014); William R. Gallagher, *Sennacherib’s Campaign to Judah: New Studies* (Boston: Brill, 1999); Robb Andrew Young, *Hezekiah in History and Tradition* (Boston: Brill, 2012). There are also many studies related to the composition of 2 Kgs 18–20 and the sources involved. The discussion of the composition typically begins with the following two works: Bernhard Stade, “Miscellen: Anmerkungen zu 2 Kö. 15–21,” *ZAW* 6 (1886):156–89; Brevard Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, SBT 3 (London: SCM Press, 1967). For a more recent discussion of the composition see, Ian Provan, *Hezekiah and the Book of Kings: A Contribution to the Debate About the Composition of the Deuteronomistic History*, BZAW 172 (Berlin: W. De Gruyter, 1988); 118–30; Paul S. Evans, *The Invasion of Sennacherib in the Book of Kings: A Source Critical and Rhetorical Study of 2 Kings 18–19*, VTSup 125 (Boston: Brill, 2009).

pay tribute to Sargon II.⁴²⁷ Likewise, 2 Kgs 17:4 records Hoshea’s refusal to pay tribute to Shalmaneser V. Both actions result in an Assyrian military response to punish the disobedient vassal for breaking the treaty. These examples confirm that the Assyrians considered the refusal of tribute to be an act of rebellion.⁴²⁸

The narrator first records Hezekiah’s rebellion in 2 Kgs 18:7. This text appears in the context of a list of Hezekiah’s actions and is described from the perspective of the narrator. The text employs the word *בָּרַד*, “to rebel” to record the rebellion.⁴²⁹ The text states, *וַיִּבְרַד בְּמֶלֶךְ אַשּׁוּר*, “He rebelled against the king of Assyria.” In the same verse, the narrator positively evaluates this event by stating that Hezekiah succeeded (*שָׁכַל*) in all that he did. This statement also follows immediately on the narrator’s comment in 2 Kgs 18:5–6 that there was no king like Hezekiah, who was able to keep all of Yahweh’s commandments. In 2 Kgs 18:14, however, the perspective is no longer that of a narrator, but of Hezekiah as he is forced to directly address the Assyrian ruler.⁴³⁰ Hezekiah addresses the Assyrian king only after his nation had been ravaged. Now that

⁴²⁷ Andrea Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II. aus Khorsabad* (Göttingen: Cuvillier, 1994), 196–98.

⁴²⁸ Bustenay Oded, *War, Peace and Empire: Justifications for War in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions*, 96–98; Peter Juhás, “*bārtu nabalkattu ana māt Aššur īpušma uhattā*...Eine Studie zum Vokabular und zur Sprache der Rebellion in ausgewählten neuassyrischen Quellen und in 2 Kön 15–21,” *KUSATU* 14 (2011): 63.

⁴²⁹ R. Meyer suggested that the features of this verse suggest that it is annalistic. He compares it to 2 Kgs 23:4–15. R. Meyer, “Auffallender Erzählungsstil in einem angeblichen Auszug aus der ‘Chronik der Könige von Juda’” in *Festschrift: Friedrich Baumgärtel zum 70. Geburtstag, 14 Januar 1958*; Erlanger Forschungen, Reihe A, Band 10, eds., J. Herrmann and L. Rost (Erlangen, 1959), 114–23. See also Tadmor and Cogan, *II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 217.

⁴³⁰ These texts are possibly from different sources. 2 Kings 18:7 comes from the standard deuteronomistic regnal evaluation present to summarize the deeds of each king. The second text comes from what Stade and Childs have referred to as account A (2 Kgs 18:13–16). See footnote 426 above for more on these positions. Childs believes this to be an “archival” source worked into this text. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 73. Many others, such as McKenzie, have followed this opinion. Steven L. McKenzie, *The Trouble with Kings: The Composition of the Book of Kings in the Deuteronomistic History*, VTSup 42 (Boston: Brill, 1991), 103. See, however, in partial contrast to this position Nazek Khalid Matty, *Sennacherib’s Campaign Against Judah and Jerusalem in 701 B.C.: A Historical Reconstruction*, BZAW 487 (Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2016), 130–40, who also discusses this issue and questions the assumption that 18:14–16 are from an archival source. He does, however see it as a different source. That these two texts come from different sources does not impact the present argument. The juxtaposition of the words for rebellion helps draw out the purpose of each. The second example that employs *אָזַח* in Hezekiah’s speech helps show what Sennacherib thought of the rebellion, while the first simply narrates an event. Further, as Childs argues even this “archival source” has been reworked by the Deuteronomist. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 69–70.

there has been punitive action against the Judahite king (2 Kgs 18:13), Hezekiah admits to the Assyrian ruler that his rebellion was an illegal offense deserving of retribution. The text reads, *וַיִּשְׁלַח הַמֶּלֶךְ הַחַוְּזַיִם מֶלֶךְ אֲשׁוּר לְכֹשֶׁה לְאֵמֹר הִטָּאתִי שׁוּב מִנְּעָלִי*, “Hezekiah the king of Judah sent a message to the king of Assyria at Lachish and said, ‘I have committed an offense, turn away from me.’” This is his surrender.

The reason the author employs *חטא* in the present context is related to the presentation of the text. The use of *חטא* serves to demean Hezekiah in the eyes of his Assyrian overlord. As we will discuss below, and as the Assyrian royal inscriptions demonstrate, this is exactly what Sennacherib expected to hear.⁴³¹ This confession provides legitimation for the ruler because, when *חטא* appears, the rebel unequivocally presents himself as the criminal party deserving of punishment. The now defeated rebel attempts to ingratiate himself into the good graces of the ruler through an admission of guilt.⁴³² The word *חטא* serves this function in ways that other words for rebellion do not because of its frequent meaning to describe iniquitous action. To state “I rebelled” (*מרדהתי*) against you would not serve as a confession or an admission of wrongdoing. It would perhaps only anger the sovereign further. The remainder of the details of this text,

Childs’ work shows the connection between 2 Kgs 18:7 and 2 Kgs 18:14. Vuk even thinks that 18:7b and 18:14 are connected which would strengthen our argument. T. Vuk, *Wiederkaufte Freiheit. Der Feldzug Sanheribs gegen Juda nach dem Invasionbericht 2 Kön 18:13–16*, FHTB 1 (Jerusalem, 1984), 33–35.

⁴³¹ If this were the only example of the root *חטא* to describe a rebellion, it might suggest that the author of this passage employed *חטא* because of the comparable use in the Assyrian royal inscriptions. See the discussion below for specific examples. This cannot be ruled out and may be true to a certain extent, but this is not the only occurrence of *חטא* in a rebellion context. As this section has demonstrated, there are several comparable examples of this usage of *חטא*, which provide the more immediate reason for its use in this context. For a scholar who did discuss the connections between this text and the Assyrian texts see, Ludger Camp, *Hiskija und Hiskijabild: Analyse und Interpretation von 2 Kön 18–20*, MTA 9 (Alterberge, 1990) 95–105.

⁴³² Long connects this to legal proceedings. He states, “The speech attributed to Hezekiah is analogous to the confessional statements in legal proceedings in which the guilty party admits wrongdoing.” Burke O. Long, *2 Kings: The Forms of Old Testament Literature*, FOTL 10 (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1991), 206. This helps to confirm the comments above about the employment of a confession in these cases and is similar to what Bovati states. Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice: Legal Terms, Concepts and Procedures in the Hebrew Bible*, 93–119.

however, demonstrate that the biblical author(s) do not view Hezekiah as a “sinner.”⁴³³ While the word **מַרְדָּן** introduces the issue of illegitimacy in the rebellion, whether the writer actually believed this is a separate issue. Thus, this employment of **מַרְדָּן** does not demand the conclusion that the biblical writers believed Hezekiah did anything wrong by rebelling against the Assyrian king. The writer chooses to present the rebellion this way for the purpose of the narrative. This is precisely what a besieged rebel would confess to a ruler who had just ravished his land.⁴³⁴

A Narrative-Driven Reason for the Use of **מַרְדָּן** as a Rebellion Term

The above discussion demonstrates that the authors of the Hebrew Bible employ **מַרְדָּן** in the context of rebellion when the view of rebellion has the subordinate engaging the perspective of the ruler against whom he had been rebelling. The subordinate does this through a confession.

⁴³³ Ehud Ben Zvi suggested, based on the appearance of **מַרְדָּן**, that the author understood this rebellion to be sin. He states that Hezekiah may have sinned against Yahweh by rebelling against his political authority. He is perhaps influenced by Ezek 17, which he cites, and that text’s critique of Zedekiah. Ben Zvi states of Hezekiah, “the fact that his actions directly led to the removal of all the silver treasures of the temple and to its physical downgrading (2 Kgs 18:15–16) which are acts that convey dishonor of the temple leads one to think the action is sin.” The passage in Ezek 17, however, explicitly mentions the covenant between Zedekiah and the king of Babylon, but the author of 2 Kgs 18 does not mention this because he does not want to condemn Hezekiah. Ben Zvi’s point misses the broader implications of the entire text to show how Hezekiah is faithful to Yahweh. Further, the comparison with the additional examples of this phenomenon demonstrates that this type of confession before a ruler was common within the Hebrew Bible as a way to demonstrate how people sought to avoid punishment, rather than as a way to declare something sinful. Based on the comments in his discussion, it appears that Ben Zvi thought of rebellion as wrong, which is not a position the Hebrew Bible takes. Ehud Ben Zvi, “Malleability and its Limits: Sennacherib’s Campaign Against Judah as a Case-Study,” in *Like a Bird in a Cage: The Invasion of Sennacherib in 701 BCE*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe, JSOTSup 363, (New York: T & T Clark, 2003), 81. Juhás also holds a similar position, believing that there must be a religious aspect to this. Juhás, “*bārtu nabalkattu ana māt Aššur īpušma uhattā*...Eine Studie zum Vokabular und zur Sprache der Rebellion in ausgewählten neuassyrischen Quellen und in 2 Kön 15–21,” 86.

⁴³⁴ Scenarios such as this must have occurred frequently in the ancient Near East. The El Amarna letters provide examples of kings saying they either “sinned” or did not “sin” against the Pharaoh as they attempt to avoid punishment and receive help from the Pharaoh. See EA 253, EA 254. Lines 16–20 of EA 253 read, *la-a ar-na-ku à la-a haṭá-ku an-nu-ù ar-nu-ia à an-nu-ia à an-nu-ù hi-ṭu-ia* “I have not rebelled and I have not been delinquent. Behold my crime and behold my delinquency.” For the texts and translations, see Rainey, *The El-Amarna Correspondence: A New Edition of the Cuneiform Letters from the Site of El-Amarna based on Collations of all Extant Tablets Vol. 1*, 1027–33. William Moran, *The Amarna Letters*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 306–07. The Akkadian word Moran translates as “rebel” is *haṭû*. See also the example later in this chapter that lists a parallel in the Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions. There are also additional examples in the Hebrew Bible that come quite close to this pattern. Jeremiah 37 records an episode in which Zedekiah accuses Jeremiah of desertion to the Babylonians (Jer 37:13–16). Following this accusation, Zedekiah’s officials throw Jeremiah in jail. Jeremiah subsequently speaks to the king and in his speech in response to this punishment he employs a form of **מַרְדָּן** in a type of confession. Jeremiah says, **מָהָהָ הָמַרְדָּןִי לָךְ**, “What wrong have I committed against you.” There is no hint that Jeremiah intends to suggest that the wrong that Zedekiah accuses him of also entailed a sin in the sense of an offense against the deity.

And the point is for the subordinate to show, by using **נצח**, that his rebellion was illegitimate. Sovereigns without fail view any rebellion against them as wrong because these events threaten their power. Engaging the perspective of the ruler creates a natural and organic connection between rebellion and criminal action and even rebellion and sin.

This connection, and the use of a word commonly indicating sin (**נצח**) to describe rebellion, could erroneously lead some to believe that the biblical writers thought of all rebellion as sin against Yahweh. This is the position of Ben Zvi, who believes Hezekiah's rebellion to be sinful.⁴³⁵ This, however, is not the case from the perspective of the biblical writer. All the episodes analyzed in this section record the rebels as speaking directly to the ruler. This admission always follows punishment or the impending expectation of punishment. People who are facing punishment or death will typically take drastic action to halt that punishment. This is what the narrators recognize in these texts with the specific use of **נצח**. They employ the pattern of a confession.⁴³⁶ Further, outside of the stories in Numbers in which the action is directed against Yahweh as the political leader, the writers do not suggest that these actions entailed an offense against a deity. In some of these cases, the ruler is a foreign king and so the action would have been primarily directed against a foreign deity. This is not a point the biblical writers would admit.⁴³⁷

This is not a statement declaring that we can separate the sacred from the secular. It is

⁴³⁵ Ben Zvi, "Malleability and its Limits: Sennacherib's Campaign Against Judah as a Case-Study," 81. See footnote 433 above for more on his position.

⁴³⁶ **נצח** often appears in the context of confession and direct speech to other human figures, as well as in confessions to the deity. See Gen 43:9 and Gen 44:32 where it also has a rhetorical function in speech to convince the other—human party—of one's innocence. This also occurs when one sins against Yahweh and attempts to stop the punishment. Pharaoh tells Moses and Aaron that he has sinned when he does not let the Israelites go. He only believes so after he had been punished with the plagues. See Exod 9:27; 10:16. The episode of Shimei and David has parallels with this as well. See 2 Sam 19:20.

⁴³⁷ There may, however be an implicit connection to the deity in these episodes. In the mind of the ruler being rebelled against, the involvement of the deity would have been paramount. The matter of whether the biblical writer wanted to emphasize this is a separate issue.

true that all rebellion in the ancient Near East involved a religious aspect. When an individual rebelled against a king, he was also rebelling against that king's deity and also possibly his own deity if the latter was made a witness to the covenant. In 1 Kgs 1, as Adonijah attempts to take the throne, he would have proclaimed that future success represents divine favor. Saul also would have believed that David's challenge to his throne was a sin against his deity. There is also no doubt that Sennacherib would have believed that Hezekiah's rebellion represented a sin against Aššur. The Assyrian king would have justified a military response by declaring that the rebel king had sinned against "the great gods" (*ilāni rabûti*).

Despite the fact that these rebellions no doubt involve a deity from some perspectives, this does not entail that the writers of these stories want to emphasize this. Bathsheba would have recognized Adonijah's perspective, but the context of 1 Kgs 1 never mentions the role of the deity in aiding Adonijah. Further, the reader knows that Yahweh favors Solomon.⁴³⁸ The narrator also could not view David's actions against Saul to be sinful. Yahweh had previously legitimized David's future ascent and thus his usurpation of the throne (1 Sam 16). Similar stories in the Hebrew Bible that see Yahweh anoint a new king while another is on the throne result in an outright rebellion against the former king (cf. Jeroboam in 1 Kgs 11–12; Baasha in 1 Kgs 15:27; Zimri in 1 Kgs 16:9; Jehu in 2 Kgs 9:1–3). These cannot be rebellions that entail a sin against Yahweh.

A comparison of Ezek 17 with 2 Kgs 18 also confirms that Hezekiah does not sin against Yahweh. If a writer wants to emphasize that a rebellion entails a "sin," in the sense of action against Yahweh, they specify this, as is clear in Ezek 17. Here, the text mentions that Zedekiah's rebellion entails a breach of an oath that directly involves Yahweh (Ezek 17:19–20). The

⁴³⁸ See 2 Sam 12:25, which refers to Solomon as Jedidiah, "beloved of Yahweh." Eric Seibert has also shown that the scribes writing this story list various propagandistic elements that undermine Adonijah's claim to the throne and support Solomon's claim. Eric Seibert, *Subversive Scribes and the Solomonic Narrative: A Rereading of 1 Kings 1–11*, LHBOTS 436 (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 115–122.

rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar is thereby a sin. Interestingly, the word Ezek 17 employs to note that the rebellion involves a “sin” is not חטא but מַעַל.⁴³⁹ The latter term is the word the biblical texts employ to describe the action of breaking an oath with Yahweh. Remarkably, the text of 2 Kgs 18–20 never states that Hezekiah broke a covenant with Sennacherib or with Yahweh.⁴⁴⁰ They were intentionally neglecting this by not mentioning a treaty. It is quite likely that the biblical author saw the original treaty between Hezekiah and Sargon II as either initially illegitimate or now void due to Sargon’s death on the battlefield. As Cohen and Westbrook state, “Rebellion by a vassal often occurred on the death of the overlord, not only because it was a politically opportune moment but also because it gave a moral window of opportunity: It could be argued that the treaty had lapsed with the death of the beneficiary of a personal oath.”⁴⁴¹ The above discussion, therefore, does not suggest that rebellion was a secular act, only that the employment of חטא does not demand the theological element be at the forefront.

The frequent sequence in these scenarios can be stated as follows: rebellious action (narrated with a specific rebellion term), punishment (or the expectation of it), followed by an admission of wrongdoing. This, of course, plays out in a few alternate ways depending on the circumstances. In the case of David and Saul, it is perceived rebellious action, followed by attempted punishment, followed by a denial of guilt; or, in the case of Adonijah and Solomon

⁴³⁹ See the discussion of this word later in this chapter.

⁴⁴⁰ Matty, *Sennacherib’s Campaign Against Judah and Jerusalem in 701 B.C.*, 139, states that “there is no theological dimension to the episode of the paying of tribute. The attitude of Hezekiah is apparently political.” The way that Matty phrases this is erroneous. Perhaps the point he wants to make is that Hezekiah does not sin against Yahweh and is simply admitting a crime against the Assyrian king.

⁴⁴¹ Raymond Cohen and Raymond Westbrook, “Introduction: The World of Isaiah,” in *Isaiah’s Vision of Peace in Biblical and Modern International Relations: Swords into Plowshares*, eds. Raymond Cohen and Raymond Westbrook (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 6. Rulers are sure to note that these treaties are expressed as being in perpetuity and applying to the subsequent ruler, but the frequency with which vassals rebelled after the death of a ruler suggests that the vassals did not see them as binding once the king died. Other scholars have also made similar comments. Grayson says, “The pact, as usual in the Ancient Near East, was regarded as a highly personal affair, and it automatically dissolved with the death of Adad-idri.” A. Kirk Grayson, “Shalmaneser III and the Levantine States: The ‘Damascus Coalition Rebellion,’” *JHS* 5 (2004): Article 4.

this scenario is projected into the future. If Adonijah is crowned king, he will attempt to punish those who threaten his kingship, which would be followed by death or a confession. The failed rebels admit wrongdoing to the ruler with the hope that they will be spared.

The recurrent pattern demonstrates that the rebels only regret their action and deem it as wrong after failure. In Gen 40–41 the Pharaoh imprisons the Cupbearer and kills his companion; in Num 12 Yahweh afflicts Miriam’s hand with a disease; in Num 14 Yahweh pronounces a death sentence; in Num 16 Yahweh is about to destroy the protestors; in Num 21 the people are punished with snakes and death; in 1 Sam 24 Saul is on a mission to kill David; in 2 Kgs 1 Bathsheba assumes Adonijah will mete out punishment on her and her son if he appropriates the throne; and finally, in 2 Kgs 18 Sennacherib destroys many of Judah’s fortified cities. Having the subordinate individuals utter נשׁוּבָה to the ruler to describe their rebellious actions after the punishment presents them as penitent and now faithful followers of the ruler. They confess that they deserve punishment and plead that they have changed their ways. The use of נשׁוּבָה comes across in these narratives as a necessary political calculation to stem the punishment and makes no general judgement on whether it is right or wrong to disobey all rulers at all times.⁴⁴² People who rebel against a human ruler are not automatically deemed criminals in the Hebrew Bible. Consequently, the connection between נשׁוּבָה and rebellion in these examples is related to the individual who is using the term and the biblical writers are sensitive to that fact. This is confirmed when noting the alternation between the rebellion/protest terms to begin the story and נשׁוּבָה in the subsequent speech in six of the eight episodes analyzed.

⁴⁴² This does not mean that all of these rebellions are legitimate. This is certainly not the case. All of the rebellions in the book of Numbers are sinful, but this does not hinge on the usage of נשׁוּבָה in the speech of the people.

Table 7. מַטְאָה – Rebellion and a Term for Sin/Offense

Text	Context	Alternating Rebellion Term	Speaker	Addressee	Perspective
Genesis 40:1; 41:9 מַטְאָה, מַטְאָה	Two servants commit an act against the Pharaoh that lands them in jail. One is killed for the actions, while the other recalls how he had wronged the Pharaoh.		Narrator, Cupbearer	Reader, Pharaoh	Subordinate speaking to a ruler admitting he wronged the ruler, a second example connected to the first one
Num 12:11 מַטְאָה	Aaron and Miriam are speaking against Moses' authority.	דַּבַּר ב	Aaron	Moses	Subordinate speaking to the ruler admitting wrong for his attack on the ruler.
Num 14:40 מַטְאָה	People refuse to follow Yahweh's directions to journey to Canaan to take the land Yahweh had given them.	מַרְד	People	Moses	Subordinates speaking to the leader attempting to reverse course by declaring the previous rebellion wrong.
Num 16:22, 26; 17:3 (Eng. 16:38) מַטְאָה	Korah and others are challenging the authority of Moses and Aaron. The example in 17:3 may be referring to a cultic matter.	קָהַל עַל יַעַד עַל לִזְנוֹת עַל	People (God in one instance reflecting on the situation)	Moses	People speaking, hoping thereby, to stem the punishment; Yahweh talking about those who challenge Moses and Aaron.

Table 7 (Continued).

Num 21:7 הַטָּאֲנִי	People are protesting to Moses and Yahweh.	דָּבַר בַּ	People	Moses	People are speaking to the ruler, admitting they were wrong to challenge the ruler.
1 Sam 24:12 הַטָּאֲתִי	David is gaining power at Saul's expense, and Saul is seeking to kill David.	קָשַׁר	David	Saul	A subordinate is talking to a ruler, trying to persuade him that he is not rebelling against him.
1 Kgs 1:21 הַטָּאֲתִי	Bathsheba is speaking to David and describing how Adonijah would view others who could also claim the throne.	1 Kgs 2:13–25 makes clear that these texts are discussing rebellions or potential rebellions.	Bathsheba	David	A subordinate is speaking to the ruler, describing how a new ruler would view those whom he saw as a threat to his rule.
2 Kgs 18:14 הַטָּאֲתִי	Hezekiah had rebelled against Assyria and was paying tribute.	מָרַד	Hezekiah	King of Assyria	A subordinate is talking to a ruler, admitting that this act of rebellion was wrong.

חָטָא (*ḥaṭû*) in Neo-Assyrian Texts

Looking at Hezekiah's rebellion against the Assyrians in the last example analyzed provides a transition into comparing the usage of חָטָא in the Hebrew Bible to its cognate (*ḥaṭû*) in the Assyrian royal inscriptions.⁴⁴³ When 2 Kgs 18 states that Hezekiah admits to Sennacherib that he has committed an offense (חָטָא), this is often how the Assyrian royal inscriptions refer to rebellious kings. One specific phrase appearing in these Assyrian texts is *bēl ḥīṭi*, "criminal." The Assyrian texts also employ the verb *ḥaṭû* to describe the actions of rebellious individuals in other contexts as well. The paragraphs below will discuss this further.

The most important point to consider is how the use of the root חָטָא as a rebellion term in the Hebrew Bible compares to the way the Assyrian royal inscriptions present rebels. There is a correspondence in the way the two cultures use *ḥaṭû*/חָטָא to discuss rebellion. The correspondence is limited, however, because the Hebrew Bible essentially restricts this word in rebellion contexts to episodes in which the subordinate is described as speaking to the ruler he wronged.⁴⁴⁴ In contrast, *ḥaṭû* and Akkadian words in the same semantic range provide the principal way the Assyrian royal inscriptions present political rebels.

Prior to looking at the predominant way that the Assyrian royal inscriptions present rebels, the paragraphs below will present a case that provides a direct parallel to the usage of חָטָא in the Hebrew Bible. This comparison confirms the analysis above of why the Hebrew Bible employs חָטָא in direct speech in the context of rebellion. This particular case occurs in Esarhaddon's letter to Aššur. This text records the campaigns of the Assyrian king against

⁴⁴³ Caution needs to be exercised because while cognate, the words exhibit differences in the two cultures. In the Assyrian texts, *ḥaṭû* is not primarily connected to a cultic sin as it is in the Hebrew Bible. It may still entail a sin against Aššur, which creates a religious connection, but it does not as often refer to cultic sins. Nevertheless, the words are cognate and as the following paragraphs will show, there are similarities in their usages.

⁴⁴⁴ As noted above, there is a possible exception in Num 16–17. The word may be used here because of the cultic actions associated with Korah and his companions. Genesis 40:1 does not have the accused rebel speaking to the king, but it is connected to Gen 41, which does present it from this perspective.

Šubria in 673. Esarhaddon had accused the king of Šubria of rebellion and specifically of illegally harboring Assyrian fugitives. Subsequently, he sent a threatening message to the Šubrian ruler to which the subordinate responds directly to Esarhaddon. In his response he states,

O, king, to whom abomination, untruth, plundering, and murdering are taboo... let the land Šubria, *the land that sinned against you*, serve you in its entirety. Place your official over them and let them pull your yoke! Lay tribute and payment upon them, yearly, without ceasing! *I am a thief and for the sin I have committed* I will restore the losses fifty-fold. For each runaway Assyrian fugitive, let me replace him one hundred-fold. Let me live so that I may proclaim the fame of the God Aššur.⁴⁴⁵

The parallels to the discussion of 𐎶𐎵𐎲 above are twofold. First, there is the use of the root *ḥaṭû* in the context of rebellion or the breaking of a treaty. Second, it is placed in the mouth of a subordinate speaking directly to the ruler admitting that what he did was wrong and stating that he deserved punishment for his act of rebellion. The two pertinent phrases are *um-ma KUR.šub-ri-a KUR iḥ-ṭu-ka*, “let the land Šubria, the land that sinned against you,” and *šar-ra-qa-ku-ma ina ḥi-ṭi aḥ-ṭu-u*, “I am a thief, for the sin I have committed...,” as they both contain the root *ḥaṭû* in the speech of the subordinate.⁴⁴⁶ The purpose is clear in this context. The subordinate does not want to be punished or killed for his act of rebellion and so admits to the ruler he rebelled against that he had erred. The use of *ḥaṭû* highlights this sentiment. The Šubrian king subsequently continues to speak obsequiously to the ruler hoping that Esarhaddon will spare him.

This is not a unique occurrence within the Assyrian royal inscriptions. One of Tiglath-pileser III’s summary inscriptions states, *ḥiṭišunu amḥuršunūtima massunu ubal[liṭ]*, “I accepted

⁴⁴⁵ Erle Leichty, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680-669 BC)*, RINAP 4 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 81. See specifically Col. i. 8–17. The italics are added to emphasize the pertinent lines.

⁴⁴⁶ See also the text from Ashurbanipal in Rykle Borger, *Beiträge zum Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals* (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996), 67–68. This text records the people of Arabia as saying, “It is because we did not respect the oath sworn to Aššur, and because we sinned against the benevolence of king Ashurbanipal!”

their sin and forgave their country.”⁴⁴⁷ Shawn Aster, commenting on this passage, states that the Assyrian king “punishes until his sovereignty is recognized, then ceases punishment.”⁴⁴⁸ This comment confirms the points noted above that the rebellious subordinates are confessing their crimes out of political expediency.

In the cases in the Hebrew Bible discussed above, the subordinates respond after their punishment with similar language. The intention of these texts is to present the ruler’s position on rebellion. These examples further show how rebels pander to rulers who are in the process of punishing them. This is the only recourse failed rebels have as they attempt to avoid further punishment or death. When one is about to be killed for some previous action, the only thing they can do is beg for their life and confess that what they did was wrong.

The Assyrian royal inscriptions, however, do not limit the use of *ḥaṭû* to situations when the subordinate king is speaking directly to the ruler as Esarhaddon’s Letter to God does. These inscriptions consistently represent rebellion as a crime against the Assyrian king. *ḥaṭû* appears frequently to describe rebels in many Assyrian texts. In the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III, *ḥaṭû* describes the violation of the *adê* agreement, *tu-ta-am-mu* LUGAL KUR.un-qi ina a-de-e DINGIR.MEŠ GAL.MEŠ *iḥ-ti*, “Tutammu, king of the land of Unqi, neglected (sinned against) the loyalty oath of the great Gods.”⁴⁴⁹ The phrase EN *ḥi-iṭ-ti* meaning “criminal” appears often in

⁴⁴⁷ Hayim Tadmor and Shigeo Yamada, *The Royal Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III (744–722 BC) and Shalmaneser V (726–722 BC), Kings of Assyria*, 1:126, text 48. The statement must entail that the rebels confessed their crime to the ruler after they failed.

⁴⁴⁸ Aster, *Reflections of Empire in Isaiah 1-39: Responses to Assyrian Ideology*, 130.

⁴⁴⁹ Tadmor and Yamada, *The Royal Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III (744-722 BC) and Shalmaneser V (726–722 BC), Kings of Assyria*, 39. See text 12:3–4. See also 13:10, which discusses the criminal seizure of various cities using the same word; no. 21:12’–13’; Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II. aus Khorsabad*, Ann. 68–69, pg. 92, 315; Ann. 72–77, pg. 93, 316.

the inscriptions of Sennacherib to refer to rebellious individuals.⁴⁵⁰ This is present in Sennacherib’s description of Ekron’s leaders who hand over their ruler, Padi, to Hezekiah. This action implicates them in the 701 rebellion. The phrase reads, LÚ.GÌR.NÍTA.MEŠ LÚ.NUN.MEŠ *ša ħi-iṭ-ṭu ú-šab-šu-ú a-duk-ma*, “I killed the governors (and) nobles who had committed crime(s).”⁴⁵¹ The word again appears to describe those involved in a rebellion presenting them as guilty and deserving of punishment.

The use of *ḫaṭû* along with similar words was part of a larger strategy employed by the Assyrian royal inscriptions to present the enemies of Assyria in a decidedly negative way. These enemies include those who had rebelled against Assyria. Oded lists numerous words these inscriptions employ to describe rebellious and enemy kings, *šaggalta lamdu* “trained in murder,” *bēl arni* “culprit,” “sinner,” *bēl ḫīṭi* “criminal,” “sinner,” *lā ṭābtānu* “malefactor,” *ša ana šipši u danānu itakkalu* “one who trusted in violence and force,” *zēr nērti* “seed of murder,” *libbašu kāšir nērti* “in his heart he plots murder,” *ginâ ikappud nīrta* “constantly he plots murder,” *ēpiš lemnēti* “criminal,” *ēpiš lemutti* “the evildoer,” *lemnū/lemuttu* “wicked man/wickedness,” *raggu u šenu* “wicked and evildoer,” *qardammu* “wicked,” *dābib šalīpti* “speaks treachery.”⁴⁵² Oded goes on to say, “the almost formulaic negative portrayal of the enemy aims to degrade him, to label him as a wicked personality and to impose upon him censure and penalties by virtue of a seemingly forensic process.”⁴⁵³ The purpose of using words such as these is to present the Assyrian ruler as justified while presenting the rebel as evil.

⁴⁵⁰ Grayson and Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704–681)*. See text 1:24; 2:12; text 3:12.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 4: 46–47.

⁴⁵² Oded, *War, Peace and Empire: Justifications for War in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions*, 34.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, 44.

Presenting rebels as evil and as criminals serves to legitimize and justify any retributive military action the Assyrians, as the aggressors, choose to engage in. This provides the aggressors and their military with a sense of moral uprightness. They recognize that if they present the rebellious enemy as wicked, they have an obligation to rid the earth of them.⁴⁵⁴ This connects to the comments made in the previous chapter about how governments often present an alternate reality to justify aggression. The Assyrians did not view themselves as the aggressors, but as those with a responsibility to punish the wicked. This presentation contrasts markedly with the focus of the weaker party on the oppression of the ruler and the depiction of rebellion as salvation, as the previous chapter discussed.

The Assyrian royal inscriptions do use terms for rebellion that do not always contain within them a moral judgment, but they often do so when paired with words that indicate negativity towards their enemies. The most prominent descriptive rebellion terms in the Assyrian texts are, *sehû*, *nabalkutu*, and *bâru*.⁴⁵⁵ An example of the combination just noted occurs in

⁴⁵⁴ Mario Liverani, *International Relations in the Ancient Near East, 1600-1100 BC* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 86-90. See also Mario Fales, "The Enemy in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: The Moral Judgment," in *Mesopotamien und Seine Nachbarn: Politische und Kulturelle Wechselbeziehungen im Alten Vorderasien vom 4. bis 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.*, RAI XXV Teil 2 (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1982), 425-435.

⁴⁵⁵ This includes *bârtu* and *bârânû* which are related to *bâru* as well as *sîhu*. For a distinction among all of these terms in the Assyrian texts see, Peter Juhás, "*bârtu nabalkattu ana mât Aššur îpušma uhattâ...Eine Studie zum Vokabular und zur Sprache der Rebellion in ausgewählten neuassyrischen Quellen und in 2 Kön 15-21*," 13-111. Admittedly, it is difficult to prove that these terms are more descriptive than those mentioned above. There is, however, some evidence for this position. Oded does not list these terms as those being employed in the Assyrian royal inscriptions to present the enemy in a decidedly negative way. Oded, *War, Peace and Empire: Justifications for War in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions*, 34. Fales also notes that *nabalkutu* is a term that he does not assess "for its use outside of the sphere of "moral judgement." Fales, "The Enemy in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: The Moral Judgment," in *Mesopotamien und Seine Nachbarn: Politische und Kulturelle Wechselbeziehungen im Alten Vorderasien vom 4. bis 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.*, 429. The terms *sehû* and *bârtu* do appear in negative contexts, and can be employed to present the enemies of Assyria as engaged in wrongdoing, as Fales discusses. The negativity, however, has to do with the perspective. Furthermore, these terms also appear in texts that must be descriptive. Esarhaddon's succession treaty, for example, states "if either a bearded (courtier) or a eunuch puts Assurbanipal, the great crown prince designate, to death, and takes over the kingship of Assyria, you shall not make common cause with him and become his servant but shall break away and be hostile (to him), alienate all lands from him, instigate a rebellion (*sîhu*) against him ...". See lines 237-248. This is behavior that the Assyrians are to engage in. Parpola and Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths*, 38. *sîhu* is also the term to describe a revolt in the Eponym Chronicles, which also suggests it is descriptive rather than a term designed to present a moral judgment on an action. Alan Millard, *The Eponyms of the Assyrian Empire 910-612 BC*, SAAS II (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1994), 41. See specifically eponym numbers 759-762. This is also the case with the Assyrian and

Sennacherib’s inscriptions. The text says, “At the beginning of my kingship... Marduk-apla-iddina, king of Karduniaš, an evil foe, a rebel (*ba-ra-nu-ú*) with a treacherous mind, an evildoer whose villainous acts are true.”⁴⁵⁶ While it can be negative, the word *ba-ra-nu-ú* is far more descriptive of rebellion than the Akkadian words discussed earlier. It often focuses on an attempted overthrow of the sovereign with a threat to his life.⁴⁵⁷ In another of Sennacherib’s texts, after saying that Šūzubu had rebelled (*is-se-ḥu-ma*), the text describes him as a Chaldean, a person of lowly status, and a coward.⁴⁵⁸ Even when the inscriptions employ descriptive words for rebellion, such as *seḥû* and *bārtu*, these texts are unambiguous in their presentation and condemnation of rebellion. The Assyrian texts have the goal of presenting rebellion in a decidedly negative way; this helped the Assyrians maintain their position as the world power by providing a mechanism through which they could justify military aggression against a rebel.

It is true that not every episode of rebellion recorded in the Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions creates a chain of these negative words in association with the rebel. However, in these limited cases, the inscriptions are not hesitant to bring up rebellion. They do so to display the Assyrian king’s unrivaled power and his ability to put down every rebellion he faces in order to fight against the chaos outside of the Assyrian center.⁴⁵⁹ As Radner has shown, the inscriptions

Babylonian Chronicles. See Grayson, *The Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, 79. See specifically chronicle 1 iii:6–7.

⁴⁵⁶ Grayson and Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704–681)*, 32.

⁴⁵⁷ Peter Juhás, “*bārtu nabalkattu ana māt Aššur ipušma uhattâ*...Eine Studie zum Vokabular und zur Sprache der Rebellion in ausgewählten neuassyrischen Quellen und in 2 Kön 15–21,” 26–27, 32–34. This act involved breaking a treaty so was not always indicative of a threat to the king’s life, but could refer to another breach of treaty.

⁴⁵⁸ Grayson and Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704–681)*, 181. The text is 22 v:17. We also see this with forms of the word *nabalkutu*. Ibid., 135. See text 17 iv: 64–65 for this story. The text describes the rebellion of a city ruler with *uš-bal-kit* and demeans him by saying that his gods abandoned him.

⁴⁵⁹ Liverani has commented on many occasions about the organization of the Assyrian empire and how the Assyrians saw the outside periphery as chaotic. See especially, Mario Liverani, *The Ideology of the Assyrian Empire in Power and Propaganda: A Symposium on Ancient Empires*, ed. Mogens Larsen, Copenhagen Studies in Assyriology 7 (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979) 306, 311; Mario Liverani, *Assyria the Imperial Mission*, MesCiv 21 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2017). See especially chapters 5, 6, 16, and 19.

never mention a rebellion without subsequently recording its suppression.⁴⁶⁰ This means the scribes avoid mentioning rebellions the Assyrian king did not successfully suppress. As expected, Esarhaddon's inscriptions fail to mention the successful rebellion of Mugallu and his ability to lead areas in Anatolia in a rebellion against the Assyrian empire in the 670's.⁴⁶¹ This is expected from the imperial power who was in the dominant position and hoped to maintain that position.

The texts of the Hebrew Bible, in contrast to the Assyrians texts, are not coy as they discuss the topic of rebellion; the presence of a rebellion is not predicated on its success or failure. If the writers of the Hebrew Bible had condemned all rebellion by frequently using a term for "sin" to describe rebellion, they would have been condemning themselves and their pious kings such as Hezekiah. Overall, the Assyrian texts attempt to condemn rebellion while the texts in the Hebrew Bible have a much more nuanced and balanced approach as they discuss the topic. The writers of the Hebrew Bible at times view rebellion as salvation, and only in specific circumstances as an offense. The various words for rebellion and the contexts in which they appear demonstrate this.

It is appropriate to pause here and refer to chapter two and the discussion of פָּשַׁע, "to offend, rebel." When considering עָשָׂה, "to offend, rebel," it is noteworthy that this word, which has a strong connection to criminal/sinful activity in the Hebrew Bible appears as a rebellion term when the rebellion takes place against Israel or Judah. Because the writers of the Hebrew

⁴⁶⁰ Karen Radner, "Revolts in the Assyrian Empire: Succession wars, Rebellions Against a False King and Independence Movements," 46. Frahm says something similar. He says, "A main requirement for the inclusion of a revolt in the Assyrian royal *res gestae* is its successful suppression." Eckart Frahm, "Revolts in the Neo-Assyrian Empire: A Preliminary Discourse Analysis," 81. One possible exception would be Sennacherib's inscriptions which mention a defeat. As Liverani suggests, the only reason this defeat is mentioned is so Sennacherib can glorify himself. He places the blame on his generals and subsequently describes how he fixes the situation. In this way, Radner's statement that the Assyrian inscriptions never mention a successful rebellion is still partially correct: Sennacherib did not fail, his generals did. See Grayson and Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704–681)*, 1: 22, as well as Mario Liverani, *Assyria the Imperial Mission*, 128.

⁴⁶¹ Frahm, "Revolts in the Neo-Assyrian Empire: A Preliminary Discourse Analysis," 81–82.

Bible write from the perspective of Israel and Judah, the perspective of the ruler is automatically engaged when a foreign nation rebels against one of these two nations. This made it natural for a word such as **פִּשַׁע** to describe these rebellions. This provides a comparison with the *modus operandi* of the Assyrian texts in that both describe rebellions against themselves with words indicating criminal activity. Surprisingly, and as discussed in chapter two, this does not automatically indicate that the writers of the Hebrew Bible view these rebellions as wrong. Some of the rebellions narrated with **פִּשַׁע** record Yahweh as the driving force. This makes it hard to declare that the rebellions recorded with **פִּשַׁע** in the Hebrew Bible are categorically wrong. This is the case despite the use of a word connected to sin to describe these events.

Overall, the usage of rebellion terms within the Hebrew Bible is quite different from what is present in the Assyrian royal inscriptions. The language of the inscriptions systematically presents all rebels as evil as it legitimizes the king, while the language of the Hebrew Bible varies in its depiction of rebels, but it never categorically condemns all rebels. The Hebrew Bible employs rebellion terms to narrate events and uses terms for “offense” to narrate a rebellion when the text engages the perspective of the ruler. This demonstrates only that the ruler of the story views the rebellion as wrong; it does not make a moral judgement on rebellion itself or even present rebellion in a negative way.

The distinction as described above is due to the difference in perspective between Israel as a small nation and the Assyrians as an empire seeking to maintain their position as the world power. Israel, as an oft subordinate nation, needed to maintain at least an ambiguous attitude toward rebellion as they consistently found themselves in a position where they needed to rebel if they wanted to regain their independence. The previous chapter demonstrated how the writers of the Hebrew Bible found ways to legitimize rebellion by employing the language of liberation and intervention. This contrasts with the Assyrians sources, which presented all rebels as sinners

as a way to help maintain their position as the world power. The use of **הטא** as a rebellion term within the Hebrew Bible, in such limited and specific contexts, supports these positions.

בגד as a Rebellion Term

Another word that also has connections to sinful behavior and is employed as a rebellion term in one episode is **בגד**, “to be deceitful, treacherous.” In this episode, **בגד** does not function analogously to **הטא** as described above, but appears because the rebellion involves one party turning their back on another party. In Judg 9, the writer avoids a rebellion term and instead employs **בגד**, “to be deceitful, treacherous” to describe the rebellion against Abimelech (Judg 9:23). Abimelech had established his rule over the people of Shechem and had been ruling for three years as stated in Judg 9:22: **וַיָּשֶׁר אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ עַל-יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁלֹשׁ שָׁנִים**, “Abimelech ruled over Israel for three years.” Following this short stint as ruler, the leaders of Shechem turn their back on Abimelech and rebel against him. They put their trust in another leader, Gaal. The word the narrator uses to describe the betrayal of Abimelech and choice of Gaal as their new leader is **בגד**, “to act with treachery.” This is indeed a rebellion.⁴⁶² By employing this term that has connections with “sinful” behavior,⁴⁶³ the text is not declaring that all rebellion is treachery but describing the behavior involved in this act. It does so by using **בגד**, which always has negative connotations. There is the recognition in this text that when a group chooses a new leader, they must betray the current ruler. This is what Gaal and the leaders of Shechem do.

Admittedly, based on the usage of **בגד** in this passage, the narrator recognizes a connection between rebellion and illicit behavior. This rebellion involves behavior that is often classified as sin, but considering the narrator’s view of Abimelech it would be hard to declare

⁴⁶² Scholars have recognized that this is a rebellion. Ellie Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest: An Ideology of Leadership in the Gideon, Abimelech and Jephthah Narratives (Judg 6–12)*, VTSup 106 (Boston: Brill, 2005), 156.

⁴⁶³ See Mal 2:10–11; Isa 24:16; Jer 3:20; 5:11; Hos 5:7; 6:7; Hab 1:13; Ps 73:15; 78:57 for some examples of this word indicating sinful activity.

that he views this rebellion as wrong.⁴⁶⁴ Tellingly, God orchestrates the rebellion. The narrator states that **וַיִּשְׁלַח אֱלֹהִים רוּחַ רָעָה בֵּין אַבִּימֶלֶךְ וּבֵין בְּעָלֵי שֵׁכֶם**, “God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the lords of Shechem” (Judg 9:23). The deity is orchestrating this action suggesting the word appears only because the leaders of Shechem betray Abimelech, which the narrator does not view as wrong in this case. While it is hard to state this with certainty, it is possible this text avoids a technical rebellion word (**קִשְׁרָה**) because the entire book of Judges intends to present a series of rebellions as episodes of liberation.⁴⁶⁵ Using a particular term for rebellion would perhaps undermine the author’s purposes to reframe these rebellion stories as stories of liberation.

Words For Rebellious Action מרה, סרר, and מעל.

The second point noted in the introduction that will help demonstrate that political rebellion is not categorically “sinful” according to the writers of the Hebrew Bible is related to an analysis of words that are connected to rebellious behavior, but that do not often describe political rebellion. This includes, **מרה**, **סרר**, and **מעל**. These words are occasionally translated with a form of the word “rebel” and are occasionally connected to words for political rebellion such as **מרד**. Consequently, they have been used by some, as we will see, to state that the ancient Israelites equated rebellion and sin. These terms are therefore important to discuss despite the claim of this chapter that they do not describe political rebellion.

מרה to Indicate Rebellious Action

The first word to analyze is **מרה**, which is often translated with a form of the English word

⁴⁶⁴ For an analysis of the narrator’s view of Abimelech see Gordon K. Oeste, *Legitimacy, Illegitimacy, and the Right to Rule: Windows on Abimelech’s Rise*, LHBOTS 546 (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 165.

⁴⁶⁵ See the previous chapter for more on the book of Judges and the ways in which writers reframe rebellion stories.

rebel,⁴⁶⁶ but more specifically means to be recalcitrant. The word predominantly appears in the context of describing disobedient actions or a defiant attitude directed at Yahweh or in a couple of cases against parents. While it is not always informative to look at what most occurrences contain to find the meaning of a word, these occurrences do appear to be instructive regarding מרה. The word is overwhelmingly paired with various phrases indicating that the people disregard or fail to obey a word or command of Yahweh, or less often, another superior like a parent. In ten instances the object of the verb מרה is פי, “mouth, command” as in Deut 1:26, 43; 9:23; 1 Sam 12:14, 15; 1 Kgs 13:21, 26. In these cases, someone has disregarded the פי יהוה, “the command of Yahweh.” Additional texts do not contain the phrase פי יהוה but preserve a parallel phrase using similar words such as משפטי, “my judgments” or רברו, “his word” as in Ezek 5:6; Ps 105:28; 107:11. In yet other contexts, while the object may not be one of these words indicating Yahweh’s command or word, the disavowal of the superior’s word is the intended meaning. The book of Ezekiel often discusses how the people of Israel “rebel” (מרה) against Yahweh and it further describes this as a refusal to listen to him, saying they have failed to walk in Yahweh’s statutes (Ezek 20:8, 13). Failing to listen to someone is akin to rejecting their word or command. Thus, these texts confirm that meaning. This also appears in Isa 1:19-20 where “rebellion,” or more accurately disobedience, described with מרה is presented as the opposite of listening to Yahweh. The people are again unwilling to obey His commands.

In other cases, מרה is a generic description of the behavior or attitude of the people as in Deut 9:23 and throughout the book of Ezekiel. This prophetic text often employs the nominal form (מרי) to describe the Israelites as a “rebellious house.” While these texts do not always specify, based on the evidence elsewhere, what must be in view is that if a person is acting

⁴⁶⁶ The NRSV repeatedly translates מרה with a form of the English rebel. See Num 20:10, 24; 27:14; Deut 1:26, 43; 9:7, 23, 24; 21:8; 31:27; Josh 1:18; 1 Sam 12:14, 15; Isa 1:20; 50:5; 63:10; Jer 4:17; Ezek 5:6; 20:8, 13, 21; Hos 13:16 for some examples. See, however, 1 Kgs 13:21 where they more accurately translate it with “disobeyed.”

according to what the word *מרה* means, then he or she is willfully refusing to obey the words or commands of Yahweh. Ezekiel, as a prophetic text, has in view the willful disavowal of Yahweh's covenantal stipulations.⁴⁶⁷ The same applies with the nominal form *מרי* in the book of Isaiah. In Isa 30:9 the people who are characterized by the action of *מרי* are described as people who are unwilling to listen to the law (תורה) of Yahweh: *כִּי עִם מְרִי הוּא בָנִים כְּחֹשִׁים בָּנִים לֹא־אָבִו*, *שְׂמֹעַ תּוֹרַת יְהוָה*, “for they are a rebellious people, lying children, children who are not willing to listen to the law of Yahweh.”

The meaning of *מרה* as just outlined is also consistent with the few texts that are not describing recalcitrant actions directed at Yahweh. Deuteronomy 21:18 is a text that does not have an individual disobeying Yahweh but parents; again, the meaning of the word concerns an individual disregarding a command or, in this case, the voice (קול) of an authority figure. This text discusses a son who is “rebellious;” he is described as one “who does not listen to the voice of his father or the voice of his mother” (*אִי־יִגַּד שְׁמֹעַ בְּקוֹל אָבִיו וּבְקוֹל אִמּוֹ*). The meaning is parallel to what is mentioned above describing a willful refusal to listen to the commands of someone with authority over you. In Josh 1:18, *מרה* does describe disobedience to an earthly leader, Joshua, but it again focuses on disregarding the *פי*, “command” of the leader. This provides the reason for the terms use in this context, not because it is a political rebellion. It could at most be described as rebellion in the sense of disobedience, but it is something different from a rebellion described with either *מורד*, *פשע*, or *קשר*. These terms focus on the rejection or overthrow of a political ruler. Individuals can disobey a command of a political ruler without rejecting or attempting to overthrow that ruler. The word is also indicative of how people with a disobedient

⁴⁶⁷ Disregarding covenantal stipulations can be considered a rebellion, but it appears the text of Ezekiel distinguishes between *מורד* and *מרה*. Based on an analysis of Ezek 20, these terms had differences, and the former is the word Ezekiel employs to describe a political rebellion, while *מרה* focuses on disobeying one's commands rather than an attempted overthrow. See chapter two for a full discussion of this issue.

attitude behave. Elsewhere, these people are described as having a עֲרִפְנֵי הַקֶּנֶסֶת, “stiff neck” (Deut 31:27; Neh 9:17).

Despite often being translated as rebellious, the word does not indicate or describe a political rebellion where a person or state acts to reject and overthrow the existing leader. It also overwhelmingly applies to action taken against Yahweh rather than action taken against an earthly figure; only once does it appear to describe action against an earthly ruler. This suggests that writers at times intentionally distinguish between action directed against Yahweh and action directed against an earthly king.

סָרַר to Indicate Rebellious Action

Another word that occasionally appears in parallel to מָרָה and is pertinent to a discussion of rebellion is סָרַר or the by-form סָרָה. The two words, מָרָה and סָרַר, are parallel in Deut 21:18, 20; Jer 5:23; and Ps 78:8. סָרַר is a word that is also on occasion translated with a form of the word rebellion,⁴⁶⁸ but again does not describe a political rebellion. It consistently appears to describe the attitude of a person or group who spurns an authority figure, whether that is parents or Yahweh. The main difference between סָרַר and מָרָה is that the former is not primarily connected with disobedience toward a word or command of an authority figure, but more often describes a general disposition of defiance that makes one difficult to control. This appears in the phrase כְּתֵף סוֹדָרָת, “stubborn shoulder” in Zech 7:11 and Neh 9:29 where it describes the obstinate character of Israel. The same stubborn attitude occurs in the use of this phrase to describe the behavior of a cow in Hos 4:16. Hosea says, כִּי כְּפָרָה סוֹדָרָת סָרָה יִשְׂרָאֵל, “For Israel is stubborn, like a stubborn cow.” It describes a person or animal who is difficult to control. This brief outline suggests that the basic meaning of סָרַר has little connection to political rebellion despite the

⁴⁶⁸ See Isa 1:5; 30:1; Ps 66:7; 68:7, 19 in the NRSV for the translation of this word using a form of the word rebellion.

occasional translation of rebel or rebellious.

Despite having little connection to political rebellion, the word appears to have political implications in the book of Isaiah. This prophetic text uses סָרַר to describe action taken against Yahweh that involves relationships with foreign nations. The Israelites often made alliances with foreign nations and the prophetic texts frequently criticize these relationships, claiming they are an indication of unfaithfulness toward Yahweh. In Isa 30 and 31, Yahweh accuses the Israelites of being בְּנֵי סוֹדֵרִים, “rebellious children” and he indicates this is in part due to alliances with foreign nations. This is comparable to Hos 7:13 where the word פֶּשַׁע appears to describe an illegitimate foreign alliance. It is possible this is also the case in Isa 1:2 where פֶּשַׁע may also indicate the disapproval of a foreign alliance.⁴⁶⁹

The prophetic texts demand that the Israelites be exclusively loyal to Yahweh as their political patron. Thus, the political association of the Israelites with these foreign empires is a breach of covenant and thus a type of rebellion against Yahweh. Isaiah 1:2 and the texts of Isa 30-31 that use פֶּשַׁע and סָרַר to attack the Israelites for these foreign alliances are, therefore, making a connection between these terms and a political rebellion against Yahweh, the suzerain of the Israelites. Based on the discussion above, the description of Judah as בְּנֵי סוֹדֵרִים, “rebellious children” in Isa 30:1 indicates Yahweh’s inability to control them because they act like a stubborn cow (Hos 7:14) as they wander in the wrong direction and ally with foreign nations. Judah is acting autonomously without consulting Yahweh as they rely on military help from other nations. סָרַר does have political overtones in this context, but the term is focused on illegitimate action against Yahweh not a human ruler. Based on this, it would be inappropriate to

⁴⁶⁹ Isaiah 1 may have been reworked by a later redactor to serve as an introduction to the entire book, but some of the oracles in this chapter are certainly earlier. Williamson specifically connects Isa 1:2b-9 to parts of Isa 30, which makes this connection more compelling. See Hugh G. M. Williamson, “Relocating Isaiah 1:2-9,” in *Writing & Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition Vol. 1*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Peter W. Flint (New York: Brill, 1997), 263-78; Aster, *Reflections of Empire in Isaiah 1-39: Responses to Assyrian Ideology*, 278-84.

make comments on the ancient Israelites' view of rebellion against an earthly ruler considering the negative connotations of סרר. Rebellion is indeed wrong when the action is directed against Yahweh.

מעל To Indicate Rebellious Action

Scholars should also be careful not to make judgements about the ancient Israelite's view of political rebellion based on the root מעל, "to be unfaithful," which also has some connections to the idea of rebellion. This word appears in at least two rebellion contexts, specifically Josh 22:16, 18, 22 and Ezek 17:20. Both the Joshua and Ezekiel texts pair מעל with מרה and condemn the rebellion described therein. The reason מעל is not always pertinent to the discussion of political rebellion against a human leader is that the focus of this word concerns a sin against God.⁴⁷⁰ In Josh 22, the word appears because the cultic sin of building an altar apart from the central sanctuary was part of the rebellion and indicated that this group was breaking their oath with Yahweh. In Ezek 17 מעל occurs due to the rebellion specifically involving a violation of an oath with God. As Milgrom outlines, oath violation is the primary focus of this word.⁴⁷¹ Ezekiel 17 describes a rebellion against Babylon, but it specifically connects the rebellion to breaking an oath with God (Ezek 17:19). Since מעל focuses on "rebellion" against God, as Milgrom says, it can shed very little light on how the ancient Israelites viewed the legitimacy of rebelling against an earthly authority. The only thing one can say is that rebellion against an earthly ruler is condemned if it also constitutes a violation against Yahweh. When it does, the authors specify this as in Ezek 17. The condemnation, therefore, involves additional comments beyond a descriptive word for rebellion.

מרה, סרר and מעל are Not Terms for Political Rebellion

⁴⁷⁰ Jacob Milgrom, "The Concept of Ma'al in the Bible and the Ancient Near East," *JAOS* 96 (1976): 236.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 237.

What this discussion has highlighted is that these words do not describe political rebellions that focus solely on human rulers. Translating them with a word for rebellion, while not incorrect if one simply means disobedience, can at times create confusion. There is a clear distinction between מרה, סרר, and מעל and the words described in chapter two (מרד, פשע, קשר) that focus on an overthrow of a political ruler. The former three words describe disobedient action rather than a political rebellion. Thus, the translation of rebellious or rebellion for these words can be misleading.

Equating one of these words to events that focus on political rebellion has helped perpetuate the idea that rebellion is sin. Based on the appearance of מרה in 1 Sam 15:23, Carroll suggests that “the theological apperception of rebellion was that it constituted sin.” He goes on from here to connect this to political action or “the political order of the day.”⁴⁷² By stating this, he argues that the ancient Israelites viewed political rebellion as sin. Connecting מרה to political rebellion is however misleading as it does not describe political rebellion within the Hebrew Bible as argued above. The previous chapters have also argued that the ancient Israelites did not automatically equate rebellion and sin (unless the rebellion is against Yahweh) or even rebellion and illegitimate behavior. They understood that there could be a connection between the two based on the perspective, but this is something different from declaring that one is always the other.

CONCLUSION

As this chapter has discussed, the connection between rebellion and criminal behavior/sin is natural. It is therefore understandable why some scholars have equated rebellion and sin. In every episode of rebellion, one party—the subordinate party—is always disobeying another, which is one reason why the natural connection between rebellion and illegal action exists.

⁴⁷² Carroll, “Rebellion and Dissent in Ancient Israelite Society,” 181.

Additionally, the ruling party will always view a rebellion against it as wrong and claim it is an offense against their deity. Because of this, readers should expect the following two scenarios: first, they should expect words for rebellion to have a connection with words for sin or criminal behavior; second, they should expect that words for sin will appear to describe rebellion. There is a logical connection. The correlation, however, does not demand that the ancient Israelites understood rebellion to be categorically, that is always, sinful. Rebellion was often acceptable, as the previous chapters have outlined. What this connection does help explain is why there is an uneasiness with the concept of rebellion and why writers at times intentionally avoid rebellion terms.⁴⁷³ The potential exists for some to view rebellion as categorically wrong based on the connections described here. These details continue to confirm one of the premises of this dissertation, namely that the writers of the Hebrew Bible are careful in how they describe rebellion due to the ambiguity of it.

One of the primary ways this chapter demonstrated this was by looking at the word **חטא** in a rebellion context. The writers of the Hebrew Bible employ the word for sin/offense (**חטא**) in the context of rebellion in episodes when the rebels are described as speaking directly to the ruler. This always follows punishment, or its expectation. When **חטא** occurs in such a scenario, these texts are telling a story about how the rebels are attempting to assuage or stem the punishment they are experiencing. This provides a rhetorical, and possibly ironic, reason for the use of **חטא** in the rebellion contexts analyzed above. It certainly does not entail that ancient Israelite society and those writing about it always deemed political rebellion to be illegal or to be sin. On the contrary, it points toward the opposite conclusion. If a word such as **חטא** was far more ubiquitous in the context of rebellion it would be easier to suggest the society equated rebellion and illicit behavior. This is the case in the Assyrian royal inscriptions. As we have seen

⁴⁷³ This is the situation in the book of Judges and the other episodes analyzed in the previous chapter.

in the previous chapters, there are many times rebellion words are purely descriptive and are condoned by Yahweh making them legitimate. Further, as previously mentioned, Yahweh is often the driving force behind a rebellion. This occurs even in episodes when a word connected to wrongdoing appears to describe the rebellion, as in the example of Judg 9 discussed in this chapter.⁴⁷⁴ Finally, these rebellions often fail to mention the involvement of Yahweh or that these actions are directed at the Israelite deity. In some cases, there are implicit connections, but in others the writers intentionally avoid mentioning the deity.

The latter part of this chapter looked at additional words for sin or wrongdoing that have often been translated as “to rebel” and are occasionally connected to rebellion terms, but as the discussion demonstrated they do not indicate political rebellion. Words such as מרה, סדר, and מעל do not comment on political rebellion against an earthly ruler, but describe various types of disobedience most often directed at Yahweh. Because of this distinction, one cannot assume that the ancient Israelites understood political rebellion necessarily to be wrong or to be sin in every circumstance. This is a point confirmed in each section of the chapter.

⁴⁷⁴ See also in chapter two under the discussion of פשע.

CHAPTER 6

PROTESTING IN THE WILDERNESS: THE ACTIONS OF THE ISRAELITES IN EXODUS 15:22–18:27 AND NUMBERS 10:11–21:9

The books of Exodus and Numbers record stories of a time when Israel wandered in the wilderness. As we will see, these texts contain various traditions that describe multiple rebellions or, more accurately, in most cases, incipient rebellions or protests. All of the wilderness protests, except for one case in Num 14, are described using words and phrases other than the standard words for rebellion outlined in the previous chapters.⁴⁷⁵ Even so, scholars overwhelmingly refer to these actions as rebellions without providing a reason as to why they use this term or an explanation of how they define rebellion.⁴⁷⁶ For this reason, it will prove beneficial to analyze the words and phrases appearing in Exod 14–17 and Num 11–21, along with their context, in light of the social science definition of rebellion discussed earlier in this work and reviewed below. This

⁴⁷⁵ Some may argue the variations in phraseology may have to do with the presence of scribal activity as we will discuss below. These phrases, however, seem to be commensurate with one another in that the rebellion is never realized except for the case in Num 14. Each phrase is also not specific to one of the proposed sources. In what follows we will discuss the sources with the traditional terms, Priestly and non-Priestly, even if we do not see the traditional source critical analysis as the best solution to the composition of the text. The focus of this work does not allow time for an in depth analysis of the composition of the text and so we are using the traditional terminology as a starting point.

⁴⁷⁶ The title of Coats' book is *Rebellion in the Wilderness*. Coats suggests that these actions (especially those behind the word מַרְדָּו) constitute rebellion. Similarly, Kupfer uses the word rebellion in his title as well. George Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness: The Murmuring Motif in the Wilderness Traditions of the Old Testament* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1968), 24. Christian Kupfer, *Mit Israel auf dem Weg durch die Wüste: Eine leserorientierte Exegese der Rebellionstexte in Exodus 15:22–17:7 und Numeri 11:1–20:13*, OtSt 61 (Boston: Brill, 2012). Other scholars sometimes label the action in the wilderness simply as murmuring, but also refer to it as a rebellion without discussing exactly what the action entails. See Frankel, *The Murmuring Stories of the Priestly School*, 19. Here he says these phrases refer to a sinful rebellion, but elsewhere he refers to it as murmuring. See also Jaeyoung Jeon, "The Zadokites in the Wilderness: The Rebellion of Korach (Num 16) and the Zadokite Redaction," *ZAW* 127 (2015): 381–411. Sometimes what occurs is that the scholar will refer to the stories in Exodus as protests, but, presumably because of the increased levels of violence, refer to the actions in Numbers as rebellions. This is the case with Albertz. Rainer Albertz, "Wilderness Material in Exodus (Exodus 15–18)," in *The Book of Exodus: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman, Craig A. Evans, and Joel N. Lohr, VTsup 164 (Boston: Brill, 2014), 162. Propp makes similar statements in his commentary on Exodus. William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1–18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 622. He does, however, refer to the events taking place in Numbers as rebellions. *Ibid.*, 232, 592. The same occurs in antiquity—Josephus referred to Korah's actions as a rebellion the likes of which had never occurred among neither Greeks nor barbarians. Josephus: *Antiquities* 4.12. Vervenne refers to these stories as representative of the protest motif, but did not go on to explain why these stories represent protests rather than rebellions. M. Vervenne "The Protest Motif in the Sea Narrative (Ex 14, 11–12): Form and Structure of a Pentateuchal Pattern," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 63 (1987): 257–71.

will help determine if these events narrate rebellions, or if the words record actions that are more closely associated with modern-day notions of protesting. I argue for the latter.

This analysis is crucial to our overall study for two reasons: (i) because many scholars generically refer to these actions as rebellions, rebuttal of that proposition is appropriate here; and (ii) as the next few pages discuss, the scale between a protest and a rebellion can be fluid due to similarities between the phenomena. Analyzing these terms that describe protests, but are often referred to as rebellions, will shed further light on the system of rebellion terms within the Hebrew Bible. It will also expand the discussion beyond rebellion to include the broader category of collective action, which is a term that subsumes both protest and rebellion.

This chapter focuses on the following words and phrases primarily as they appear in Exodus and Numbers: לֹאן עַל,⁴⁷⁷ “to murmur against,” בַּלְדָּבָר,⁴⁷⁸ “to speak against,” קָהַל עַל,⁴⁷⁹ “to assemble against,” יָעַד עַל,⁴⁸⁰ “to gather against,” and רִיב עִם,⁴⁸¹ “to quarrel/contend with.” There are a few additional phrases that appear less often in these texts and indicate similar activity. For example, Num 11:1 uses the rare word אָנַן in the phrase וַיִּהְיוּ הָעָם כְּמִתְאָנְנִים, “When the people complained,” and Num 16:2 employs the phrase וַיִּקְמוּ לְפָנָי בַּחֲשָׁה, “They rose up before Moses.” Both clauses indicate the same type of activity as those above and will be discussed briefly below. There is another text (Exod 14:11-12) that employs the verb צָעַק, “to cry out” and may stand outside of the protest tradition, though it shows a certain affinity with it.⁴⁸² Lastly, one

⁴⁷⁷ See Exod 15:24; 16:2, 7, 8; 17:3; Num 14:2, 27, 29, 36; 16:11; 17:6 (Eng. 16:41), 20 (Eng. 17:5) and nominally in Exod 16: 7, 8, 9, 12; Num 14:27; 17:20 (Eng. 17:5), 25 (Eng. 17:10).

⁴⁷⁸ See Num 12:1, 8; 21:5, 7.

⁴⁷⁹ See Exod 32:1; Num 16:3, 19; 17:7; 20:2.

⁴⁸⁰ See Num 14:35; 16:11; 27:3.

⁴⁸¹ See Exod 17:2; Num 20:3, 13 and nominally in Exod 17:7.

⁴⁸² Vervenne sees Exod 14 standing at the border between the Exodus event and the stories of the wilderness wanderings. It doesn't fit exactly into the pattern of the protests, but has some of the features of the wilderness texts.

wilderness text also describes the Israelites as “weeping” in the wilderness. Numbers 11:4, 10, 13, 18, 20 all use the verb *בכה*, “to weep” to describe the action of the people as they hope for changes to what they see as a dire situation.⁴⁸³

Distinctions Between a Protest and a Rebellion

Prior to looking at the discrete phrases the wilderness stories employ to describe these protests, it is imperative to examine the idea of protesting in comparison to rebellion because of the multiplicity of terms scholars use to refer to the action in the wilderness. Beyond providing definitions, two questions will help broach the discussion: (i) what is the difference between a protest and rebellion? (ii) If a protest is poised to mature into a rebellion, when does it reach that threshold? The following paragraphs will touch on these questions as well as expound on issues of definition.

This dissertation has defined a political rebellion as an “act by a group or individual that refuses to recognize, or seeks to overturn, the authority of the existing government.”⁴⁸⁴ The focus of the political act of rebellion is on the goal behind the action and the fact that it is an outright rejection of the ruling authority. The crucial point to recognize is that a rebellion is more than pressure or disobedience designed to bring about a change in policy. In a rebellion, a subject group no longer sees the governing party as having authority over them, and this results in either an attempt to overthrow the current leader or for the subject group to break with their rulers and

Marc Vervenne, “The Protest Motif in the Sea Narrative (EX 14, 11–12): Form and Structure of a Pentateuchal Pattern,” 257–72. See especially 267–68. Albertz suggested the same thing and shows how this connects to the redaction of the text. Albertz, “Wilderness Material in Exodus (Exodus 15–8),” 151–52. See these two texts for more on the wilderness period as a distinct tradition within the Pentateuch and some of the complications of defining this. See also Frankel, *The Murmuring Stories of the Priestly School*, 11–14.

⁴⁸³ *בכה* may record episodes that lack some of the elements of a true protest, but drawing out these distinctions will shed further light on the protest terms in the other episodes and the claim that they are not rebellion terms.

⁴⁸⁴ Goldstone, *Revolutions: A Very Short Introduction*, 8. Another definition noted in the introduction is that of Diana Russell. She defined rebellion as “a form of violent power struggle in which the overthrow of the regime is threatened by means that include violence.” While we noted some issues with the definition, the focus of her definition is on the fact that the act threatens to overthrow the ruling power. Russell, *Rebellion, Revolution, and Armed Force*, 6.

act autonomously.

Protest, according to social scientists, can be defined as “public group activity utilizing confrontation politics to apply stress to specific targets for the purpose of affecting public policy.”⁴⁸⁵ The focus of a protest is on action intended to push the current leadership into meeting the protesting group’s demands. Protestors, even if they are not satisfied with it, recognize that the government has authority over them and that the rulers can use this authority to change the current situation. This form of collective action typically has a different goal from a rebellion and often involves different actions and methods, as we will discuss below. The problem with any definition of protest is that it can occasionally make it hard to distinguish a protest from a rebellion. This may be one reason that scholars refer to the stories in the wilderness as rebellion stories or alternate between describing these events as rebellions and as demonstrations without explanation.

Many protests involve collective violence and often, even if indirectly, threaten the ruling authority. They do so because violent protests frequently highlight existing weakness in the ruler that may undermine his or her ability to govern.⁴⁸⁶ While the presence or absence of violence is one way to discern where on the scale an event falls, it does not always serve as an accurate indication. A rebellion might, on the one hand, involve very little violence if a group kills or imprisons the ruler only. A protest involving a riot, on the other hand, might involve brief widespread violence to make a point, but may never intend to usurp or renounce existing leadership. And this, perhaps, is the best distinguishing factor. When the group decides that

⁴⁸⁵ Herbert M. Kritzer, “Political Protest and Political Violence: A Nonrecursive Causal Model,” 630. See also the discussion on page twenty two in the introduction.

⁴⁸⁶ The ability of a protest to undermine the government is clear in some of the events that took place in the 1960’s across the world. This decade saw protests in the United States, Western Europe and the Soviet Union and the Red Guard stirred trouble for Mao in China as part of the Cultural Revolution. The civil unrest threatened the governments in each country. Suri said, “Governments could no longer assume that they commanded legitimacy in the eyes of their citizens.” Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 4. The protests in France forced De Gaulle to say he was “not in charge of anything anymore.” *Ibid.*, 1.

usurpation or rejection of the leader has become necessary, the event evolves from a protest or riot to a rebellion. Thus, a rebellion is ripe when the group's goals shift from trying to affect policy to a forcible attempt to overthrow the leader.⁴⁸⁷

Another possible reason why many refer to the stories in the wilderness as rebellion stories relates to the potential impact the event has on the authority figure. Protests include activity that may threaten or undermine the ruler's power, but may never intend to reject or overthrow the leader. "Protests are signals of government illegitimacy," as Johnson and Thyne have stated.⁴⁸⁸ Therefore, these events can indicate serious threats to the power structures but this does not demand that they be political rebellions.

Further, the goal of a protest could also be to pressure a ruler to relinquish power voluntarily, to change the governing structure, or to incite others with power to initiate a coup.⁴⁸⁹ These appear to be central issues in some of the wilderness stories.⁴⁹⁰ In these cases, the scale from a protest to a rebellion is recognizably fluid; the two events involve some of the same actions and could even have similar goals. In situations such as these, the key is to determine whether the group is applying pressure to force the leaders or others to act or if they are

⁴⁸⁷ The ambitions of the group, however, may not always be clear and it is possible that individuals within the group maintain different objectives. These differences would further make it difficult to distinguish between these actions. The present work, however, is judging based on the details of the text rather than trying to impute hypothetical motivations to the actors.

⁴⁸⁸ Jaclyn Johnson and Clayton L. Thyne, "Squeaky Wheels and Troop Loyalty: How Domestic Protests Influence Coups d'état, 1951–2005," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (2016): 601. The entire premise of their work argues that protests and coups are often related and that a protest has the ability to spark a coup because protests raise issues of governmental legitimacy.

⁴⁸⁹ In 2011 a series of protests broke out in Egypt that forced Hosni Mubarak to resign. For more on these protests as an example of protesting forcing a change in the leader see Dina Shehata, "The Fall of the Pharaoh: How Hosni Mubarak's Reign Came to an End," *Foreign Affairs* 90 (2011): 26–32. See also the previous footnote.

⁴⁹⁰ A specific example of this occurs in Num 12 where Miriam and Aaron protest over the structure of government and attempt to undermine Moses' authority. Numbers 16 provides an even more vivid example of this. In this chapter Korah pushes to change the entire structure of society. He proposes that all people should have the same amount of priestly power. This could be considered a rebellion, because Moses would lose his status. The discussion below, however, will argue it should still be considered a protest, because it is pressure for a policy change rather than an outright attempt to replace Moses. See the discussion later in this chapter for more on this.

attempting to forcibly bring about the change themselves. The classification of such an event may even depend on the type of government or from whose perspective the narration comes.⁴⁹¹ For these reasons, some scholars might use the term “rebel” to denote mere disobedience to an authority figure.⁴⁹² In such cases, the scholars are failing to clarify or provide definitions for their terminology. The distinct terms employed by the writers of the Hebrew Bible allow us to be more precise.

Additionally, protests have the ability to transform into a rebellion when people become increasingly agitated and organize with more subversive goals. Therefore, one might call what takes place in the wilderness stories either protests or incipient rebellions. They are incipient because the potential exists for the protest to transform into a rebellion, as is the case in Num 14. This does not, however, make the events “rebellions,” as the goal is never to forcibly overthrow or reject the leader with one exception found in Num 14.⁴⁹³ These are just a few details that highlight some of the difficulties that arise when distinguishing a protest from a rebellion and are necessary to keep in mind for this chapter. For the present work, it is important to determine whether the action behind these words is confined to pressure for policy changes, or if it is designed to reject and replace the current leader. While recognizing that there is a spectrum of

⁴⁹¹ To begin to analyze all the differences between a protest and rebellion would be beyond the scope of this study. We would have to look at the differences in each and every type of government. For instance, what is called a protest in a democratic society might be called a rebellion in an autocratic society. How these types of governments deal with protests also varies. For more on the differing responses of governments to protest see Sabine Carey, “The Dynamic Relationship Between Protest and Repression,” *Political Research Quarterly* 59 (2006): 4, 8.

⁴⁹² While it must remain entirely speculative, one has to wonder if, historically, scholars were likely to collapse the categories of rebellion and disobedience since they were part of a religious/academic elite. They therefore, have the potential to view any form of adversarial statement against authority as a kind of rebellion that threatened the maintenance of their authority.

⁴⁹³ There are many modern examples of protestors seeking to bring about a coup through the use of protests. These groups attempt to pressure others who have more power than they do to lead the coup. This occurred in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Thailand, and Ukraine. Despite the protestors’ goal to see a change in government, the initial actors did not rebel because they were applying pressure rather than forcibly making the change themselves. For more on these examples see, Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, “Drop Your Weapons: When and Why Civil Resistance Works,” *Foreign Affairs* 93 (2014): 94–106.

phenomena that connect these two ends and that confusion will arise, this is what distinguishes a protest from a rebellion and is key to the distinctions in the discussion below.

The Wilderness Traditions in the Pentateuch

A final matter to consider prior to analyzing these protest terms relates to the choice and nature of texts under analysis. The texts under discussion are concentrated in the wilderness traditions found within the books of Exodus and Numbers. Many scholars have recognized a tradition within the Pentateuch referring to a time in which Israel wandered in the wilderness.⁴⁹⁴ Martin Noth argued that the Pentateuch is a compilation of five major themes with one of these themes being “guidance in the wilderness.”⁴⁹⁵ Scholars have subsequently sought to define and delimit this tradition. Burden broadly defines the wilderness traditions as “those narratives found in the books of Exodus and Numbers that refer to the wanderings of the Israelites in the wilderness under the leadership of Moses.”⁴⁹⁶ Scholars debate the starting and end points of the wilderness tradition, but recognize its existence.⁴⁹⁷ The complication of defining the limits of this tradition demonstrates how intricately connected it is to the rest of the Pentateuch. In some cases, there is overlap with other traditions and a clear indication that the traditions are connected as part of one work. One protest text—Exod 14:11–12—connects the Exodus tradition with the wilderness texts, as we will see below. For our purposes, the wilderness wandering texts are those found in Exod 15:22–18:27 and Num 10:11–21:9.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁴ Some biblical texts also recognize the wilderness period as a distinct tradition. See the following texts for some examples: Isa 48:20–21; Jer 2:2–5; Ezek 20; Ps 78; 95; 105; 106.

⁴⁹⁵ Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, 58–59, 115–36.

⁴⁹⁶ Terry L. Burden, *The Kerygma of the Wilderness Traditions in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 1.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., 17–19. See also Won W. Lee, “The Concept of the Wilderness in the Pentateuch,” in *Israel in the Wilderness: Interpretations of the Biblical Narratives in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Kenneth E. Pomykala (Boston: Brill, 2008), 1–16.

⁴⁹⁸ See the discussion in Burden for more on this and the debates surrounding the beginning and end point of the wilderness texts. Burden, *The Kerygma of the Wilderness Traditions in the Hebrew Bible*, 17–24. For the note on the

The primary reason for the focus on the wilderness texts is that one of the main themes recurring in these stories is that of murmuring or protest. The wilderness texts record around thirteen episodes of people complaining to their leaders as they push for societal changes.⁴⁹⁹ The protesting begins in Exod 14, just prior to the wilderness texts, and continues intermittently until Num 21. The work of George Coats has served as a catalyst for recent discussion of this motif.⁵⁰⁰ Subsequently, the theme has been defined and discussed by numerous scholars and there is no doubt of its existence.⁵⁰¹

A final issue related to the wilderness texts and the protest motif that is important to comment on is the literary organization of these protest stories. First, it is noteworthy that the wilderness texts in Exodus (Exod 15:22–18:27) and Numbers (10:11–21:9) show numerous connections. Both sets discuss the following issues: Manna and Quail (Exod 16; Num 11), water flowing out of a rock (Exod 17; Num 20), military conflict (Exod 17; Num 13–14), Moses’ wife (Exod 18, Zipporah; Num 12, the Cushite woman), and Moses’ father-in-law (Exod 18; Num 10:29). The connections between these two sets of texts demand that we think of them together. Second, these texts are organized into a structured whole that resembles what social scientists

endpoint of these traditions see Milgrom who ends the wilderness texts at Num 21:9. Jacob Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1981), xiv. Burden suggests the Red Sea tradition concludes the Exodus event. In agreement, we take the Red Sea texts (Exod 13:17–15:21) to provide a transition between the exodus tradition and the wilderness texts. Elements of both the exodus tradition and the wilderness tradition are found in the Red Sea narratives. This provides a reason to discuss Exod 14:11–12 also.

⁴⁹⁹ The number may differ among scholars, but we see a protest in Exod 14:11–12; 15:22–27; 16; 17; Num 11 (2 in this chapter); 12; 14; 16–17 (3 in these chapters); 20; 21.

⁵⁰⁰ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness: The Murmuring Motif in the Wilderness Traditions of the Old Testament*. Despite disagreement with Coats over the nature of the action, we are indebted to his work.

⁵⁰¹ See Marc Vervenne, “The Protest Motif in the Sea Narrative (EX 14, 11–12): Form and Structure of a Pentateuchal Pattern,” 257–72; Frankel, *The Murmuring Stories of the Priestly School*; Kupfer, *Mit Israel auf dem Weg durch die Wüste: Eine leserorientierte Exegese der Rebellionstexte in Exodus 15:22-17:7 und Numeri 11:1–2013*; Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness: The Murmuring Motif in the Wilderness Traditions of the Old Testament*; Brevard Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1974), 254–64. These stories are grouped together because of recurring themes and vocabulary found in many of the stories. For example the verb יָרָא appears in many of the stories. The Israelites also mention Egypt in many of their complaints. These details demonstrate that these stories belong together. See the above works for more on the connections among the murmuring stories and the pattern(s) that exists.

have referred to as a protest cycle.⁵⁰² Social scientists have used this label to refer to “a phase of heightened conflict across the social system with rapid diffusion of collective action.”⁵⁰³ Sidney Tarrow adds to this in another paper by stating that a protest cycle is characterized by “increasing and then decreasing wave(s) of interrelated collective actions and reactions to them.”⁵⁰⁴ The final form of these wilderness texts presents a situation in which there are waves of protests and responses concentrated in a distinct and tumultuous period.⁵⁰⁵ The wilderness and Sinai texts discuss the difficulty with the formation of Israel as a polity during the time when the Israelites transition from living as slaves to the Pharaoh to becoming a “holy nation” (Exod 19:6). The protests also extend to multiple segments of the society with the tension increasing and decreasing repeatedly throughout the cycle. As this cycle progresses, both the protests and responses become more severe.

Scholars have recognized some of this development, but have primarily focused on the absence of punishment in the stories prior to Sinai (Exod 15:22–18:27) and punishment in those stories after Sinai (Num 10:11–21:9).⁵⁰⁶ This is an accurate depiction of how the texts are organized, but there is far more detail to the cycle than simply stating that protesting is

⁵⁰² Social scientists are always talking about actual history, while we are focused on the literary presentation of the text. As discussed in the introduction, ancient texts, whether they are focused on actual history or not, reflect the way that their writers see the world along with showing the types of events and actions that occur in their world.

⁵⁰³ Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics 3rd ed.* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 199.

⁵⁰⁴ Sidney Tarrow, “Cycles of Collective Action: Between Moments of Madness and the Repertoire of Contention,” *Social Science History* 17 (1993): 286–87.

⁵⁰⁵ As the discussion below will indicate, there are two different types of protest stories present in the wilderness texts and there is debate over the original relationship between them. There is further debate about the original placement of some of the stories. Baden for example argues that Exod 16 is out of place and originally existed in a different context. Joel Baden, “The Original Place of the Priestly Manna Story in Exodus 16,” *ZAW* 122 (2010): 491–504. For these reasons, we can only comment on the nature of the present text. We do think it was likely that a form of the protest cycle existed in the earlier forms of these stories, but this is not a point easy to prove.

⁵⁰⁶ Nahum Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary Exodus: The Traditional Text with the New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991) 93–94. Childs notes this as well, but adds that it is the Golden Calf story that separates the punishment from non-punishment stories in the stories he assigns to the J account. Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 260–63. See also Lee, “The Concept of the Wilderness in the Pentateuch,” 3.

acceptable prior to Yahweh's choice to give the law at Sinai and illegitimate after. It is not merely the presence of the law that explains the punishment; in each of the punishment stories, there are added details that make the events illegitimate. These details suggest an intentional structure to the entire cycle. The protest stories are set up to indicate increasingly aggressive levels of protest followed by strategic responses on the part of the leaders. The leaders begin by responding positively to the protests (e.g. Exod 15; 16); they subsequently respond with administrative changes (the addition of elders in Exod 18, cf. Num 11) and the establishment of law (Exod 20ff.). When these mild and administrative responses fail, the leaders warn the people with fire (Num 11); and finally they respond with violence and death as the protests endure and become illegitimate (Num 13–14, 16-17, 21). Along with the violent responses, the leaders also provide demonstrations to prove that they are the legitimate rulers (Num 17). These details demonstrate that these texts are intentionally structured to indicate an escalation in the seriousness of the protests along with a progression in the way the leaders respond to these events. The purpose of this cycle is to condemn the people for their repeated and increasingly aggressive protests throughout this period. This is an important point to recognize at the outset and will be further discussed throughout the chapter. It is difficult to understand the meaning and tone of the words present within the wilderness texts without considering the organization of these texts as presented here.

לָנָח: The Most Prominent Word for Protests in the Wilderness

The first word this chapter will examine is the word לָנָח meaning “to murmur/grumble.” The analysis of this word will serve as a paradigm for understanding the related terms. It primarily appears in texts that scholars assign to stories regarded as priestly, but it also appears in Exod

15:24 and 17:3. The latter two texts are regarded by many as non-P texts.⁵⁰⁷ In all but one occasion, the word לִוֵן has the basic meaning of “to grumble/murmur” or even “to level a complaint.”⁵⁰⁸

In the wilderness texts, a group of subordinates unhappy with the present situation often gathers collectively before its leaders. The disgruntled subordinates hope to remedy a societal problem by expressing their complaints, which is when לִוֵן appears. לִוֵן is often associated with speech directed at the ruler and is frequently followed by the verb אָמַר, “to say” (Exod 15:4; 16:3; 17:3; Num 14:2; 17:6). In other cases, it is an action that someone hears as in Exod 16:7 and Num 14:27. In addition to this, לִוֵן is often associated with group activity. The subject of the verb is typically “the people,” (e.g. Exod 15:24) or “the entire congregation” (e.g. Exod 16:2). Further, it is paired with words that indicate group action, which is behavior that must precipitate any protest. This occurs in Num 16:11 with יָעַד, “to gather” preceding לִוֵן and in Num 16:3, 19; 17:7 (Eng. 16:42) with קָהַל, “to assemble” associated with the protests mentioned in Num 16:2, 11 and 17:6 (Eng. 16:42).

Despite these nuances, in his well-known book on the wilderness period, George Coats equates the word לִוֵן to rebellion by connecting it to the one case in Num 14:9 where the word מָרַד, “to rebel” appears, as well as its connection with מָרָה in Num 20:10.⁵⁰⁹ Knierim similarly

⁵⁰⁷ The distribution demonstrates that the phrase has the same meaning regardless of what source scholars assign a text to.

⁵⁰⁸ This is an action that might originate with the idea that people and animals often emit a vocal guttural sound (a growl), or at least lower their voices, when they express dissatisfaction with a situation. This could be the case if this is the proper reading of Ps 59:16 where it indicates the growling of a dog. This is the only text where לִוֵן appears and does not record a complaint to a group of leaders.

⁵⁰⁹ Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 24. Others have suggested something similar. Kupfer does not declare the word a rebellion term, but does suggest it indicates an aggressive action. Christian Kupfer, *Mit Israel auf dem Weg durch die Wüste: Eine leserorientierte Exegese der Rebellionstexte in Exodus 15:22–17:7 und Numeri 11:1–20:13*, 48–49. Rainer, speaking of Exod. 15, says, “Although R^{EX} used the Hebrew verb *lôn* ‘to murmur,’ no kind of rebellion is meant.” With this statement, he appears to be implying that the verb typically indicates a rebellion

equates לָוֶן to rebellion. In his article in *TLOT*, he titles the entry on לָוֶן “To Rebel” and says, “judging from context, *lûn* always has the character of open and plaintive rebellion.” He alleges that the translations of לָוֶן as “to murmur” or “to grumble” are not strong enough to characterize the action.⁵¹⁰ What exactly he means by rebellion is unclear, however. As noted above, many others refer to these actions as rebellions even if they do not literally translate לָוֶן as “to rebel.” It is hard to read an article on the wilderness period without reading about the frequent episodes of rebellion found in both Exodus and Numbers.⁵¹¹

The following analysis will argue that while לָוֶן may be involved in a rebellion and may be considered refractory behavior or even the beginning of a rebellion, it should not be equated to political rebellion. Throughout the wilderness stories, לָוֶן has more to do with community protests aimed at what modern political scientists would call public policy⁵¹² changes than it does with full-fledged rebellions resulting in changes of regime. The action of protesting is consistent with the translation of “grumbling” or “murmuring,” especially considering that within the Hebrew Bible the action always involves a group complaining to its leader. Because of these nuances, scholars should not automatically assume that לָוֶן indicates an illegitimate rebellion. Rather, in line with the comments above, the word indicates that people verbally challenge their leaders as they attempt to put pressure on them. As these comments underscore, לָוֶן records

despite the fact that Exod 15 does not recount a rebellion. Albertz, “Wilderness Material in Exodus (Exodus 15–18),” 163. The NRSV does not typically translate לָוֶן as “to rebel,” but they do in Num 17:6 (Eng. 16:41).

⁵¹⁰ Rolf Knierim, “לָוֶן *lûn* To Rebel,” *TLOT*, 2:644–45.

⁵¹¹ See footnote 476 above. This is especially the case with the stories in the book of Numbers.

⁵¹² Public Policy refers to “what public officials within government, and by extension the citizens they represent, choose to do or not to do about public problems. Public problems refer to conditions the public widely perceives to be unacceptable and that therefore require intervention.” Michael E. Kraft and Scott R. Furlong, *Public Policy: Politics, Analysis, and Alternatives* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2013), 3.

protests that do not always rise to the level of criminal actions.⁵¹³

One reason לָרַן has been regarded by scholars such as Coats and Knierim as denoting illegitimate actions is based on its distribution in the text. The occurrences are essentially limited to the wilderness tradition(s) in Exod 15–17 and Num 14–17. Outside of these chapters, it appears only in Josh 9:18, where it also indicates a protest in a situation remarkably similar to that appearing in the wilderness episodes, and possibly in Ps 59:16.⁵¹⁴ Based on this limited distribution, לָרַן acts as a specific word to describe complaints to the authority, which, when viewed as part of the entire wilderness cycle, appear illegitimate. The Israelites are often condemned by texts such as Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel for their behavior in the wilderness.⁵¹⁵ Significantly, these texts condemn the Israelites for the wilderness period in its entirety. This has possibly created an unnecessary bias in the way many scholars have evaluated this word and the action behind it. The following discussion will show that these protests are not always illegitimate, even if they contain negative insinuations.⁵¹⁶

לָרַן In Exodus

A more detailed look at these protests, first in Exodus and then in Numbers, will demonstrate

⁵¹³ Frankel agrees with this position. He states of לָרַן, “It can certainly be employed to indicate a justified complaint and need not imply a sinful rebellion.” Frankel, *The Murmuring Stories of the Priestly School*, 19. He does, however, often call these actions rebellions. Childs says something similar in his commentary on Exodus. Brevard Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1974), 266. The examples where לָרַן appears to indicate a legitimate event appear in Exodus. The context of these passages is key to determining this, but the interpretation also depends on the details of the story.

⁵¹⁴ The reason it is not clear if לָרַן is present is due to a text critical issue. Despite the textual issue the context makes it likely that לָרַן is present.

⁵¹⁵ See Deut 9:6–7; Jer 2:5; Ezek 20:10–13; Ps 95:10–11. Psalm 95:8–9 does mention specific events but only mentions testing and only condemns the Israelites in later verses.

⁵¹⁶ It is important to note that negativity is something different from illegitimacy. No government desires a protest against itself. Protests indicate that the people of a society disagree with their leaders. Despite this feeling, rulers will sometimes allow the protests and respond positively. We should, therefore, expect that all protests have some associated negativity from the perspective of the rulers. Modern scholars have looked at the variety of ways that governments respond to protests and recognize the problem with trying to figure out when they will respond positively and when they will respond with repression. For an example of this type of work, see Jan Henryk Pierskalla, “Protest, Deterrence, and Escalation: The Strategic Calculus of Government Repression,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 54 (2010): 117–45.

these points. Exodus 15:24 records the people as protesting to Moses (וַיִּלְנוּ הָעָם עַל-מִוֶּשֶׁה) over the bitter water. In Exod 16:2–4 the entire congregation protests (וַיִּלְנוּ כָּל-עֵדֻת בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל-מִוֶּשֶׁה) to Moses and Aaron over the lack of food as they remember the pots of flesh they had in Egypt. The same situation occurs in Exod 17:3, as the people thirst for water and protest to Moses again (וַיִּלְנוּ הָעָם עַל-מִוֶּשֶׁה). This list demonstrates that these passages are describing community grievances directed at Moses rather than a series of developed rebellions or grievances directed at Yahweh.⁵¹⁷ A human group is the subject of the verb and the human leaders are the object of the preposition in these three cases.⁵¹⁸ The people have a genuine need in each case and expect their leaders to provide them with basic life necessities, specifically food and water. When this does not happen, they make their grievances known by approaching their leaders, possibly indignantly, to air these grievances. Based on the texts, one of the reasons they expect to have food and water is that they previously had these necessities in Egypt. The people are protesting due to deprivation, which occurs when people feel deprived of what they expect they should have.⁵¹⁹ The people are pressuring their leaders to make policy changes that will lead to the provision of material resources. They are not rejecting or seeking to kill and replace their leaders.

Further, the protests in Exodus work, and neither Moses nor Yahweh condemns them. In response to the protests, Moses turns the bitter water sweet in Exod 15:25, provides manna in Exod 16:4, 12, and provides water from the rock in Exod 17:6. These are precisely the

⁵¹⁷ Moses does mention in Exod 16:8 that the people's complaints are directed at Yahweh, but at this point the narrator does not state this.

⁵¹⁸ This demonstrates that the preposition *על* is an important part of these texts. It adds the element of opposition directed at another party. The word *לן* alone focuses on a murmuring, but when the preposition is added it directs the complaint toward another party turning it into a protest.

⁵¹⁹ This is an issue we will return to below, as we think about the reasons that social scientists suggest people engage in this type of collective action.

necessities the people pressured their leaders to provide. Not one of these events leads to repression. On the contrary, Moses and Yahweh show the people the miraculous things they are capable of. The protests exist in Exodus to set up the opportunity for Moses to provide for the people, which is a necessary part of granting him the legitimacy he needs as an untested leader.⁵²⁰ At this point in the story, Israel is looking to come together as a political entity and they need a proven leader. The protests help confirm that Moses is the prophetic leader Yahweh had chosen for this new society.⁵²¹ He gains legitimacy through these events. By making these requests of Moses, the people show their recognition that he has power. The evidence thus far suggests that רָבַח records protests rather than rebellions and that it does not universally record criminal actions. Each of these acts leads to its intended response with no condemnation.

Despite the focus on Moses' and Yahweh's ability to provide resources in the Exodus protest stories, negativity is not entirely absent (cf. Exod 14:11–12; 16:3, 7, 20; 17:2, 7).⁵²² The negativity of these passages is heightened due to the connection of these stories with the entire protest cycle in Exodus and Numbers and the common words and stock phrases appearing in both books.⁵²³ Later biblical books also view Israel as sinful for the entire wilderness period.⁵²⁴

⁵²⁰ Frankel says something similar. Frankel. *The Murmuring Stories of the Priestly School*, 15.

⁵²¹ Many have recognized that the story in Exodus describes the beginning of Israel as nation, or polity. They replace the Pharaoh as their suzerain with Yahweh. They enter a covenant with him as he establishes the laws by which the society will function. Dozeman said, "Israel emerges as a nation at the outset of the Book of Exodus." Thomas Dozeman, *God at War: A Study of Power in the Exodus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 108. Peter Enns says, "Israel as a nation is 'born,' so to speak, at the Exodus. A mass of upstart slaves crosses the sea and emerges as a nation." Peter Enns, *Exodus*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 65. Hendel also says, "The 'escape from Egypt' is literalized as a journey at the same time that it is a metaphor for transformation into a distinctive people and polity." Ronald Hendel, "The Exodus as cultural Memory: Egyptian Bondage and the Song of the Sea," in *Israel's Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective: Text, Archaeology, Culture, and Geoscience*, ed. Thomas E. Levy, Thomas Schneider, William H. C. Propp (New York: Springer, 2015), 69. See also the work of Brueggemann. Walter Brueggemann, "Pharaoh as Vassal: A Study of a Political Metaphor," *CBQ* 57 (1995): 27–51.

⁵²² Some have argued that the negative elements are later additions to the originally positive stories and that there are multiple sources involved. The following few pages will discuss this further.

⁵²³ Many have pointed out the connections between the stories in Exodus and Numbers. E. Zenger and C. Frevel note the manna and quail in Exod 16 and Num 11, the water from the rock in Exod 17 and Num 20, the Amalekites and military conflict in Exod 17 and Num 13–14, Moses wife (Zipporah) Exod 18 and the Cushite woman in Num 12, Moses' father in-law in Exod 18 (Jethro) and Num 10:29 (Hobab). E. Zenger and C. Frevel, "Die Bücher

Deuteronomy 9:7 presents Israel as sinful “from the day you left Egypt,” לְמִן־הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר־יָצָאתָ. Jeremiah 7:25 states essentially the same thing: Yahweh had attempted to warn the Israelites through prophets “from the day your ancestors came out of Egypt,” לְמִן־הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר יָצְאוּ. The people did not listen (cf. Jer 7:26).⁵²⁵ Such passages bias modern readers into thinking the Israelites acted sinfully from the moment they left Egypt.

The passage in Jer 7 is particularly interesting. Elsewhere, the book of Jeremiah presents the early period in the wilderness as a honeymoon (Jer 2:2–3 cf. 2:5–9).⁵²⁶ An analysis of Ps 105

Leviticus und Numeri als Teile der Pentateuchkomposition,” in *The Books of Leviticus and Numbers*, ed. T. Römer, BETL 215 (Leuven: Peeters, 2008), 35–74. Römer also notes there are parallels in what he calls the subtheme of “Egypt Nostalgia” in texts in both Exodus and Numbers. His analysis further shows the connections between the stories. Thomas Römer, “Egypt Nostalgia in Exodus 14–Numbers 21,” in *Torah and the Book of Numbers*, ed. Christian Frevel et al., FAT 11/62 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 70–71.

⁵²⁴ Many scholars see this as evidence for two different traditions circulating separately, or as the murmuring stories as a late invention. There is something to the tradition history and we will discuss this in the following paragraphs, but this does not explain why Jeremiah has both traditions present.

⁵²⁵ See also Ezek 20; Ps 78 and 106. The language in Jeremiah has been connected to the language of Deuteronomy, which could explain the similarity of these statements. The connection between Jeremiah and Deuteronomic ideas have been noticed for quite some time. For some prominent commentators who have noticed this connection see Bernard Duhm, *Jeremia*, KHC 11 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1901); See pgs. 107–08 for an example. Sigmund Mowinkel, *Zur Komposition des Buches Jeremia* (Kristiania: Dybwad, 1914), 31–45; J. Philip Hyatt, “Jeremiah and Deuteronomy,” *JNES* 1 (1942): 156–73; H. H. Rowley, “The Prophet Jeremiah and the Book of Deuteronomy,” in *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy*, ed. H. H. Rowley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1950), 157–74. William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986). These works have set the stage for many later interpreters to comment on specific connections and allusions. For a more recent work touching on these connections see Nathan Mastnjak, *Deuteronomy and the Emergence of Textual Authority in Jeremiah*, FAT 87 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016).

⁵²⁶ The debate on the two views has been contentious with scholars at times wavering on their position of whether there are two views, one positive and one negative, of the wilderness period. Scholars such as Budde and Flight initially thought that the Jeremiah and Hosea passages suggested that some in ancient Israel longed for Israel to return to a nomadic lifestyle and that they had been corrupted by the settlement in Canaan. K. Budde, “The Nomadic Ideal in the Old Testament,” *The New World* 4 (1895): 726–45; J. W. Flight, “The Nomadic Idea and Ideal in the Old Testament,” *JBL* 42 (1923): 168–226. This position fell out of favor over time. See for example, G.E. Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation: The Origins of the Biblical Tradition* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1973), 174–97. Since the idea of the nomadic ideal had fallen out of favor, scholars have needed to revisit Jer 2:2–3 along with Hos 2:16–17. Both Talmon and Fox also reject the nomadic ideal and reinterpret these passages and suggest that they do not depict a “honeymoon” period. They force these texts to appear as consistent with the position on the wilderness period elsewhere in the biblical text. Talmon says, “Hosea’s return to the wilderness motif, like the historical trek through the desert, is not set up as an aim per se, but like it serves as punishment and as a *rite de passage* toward the true goal- the re-establishment of the wife- Israel in the Land of Canaan” (pg. 50). For Talmon, this connects to the major marriage metaphor present in the early chapters of Hosea and the punishment Israel will receive for her unfaithfulness to her “husband.” Fox builds on this interpretation and claims that “Jeremiah did not understand the implications of his literary usages.” Fox focuses on the word חסד and its one sidedness. For Fox Jer 2:2 focuses on the חסד Yahweh shows Israel and not vice versa. According to him, this depiction is not then in contrast with the

and Ps 106 demonstrates a similar situation. Psalm 105 chooses to focus on the positive side of the wilderness tradition, while the author of Ps 106 chooses to emphasize the negative side. The choice to present the wilderness period as positive (Ps 105) or negative (Ps 106) is based on the message the author wants to present.⁵²⁷ Psalm 105 focuses on the fulfilment of Yahweh's promises, while 106 focuses on the corporate confession of sin. The positive presentation within Ps 105 demonstrates that it is possible to think of the wilderness period as having some positivity.

The dual presentation of the wilderness period as positive in some texts and negative in others has perplexed scholars, leading them to postulate a development in the traditions. This proposed development is characterized by the editorial combination of two originally separate and unrelated traditions. An early wilderness tradition portrayed Israel in a positive light, while a later tradition focused on complaining and punishment. According to this view, the element of protest or murmuring is a late addition created to bring the two traditions together.⁵²⁸ The point of

depiction of the wilderness period found in most of the Hebrew Bible. It was not commenting on how Israel treated her God. See Shemaryahu Talmon, "The Desert Motif in the Bible and in Qumran Literature," in *Biblical Motifs – Origins and Transformations*, ed. A. Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1966) 31–63; and Michael Fox, "Jer. 2:2 and the Desert Ideal," *CBQ* 35 (1973): 441–450. The positions of these scholars at times seem forced. It is easier to suggest there could be a different presentation of the same event.

⁵²⁷ In his study of the Exodus Psalms, Emanuel highlights this difference and shows how each Psalm is selective in what it focuses on and, further, where they are drawing their information from. David Emanuel, *From Bards to Biblical Exegetes: A Close Reading and Intertextual Analysis of Selected Exodus Psalms* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 75–76, 87–88, 144–45. This demonstrates that later authors could look at the wilderness period and deem some of it as positive. Emanuel shows how the positive depiction from Psalm 105 comes from the postexilic period when these texts would have been known. He notes that the author of Psalm 105 was familiar with priestly material, which would suggest he had the negative elements of these texts in front of him.

⁵²⁸ Scholars who argue along these lines are Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichte des Pentateuch*, 137; Coats, *Rebellion*, 249–50. P. J. Budd, *Tales of Disaffection: A Pentateuchal Motif Examined and Assessed* (Dissertation, Bristol University, Bristol, 1978), 374–75; Fritz, *Israel in der Wüste*, 113–23. Gerhard Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* vol. I. trans. D. Stalker (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962), 284; Römer, "Egypt Nostalgia in Exodus 14–Numbers 21," 84. Thomas Römer, "Israel's Sojourn in the Wilderness and the Construction of the Book of Numbers," in *Reflection and Refraction. Studies in Biblical Historiography in Honour of A. Graeme Auld*. VTsup 113 (Boston: Brill, 2007), 431–33. Childs in part disagrees with this position stating that all the stories of murmuring originally had some negativity to them. He divides the stories into two types but maintains that some negativity was present from the beginning, Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 254–64. Frankel also takes a modified position suggesting that both the provision stories and the punishment stories are ancient. He does not, however, see the request as original. Frankel, *The Murmuring Narratives of the Priestly School*, 14. See below for more on the positions of Childs and Frankel.

the present work is not to solve the problem of the relationship of these stories, or to suggest how the prophetic texts are connected. Nevertheless, better understanding of the word לָוִן, as not inherently negative, can help demonstrate that not every episode of murmuring has to be late. Scholars who hold this position often assume that the murmuring (לָוִן) is illegitimate, and if this is the case, it must be an intrusion into originally positive stories of provision.

It is unlikely that all of the provision stories initially lacked the “protest” or request.⁵²⁹ Without a protest there is nothing to urge Yahweh and Moses to provide. It is far from a stretch to assume that the protests or complaints initially started as benign and acceptable and served as a catalyst for Yahweh’s provision, but as they continued they became aggressive and illegitimate leading eventually to the condemnation of the whole cycle. If לָוִן is not inherently negative and can invite provision, scholars do not need to think of it as a redactional addition that transforms these stories into tales of rebellions.

To prove that לָוִן and the action behind this do not have to be negative, even as the text stands, the analysis will look further into the stories in Exodus. The discussion will consider the character of the present text, but also highlight how possible redactional additions affected the meaning.⁵³⁰ The argument here is that the additions scholars see to the texts in Exodus do not transform these episodes into tales of rebellion. The Exodus stories can only be deemed illegitimate when they are viewed as part of the entire protest cycle.⁵³¹

Exodus 14: Fear of the Egyptians

⁵²⁹ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 254–64 suggests there are two types of stories, but that the protest is original in both.

⁵³⁰ Thomas Römer believes that all the texts in Exodus that mention the desire to return to Egypt are likely additions to earlier texts that help tie the wilderness sections of Exodus and Numbers together. Römer, *Egypt Nostalgia in Exodus 14-Numbers 21*, 66–86.

⁵³¹ This is not a statement that it is a positive word. It is more often associated with stories where there is some negativity. The negativity of these stories arises because the protest is directed at Moses and Yahweh, which are cases where we expect at least some negativity.

The first episode to analyze is in Exod 14. This is a text that stands outside of the wilderness traditions, but contains a marker of protest common within the stories.⁵³² The purpose of the complaint at the Red Sea is to link the Exodus and wilderness texts together. The verb לָאָן does not appear, but this episode nevertheless sets the pattern on how to analyze these texts of protest.

In the brief episode in Exod 14:11–12, the Israelites naturally fear the approaching army of the Egyptians and cry out to the leader asking him why he brought them out of Egypt to die. Moses never suggests in response that the people did anything wrong, but only says that they should not fear and should observe the salvation Yahweh will bring (Exod 14:13). In the present text, their protest occurs as a natural response to the fear of death and war. The text uses the phrase צָעַק אֱלֹהִים, “to cry out to,” which is a legitimate action in many other circumstances and often elicits a positive response.⁵³³ The only negativity in this text occurs in the mention of the Israelites’ desire never to have left Egypt (Exod 14:11–12). There is nothing in this passage to suggest this is a sinful action.⁵³⁴ As we will see, the action reminds the reader of a lament. The fearful response comes across as quite natural. When people face looming danger, it can be expected that their thoughts will naturally revert to a time when they were not facing the prospect of imminent death. Even if scholars view Exod 14:11–12 as a redactional element, and many in fact do,⁵³⁵ the redactor knew that Moses’ response to the desire to return to Egypt would read as

⁵³² See Römer for the presence of this motif in many of these stories. Römer, “*Egypt Nostalgia in Exodus 14–Numbers 21*,” 66–86. See also Vervenne and Burden for the placement of Exod 14:11–12 as standing between the Exodus event and the wilderness texts. Vervenne, “The Protest Motif in the Sea Narrative (Ex 14, 11–12): Form and Structure of a Pentateuchal Pattern,” 257–71; Burden, *The Kerygma of the Wilderness Traditions in the Hebrew Bible*, 20–23.

⁵³³ In the following chapter, Exod 15:25, Moses cries out to (צָעַק) Yahweh to help him find water for the people. Yahweh responds positively by showing Moses a stick to throw into the water to make it potable. This is a phrase the chapter will discuss below.

⁵³⁴ Baden does see Yahweh’s response in Exod 14:15 as providing some criticism. Yahweh questions why Moses cries out to him, but there is nothing in this text to condemn the action. Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis*, 197.

⁵³⁵ Römer, *Egypt Nostalgia in Exodus 14–Numbers 21*, 74. Moses, in his response does not comment on the Israelites statement about returning to Egypt, suggesting that in the earlier version that was not present.

positive in Exod 14:13. Moses says, אַל־תִּירָאוּ הַתַּנְצַבִּי וְרֵאוּ אֶת־יְשׁוּעַת יְהוָה, “Do not fear, stand and see the salvation of Yahweh.” This comment reassures the fearful Israelites rather than condemning them for a lack of trust. What the verses in Exod 14:11–12 do is to help connect this event to the entire cycle by creating a pattern of behavior that one can see retrospectively after reading Exodus and Numbers.

Exodus 15:22–27: A Protest over Water

The following protest in Exod 15:22–27 has no negative tone. The people complain about the lack of water and Moses and Yahweh immediately provide. Neither Moses nor Yahweh condemns the protesting or murmuring of the people, and the protesting is recorded with the phrase וַיִּלְנוּ הָעָם עַל, “the people murmured against” (Exod 15:24).⁵³⁶ There is also no desire to return to Egypt mentioned in this episode. Exodus 15:22–27 is, in fact, the most positive of all the protest stories as it has no basis for condemnation.⁵³⁷ If one were to judge the action behind לִין based on this passage alone, it would be easy to argue that the word had the ability to represent a protest over a genuine need: water in this case. It is also important to recognize that Exod 15:24, the verse containing לִין, does not break the flow of the text and, therefore, should not be taken as a redactional addition to the larger unit it is a part of. One cannot then argue that a redactor added לִין in each case to create negativity.⁵³⁸

⁵³⁶ This is one of the examples of לִין in what most see as a non-priestly text.

⁵³⁷ Coats even declares that the word לִין is employed in this text against its meaning. He states that the text records a request for information and has no “negative connotation.” Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness: The Murmuring Motif in the Wilderness*, 52. It is strange why he does not see this as the case in the other episodes. In all episodes where negativity is present, it is the object of the protest that creates the negativity rather than the word itself. Some have recently recognized that this is the case. See Norbert Lohfink, *Theology of the Pentateuch: Themes of the Priestly Narrative and Deuteronomy*, trans. Linda Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 40 and Thomas Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 368.

⁵³⁸ Propp, *Exodus 1–18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 575. Propp does suggest that the whole section might be redactional but that also means that לִין, in this positive context, is original. This, however, we see as unlikely. There are some who see this verse as an addition, but they do so because they assume that the verb לִין is negative and that its presence turns this into an episode of rebellion. Römer, “Israel’s Sojourn in the Wilderness,” 432–33.

There is within the larger passage an implicit warning, but the warning comes without any show of force or punishment. This is where the break within the unit of Exod 15:22–27 occurs. Exod 15:25b–26, which contains this warning, may represent a different layer from what is in 15:22–25a,⁵³⁹ and this statement again serves to connect this episode to the larger protest cycle. Exodus 15:25b–26 states, *וַיִּשֶׁם יְהוָה לְיוֹתָם וַיִּנְסֵם*, “There he set for them a statute and judgement and there he tested them.”⁵⁴⁰ The warning comes in the form of a test, and this test is an adumbration of what is to come in the following two chapters.⁵⁴¹ With the mention of a test, this passage sets up the following pre-Sinai protest stories, as all the protest stories in Exod 15–17 employ the word *נִסָּה*, “test.” This test begins to establish a formal relationship between Yahweh and Moses/Israel. The Israelites had just escaped the Egyptians and had not yet entered a covenant with Yahweh. As Propp says, “Yahweh and Israel probe one another before entering into a permanent legal relationship.”⁵⁴² The lack of a covenant and the designation of this as a test contribute to why these protests over food and water lack punishment.⁵⁴³

Within the wilderness tradition and after these three stories, the word *נִסָּה*, “to test” appears again only in Num 14:22. In Numbers it occurs in the phrase “They have tested me these ten times,” and so the word harkens back to previous protests in the wilderness rather than referring to the specific case narrated in Num 14. Testing, therefore, is a more prominent feature

⁵³⁹ Propp, *Exodus 1–18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 575. The language in this section is deuteronomistic as Propp notes.

⁵⁴⁰ The 3ms pronominal suffixes must be collective and thus, refer to all of Israel.

⁵⁴¹ There is debate over the nature of the test and the subject of the verb, but this ambiguity does not impact the connections between Exod 15, 16, and 17. See Brian T. German, “Moses at Marah,” *VT* 63 (2013): 47–58.

⁵⁴² Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, 579.

⁵⁴³ This is related to the presence of the protest cycle. These stories all appear before the Sinai narrative, and all of the punishment stories now stand after Sinai. Many have commented on how Sinai separates the punishment stories from the non-punishment stories. See Nahum Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary Exodus: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991) 93–94. There is a question as to whether or not there could be punishment without a covenant.

of the early non-punishment stories than of the later stories that contain punishment. While the language of testing coming from Yahweh is a warning, in the early stories of Exod 15:22–17:7, it is not intended to condemn the people. The test prepares the reader for later stories when the people will fail the test (Num 14:22) and sin against God.

Exodus 16: A Protest over Food

The more negative elements of the pre-Sinai stories (Exod 16:3; 17:3) come in the two stories following the initial comment about the lack of resources being a test for Israel to endure.

Exodus 16:2 sets up the protest of this chapter with the phrase, וַיִּלִּינוּ כָּל־עֵדֻת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל־מֹשֶׁה, וְעַל־אַהֲרֹן, “The entire congregation of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron.” Then, in Exod 16:3 the Israelites raise the hostility of the protest as they recall their time in Egypt and the meat they enjoyed there: מִי־יָתֵן מוֹתֵנוּ בְּיַד־יְהוָה בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּשֹׁבְתֵנוּ עַל־סִיד הַבְּשָׂר, “Oh that we had died by the hand of Yahweh in the land of Egypt as we sat by the pot(s) of meat.” Complaining about their present state provides some negativity, but it again fits into the stereotypical language of these protest stories and serves to connect it to the entire cycle, not to condemn the episode.⁵⁴⁴ The response from Yahweh is to say immediately (Exod 16:4, cf. Exod 16:8, 12) that he is going to rain down bread from heaven. There is no hint in this response that anything is wrong with the complaint about food. Further, the people blame Moses and Aaron, not Yahweh (Exod 16:2).

The discussion of redactional activity suggests that Exod 16:2 is part of the original story.⁵⁴⁵ The root לִין, “to murmur” is what drives Yahweh to provide bread (cf. Exod 16:12). Part of the debate over the composition of the chapter centers on Exod 16:3 and the negative comment about the abundance the Israelites had in Egypt: “Oh that we had died in Egypt by the

⁵⁴⁴ This may also be a redactional element added to the text as some have suggested, but this again does not take into account the present narrative context of the verse. For the idea that 16:3 is a later addition see Frankel, *The Murmuring Stories of the Priestly School*, 324–29. See also Römer, *Egypt Nostalgia in Exodus 14-Numbers 21*, 75.

⁵⁴⁵ Most assign this to the priestly source. Frankel, *The Murmuring Stories of the Priestly School*, 324–29.

hand of Yahweh, when we sat by the pot of meat and ate bread until we were satisfied; for you have brought us into this wilderness to kill this entire assembly with hunger.” Some have suggested that the recollection of Egypt is a redactional addition, while others suggest it is part of the original text.⁵⁴⁶ In this case it is likely original. Without this statement it is unclear what the Israelites are protesting over. Either way, Yahweh responds by providing bread, rather than chastising the Israelites. The positive response appears in Exod 16:4, 8, 12.⁵⁴⁷ The comment regarding Egypt is not enough to condemn the protest over resources and transform this into a rebellion story. If a redactor added 16:3, this individual knew that Yahweh’s response would not be to punish the people.

More negativity enters in Exod 16:7–8 when Moses tells the people that their protest is against Yahweh rather than against him. The narrator, however, stated that all the complaints have been directed against Moses or Moses and Aaron (Exod 16:2).⁵⁴⁸ With this comment, the Israelites should start to realize that they are protesting against Yahweh because he had ordained Moses for leadership. There is, however, again no indication that the Israelites had sinned or done anything wrong by pressuring Moses to provide. Even after the text records Moses as saying, “Your protests are not against us, but against Yahweh” (Exod 16:8), the text records Yahweh’s response in Exod 16:12: שְׁמַעְתִּי אֶת־תְּלִוּנֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל...בֵּין הָעֶרְבִים תֹּאכְלֶי בָשָׂר, “I have heard the protestations of the Israelites...at dusk you shall eat meat.” The protests (תְּלִוּנֹת) appear

⁵⁴⁶ Ruprecht, Schmidt, and Baden suggest that Exod 16:2–3 belong to the original priestly document. E. Ruprecht, “Stellung und Bedeutung der Erzählung vom Mannawunder (Ex 16) im Aufbau der Priesterschrift,” *ZAW* 86 (1974): 279–81; L. Schmidt, “Die Priesterschrift in Exodus 16,” *ZAW* 119 (2007): 483–98; Joel Baden, “The Original Place of the Priestly Manna Story in Exodus 16,” *ZAW* 122 (2010): 491–504. Others, such as Gertz and Frankel, see Exod 16:3 as a redactional addition. J. C. Gertz, *Tradition and Redaction in der Exoduserzählung: Untersuchungen zur Endredaktion des Pentateuch*, FRLANT 186 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 212–14; Frankel, *The Murmuring Stories of the Priestly School*, 324–29.

⁵⁴⁷ Some have seen Exod 16:4 as from a separate source, but there is little doubt that Exod 16:12 is responding to Exod 16:2 as they are both traditionally assigned to P. See the previous note along with Propp, *Exodus 1-18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 590.

⁵⁴⁸ This will change in the later stories when Yahweh is specifically mentioned as a target of the protests, but it is not the case in this chapter. See the discussion of Num 21 below.

necessary to make Yahweh act on their behalf.⁵⁴⁹

Furthermore, these verses (Exod 16:8–9) might record Moses’ befuddled attempts to respond to the protest. Moses shifts the focus to Yahweh as he claims twice in back-to-back verses וַיִּגְדָּהוּנָה לַיהוָה, “what are we” that you complain against us? Propp says these verses read as “one jumbled but continuous thought.”⁵⁵⁰ Their confusing quality adds to the picture of a leader facing pressure from his people. These verses heighten the tension of the narrative, but there is no basis for condemning the protests based on Moses’ response. The people had concerns about the harsh environment of the wilderness and did not yet trust Moses and the text recognizes this. The text also presents Moses as a leader who is still figuring out how to respond. At this point in the protest cycle, the groups are still in the testing stage, which makes it appear that the people have a right to protest when the leaders have not provided basic resources.

The most negative aspect of the chapter comes in 16:20, but it has nothing to do with the verb לִיָּן or the protest. The people’s disobedience in this verse centers on the command about how much manna they should gather. Childs suggests that this chapter, which he and others assign mostly to P, stresses rebellion in Israel’s complaint.⁵⁵¹ Childs, like those noted above, divides the murmuring stories in the wilderness into two patterns that he believes originate from the two different traditions mentioned previously. One pattern focuses on the provision of the deity, and the other focuses on complaint and punishment. He assigns Exod 16 to pattern I, or stories focused on provision, but suggests that the focus on rebellion in this story differs from

⁵⁴⁹ This episode is similar to what we will see below with the verb יָצַעַק/צָעַק “to cry out.”

⁵⁵⁰ Propp, *Exodus 1–18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 595. This would explain why there is confusion in the flow of the text. These verses almost appear unaware of 16:4, which declares that Yahweh will provide bread.

⁵⁵¹ The slight negativity occurs in the sections of the chapter scholars assign to both J (non-P) and P. The negativity in the section assigned to P occurs in the passages listed above, Exod 16:2–3, 20. In the non-P section, there is a similar negativity related to what the people gather in Exod 16:27–29. This is not related to the protests, but to the gathering of the manna and at this point there is no punishment. For the division of the text into J and P see Baden, “The Original Place of the Priestly Manna Story in Exodus 16,” 491–504.

other pattern I stories he assigns to J.⁵⁵² It marks a difference, he says, because of the disobedience and emphasis on “rebellion” in the “Israelites’ complaint.” The verse he mentions immediately after this comment is Exod 16:20.⁵⁵³ This verse, however, disregards the Israelites’ complaint. Rather, it focuses on how much manna they gather. There is no declaration that anything is wrong with their asking for food just as in the prior story in Exod 15:22–27, and in the following story of Exod 17:1–7. The response that Exod 16:20 mentions is the natural result of leaving food out overnight; it spoils and worms find it.⁵⁵⁴ If Childs wants to consider this punishment, it is quite minor and the punishment is unrelated to the protest. There is not, therefore, a “marked tendency to stress the element of rebellion in Israel’s complaint.”

Exodus 17:1–7: A Protest over Water

Turning now to Exod 17:1–7, this passage appears to be more negative than Exod 16. There are a couple of different words employed to mark the protest. The word רִיב, “to contend” appears in Exod 17:2, while לָוֵן, “to murmur” appears in Exod 17:3. This chapter also declares that Moses reverses the object of the test (Exod 17:7). Instead of Yahweh testing Israel as in Exod 15 and 16, Moses now asks, מַה־תִּנְסֶינִי אֶת־יְהוָה, “Why do you test Yahweh?” Moses’ question provides some negativity to the action. The testing of Yahweh also comes across as negative in Isa 7 and in Deut 6:16, but it is hard to claim that the reader should condemn it here.⁵⁵⁵ Further, in Exod 17:3 where לָוֵן appears, the people ask why Moses brought them out of Egypt using formulaic language similar to the previous cases in Exod 14 and 16. In Exod 17, Moses even wonders if the people might stone him (Exod 17:4). This is certainly an aggressive protest and perhaps worthy

⁵⁵² Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 261–63.

⁵⁵³ Ibid., 263. It is possible he is referring back to 16:3, but he does not explicitly state this.

⁵⁵⁴ This appears to be a concern over the issue of cleanliness.

⁵⁵⁵ See the following footnote, which discusses a scholar who does not see testing as a negative action.

of retribution, but Israel's test and challenge to Moses' authority are only questioned and not condemned. Yahweh and Moses provide water from the rock in what is a metered answer to the "test" question in 17:7: **הֲיְהוָה בְּקִרְבָּנוּ אִם־אֵין**, "is Yahweh in our midst or not?" A lack of confidence is evident, but nowhere is there punishment for their protest or the test; Yahweh and Moses yet again respond positively to their requests as they pass the test and show the Israelites that they can provide the necessary resources.

Significantly, the test in Exod 17 occurs prior to the establishment of the formal agreement (the Sinai Covenant in Exod 20ff.) between Yahweh and Israel. The two sides are still laying the groundwork for the formation of this polity, which includes laws and a governing structure. The lack of the formal agreement appears to provide the Israelites with some leeway. As Wildavsky says, "the stubborn complaint of the people is an essential part of how they come to terms with their God and their God with them."⁵⁵⁶ After an initial period of testing and the establishment of societal laws, the groups should have come to terms one with the other and the protesting and testing should have ceased. In this period of radical social change, these mild protests appear tolerable.⁵⁵⁷

As the discussion of **לִין** in Exodus moves towards a conclusion, it will help to provide a note on the redaction of this text. It is possible that Exod 17:3, which contains the verb **לִין**, "to murmur," was added later. The reason it may be an addition is because it is connected directly to the memory of Egypt also appearing in Exod 17:3. The mention of Egypt is likely a redactional addition in Exod 14:11–12. Further, Exod 17:2 employs the verb **רִיב** to mark the protest making **לִין** unnecessary. It is important to note, however, that **לִין** is not what provides the negativity, it is

⁵⁵⁶ Aaron Wildavsky, *Moses as Political Leader* (New York: Shalem Press, 2005), 288.

⁵⁵⁷ The audience of the text should also see that Yahweh had proven his effectiveness to Judah in the past, so that the readers in the present should no longer test Yahweh or his chosen intermediaries.

the complaint about Moses leading the people out of Egypt to kill them that is negative. לִן only appears to introduce the complaint about Egypt. As we have seen from Exod 15:22–27, לִן can record a legitimate request and therefore should not be taken as the element providing a negative sentiment. Römer believes this mention of Egypt is an addition and connects it to a “post-priestly redactor.”⁵⁵⁸ He also suggests that this may have been the same person who added the comments about returning to Egypt in Exod 14:11–12 and possibly in 16:3. If this is true, the redactor knew that he was placing this addition into a text that ends with Yahweh’s positive response to the protest. His intention could not have been to condemn this event. This comment about Egypt, which contains the verb לִן, helps connect it to the larger cycle by continuing a pattern that started in Exod 14:11–12.

What this discussion has demonstrated is that the negativity of these stories is slight and concentrated in the stock phrases about returning to Egypt (Exod 14:11–12; 16:3; 17:3), some agitation, and disobedience centered on gathering food. This is the case in the stories scholars regard as priestly and non-priestly. With its presence in both types of texts, it appears this is an original idea that later tradition built upon to make the cycle more pronounced. The narrative appears to recognize that as a society solidifies there are going to be problems and so the leaders tolerate the protests over resources as an important part of developing the relationship.⁵⁵⁹ At this

⁵⁵⁸ Römer, *Egypt Nostalgia in Exodus 14-Numbers 21*, 75–76. See also Garton’s work. He also suggests that this verse enters into the text at the latest stage of its development. Roy E. Garton, *Mirages in the Desert: The Tradition-Historical Developments of the Story of Massah-Meribah*, BZAW 492 (Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2017), 157–97, 260–61.

⁵⁵⁹ There is a significant amount of research on the development of states that suggests state formation can be a violent and tumultuous time. The stories in the Hebrew Bible are not describing state formation exactly as modern theorists think about it, but there are some similarities in matters such as the institution of leaders, laws, and a governing structure. This is followed by seeking land and the development of a national identity in that land. For some who discuss the violence that is often associated with developing polities see, Youssef Cohen, Brian R. Brown and A. F. K. Organski, “The Paradoxical Nature of State Making: The Violent Creation of Order,” *The American Political Science Review* 75 (1981): 901–10. Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968). See especially the first chapter on “Political Order and Political Decay.” Edward Newman, “The Violence of Statebuilding in Historical Perspective: Implications for Peacebuilding,” *Peacebuilding* 1 (2013): 141–57.

point in the narrative, the Sinai covenant/laws had not yet been established and so the narrative records a series of benign protests over legitimate issues.

The negativity of these chapters appears primarily due to a connection with the entire cycle and the stories of protest in Numbers. The argument here is that the protests of Exodus are acceptable, not necessarily positive, with or without the redactional phrases recording the desires about Egypt. It is a foreknowledge of the stories in Numbers that leads some readers to condemn the action behind לָוִן in these pre-Sinai protests and to further declare them rebellion stories. The present narrative views these initial events anticipating the heightened levels of violence and negativity to come in Numbers and with a goal in mind of condemning the whole cycle, not the individual events. If these stories stood alone, there would be no basis for the reader to condemn them because Yahweh, Moses, and the narrator do not. This suggests that to protest to a leader, the action that is behind לָוִן, “to murmur,” can at times be a legitimate action within the Hebrew Bible as it is in Exod 15–17.⁵⁶⁰

לָוִן In Numbers

Now that our discussion has shown how the word לָוִן is employed in the book of Exodus, we can proceed to look at the actions behind this word in Numbers and how the leaders respond. As previously stated, with the progression of the narrative into the book of Numbers, the protests narrated with this phrase לָוִן עַל, “to murmur against” become more severe as do the responses.⁵⁶¹

This appears to be natural as people become increasingly agitated when they see what they

⁵⁶⁰ As we look at some of the words outside of the wilderness tradition, especially צַעַק, we can confirm that protesting to a leader is not always condemned. This does not, however, indicate that these events are positive. That would be something different.

⁵⁶¹ The increased violence is one reason why many refer to the stories in Numbers as rebellion stories, even if they do not refer to the events in Exod 15–17 as rebellions. The presence of violence, however, is not what changes a protest into a rebellion. Another who does this is Dennis Olson, *Numbers, Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 60. Olson says, “The abrupt shift from the picture of total obedience in Num 1–10 to the repeated rebellions beginning in chapter 11 represents an unanticipated turnabout in the flow of the story.” He continues to use the term rebellion to refer to the episodes in Num 11–20.

perceive as the repeated failures of leadership. In response as leaders see protests continue and become more aggressive, they act with more furor. They do so after seeing that their amiable responses, as observed in Exodus, have failed.⁵⁶²

Despite the increased hostility in Numbers, the phrase לִוְיָן עַל, “to murmur against” is still indicative of protesting and rioting rather than a developed rebellion. These episodes continue to be situations recording complaints against the leaders, which consist of pressure for policy changes, not for changes in the leaders. The changes the people seek in the stories in Numbers where לִוְיָן appears no longer deal with requests for food, but center on issues of power and governance.

Numbers 14: A Protest/Rebellion over Safety/Military Preparedness

Numbers 14 records the first occurrence of לִוְיָן in the book. It occurs at both the beginning and the end of the chapter (Num 14:2, 36) as well as in the nominal form in Num 14:27. The protest in Num 14 is connected to the issue recorded in Num 13 concerning the Israelites fear of the inhabitants of Canaan. Moses had sent a group of scouts to Canaan to determine the feasibility of conquering the land. Once they return, most of the scouts provide a negative account. They convince the people that if they attack Canaan they will die at the hands of the resident giants at whose feet they stand like grasshoppers (Num 13:33). At the urging of the scouts, the people begin protesting over the issue of safety; they do not believe the leaders possess the ability to successfully lead them in battle against the “monstrous” inhabitants of Canaan. They are protesting a policy issue concerning military preparedness.

This protest involves weeping (Num 14:1) as they approach Moses and complain to him (לִוְיָן עַל), wishing they had died in Egypt or even in the wilderness (Num 14:2). They

⁵⁶² The administrative system appears in Exod 18 (cf. Num 11) when Moses and Yahweh put elders in place to help Moses deal with all the people’s requests. Further, prior to the Sinai covenant the society had few laws, but the latter half of Exodus explicitly provides the laws for society and an outline of the relationship (covenant) between Yahweh and Israel.

subsequently begin to attack Yahweh, claiming he had brought them to the wilderness to die by the sword (Num 14:3). Similar to what appears later in Num 21, the Israelites are not only protesting against Moses, but now are attacking Yahweh as well. This is where the reader starts to expect that the protest will become illegitimate and will be met with a severe response.

The protest, however, does not stop with the people's verbal attack on Yahweh. The people's fear of death transforms the protest into a rebellion. It is at the point when the people feel the leaders cannot solve the problem that this develops into a rebellion. In Num 14:4 the people declare, *נְתַנָּה רֹאשׁ וְנָשׁוּבָה מִצְרָיִמָּה*, "Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt."⁵⁶³ This moves beyond a request to provide food, water, or security; the people are now actively trying to install a new leader as they create their own faction. At this point, Moses and Aaron face defeat and fall on their faces before the hostile crowd. Joshua subsequently begins to speak and in his speech he declares to the people where they are wrong: *אַךְ בְּיַהֲנֹה אֶל־תִּמְרְדוּ*, "Only do not rebel against Yahweh" (Num 14:9). *מֵרֶד* is a specific word for rebellion.⁵⁶⁴ Confirming Joshua's accusation, the people attempt to stone the leaders.⁵⁶⁵ Numbers 14:10 states, *וַיִּאֲמְרוּ כָל־תַּעֲבֹדָה*

⁵⁶³ Some scholars have suggested based on Neh 9:17 that the phrase combining *נָתַן*, "to give" and *רֹאשׁ*, "head" in this verse suggests a turning about or heading back. Levine, *Numbers*, 363. He also mentions the possibility, as others suggest, that it indicates the appointing of a new leader and that the phrase is ambiguous. We see the latter as the most likely possibility as indicated above. The verb *נָתַן*, "to give/appoint" is employed elsewhere to indicate the establishment of a leader, see 1 Kgs 14:7; 16:2; Isa 55:4; 1 Sam 12:13. The context also makes this likely, as in a few short verses the people attempt to stone Moses and Aaron. Joshua further uses the word *מֵרֶד*, "to rebel" to describe these actions, which is consistent with rejecting Yahweh and Moses and choosing a new leader. The noun *רֹאשׁ*, "head, chief" is also a noun that is employed to describe the leader of a clan. See Num 1:16; 25:4 Deut 5:23; 1 Sam 15:17; Judg 10:18; 11:8–9; Isa 7:8. In Exod 18:25 Moses chooses leaders for the people, and the phrase in that text is quite similar to what appears in Num 14. Exodus 18:25 contains the phrase *וַיִּתֵּן אֲתָם רֹאשִׁים*, "He gave them leaders."

⁵⁶⁴ See chapter two for a full discussion of *מֵרֶד*.

⁵⁶⁵ In agreement with Levine, we see this as indicating an attempt to stone Moses, but Frankel suggests that in the present context the stoning is directed at Joshua and Caleb. He uses this to argue that the mention of Joshua and Caleb were redactional additions. Levine, *Numbers*, 364; Frankel, *The Murmuring Stories of the Priestly School*, 125–27.

לְרַגְזוֹם אֹתָם בְּאֶבְנִים, “The entire congregation planned to stone them.”⁵⁶⁶ There has now been a clear attempt to replace the leader rather than only pressure for policy changes. Nonetheless, the two events involving לֹאן and מִרְד are related, but are not identical.⁵⁶⁷

The intensification of this event into a rebellion against the deity and his designated leaders explains why Yahweh sentences the people to die and threatens them with a plague. Nevertheless, the text also condemns the “protests” (תְּלִנוֹת) as appears in Num 14:27. The verses in Num 14:26-37 describe the punishment the Israelites will receive and focus on the series of protests.⁵⁶⁸ Looking at the chapter’s connection to the entire cycle will highlight one reason why this protest deserves punishment even if those in Exodus did not. Numbers 14:27 (cf. Num 14:11) shows a clear connection to the protest cycle, as it employs the phrase עַד-אֵינָהּ, “how long.” This is a clear recognition that this is not the first time the Israelites had brought their complaints to Yahweh and Moses. Numbers 14:22 also links this episode to the entire protest cycle and shows that the Israelites have been repeatedly protesting despite numerous favorable

⁵⁶⁶ The infinitive construct is employed here to indicate inceptive action, or action about to take place.

⁵⁶⁷ The proposed source division does not complicate this especially when it would be one text building on the other. If Noth is correct, the note about choosing a new leader would be the J source (non-P) while the use of מִרְד in 14:9 would be the P source. The note about stoning the leaders in 14:10 would also be the P source. Both texts have details that indicate an event moving from a protest to a rebellion. Noth, *Das vierte Buch Mose: Numeri*, ATD 7 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), 90–91. As Frankel notes, many follow the position of Noth with only a few variations. Frankel, *The Murmuring Stories of the Priestly School*, 120. Some scholars, such as Levine, take a different position, but his division also suggests that each version has details that move the protest beyond a rebellion. Levine, *Numbers*, 348.

⁵⁶⁸ This comment applies even if we divide the chapter into multiple sources. Scholars have argued that both priestly and non-priestly texts are present within this chapter. If we look at the proposed division, the same negativity, punishment, and connections to earlier stories exists in both sources. Numbers 14:11 and 14:27 both use a temporal phrase suggesting that this event is the culmination of a series of protests. Numbers 14:11, assigned to J or non-P, uses the phrase עַד-אֵינָהּ יִנְאָצְנִי, “how long will they despise me.” The section assigned to the P source uses a similar phrase to indicate the same connection later in Num 14:27, עַד-כִּי־יִמְלִינִים בְּעָלָי, “how long... will they murmur against me.” If both sources are present, they have similar goals. The punishment of not entering the promised land and dying in the wilderness is also the same in both accounts. See Num 14:23b for what many claim is the J (non-priestly) account and Num 14:35 for the P version. Michael Widmer, *Moses God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer: A Study of Exodus 32–34 and Numbers 13–14*, FAT II 8 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 238–53; and Levine, *Numbers*, 364, 369. Widmer argues with others that the P source is expanding the earlier account which would demonstrate that they have a similar goal. It is likely that no passage refers back to the rebellion, because Yahweh swiftly puts down the rebellion.

responses. This verse demonstrates that the leaders have now become exasperated with the situation as they say, וַיִּנְסוּ אֹתִי זֶה עֲשָׂר פְּעָמִים, “They tested me these ten times.”⁵⁶⁹ Yahweh’s response demonstrates that there had been a series of events that he had miraculously responded to and yet the people still do not believe he will keep them safe. Concerning the issue of military security, the issue at hand, Yahweh had delivered the Israelites from the approaching Egyptian army by helping them cross the sea in Exod 14. He had also defeated the Amalekites in Exod 17, a story that is related by literary placement to the protest cycle.⁵⁷⁰ He, as the leader, had demonstrated his ability to provide security and defeat his enemies, yet the people still do not trust him. These comments make it clear that the protests (תלונה) are in part condemned due to their persistent nature, not because the people are protesting.

Not only have these protests endured despite earlier provision; they have also become increasingly worse and now center on illegitimate issues. The author or editor sets it up so that Num 14 is the climax of the rising action of the previous three chapters, as Olson notes.⁵⁷¹ The protests started in the outskirts of the camp (the rabble in Num 11:1–3), moved to the people (Num 11:4–35), next to its leaders outside of Moses (Num 12:1–16), and here in Num 14 it is both the people and some leaders (ראשי) who had scouted the territory.⁵⁷² The previous protests had all been on a smaller scale, while this event forms a climax. If the reader considers those stories in Exodus, the rising action is only more pronounced and the severity of the protests becomes more prominent.

⁵⁶⁹ The reader should recall the events of Exod 15–17 and the employment of נסה in those stories.

⁵⁷⁰ Albertz, “Wilderness Material in Exodus (Exodus 15–18),” 152–54, 158.

⁵⁷¹ Olson, along with most other commentators, calls these events rebellions, but as we are arguing that is a misapplication of the term and so we are using the term protest. D.T. Olson, *The Death of the Old and the Birth of the New: The Framework of the Book of Numbers and the Pentateuch*, BJS 71 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 144–45.

⁵⁷² Ibid. These comments from Olson help to highlight the presence of the protest cycle and how it is intentionally set up to indicate increasingly aggressive protests.

Another reason this protest is far more severe than the previous protests is that, as Olson argues, the entire Pentateuch since Gen 12:1–9, 15 has been anticipating the Israelites’ entrance into Canaan. They have now rejected their destiny just as they reach the threshold.⁵⁷³ The Israelites are protesting over a safety issue, but they are also protesting Yahweh’s plan laid out first in Gen 12 and repeated after this. In response to the series of protests culminating in a rejection of His plan, Yahweh threatens to kill and disinherit the entire people (Num 14:12, 27–30), which confirms the illegitimate nature of this protest.

There is also punishment meted out to a specific group. As is the case elsewhere, the leaders of this protest are punished immediately and severely. Those who brought “an unfavorable report concerning the land” (רַב־תְּהַאֲרִיץ רָעָה), “and incited the entire congregation to complain” (וַיִּלְוֶנוּ עָלֵינוּ אֶת־כָּל־הַעֲבָדִים)⁵⁷⁴ over security are killed right away (Num 14:36–37). The form of לָוַן has a causative meaning in this case.⁵⁷⁵ It indicates that there is a group that was pushing others to protest. Yahweh singles out those who incited this protest for more severe punishment. This is consistent with both Num 11 and 12, which, as we will see, treat more severely the individuals seducing others to protest.

Numbers 16: A Protest Concerning Who is Holy

Moving to Num 16–17, the stories of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram’s protests, along with the

⁵⁷³ Ibid. In addition to the comments from Olson, Lee also sees this chapter as a turning point and as being important to the macro-structure of the wilderness tradition. The events leading to this chapter focus on the sin and punishment of the Israelites, ultimately leading the entire older generation of Israelites to be condemned to die. They die because they fail to take the promised land. After reaffirming the leaders and narrating the death of the old generation, we start to see the element of forgiveness and the rise of the new generation that will eventually take the land. Won W. Lee, “The Concept of the Wilderness in the Pentateuch,” 4–5. See also Lee’s book Won. W. Lee, *Punishment and Forgiveness in Israel’s Migratory Campaign* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 209–79.

⁵⁷⁴ Due to the presence of a direct object, this should be pointed as a *hiphil*.

⁵⁷⁵ Levine suggests the *hiphil* of לָוַן always has a causative sense, but outside of this text that has a direct object and must be causative, it is hard to see a distinction between the various forms. There is no mention of whom the group is pushing to protest in the other cases. Furthermore, two groups are not mentioned in Exodus. Levine, *Numbers*, 413.

aftermath, employ לָוִן a few times. It first appears in Num 16:11 in the phrase, וְאֶת־הַלֵּוִי מִהָהוּא תִלְוֶנּוּ, “And what is Aaron that you murmur against him.” There are a couple of issues that the people are protesting over in this chapter.⁵⁷⁶ The issue behind the protest recorded with לָוִן centers on the Levites’ position in relationship to Aaron’s status as priest (cf. Num 16:3, 10–11). As with the situation in Num 13–14, the text is again not dealing with protests over food and water, but in this case over power and positions within the government. Of all the episodes in the wilderness, this one has been referred to by most commentators as a rebellion. The text, however, lacks the details to state with certainty that this is a rebellion. The action does come close to a rebellion and the people accost Moses as they advocate for a revolutionary outcome, but the details of the text do not suggest the people engage in a rebellion. The following discussion will argue this by approaching the difficulty over this question from two angles. First, we will look at the governmental position these people are challenging and how this situation contrasts with contexts in which בָּרָד, בַּשֶּׁע, and קִשְׁר appear. Second, the analysis will address the methods and actions of these protestors as they are related to the words employed.

As the story begins, the Levites⁵⁷⁷ are unhappy with the structure of society and as a result they gather to put pressure on Moses and Aaron to make changes that would lead to a more egalitarian situation. These Levites desire the same power that Moses and Aaron have and they push the leaders to relinquish some power so that all people will be equal. It is easy to see, based on these details, why many suggest this is a rebellion.⁵⁷⁸ A group of people are seeking to have

⁵⁷⁶ Many have discussed the presence of multiple traditions present in this chapter and how an editor brought them together. See Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis*, 149–168; Jeon, “The Zadokites in the Wilderness: The Rebellion of Korach (Num 16) and the Zadokite Redaction,” 381–411.

⁵⁷⁷ There is a question over whether it could be the Levites stating in 16:3 that all people should be holy. This is not a comment one would expect coming from the Levites.

⁵⁷⁸ Even Frankel, who does not label לָוִן as a rebellion term, and employs the word murmuring in the title of his book, titles the chapter on Num 16–17 the rebellion stories. Frankel, *The Murmuring Stories of the Priestly School*, 203.

the governing structure reorganized. They say to Moses, רַב־לָכֶם...וּמַדּוּעַ תִּתְנַשְּׂאוּ עַל־קַהְלֵי יְהוָה, “You have too much...why do you exalt yourselves over the assembly of Yahweh” (Num 16:3).

Everything in the text points toward this being an issue of priestly power rather than military or royal power. The Levites are not trying to replace Moses as the leader of the people. They do not suggest that they want to be the ones who will lead the Israelites in their military battles or be forced to provide material resources. The issues at the core of this protest center on holiness, the priesthood, and who can approach Yahweh. Indeed, the entirety of Num 16–18 focuses on the issue of priestly power and privileges.⁵⁷⁹ Numbers 16:3, in addition to recording the complaint that Moses and Aaron have too much, also says, כָּל־הַעֲדָה כֹּהֲנִים וּבְתוֹכָם יְהוָה, “The entire congregation is holy, all of them, and Yahweh is in their midst” (Num 16:3).⁵⁸⁰

Moses follows this statement in Num 16:5 with another comment focused on priestly roles within society. He says, בֹּקֶר וַיֵּדַע יְהוָה אֶת־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ וְאֶת־הַקְּדוֹשׁ וְהַקְּרִיב אֵלָיו, “In the morning, Yahweh will make known who is His, and who is holy, and who can approach Him.” The show

⁵⁷⁹ The amount of power the High Priest held throughout the biblical period is debated among scholars. Rooke argues that the role of the priest and the king or other civil leader are separate. She states that this is the case throughout the entire Hebrew Bible and even through the Persian and Ptolemaic periods. She says of the priestly documents, “The picture of the high priesthood which is presented throughout P, then, is consistent in emphasizing the high priest’s importance in the cultic realm alone.” Later she says, “The natural conclusion from this is that the high priest continued to be limited in his importance and influence throughout the period of Persian domination, not only by the presence of the Persian governors mentioned above, but also by the lack of any concept that the high priesthood could be an appropriate successor to the Davidic line as the focus of identity, leadership, and hope for the people of Judah.” She also argues that this is the case in the period of restoration after the exile. Deborah Rooke, *Zadok’s Heirs: The Role and Development of the High Priesthood in Ancient Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 35, 239. See page 151 for her comments on the high-priest having no authority outside of temple even in the later restoration period. While she is likely overstating her claim, if true this would strengthen our argument. See also Taggar-Cohen who shows how the priesthood was subject to the political authority throughout the Hebrew Bible. Ada Taggar-Cohen, “Covenant Priesthood: Cross-cultural Legal and Religious Aspects of Biblical and Hittite Priesthood,” in *Levites and Priests in Biblical History and Tradition*, ed. Mark Leuchter and Jeremy Hutton (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 19. Arguments have been made that the high priesthood did take on civic or political authority in the restoration period. See pages 1–5 in Rooke’s work for the many people who have suggested this.

⁵⁸⁰ It is possible Num 16:3 records a similar yet different issue. In this verse, we do not read about the priesthood, but a phrase stating that the “entire congregation is holy.” This is not necessarily something the priests would say. Frankel sees this as originally a separate issue that was turned into a priestly story. This, however, is very difficult to prove and so in the opinion of the present writer, these texts are dealing with the same issue. Frankel, *The Murmuring Stories of the Priestly School*, 206–07.

of legitimation that Moses plans to provide is also focused on priestly roles as he tells the Levites to put fire and incense in their censers and approach Yahweh (Num 16:7). Further, Num 16:10 explicitly says they are seeking the priesthood: **וּבְקִשְׁתֶּם נְסִיבְהֶנָּה**, “yet you also seek the priesthood.”

The details in the previous paragraph would suggest that the story narrates an attempt to demote Aaron and Moses in their priestly roles and replace them with the Levites, or, according to 16:3, with every person. There is little, however, to suggest that the people are trying to replace Moses as the societal leader.⁵⁸¹ The text does not appear concerned with this issue. We should, therefore, recognize that this is something very different from a rebellion narrated with one of the specific rebellion terms **מִרְד**, **פְּשַׁע**, or **קִשּׁוּר**. Each of these terms describes a rebellion against the king or ruling nation.

Priests did wield political power in ancient Israel as the story of Jehoida in 2 Kgs 11:2–3 indicates. Many also argue that Num 16–17 reflects the struggle over priestly power during the Persian period when Judah did not have a king.⁵⁸² If this is the case, the priests were the only domestic power in Judah at this time. Thus, the text could still be concerned with the governance of the community of Israel and reflect a struggle for political power. The Levites also appear to be advocating for revolutionary changes as they seek to alter the structure of society. However, claims that this is a rebellion overlook a key element in the definition of rebellion, which states that the agitators are rejecting or attempting to replace the leaders. In light of this, we also need to analyze this in terms of the methods and actions of those involved. If the agitators aim to

⁵⁸¹ See the following paragraphs for a discussion of how this text may be reflecting on a time in which Israel had no king and may thus be focused on a struggle for political power.

⁵⁸² See Jeon, “The Zadokites in the Wilderness: The Rebellion of Korach (Num 16) and the Zadokite Redaction,” 381–411.

reject the authority of the leaders and use their own power to force this political change, we should deem it a rebellion.

The definition of protest mentioned above stated that a protest involves public group activity designed to put pressure on the leaders through confrontation politics. The verbs קהל, “to assemble” and יעד, “to gather” employed in Num 16:11 indicate this.⁵⁸³ Neither indicates a military action or an attempt to replace the leader, even if they record aggressive encounters. These two verbs indicate the first part of a protest. Before a group can pressure their leaders for policy changes, they need to gather where the leaders can hear and see them. This is precisely what these words indicate; and in the first section of this text, Num 16:3–11, they precipitate the action recorded with לין. לין, as we have been arguing, indicates a verbal challenge. The fact that the protestors speak to and pressure Moses and Aaron suggests that they recognize where authority lies. If they had rejected Moses as the leader, there would be no need to speak to him and pressure him over this matter. They would simply act with force to inaugurate the change.

Additional details in the text also support the notion that the individuals involved in this action have not rejected Moses’ authority. As much as they hope to diminish his authority, their actions indicate that they do not deny it. Korah and the other agitators approach Moses and verbally challenge him as they pressure him into acting. Moses, as he responds to these individuals and their challenge, gives Korah and his company instructions: וְזֹאת עָשׂוּ קְהַל-לְכֶם בְּמֹחְתֹתַי... וְהִנֵּנוּ בְּהֵן אֵשׁ וְשִׁימוּ עֲלֵיהֶן קְטֹרֶת לְפָנַי יְהוָה מִחֹר וּפִתּוֹחַ אֲרֹנֵי הָעֵדוּת וְהָיָה אֵשׁ יֵצֵא וְשָׂרְפוּ אֹתָם וְאֵת כָּל-אֲשֵׁר עִלְּיָם וְהָיָה לְעֵלִילָם וְלְעֵלְוֵתָם וְלְכָל-אֲשֵׁר עָלְיוֹתָם וְהָיָה לְעֵלְוֵתָם וְלְעֵלְוֵתָם וְלְכָל-אֲשֵׁר עָלְיוֹתָם וְהָיָה לְעֵלְוֵתָם וְלְעֵלְוֵתָם... “Do this: ...take censers...and tomorrow put fire and incense in them before Yahweh” (Num 16:6–7). Moses reiterates this command in Num 16:17. With this request, Moses and Yahweh plan to provide a show of legitimation through divination to solve this problem. Rebels, those who have rejected the ruler, are not

⁵⁸³ If we look at those scholars who have broken down this text into multiple sources, we see that these words are found in the sections assigned to P. See Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis*, 158–159. See also Levine, *Numbers*, 412; and Frankel, *The Murmuring Stories of the Priestly School*, 206–07.

expected to obey a command from the leader. Despite displeasure with the present structure of society and advocating for a revolutionary outcome, Korah and his company obey Moses rather than reject him. Numbers 16:18 states, *וַיִּקְחוּ אִישׁ מִתְּתָלוֹ וַיִּתְּנוּ עֲלֵיהֶם אֵשׁ וַיִּשְׂמוּ עֲלֵיהֶם קִטְרֶת וַיַּעֲמֵדוּ*, “So each person took his censer and placed fire in it and placed incense in it and they stood at the entrance of the tent of meeting with Moses and Aaron.” The text records a clear case of obedience to Moses’ command.⁵⁸⁴ They are not engaging in a rebellion to bring about their desired changes. They are applying pressure as they hope to force Moses to act. Thus, the actions fit under the definition of a protest mentioned above.

The analysis can now begin to look at why the protest (לִזְנוּן) in Num 16 over this issue of power is illegitimate. The punishment leveled in Num 16:35 certainly proves that Yahweh objects to these actions. There are two primary reasons for the punishment. First, Yahweh had already designated the Levites for service at the tabernacle, as Moses states in Num 16:9. They were tasked with caring for the central sanctuary (Num 3:5–10).⁵⁸⁵ Moses declares that they are questioning the hierarchical structure that Yahweh had previously established through law and that their complaints to Aaron mean nothing as he is not the one they are challenging. Moses’ test is designed to prove to them that Yahweh had established the power structures in this way.

Second, Lev 10 demonstrates that any attempt to acquire priestly power and approach Yahweh, unless ordained, can be dangerous. The episode in Num 16 involving the Levites has

⁵⁸⁴ If there is a rebellion in this chapter it is not by Korah and his company, but rather by Dathan and Abiram. Numbers 16:12–15, which preserves a separate protest, notes that Dathan and Abiram refuse Moses’ command: *וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֹא נֵעֲלֶה*, “and they said, we will not come.” The problem with declaring this a rebellion is that there is not enough detail to know what these individuals are arguing about. Numbers 16:14 demonstrates that they are not happy with Moses bringing them into the wilderness, but the event simply ends and what follows is the statement that Korah and his company obey the command. The episode of Dathan and Abiram is in the background and so we should be careful to make comments when we lack enough detail to determine what Dathan and Abiram are refusing. One additional reason that complicates discussion of what these individuals are involved in is the lack of terminology associated with their action. The verbs *לִזְנוּן*, *קָהַל*, and *יָעַד* all appear in association with Korah and his followers. See Levine, *Numbers 1–20: A New Introduction with Translation and Commentary*, 405–17 for a discussion of how the Korah episode overlays and obscures the issue with Dathan and Abiram.

⁵⁸⁵ The covenant at Sinai gave the Levites certain jobs and responsibilities that we can read about in various places. See Exod 28; 32:26–29 and especially Num 3:5–10; 8 which outline their role in caring for the sanctuary.

comparisons with Lev 10 and the deaths of Nabab and Abihu, who also place fire in their censers and experience Yahweh's wrath as a result. Both texts indicate that this is the structure of society that Yahweh had established and so the people should not protest over it. Yahweh reminds them of this in Num 17:5 (Eng. 16:40). Here, Yahweh has Eleazar the priest use the censers of those who died in the fire as a covering for the altar. This action is again connected to the issue of legitimacy in the face of protests. The presence of the altar covering is to serve as a warning of what will happen if someone protests over this issue in the future.

Numbers 17: A Protest over Perceived Repression

Immediately following this warning that is designed to end the previous protest, the people level yet another protest against Moses and Aaron using the phrase וַיִּלְנוּ עַל, “they murmured against” (Num 17:6; Eng. 16:41). The protest in this case centers on the accusation of severe repression, or as the text states, אַתֶּם הָרַמְתֶּם אֶת־עַם יְהוָה, “You have killed the people of Yahweh.” This is again a policy issue related to matters of governance. The people want their leaders to alter their methods of governance and so complain again. This protest takes place at the end of what is a miniature cycle of protest in Num 16–17 where a sequence of action and counteraction occur. In Num 16, there are the complaints of Korah and his group along with the complaints of Dathan and Abiram. These protests led to the earth swallowing Dathan and Abiram, along with those aligned with them (Num 16:32–33). They also led to fire consuming 250 individuals offering incense (Num 16:35). The people are responding to these acts they perceive to be repressive by protesting again in Num 17:6 (Eng. 16:41). The details do not suggest anything close to a rebellion.⁵⁸⁶ The people complain and thereby pressure their leaders to make changes, in this case related to how the leaders respond to protests.

⁵⁸⁶ Interestingly, the NRSV translates לָוַן in this case with the word “rebelled.” This is not something they do in Exod 15:22:16:2; 17:3; Num 14:2; 16:11. It is likely that the violent response on the part of the leaders leads them to assume the action is different in this case.

Almost immediately after the protest begins, severe punishment ensues in the form of a plague that kills thousands. The nature of this aggressive response might appear to suggest that the action of these individuals extends beyond a protest. To make this claim, however, one needs to add details to the text. There is nothing in this text that suggests the protestors do anything besides complain to Moses as לָוִן has indicated throughout these texts. Numbers 17:6 (Eng. 16:41), which records this verbal challenge, adds that it is indeed a form of speech by using the verb אָמַר after לָוִן. A violent response by the leaders does not change the nature of the action. The reader can choose to believe that the violent response suggests something more than a protest, but the details presented do not. It is not uncommon to see governments respond to non-violent forms of collective action with violence.⁵⁸⁷ A violent response by the leaders does not, therefore, transform the event into a rebellion.

The text does not state why the protest is condemned or why the punishment is so severe, but there is no doubt it is based on Yahweh's response. A few details stand out. First, the people are no longer protesting over food and water, but over the way Yahweh chooses to govern and set up his society. It is an issue of power. Second, because this protest appears at the end of this miniature-cycle of protesting, it demonstrates their penchant for continually protesting. As the following paragraph will discuss, the text comments on this proclivity later in the chapter.

⁵⁸⁷ Kelly notes that both Plutarch and Chrysostom report repressive measures by the Romans as responses to riot like behavior. He also says that "there are various reports of emperors using soldiers to massacre crowds that were guilty only of verbal protests or insults, often uttered at a public spectacle. Benjamin Kelly, "Riot Control and Imperial Ideology in the Roman Empire," *Phoenix* 61 (2007): 162–63. Modern parallels also suggest that some governments respond to non-violent forms of collective action with violence. Admittedly, governments in the ancient and modern world do not function in the same way. Nevertheless, modern parallels demonstrate that it is not uncommon for protests to lead to violent responses. Mason argues that unorganized governments (third world governments) often respond in a violent way to protests and other forms of non-violent collective action. Their lack of organization creates a lack of opportunity for dissidents to express their requests, which leads to violence from both sides. T. David Mason, *Caught in the Crossfire: Revolution, Repression, and the Rational Peasant* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004). See also Sabine C. Carey, "The Use of Repression as a Response to Domestic Dissent," *Political Studies* 58 (2010): 167–86. Carey discusses how various forms of dissent, including non-violent forms, lead to what she calls state terror. She further looks at how this is different in different regime types. What these violent responses do suggest is that the governments recognize that these protests represent a challenge to their authority and that their survival may be at stake. If not stopped, these protests could lead to more threatening action. This raises the issue brought up in the introduction that protests often lead to rebellions if they are not stopped.

Regardless of exactly why this protest is condemned, Yahweh responds to it with a plague that kills 14,700 (Num 17:10-14; Eng. 16:45-49), demonstrating its illegitimacy.

The last few occurrences of the root לון also appear in Num 17 as this miniature cycle of protest concludes. In Num 17:20, 25 (Eng. 17:5, 10) the root appears in the nominal form תלונה as well as the participle מלינים. In this section, Yahweh is reflecting on the previous protests and is attempting to find a way to end them when he says to Moses, וְהִכַּלְתִּי תְלוּנֹתֵיכֶם מֵעַלַי, “So you shall put an end to their murmurings against me.” The comments in these verses explicitly connect the episode of the budding staff in Num 17 to the previous protests and are linked to the issue of providing legitimacy after it has surely suffered as a result of the violent responses.

These occurrences of the root לון in Num 17 do not indicate what the complaints are. They do show, however, that the illegitimacy of the protests centers in part on their incessant nature. This is highlighted by noting the strong contrast between the use of תלונה in Exod 16 compared to its appearance in Num 17. The use of תלונה in Num 17:20 (Eng. 17:5) is noticeably negative, while that is not the case in Exod 16:12. Yahweh says in the Exodus text, “I have heard the murmurings (תלונה) of the people... in the evening you shall eat meat.” Here, he does not attempt to stop the murmurings; he acquiesces.

A look at this phrase in Numbers continues to confirm that the word לון describes protests and possibly riots or protests that turn aggressive rather than into organized rebellions. The actions behind this word are always focused on a group of people looking to pressure their leaders to make policy changes. The increase in the amount of violent responses in Numbers should not change the way scholars classify these events.⁵⁸⁸ Not once in these chapters does the phrase indicate that the people are forcibly attempting to eliminate Moses, Aaron, or Yahweh or

⁵⁸⁸ The violence in these stories is also not coming from the people; it is rather coming from the leaders as they respond. Numbers 14 does include an attempt to stone Moses, but as we argued above this event moves beyond a protest to a rebellion, as both the words and the details demonstrate. This is not the case with the other protests.

even physically forcing them to change a policy. They apply pressure to their leaders because they recognize who retains power and who has the ability to change the situation.

In conclusion, the people continue to protest the presence of what they see as injustices committed against the community. The injustices they see outlined in Numbers are related to issues of security (Num 14), authority (Num 16), and governance (Num 17). In the stories in Numbers, it is no longer an issue of resources, but the people are still pushing for policy changes. In response to these protests, Yahweh defends his authority and that of his ordained leaders, demonstrating that the protests recorded in these chapters, coming later in the entire protest cycle and centered on issues of power, are illegitimate.

Thus, לִיָּן is indeed indicative of a protest rather than a rebellion. This does not mean that the protests could not morph into a rebellion if the people organize with different goals as they do in Num 14 when they attempt to choose a new leader and stone Moses and Aaron. This is not unexpected; protests often indicate the initial agitation of the people and, since that agitation is present, protests always have the potential to lead into more threatening action such as rebellion. In light of this discussion, scholars should begin to rethink referring to all of these events as rebellions. A look at the subsequent phrases appearing in the wilderness stories, often paired with לִיָּן, will confirm these findings.⁵⁸⁹

עַם רִיב “To Contend With”

In one of the episodes previously discussed, לִיָּן עַל, “to murmur against” is parallel with the phrase עַם רִיב, “to quarrel/contend with.” Both phrases appear in Exod 17:2-3. As with לִיָּן עַל appearing in this passage, עַם רִיב, “to contend with” is not a rebellion term. Rather, in the wilderness texts the phrase describes a dispute the Israelites have with their leader. This dispute

⁵⁸⁹ The occurrence of the word לִיָּן in Josh 9:18 confirms the meaning of the word as we have been describing it. In this case, the people gather before their leaders and are upset with them because the rulers have made a covenant with the Gibeonites, and allowed them to live. The leaders are making a policy decision that the people are upset with, which leads to the verbal challenge.

leads them to confront Moses as they attempt to coerce him into providing for their needs. The meaning of רִיב, while not necessarily indicating a protest, is consistent with describing the necessary preconditions of a protest along with events that are involved in a protest. All protests begin because a set of circumstances leads two sides with a previously defined relationship to be at odds over a societal problem. What follows is one side's accusing and challenging the other over the manifestation of the problem.

Looking at additional usages of רִיב will help confirm its meaning and show how the event or situation it describes fits into a protest context. In most episodes, רִיב describes a crisis existing between two parties with a previous bond (the nominal form) or on the varying forms of contention (the verbal form) resulting from the crisis. It is important to begin with simple statements such as these because רִיב is prominent for its appearance in what some have called the prophetic or covenant lawsuit genre.⁵⁹⁰ Due to the presence of רִיב in these contexts, scholars in the past have overemphasized the word's connection to the courtroom.⁵⁹¹ It is clear, however,

⁵⁹⁰ The discussion of a possible genre called the prophetic lawsuit became prominent with Gunkel and flourished for quite some time. See for example Herbert B. Huffmon, "The Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets," *JBL* 78 (1959): 285–95; Julien Harvey, *Le plaidoyer prophétique contre Israël après la rupture de l'alliance: Etude d'une formule littéraire de l'Ancien Testament*, *Studia* 22 (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1967). James W. Limburg, "The Root רִיב and the Prophetic Lawsuit Speeches," *JBL* 88 (1969): 291–304; Kirsten Nielsen, *Yahweh as Prosecutor and Judge: An Investigation of the Prophetic Lawsuit (Rib-Pattern)*, *JSOTSup* 9 (Sheffield: University of Sheffield Press, 1978). This position circulated widely until some raised questions. See Dwight R. Daniels, "Is There a Prophetic Lawsuit Genre," *ZAW* 99 (1987): 339–60 for a scholar who raises a question about this genre. See also, Michael De Roche, "Yahweh's *Rib* against Israel: A Reassessment of the So-Called 'Prophetic Lawsuit' in the Pre-Exilic Prophets," *JBL* (1983): 563–74. De Roche thinks the term Prophetic Lawsuit should be abandoned. For more recent discussions of this see Alan S. Bandy, "Patterns of Prophetic Lawsuits in the Oracles to the Seven Churches," *Neotestamentica* 45 (2011): 178–205; and Alan S. Bandy, *The Prophetic Lawsuit in the Book of Revelation*, *NTM* 29 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010). See especially the chapter on the lawsuit as a prophetic subgenre.

⁵⁹¹ Begrich suggested רִיב is a technical term for describing events in the "courtroom." Joachim Begrich, *Studien zu Deuterocesaja* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1938), 31–37. Others have followed this with similar sentiments. Würthwein noted it referred to accusing or brining a charge against a defendant in a courtroom situation. E. Würthwein, "Der Ursprung der prophetischen Gerichtsrede," *ZThK* 49 (1952): 1–15. Limburg focuses on the presence of speech behind this word and so essentially calls it a legal accusation. He moves it from a domestic legal context to an international one. Limburg, "The Root רִיב and the Prophetic Lawsuit Speeches," 291–304. Some have more recently moved away from this as the original meaning. They still maintain the appearance of רִיב to indicate a lawsuit, but recognize that the understanding of a lawsuit as having to take place in a courtroom is anachronistic. See H. Ringgren, "רִיב" *TDOT*: 13:477–78 and the following footnote.

that even if ריב is inherently juridical, this does not demand that the action be thought of as taking place in a courtroom. The root ריב also occurs in juridical settings outside of the courtroom with no third party arbiter present.⁵⁹² Examples that discuss events outside the courtroom will be the focus of the section below. This type of context provides the closest parallel to what occurs in Exodus and Numbers.

The first point to note is that in many cases the contexts in which ריב appears fail to elaborate on the type of action involved in resolving the disputes. The focus of these texts is the presence of what Bovati calls a “juridical crisis poised between two situations with a tendency to stability.”⁵⁹³ In one episode, Abram and Lot’s shepherds have a dispute over wells. Genesis 13:7 reads, וַיְהִי־רִיב בֵּין רֹעֵי מִקְנֵה־אַבְרָם וּבֵין רֹעֵי מִקְנֵה־לֹט, “There was a dispute between the shepherds of Abram’s flock and the shepherds of Lot’s flock.” A parallel situation unfolds in Gen 26:20–22. The focus in these contexts is on the existence of a situation that negatively affects the relationship between two parties. This situation has the potential to lead to a physical or verbal confrontation between the groups. The focus, however, is not on realized altercation or action in a courtroom. This is also the case in Gen 31:36 as Jacob and Laban are at odds over Laban’s pursuit of Jacob. In this episode, Rachel had stolen the household gods of Laban, which is the problem or juridical crisis that leads Laban to accuse Jacob. The point of employing the word ריב is not to mention fighting or violence, but to demonstrate that there is a dispute between two parties with a previously defined relationship that will lead the wronged party to confront the other.

⁵⁹² Leidke argues that these scenarios should be referred to as pre-judicial. G. Liedke, “ריב” *TLOT III*, 1236. Bovati, however, cogently demonstrated that ריב can still be a juridical term even if the event does not take place in the courtroom. He states, “From a biblical point of view it is extremely deceptive to undervalue the pre-judicial nature of a two-party controversy, believing it to have less juridical rigour than a trial before a judge, or trying to ascribe to it archaic procedures that disappeared when Israel achieved a sufficient level of cultural evolution.” Pietro Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice: Legal Terms, Concepts and Procedures in the Hebrew Bible*, trans. Michael J. Smith, JSOTSup 105 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 33.

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*, 31.

The texts of Deut 25:1-3, 2 Sam 15:1–6, and Prov 25:7–9 all support the conclusion that the noun רִיב refers to a problem or dispute that occurs prior to any fight or contention.

Deuteronomy 25:1 states, פִּי-יִהְיֶה רִיב בֵּין אָנָשִׁים, “if there is a dispute between people.” The focus of this clause is not on the legal proceedings that follow, but on the presence of a dispute between individuals. There is little doubt that in this case the problem leads to a lawsuit, but this is not the focus of the text. The text sets up the juridical crisis in which two people are at odds over a breach in expected norms. Absalom’s story in 2 Samuel outlines an analogous situation. In 2 Sam 15, Absalom is attempting to convince the citizens of David’s kingdom to follow him instead of the king. He argues that David has not installed legal mechanisms to adjudicate the contentions (רִיבִים) of the people. Again, the רִיב is not always the lawsuit or the judicial procedure that Absalom hopes to implement, but the crisis between individuals.

Following the juridical crisis, the wronged party will attempt to resolve the problem. The action to resolve the problem is what the verb רִיב indicates. There are a variety of actions that fit within the nature of the רִיב. The term may have juridical connections, but the action to resolve the dispute can be juridical without involving a courtroom or a third party arbiter.⁵⁹⁴ In fact, as is the case in Gen 13:7; 26:20 and 31:36, the individual who had been wronged seeks to rectify the problem at the individual level.

Proverbs 25:8–9 also demonstrates that individuals are not obliged to solve the dispute (רִיב) by appealing to a Judge: אֶת-רִעֶךָ רִיב, “Argue (solve) your dispute with your neighbor.” Earlier, the text states that individuals should not be quick to bring their problems to the court, meaning that they should address them directly with the other party. This passage confirms that the root רִיב can indicate the dispute as well as various possible ways of settling the

⁵⁹⁴ Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice: Legal Terms, Concepts and Procedures in the Hebrew Bible*, 33.

dispute.⁵⁹⁵ The nominal form indicates the problem, while the verbal form indicates the attempt to solve the crisis. For this reason, Davidson is correct to state that the root means “to contend” or “contention.”⁵⁹⁶ To contend implies that one engages in activity designed to solve the problem. This activity includes a range of behaviors as the following paragraph will discuss.

The activity undertaken to resolve the dispute (רִיב) can include speech, as is the case in Exod 17 and Num 20.⁵⁹⁷ It can indicate a physical altercation as it does in Exod 21:18 where the contention involves a fight between two opposing parties. This example involves a situation with an unstated problem that leads to a physical struggle. The struggle is the attempt to solve the problem that must have been present before the altercation occurred. The physical and even violent confrontation of the act behind רִיב is also apparent in Ps 35:1 where רִיב עַם is parallel with לָחֵם, “to fight.” The action indicated by רִיב may even rise to the level of a military conflict as occurs in Judg 11:25 or 2 Sam 22:44. This leads the accusing party to engage in military activity.⁵⁹⁸ As Bovati argues, violence often ensues when there is no arbiter or if the accused party fails to remedy the problem at the individual level.⁵⁹⁹

The contention, or attempt to resolve the crisis, does not have to involve multiple people, nor does it have to be negative. One individual can fight or “contend” against an unspecified problem for the benefit of another. This occurs in Isa 1:17 where the people of Judah are

⁵⁹⁵ The two situations that רִיב can indicate are not always easy to distinguish because they are often interwoven with one meaning sliding into the other.

⁵⁹⁶ Richard M. Davidson, “The Divine Covenant Lawsuit Motif in Canonical Perspective,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 21 (2010): 58. Both De Roche and Daniels agree with this sentiment. Daniels makes the important correction to De Roche’s comments that appear to limit the contention to verbal activity. As the above examples demonstrate it must move beyond that. Daniels, “Is There a Prophetic Lawsuit Genre,” 353.

⁵⁹⁷ Liedke, *TLOT III*, 1236 believes the רִיב indicates an accusation and therefore limits the confrontation to speech activities.

⁵⁹⁸ Bovati states that this occurs due to “the lack of a superior authority endowed with suitable jurisdiction.” Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice: Legal Terms, Concepts and Procedures in the Hebrew Bible*, 33–34.

⁵⁹⁹ Bovati establishes set patterns for these type of events. *Ibid.*, 31–32.

exhorted to *אֶל־קָנְיָהּ* רִיבוּ, “plead” or “contend” “for the widow.” The pre-existing crisis is the social plight of the widow, and Yahweh tells the people that they are to fight or “contend” (רִיבוּ) on her behalf against the crisis she faces. A similar situation appears in many of the Psalms where God is called to contend on behalf of his people against their perilous situation.⁶⁰⁰

This analysis demonstrates that רִיבוּ is not trying to narrate the attempt of one party to overthrow another party.⁶⁰¹ Rather, the focus is first on the juridical crisis and second on the efforts to solve this crisis and restore equity in the relationship or situation. Protesting involves a situation in which one party feels wronged by another. The crisis leads the aggrieved party to accuse or challenge the other with the hopes of remedying the problem. In two wilderness stories, the dispute leads the people to contend (רִיבוּ) with Moses, which pushes him to provide, thus restoring the relationship. They do this through assembling and airing their grievances, which becomes clear as we look at the associated vocabulary (cf. *לִזְנוּן*, *קָהָל*, and *יַעַד*).

Exodus 17:1–7: A Crisis over Water

The first of the two wilderness stories that employ רִיבוּ is in Exod 17. Some scholars have argued that there are two sources present in this chapter.⁶⁰² The comment about water appears twice, once in Exod 17:2 and again in 17:3. These two verses also employ different verbs to introduce

⁶⁰⁰ See the following examples for the usage of this term in the book of Psalms: Ps 35:1, 23; 43:1; 119:54 cf. Prov 23:11; 22:23; Isa 3:13. Interesting in this regard is Gideon’s alternate name in Judges 6, Jerubba’al. The issue is whether the name indicates Ba’al will contend for him or against him. Originally the name likely meant that Ba’al will contend for him, as his father would have conceived of it as a positive. Yet, if the father originally meant it as a positive, the narrator of Judges 6 presents it as negative as he employs it to make a polemical point against the worship of Ba’al. This was pointed out to me in a conversation with Peter Machinist.

⁶⁰¹ Liedke says, “No texts portray extra-judicial disputes between an individual and a group. This lack may be accidental or it may be due to the fact that the extra-judicial *rib* is essentially only conceivable as a symmetric conflict.” He further says that in pre-judicial disputes you can see conflict between an individual and a group, but that this dispute could only lead to harm for the weaker party. He classifies Exod 17 as a prejudicial dispute due to the accusation. Liedke, *TLOT III*, 1236. This suggests the word focuses on the relationship between the parties, which is a point that is very hard to prove.

⁶⁰² See the discussion in Propp for more on this. Propp, *Exodus 1–18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 604.

the problem (רִיב in Exod 17:2 and לָחַן in Exod 17:3). Despite these arguments, it is more likely that Exod 17 preserves one tradition with a redactional addition in 17:3.⁶⁰³ This verse records a comment about Egypt, which helps tie this episode to the additional murmuring stories. But even if an editor added a phrase in Exod 17:3, the phrases focused on the protest are parallel one with the other as they both outline a similar grievance against Moses.⁶⁰⁴ In Exod 17, the confrontation focuses on Moses' inability to provide water; and, as the discussion above outlined, Moses and Yahweh respond favorably to this request. The only new element that an analysis of Exod 17:2, the verse containing רִיב, can add to our understanding of protesting is to note that the protest in Exod 17 involves a juridical crisis between two parties. The crisis has arisen because one party believes the other has failed to abide by the norms of the relationship. In this case, the people believe the ruler has failed to provide material resources adequately. This leads the aggrieved party to confront and essentially accuse the other as they hope to resolve the problem. A protest involves a group confronting leadership while highlighting the problem through speech, a visual demonstration, or violence. In the present Masoretic text of Exod 17, the verb רִיב, "to contend" focuses on a crisis leading to confrontation, while לָחַן, "to murmur" reveals the way in which the group confronts the leader. They confront the leader through leveling complaints.⁶⁰⁵

Numbers 20: A Crisis over Water

The word רִיב appears a second time in Num 20:3, which is a text with strikingly similar details

⁶⁰³ Römer, *Egypt Nostalgia in Exodus 14-Numbers 21*, 75–76.

⁶⁰⁴ For more on the presence of sources in this passage see Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, 603–04. One has to wonder if the mention of רִיב appears in addition to לָחַן to make sure we connect the episode in Exod 17 with Num 20, which also employs רִיב to introduce the parallel protest. For another view of the various layers present in this passage see, Garton, *Mirages in the Desert: The Tradition-Historical Developments of the Story of Massah-Meribah*, 157–97, 260–61.

⁶⁰⁵ See the discussion above on לָחַן for more on this episode of protesting.

to Exod 17. This has led many to believe it is a doublet.⁶⁰⁶ Analogous to Exod 17 this text also confronts Moses' and Yahweh's inability to provide water. The people are not seeking to kill Moses and install a new leader or even rejecting his authority; rather they are challenging him and his capability to provide resources in this difficult environment. Numbers 20:3 states, **וַיָּרֹב** **וַיִּאמְרוּ** **הָעָם** **עִם־מֹשֶׁה** **וַיֹּאמְרוּ**, "The people quarreled with Moses and said...." The details of this episode reveal that the focus is on an issue over which the two groups are at odds, a lack of water. The crisis results in a verbal challenge by the people and the questioning of Moses' actions. This is similar to what appears in Exod 17. The people hope that by confronting Moses over the dispute they will be able to engender a change in the situation, a change in which the leader will respond and provide for their needs. The protest appears to work, as Moses and Yahweh provide water from the rock (Num 20:11; cf. Exod 17:6). There is no indication that the action of Num 20 involves a concerted effort to overthrow Moses or even a rejection of his authority. The people are simply complaining and pressuring him to provide water. The addition of the added phrase **וַיִּקְהָלוּ עָלָיו**, "they assembled against" in Num 20:2 may suggest the presence of an aggressive demonstration, but this is not a rebellion. In the end, what the people's quarreling does is to pressure Moses to address the grievance and provide water in the same way **לִוְנָה עָלָיו** discussed above did.

One difference between Exod 17 and Num 20 is that the protest in Num 20 angers Moses and leads him to lose his temper, which culminates in his caustic statement that the people are recalcitrant (cf. Num 20:10 **מִרְדָּה**). In Exod 17:4, Moses fears the people might stone him, but he does not become angry and only looks for a way to satisfy the people's request. The focus on Moses' anger and word choice (**מִרְדָּה**) in Num 20 might push the reader into thinking that the

⁶⁰⁶ Christophe Nihan refers to this as a "sophisticated *réécriture* of Exod 17. Whether we refer to this as a doublet or a *réécriture*, it is obvious that the text builds on the passage in Exod 17. Christophe Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch: A Study in the Composition of the Book of Leviticus*, FAT2 25 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 27–28.

protest is illegitimate. The similarity of these texts, however, complicates this suggestion. It is certainly illegitimate from Moses' perspective, but whether the text of Num 20 demands this is more difficult to say. The details of the chapter suggest the focus is not on the protest but rather on Moses, his response, and ultimately Yahweh's punishment of him. The differences between Exod 17 and Num 20 substantiate this claim. One of these differences centers on Moses and his exclusion from the "promised land." The protest of Num 20, therefore, exists at the end of the cycle to explain why Moses does not enter the land with the younger generation of Israelites. The text adapts or advances the story of Exod 17 to set up a scenario that leads to Moses' punishment, not to condemn the Israelites for a protest.⁶⁰⁷

The use of ריב continues to confirm that the type of action the people take in the wilderness is closer to protesting than any other form of collective action. It entails a crisis (the nominal form) that leads one party to confront (the verbal form) another over the presence of a dispute. ריב never describes the attempt to overthrow or eliminate another party. It further does not imply a rejection of someone's authority; rather, it suggests that one party challenges another, forcing the accused party to respond. The accused will either respond with a denial of the accusation, or with an attempt to resolve the crisis and restore the status quo.⁶⁰⁸ The ריב is designed, in the wilderness episodes, to force Moses to act, just as a protest is designed to force those in power to act. In both cases, the pressure on Moses forces him to address the problem of

⁶⁰⁷ There are many scholars who see Num 20 as a late redactional adaptation of Exod 17 existing to explain why Moses and Aaron do not enter Canaan. Reinhard Kratz, *Komposition der erzählenden Bücher des Alten Testaments: Grundwissen der Bibelkritik*, UTB 2157 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 115; Reinhard Achenbach, *Die Vollendung der Tora: Studien zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Numeribuches im Kontext von Hexateuch und Pentateuch*, BZABR 3 (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2003), 309; Christophe Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch: A Study in the Composition of the Book of Leviticus*, 29. Blum has a similar position, but argues that Num 20 begins with the story of Exod 17 and advances it. Erhard Blum, *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch*, BZAW 189 (New York: Walter De Gruyter, 1990), 278.

⁶⁰⁸ Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice: Legal Terms, Concepts and Procedures in the Hebrew Bible*, 31.

a lack of resources and to re-establish an equitable situation by providing water.⁶⁰⁹

לְדַבֵּר בַּ “To Speak Against”

Another phrase the wilderness texts employ to describe a protest is the phrase לְדַבֵּר בַּ, “to speak against.” This phrase is also not prominent within the wilderness traditions as it appears in only two episodes—Num 12⁶¹⁰ and Num 21. A look at these two episodes, along with additional occurrences of the phrase elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, will demonstrate that the focus of the phrase is on the hostile speech of one party against another. This is an action that is consistently involved in protests and is designed to weaken the leader.

Numbers 12: Miriam and Aaron Protest Moses’ Power

The analysis will first look at Num 12, which records the account of Aaron and Miriam’s challenge to Moses’ authority⁶¹¹ using the phrase לְדַבֵּר בְּמוֹסֵף, “to speak against Moses” (Num 12:1, 8). As Num 12 states, Aaron and Miriam believe their authority is commensurate with Moses’ and so they verbally attack him (Num 12:1).⁶¹² Similar to the way that scholars equate לִן

⁶⁰⁹ Bovati focuses on this word as lending itself toward re-establishing justice, which is part of the title of his book. Ibid.

⁶¹⁰ There is some debate over whether this passage belongs to the murmuring traditions of the Pentateuch, as it has a slightly different pattern and focus. Vervenne sees it as standing outside of the strict murmuring tradition. Despite his point, it is clear it is related to the murmuring stories and the challenges to the leaders that occur in Num 11–21. Based on the action involved, it is necessary to discuss this episode in this chapter. For a discussion of this see Vervenne, “The Protest Motif in the Sea Narrative (EX 14:11–12) Form and Structure of a Pentateuchal Pattern,” 258.

⁶¹¹ Some scholars have seen in this confrontation two separate issues that are now interwoven. The first controversy surrounds the Cushite wife and the second is a controversy over the issue of authority. According to this view, Miriam is involved in the first controversy while both Aaron and Miriam are involved in the second. Davies builds from Noth suggesting that verses 1, 9a, 10ab, 13–16 record the first controversy while verses 2–5a, 6–8, 9b, 10aa record the second controversy. See Martin Noth, *Numbers: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), 93; and Eryl W. Davies, *Numbers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 114. In the opinion of the present writer, Wenham has cogently argued the entire chapter is intended to be read as a unified whole. See Gordon Wenham, *Numbers*, OTG 5 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 51–52.

⁶¹² This particular attack on Moses raises many questions. Scholars are divided as to why Miriam and Aaron see something wrong with Moses’ wife having a Cushite background. Furthermore, whether this is Zipporah or not is unclear. For a discussion of these issues along with bibliography see Rodney S. Sadler, Jr., “Representing the Cushite Other: The Use of Cushite Phenotypes in Numbers 12 and Jeremiah 13:23,” in *The Archaeology of Difference: Gender, Ethnicity, Class and the “Other” in Antiquity Studies in Honor of Eric M. Meyers*, ed. Douglas R. Edwards and Thomas McCollough (Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2007), 127–37.

to rebellion, scholars also suggest that “to speak against” should be considered a rebellion. Baruch Levine says of the phrase, “Idiomatic *dibber b-*, which occurs again in v 8, below, connotes actual rebellion or advocacy of the same.”⁶¹³ It is unclear exactly what he means by this, but as the discussion will show, it does not involve an actual overthrow of Moses.

In this episode of protest, Miriam and Aaron are unhappy with the way the current government is set up and aim to change this. It is indeed an issue of power and there is little doubt this borders on a rebellion due to their expressed desire for power and their hope for a change to the governing structure. Nevertheless, there are details within the text suggesting that neither Aaron nor Miriam is physically attempting to reject and replace Moses. They further do not force the change. Individuals can be upset with and protest against the structures of power without engaging in rebellion. There are additional methods individuals can employ to bring about changes to government, and this is what Miriam and Aaron attempt to do. They apply pressure to Moses hoping that he will make this change.⁶¹⁴ Indeed, their methods are more political than militaristic; and, while their methods do not eliminate rebellion as an option, they make it less likely. Miriam and Aaron first attempt to undermine Moses’ power. In their “speech against Moses,” they attack him by appealing to the perceived illegitimacy of his foreign wife (Num 12:1). Challenging the credibility of the leader is a non-violent way to pressure and undermine his standing. Their goal is to make it easier to create the change that would endow them with more power. The text portrays this action as a threat to Moses’ leadership, which forces Yahweh to respond and “speak” on Moses’ behalf. That this episode involves a threat to Moses leadership, however, does not make this a rebellion. Protests often undermine the power

⁶¹³ Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, 328.

⁶¹⁴ Protest theorists often note that the protests can involve “demands for changes in political rights or rulership.” The demand for more power from a group does not turn it into a rebellion. Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 129.

of a leader because they highlight a perceived weakness, which has the potential to make people doubt him or her.⁶¹⁵ The perception of weakness raises the probability that the leaders will implement the requested changes. If they do not make changes or stop the protest, they risk further erosion of their power and credibility. Yahweh, however, does not bow to this pressure. He responds to the hostile speech by afflicting Miriam with a disease. This response undergirds Moses and delegitimizes Miriam and Aaron's action.

Yahweh's response demonstrates that Miriam is the focus of the punishment. Looking at Num 12:1 provides a plausible reason why Yahweh strikes Miriam with a skin disease and leaves Aaron unscathed. She is listed first and the verb agrees with her as it is a feminine singular. This appears in the phrase *וַתִּדְבֹר מִרְיָם וְאַהֲרֹן בְּמִשְׁחָה*, "Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses." The more prominent character, Aaron, would typically be named first in a list, so fronting Miriam suggests that she is the focus of the action and the more prominent figure in this sentence. The verb also could have been plural as is the case in the following verse. The presence of a plural verb in both sentences would have unambiguously placed the focus on both individuals.⁶¹⁶ The grammatical focus on one individual is consistent with the punishment being meted out on Miriam, who could be the agitator seducing Aaron to join her.⁶¹⁷ This parallels the situation in the previous chapter. In Num 11 the instigating party receives punishment while the

⁶¹⁵ See footnote 486 above, which discusses how protests often undermine the power and control of the leader.

⁶¹⁶ Admittedly it is common for a prepositive verb to agree with only the first subject listed while the subsequent verbs are inflected as plurals. See Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2006), 520–21. Others have suggested that there are two different sources interwoven into this chapter and that only Miriam speaks against Moses for his Cushite wife and Aaron raises the issue over the unique prophetic status of Moses. This could also explain why Miriam is the subject in this verse because Aaron was added in later. See footnotes 611 and 612 above.

⁶¹⁷ Abela suggests something similar and also notes that a reference to Miriam ends the story in Num 12:15. He goes on to call this a Miriam story. Anthony Abela, "Shaming Miriam, Moses' Sister in NUM 12, 1–16," in *The Books of Leviticus and Numbers*, ed. Thomas Römer (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2008), 521–34.

seduced party escapes the more severe punishment.⁶¹⁸ The same stratification of punishment also occurs in the extant story of Num 14. There, the leaders who seduce the people to protest are killed immediately, while the remainder of the population is forced to wander before they die.

There are two main reasons for the employment of the phrase **דַּבֵּר בַּ**, “to speak against” to describe this protest. First, this phrase is important to the context because of the prominence of **דַּבֵּר** in this chapter. In Num 12:2, 8 **דַּבֵּר בַּ** indicates that Yahweh speaks directly with Moses **אֶדְבָּר־בְּיָוֹ**, “I speak with him,” which highlights the unique and prophetic status of Moses. The same word (**דַּבֵּר**) with the same preposition (**בַּ**) appears in both cases but with radically different meanings. The preposition **בַּ** in one case marks an oblique object and means “with.” In the other case it carries the adversative meaning “against.” Based on the prominence of the root **דַּבֵּר** in this chapter, the use of **דַּבֵּר בַּ** to narrate a protest is intentional and serves to highlight the actions of Yahweh in comparison with the illegitimate actions of Aaron and Miriam. The contrasting uses of **דַּבֵּר בַּ** make it easy to see why verbally undermining the authority of Yahweh’s chosen leader is condemned. You do not speak “against” someone whom Yahweh speaks “with.” The importance of the root **דַּבֵּר** to this chapter is not, however, the only reason it appears in Num 12.

Second, the protest in this case does not involve a direct threat to Moses’ life, but rather an attempt to undermine him. It is, therefore, different from a rebellion against a king or ruler in which the rebels reject and violently depose the king. It indicates in this case a less serious form of collective action. The action involves confrontational politics. The focus in Num 12 is on hostile speech employed as an aid in bringing about change to the governing structure. This makes it suited for a situation of protest. Protests often involve hostile and mocking speech as the

⁶¹⁸ David Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative: Structural Analyses in the Hebrew Bible 2nd ed.*, JSOTSup 7 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 39, suggests something similar.

mechanism through which subordinates can highlight problems with a ruler or position.⁶¹⁹

In Ps 50:20; 78:19, and Job 19:18, דַּבַּר בּ, “to speak against” also indicates aggressive speech towards an individual and thus is comparable to Aaron and Miriam’s actions in Num 12. In Job 19:18 a group of youths is speaking against or reviling an adult. Job, in this speech, is discussing the level of hostility directed at him. He uses the phrase דַּבַּר בּ, “to speak against” to indicate the antagonistic speech that the youths direct toward him. The scene recalls an image of a group of adolescents mocking or belittling an elder for a perceived deficiency. This is similar to Aaron and Miriam attempting to belittle Moses over his foreign wife.

A similar situation occurs in Ps 50:20. Here, דַּבַּר בּ, “to speak against” indicates hostile or mocking speech toward a kinsman. Elsewhere, in Psalm 78:19 דַּבַּר בּ appears in direct reference to the wilderness tradition. The narrator says in this verse, וַיִּדְבְּרוּ בְּאֱלֹהִים, “They spoke against God,” and what follows is a challenge to God’s ability to provide for the people. The people mockingly ask, “Is God able to arrange a table in the wilderness?” The community is attacking the leader, God, with aggressive speech by highlighting what they expect will be his failure to perform his duty to provide resources. The phrase in Ps 78 is akin to a protest against the leader over issues of policy as the people hope their aggressive and mocking speech will put pressure on the leader to provide. The writer of Ps 78, however, condemns the people’s aggressive speech because it demonstrates they are attempting to undermine the deity and are further doubting his facility to provide (Ps 78:20–24). These examples exhibit why the phrase is suitable to describe some protests. Protests often involve harassing and hostile speech. The protesters are, with aggressive speech, bringing light to what they see as faults in their leader. This naturally

⁶¹⁹ A modern example of this would be the protests in Egypt against Hosni Mubarrak. These protests eventually led to his resignation. See Shehata, “The Fall of the Pharaoh: How Hosni Mubarak’s Reign Came to an End,” 26–32. We do not classify this as a rebellion because Mubarrak chose to step down and pass all authority to a military council. Had he not chosen to relinquish power, the situation likely would have escalated into a rebellion with the people forcing the change.

undermines and therefore angers the person the speech is directed at.

Numbers 21: A Protest over Food

The phrase **דבר ב**, “to speak against” is more specifically connected to the protest tradition as it appears again later in the book of Numbers. The narrators employ this phrase in Num 21:5 in a similar fashion to the case of Num 12. In this passage, the people speak not only against Moses, but also against God. Numbers 21:5 states, **וַיִּדְבֹר הָעָם בְּאֱלֹהִים וּבַמֹּשֶׁה לְמַעַן הָעֵלִיתָנוּ מִמִּצְרָיִם לָמוֹת**, **בַּמִּדְבָּר**, “The people spoke against God and against Moses, why have you brought us up from Egypt to die in the wilderness?” “To speak against” is the term appearing in Num 21 to introduce the protest. The parallel between Exod 17 and Num 21 proves this. **ב דבר** parallels **לון** in Exod 17 almost exactly. Exodus 17:3 states, **וַיִּגְלוּ הָעָם עַל-מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמְרוּ לְמֹשֶׁה זֶה הָעֵלִיתָנוּ מִמִּצְרָיִם לְהַמִּית אֶת־**, “The people murmured against Moses and said, why did you bring us up from Egypt to kill me (us).” The only significant difference is the change from **לון** to **ב דבר** along with the fact that God is specified as part of the attack in Num 21. This is not always the case in these protest stories. In Exod 15:24; 16:2; 17:2–3, only Moses or Moses and Aaron are the objects of the protests. These are all stories without punishment. Frankel says that in the stories of punishment Israel sins against God, while in the others they do not.⁶²⁰ Numbers 21 helps to confirm this.

In Num 21 the people are challenging the leadership of Moses and Yahweh because of what they see as their failure to provide basic necessities of food and water, which the people had in Egypt. The phrase mentioning Egypt, quoted in the previous paragraph, is similar to those in Exodus (cf. Exod 14:11–12; 16:3; 17:3) discussed above and those episodes did not come with punishment. The reference to Egypt alone is not the reason for Yahweh to punish the people in

⁶²⁰ Frankel, *The Murmuring Stories of the Priestly School*, 37. In the texts from Exodus mentioned above, Moses is the only one who suggests that the action is also against Yahweh (cf. Exod 16:7–9), but that is not what the narrator states. In Num 21 the narrator states that the action is directed against Yahweh.

this episode. That comment must be taken with others as it serves to connect to the other protest stories. There are a few supplementary details, however, that provide the reasons for punishment.

The first of these details centers on the fact that Num 21 is not the first time the people have complained over the issue of resources. Moses and Yahweh had already addressed similar issues in Exod 15–17 and in those cases provided food and water in what were legitimate protests. Despite punishment and warnings, the leaders also provide food in Num 11. The text of Num 21:5 appears to recognize as much. In a contrast to saying there is no food and water in the first half of Num 21:5, the following statement records the people as stating, וַנִּפְשְׁנוּ בְלֶחֶם הַקֶּלֶקֶל, “We loathe this miserable food.” This phrase shows a connection to the previous incidents. The people have food in Num 21, but they are not satisfied with the specific food the leaders had earlier provided. Childs suggests that the statement about loathing the food in Num 21:5 is the reason for the punishment and what makes this event illegitimate.⁶²¹ He is correct. This is a matter the leaders had already adjudicated.

In both Num 12 and 21, it is clear that the phrase דַּבֵּר בִּי indicates a verbal action attacking the ruling authority with an attempt to undermine it. In Num 12, it is a group of people, that is Miriam and Aaron, who use Moses’ Cushite wife as a smokescreen to question his authority and elevate themselves. But in Num 21, it is all the people, who claim that Moses and God have failed in their responsibilities and criticize them over the food they had provided. In both cases, Yahweh defends the legitimacy of Moses and/or himself with violent and miraculous actions. The nature of Yahweh’s response suggests that to “speak against” a leader records an unacceptable action.⁶²² In none of the cases listed above is the response positive or accepted.

⁶²¹ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 258–260.

⁶²² Reading this text canonically demonstrates that many of the actions recording earlier events were not met with such aggressive responses. In Exod 16–17 the people protest and Yahweh and Moses respond by meeting their demands. Considering that we continue to read about more and more protests, it is natural that the response of the leaders will be more severe as this action continues.

Yahweh moves to stop these events because he perceives them as a threat to him and/or his ordained leader, which explains why punishment ensues. Further, within the protest cycle Yahweh's actions appear in Num 21 to decisively end the protests. The deity ends them with the deaths of many of the participants (Num 21:6).

The severity of the response(s) is likely one reason why some equate **ב דבר** to rebellion.⁶²³ The responses, however, cannot change the nature of the action. This phrase describes hostile speech with the intent to undermine and thus pressure the leader. The protestors subsequently hope that the leader will act in accordance with their wishes. This is very different from an organized rebellion that seeks to overthrow the leader or break away from the community. In this way, the phrase **ב דבר** is similar to the phrases described above and below. It is possible, however, that since both episodes in the wilderness, as well as the reference in Ps 78, are condemned, our phrase indicates a more threatening action than **לון** or **ריב**. This is difficult to determine because of the limited distribution of the phrase. The violent response occurs, in Num 21 at least, because of where this episode occurs within the protest cycle. This episode ends the incessant protests recorded throughout Exod 15–17 and Num 11–21.

קהל על and יעד על “To Assemble Against” and “To Gather Against”

The following section will deal with the next two phrases together because they indicate a similar action, that is the action of gathering together to put pressure on a target. The two phrases are **קהל על**,⁶²⁴ “to assemble against,” and **יעד על**,⁶²⁵ “to gather against.” There are many similarities between the phrases so many of the comments below apply to both. But since **קהל על** is slightly more prominent, this section will focus on it.

⁶²³ Levine, *Numbers 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 328.

⁶²⁴ See Exod 32:1; Num 16:3, 19; 17:7; 20:2.

⁶²⁵ See Num 14:35; 16:11; 27:3.

This phrase קהל על appears conspicuously in texts scholars believe are priestly, specifically in Num 16:3, 19; 17:7 (Eng. 16:42), Num 20:2,⁶²⁶ but also in Exod 32 when the people “assemble against” Aaron while Moses is on the mountain. The word קהל means “to assemble” and indicates the gathering of a group. The nominal form (קהל) appears often as another name for the Israelites, which demonstrates its connection to a group of people.⁶²⁷ We also see its use to indicate people organizing for non-hostile purposes, for example, in Num 20:8 when Yahweh tells Moses to אָתֶּהְעַדָּה הַקְהֵל, “gather the congregation” as he prepares to show them a miraculous demonstration. Unlike in these peaceful gatherings, when a writer employs קהל for action in a protest the root is always followed by the preposition על with the adversative meaning “against.” The meaning of קהל על is connected to the protest phrases mentioned above—לֹאן עַל-עַם, רִיב עַם—but is not identical to them. It is not focused on the leveling of grievances or on a dispute. Rather, the phrase is focused on the mobilization for collective action as people assemble to demonstrate, or perhaps riot, as they express complaints.

The leveling of grievances and the mobilization of a group are two parts of every protest. Without the mobilization of a group, political protests never materialize; it is therefore not a surprise that קהל על is occasionally connected to the phrases discussed above. The narrator uses קהל על alongside phrases focused on expressing grievances in Exod 32:1; Num 16:3; 17:6–7 (Eng. 16:41–42) and 20:2–3. Also, similar to the phrases discussed above, when the texts employ קהל על the people are not attempting to kill Moses or replace him with another leader. In fact,

⁶²⁶ Baden assigns these texts and this language to his priestly source. Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis*, 152–55; See also Levine who notes that this is priestly language, Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, 405, 412, 483, 488. For Exod 32 as a J passage, see Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 558–59. This is not a unique position. As Chung notes, most scholars including Noth and Wellhausen have assigned Exod 32–34 to either J or E or some combination of both. Whether we accept the presence of J or E, this demonstrates the non-priestly nature of this story. See Youn Ho Chung, *The Sin of the Calf: The Rise of the Bible’s Negative Attitude Toward the Golden Calf*, LHBOTS 523 (New York: T & T Clark, 2010), 30–32.

⁶²⁷ Exod 16:3; Num 16:3; 17:12; 19:20; 20:4.

the wilderness stories never explicitly record the people as engaging in violence. At most, only in Num 14 do we encounter people attempting violence.⁶²⁸ A comparable phrase to describe the action behind על קהל might be “to demonstrate against.” A demonstration describes the collective gathering of a group either in opposition or in support of a position. It focuses on the gathering or visual element of a protest rather than the speech or conflict.

It is possible that our phrase על קהל has the potential to indicate a more aggressive action beyond a peaceful protest or demonstration. This may be the reason for the use of these phrases rather than the use of ריב or לון alone. Unlike לון, the most prominent word in these stories, קהל has nothing to do with speech. This is evident in Num 17:6–7 (Eng. 16:41–42). When the people first protest, the grievance is narrated with the word לון. Following this speech and as tensions rise, a mob forms and they assemble against (קהל) the leader. This also appears to be the case in Num 16:19 as Korah proceeds to gather an assembly to confront Moses. In this case, the verb appears in the *hiphil* (ויקהל) showing Korah to be the driving force behind the organization. The potentially aggressive nature of this is possible because of the response it prompts from Yahweh. Immediately after Korah mobilizes his band of agitators, the glory of Yahweh appears to put an end to the protestors by killing them. It is also possible that there is violence in Num 16:2. In Num 16 the mob mentality of the extant text is present from the start as individuals “rise before Moses” (ויקמו לפני משה), when they “assemble against” him and Aaron (על-משה ועל-און).⁶²⁹ The verb קום can indicate violent conflict.⁶³⁰ In Num 16, they only speak to Moses and

⁶²⁸ Moses fears the people might stone him in Exod 17 but the event never reaches that point. Numbers 14 is the only episode in which the people plan to engage in violence and, as we have seen, this episode employs a specific word for rebellion and a clear attempt to replace the former leaders with a new ruler.

⁶²⁹ Scholars see these two texts as coming from separate sources. According to this view, the phrase “to rise before” is from the J (non-P) source while the phrase “to gather against” is from the P source. Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch*, 158.

⁶³⁰ The word קום followed by a preposition appears in additional contexts to indicate either warfare or violent actions. In these cases, it is typically followed by the preposition על. This occurs in 2 Sam 12:11 where Samuel

level grievances after the text indicates they had already “assembled against him.” From the start, Num 16 appears to record a more threatening protest with more serious grievances and ultimately severe responses.

We must note, however, that the texts never directly state that the people engage in violence. Despite what could be akin to a riot in Num 16:2, immediately following the gathering the text states that the people *אמרו*, “speak” to Moses. They do not assault him. Numbers 20:2 also uses *על קהל* in a text that results in no punishment of the people. The only thing in that chapter that might indicate an elevated level of protesting is Moses’ caustic response, but he is the one punished not they.

It is also unlikely that *על קהל* indicates violence in Exod 32. This episode records a method of collective action the people employ to pressure their leader to act. Exodus 32 is a text that does contain punishment, but in this case when the people “assemble” against Aaron their demonstration works and Aaron acquiesces. The picture presented in this chapter is that of numerous people accosting the leader before speaking (*אמרו* Exod 32:1) to him. The Israelites are punished later in the text, but not for demonstrating. They are punished for building the golden calf. Thus, it appears that *על קהל* might indicate threatening action, but does not focus on actual violence. It at most describes mob or riot-like behavior, which is consistent with the nature of protesting.

Regardless of how different *על קהל* is from the other terms, the actions are indeed

speaks the words of Yahweh, *הִנְנִי מִקִּיָּם עָלֶיךָ רָעָה מִבֵּיתְךָ*, “I will raise evil against you from your own household.” For comparable passages where a similar phrase is used to describe violent actions see 2 Sam 18:31, 32; 2 Kgs 16:7; Isa 31:2; Amos 6:14; 7:9; Obad 1; Mic 5:4; Ps 27:3. The word *קום* “arise” also appears on occasion with the preposition *לפני* “before.” In these cases, it can indicate the inability of one group to resist another group in a violent conflict. In Jos 7:12–13 the text says, “you are unable to rise before your enemies,” *לֹא הוּכַל לָקוּם לְפָנַי אִי־יָדָךְ*, speaking of Israel, meaning they will fall in battle. A similar idea is expressed in Jer 51:64. When these texts are contrasted with the context of Num 16, where the phrase is formulated without the negative, it may indicate that the group who “rose before” Moses had the ability to withstand retributive action and presented a formidable threat.

connected. A group needs to gather physically to make their grievances known to the leaders. Additionally, as the definition of protesting mentioned above indicates, protests involve an intent to pressure the target through confrontation politics. The group dynamic and the visual element that come along with a mass gathering exist to increase the ability of the protestors to intimidate their target. This makes it more likely that the leaders will acquiesce to their demands.

The same comments apply to the comparable phrase **יָעַד עַל**, “to gather against.” This phrase also indicates group activity or a demonstration. The word **יָעַד** alone means “to appoint” or “to designate” and often indicates the agreement of people to meet (e.g., Amos 3:3). When associated with the preposition **עַל**, “against,” it indicates that people have agreed to assemble to express their opposition to a person or a position. In the three uses of this phrase in the wilderness stories, or in reference to them (Num 14:35; 16:11; 27:3), Yahweh is always the object and so these assemblages are naturally condemned. One of these is a comment on the wilderness texts in Num 27 where the daughters of Zelophehad state they were not part of Korah’s group who **הִתְקַבְּלִים עַל־יְהוָה**, “gathered against Yahweh.”⁶³¹

בָּכָה “To Weep”

Another phrase appearing in a couple of the wilderness texts is not one of the typical words used to describe the protests. It is simply the word meaning “to cry or weep,” **בָּכָה**. It records the weeping of a child (e.g. Exod 2:6) along with individuals weeping over the dead (e.g. 2 Sam 1:12; Ezek 24:16). Various texts also record episodes in which people cry when their emotions overcome them, as Esau does when he loses his father’s blessing (Gen 27:38), or when Jephthah’s daughter hears that her father’s vow is directed at her (Judg 11:37). The focus on an outburst of emotion is what occurs in these wilderness texts. Within the protest stories **בָּכָה** appears in Num 11 five times (11:4, 13, 10, 18, 20), but only once outside of this chapter (Num

⁶³¹ See also Num 14:35 and Num 16:11.

14:1). The occurrence in Num 14:1 confirms that בכּה is related to the entire protest tradition, for in this text the people weep and in the next verse (Num 14:2) they begin to level complaints (לִזְנוּ). The weeping and the feeling of grief are what precipitate the protest. בכּה, therefore, captures the feelings of relative deprivation. It is not a word that describes the protest per se. Something similar may be present in Numbers 11.

Unlike many of the protests in Exodus, Num 11:4ff records the presence of two separate groups. The group that begins the episode and is ultimately punished is called “the rabble” (הַמְּסֻבִּים). The text sets this group apart by noting that the rabble was “among it,” בְּקִרְבּוֹ (the it refers to the people of Israel). The protest begins by noting that this group experienced “a strong craving” (הִתְאַוּוּ תַאֲוָה), but does not declare that they took their complaints to Moses. Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible the word אוּוה, “to crave” is negative, meaning that in this case it likely indicates a gluttonous desire. The adverse tone of אוּוה is apparent in one version of the Decalogue where אוּוה also indicates an improper desire or coveting: וְלֹא תִתְאַוְוֶה בֵּית רֵעֶךָ, “Do not covet the house of your neighbor” (Deut 5:21).⁶³² Taken alone, the phrase focused on craving does not seem to indicate a protest in Num 11:4. The result of the rabble’s actions, however, suggests that they might be inciting a protest. Immediately after the rabble experience this craving the text states that the Israelites “also” (גַּם) cry out in their desire for meat: וַיִּשְׁבוּ וַיִּבְכּוּ, “they wept again” (11:4). The severe punishment of them later in the chapter (Num 11:34) confirms that the rabble are responsible for this episode.⁶³³

In Num 11:4 בכּה is connected to a general wish for meat, but is not a grievance specifically leveled against Moses. The text states, וַיִּשְׁבוּ וַיִּבְכּוּ גַם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּתְאַוְוּ מִן הַבָּשָׂר, “they wept again and the children of Israel also craved for the flesh.”

⁶³² See also Amos 5:18 and Prov 13:4; 21:26. It has a negative connotation in these cases as well.

⁶³³ Jobling notes that the rabble are instigating the protest. Jobling, *Sense of Biblical Narrative*, 34.

“The people of Israel also wept again and said, O that he would give us meat.” This is a group action, but as will become clear it is done privately and not before the leaders. In Num 11:10 this becomes explicit; the people are not protesting but are weeping at the entrances of their tents. In previous circumstances, the people grumbled against Moses (Exod 15:24; Num 14:2), they assembled against Moses (Num 16:3, 19), or they quarreled with Moses (Exod 17:2; Num. 20:3). These are all collective actions carried out in public rather than individual actions taking place at one’s tent. Based on this, the verb בכה in Num 11:4 does not reach the level of a protest and likely represents something less confrontational than the words discussed thus far.

Numbers 11:18 also does not say that the people directed their weeping at Moses, but rather that it was בְּאָזְנוֹי יְהוָה, “in the “hearing of Yahweh.” This does not specify whether it was a public or private act. A similar comment appears in Num 11:20 where the text says, וַתִּבְכּוּ לְפָנָיו, “you wept before him.” The him in this verse is Yahweh, which again makes it unclear if this is a public form of collective action. The details suggest that the action of this chapter does not reach the same level of hostility as that of the other chapters and the choice of בכה captures this. The omniscient narrator records widespread societal complaints.⁶³⁴ This is not a form of confrontational politics where the people are pressuring their leaders as in the other episodes.

Despite בכה appearing as a less aggressive social action in Num 11, the weeping still angers Moses and Yahweh.⁶³⁵ It first leads to Moses’ own complaints against Yahweh, as he recognizes he does not know how to deal with this weeping on his own (Num 11:10–11). These verses record Moses’ crying out to God as a result of the people’s weeping. He feels

⁶³⁴ Frankel also does not see the action of weeping in this chapter as sinful or rebellious. Frankel, *The Murmuring Stories of the Priestly School*, 25.

⁶³⁵ Some scholars argue that the punishment expressed within this passage, as well as the negative depictions of Israel (e.g. Israel rejecting Yahweh in 11:20), are later additions. If true, this would only bolster the claim that בכה indicates a less severe form of protest. This is not, however, a settled issue and not one we are concerned with. Because this is not a settled issue we cannot use this to determine if a protest is taking place here. See Frankel, *The Murmuring Stories of the Priestly School*, 21–22. See also Fritz, *Israel in der Wüste*, 16–18, 70–75.

responsibility and accepts the burden of trying to lead as the Israelites continue to grieve and display their frustration. The leader naturally feels all complaints are directed at him; it is his job to care for the people. The text, therefore, betrays an indication of Moses' besieged mentality.

Later in the chapter, the text explicitly condemns the weeping, making it appear extremely negative. The most negative comment comes in a verse that also mentions Egypt (Num 11:20). The language related to Egypt, as previously mentioned, comprises a stereotypical complaint appearing in many of the wilderness stories both before and after Sinai.⁶³⁶ When the complaints mentioning Egypt in the stories before Sinai are placed alongside this comment in chapter 11, an important difference stands out. In Exod 14:11 and Exod 16:2–3, the Israelites blame Moses for taking them out of Egypt to kill them. They never say Yahweh was the one who brought them out for harm; they rather wish that Yahweh was in charge and that they “died by his hand” while in Egypt (Exod 16:2–3). The focus in the pre-Sinai stories is on Moses not Yahweh. Numbers 11:20 in contrast states, *כִּי־נִאֲסַתֶּם אֶת־יְהוָה*, “For you have rejected Yahweh.” The equation of the weeping to a rejection of Yahweh must be what makes this event deserving of punishment, whereas Yahweh granted the previous request for meat in Exodus without retribution (cf. Num 20:5).⁶³⁷

Significantly, Numbers 11 is the first chapter in which punishment follows as a response to the protests. The leaders punish the people by giving them an overabundance of meat, leading it to come out of their nostrils (Num 11:20). In a sense, the leaders are still providing, but doing so in a way that makes the people look foolish and eventually nauseates (*אָרַר*) them with the very

⁶³⁶ It is possibly a redactional addition again in this case as some suggest. Römer, “Egypt Nostalgia in Exodus 14–Numbers 21,” 76. It is noteworthy that the root *בכה*, “to weep” appears in the additions as well as the base text. If these are additions, they are not attempting to change the story but to keep the original words and context.

⁶³⁷ The use of the verb *נִאֲסַת*, “to reject” almost suggests that these people are involved in a type of rebellion. The verb, however, appears to be referring to the people's unwillingness to trust Yahweh rather than any political action the people undertake. The people do not engage in an attempt to replace Moses nor do they attempt to break away and start another community at his expense. The statement is hyperbolic in that it emphasizes their lack of trust.

thing they request (Num 11:20). There is a psychological goal to this response; the leaders hope that with an inordinate amount of meat the people would stop asking for it. As the narrative progresses, more punishment ensues, but the more severe punishment in this chapter is directed not toward the Israelites and those weeping, but toward the rabble. The rabble are the ones who began this episode with their craving (Num 11:4) and so are punished more severely when a plague breaks out. The rabble's punishment serves as a warning to the Israelites.

The prominence of *בכה* in this chapter is noteworthy and likely related to the less severe punishment. This chapter reintroduces the protests after a long hiatus. This abeyance includes outlining the details of the covenant, the Golden Calf story, and the organization of the camp in Num 1–10. In addition to this, the present structure of the chapter is set up to demonstrate how the leaders can respond to these protests in a diplomatic way rather than with repression. This comes in the form of the establishment of elders to help Moses, which is the centerpiece of the chapter (Num 11:16–30). A less severe protest word (*בכה*) appears prominently in Num 11 instead of words such as *לָיַן*, *רִיב*, or *קָהַל*, perhaps to take the focus off the protest. This terminology and the mild punishment further prepare the reader for the rising level of action and counter-action to come in the following stories. It does so by lessening the complaints and placing the focus on other details.

There is another word in Num 11 that is worth looking at. The chapter begins with a short introductory section, vss. 1–3, which is an etiological story about the naming of Taberah. The text of Num 11:1 uses the word *אָנַן* in the *hitpael* to describe the protest of the people over their general misfortune. The exact grievance is not stated. The verb *אָנַן* appears in the Hebrew Bible only here and in Lam 3:39. In both cases, it indicates a complaint or expression of grief over the situation faced by the individual or group. It is possible the term is related to the root *אָנַה*, which

means to lament because of grief as in Isa 3:26; 19:8.⁶³⁸ With the focus of the word on the expression of grief in the form of a complaint, it is clear this story is related to the cycle of protesting occurring in the wilderness. The meaning must be similar to a word such as לָוַן.

One noteworthy feature of this story is that it is the first protest story that records punishment.⁶³⁹ Interestingly, there is no plague killing thousands (Num 17), snakes killing the people (Num 21), death sentence (Num 14), nor the earth opening to swallow the people (Num 16). There is, to be sure, fire sent as punishment (Num 11:1), but the fire does not touch or harm any of the people; it consumes the “edges of the camp” (קְצֵיהַ הַמַּחֲנֵה). When thought about within the cycle of protest, it is a warning that if additional protests follow they are going to be met with a more severe response. This could be why the punishing fire consumes only the outer part of the camp. Warning the people with a show of force would be an effective counteraction by the authorities as they seek to end the protests prior to enacting more violent responses, which will of course come in the following chapters when the situation persists.⁶⁴⁰ The placement of this warning squarely in the middle of the cycle and just prior to the more severe responses comes across as intentional.

צַעַק “To Cry Out”

The last word to scrutinize in this chapter is צַעַק/זַעַק “to cry out.”⁶⁴¹ The word is rare in the wilderness texts to record a protest, but it does appear in Exod 14:10. This is a text that stands on the border between the wilderness stories and the Exodus. Exodus 14 narrates the Israelites’

⁶³⁸ Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, 1–20, 320.

⁶³⁹ This excludes Exod 32, which has the people mobilizing to enact change, but in this case it is a complaint that the leader is gone necessitating the establishment of new ones.

⁶⁴⁰ Olson has shown that the protests in Num 11, 12, and 14 work together. The protests move from the rabble, to the people, to the leaders, and finally to both groups. This development may also be present with the punishment that reaches a climax with a death sentence in Num 14. Nevertheless, it starts here with a warning. Olson, *The Death of the Old and the Birth of the New: The Framework of the Book of Numbers and the Pentateuch*, 145.

⁶⁴¹ These are parallel forms employed interchangeably to mean the same thing.

flight out of Egypt and their eventual escape through the sea as the Egyptians are in pursuit. Prior to reaching the water, the Israelites see the Egyptian army and in response the narrator states וּפְרָעָה הַקָּרִיב וַיִּשְׂאוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־עֵינֵיהֶם וַהֲגָה מִצְרַיִם נֹסֵעַ אַחֲרֵיהֶם וַיִּירָאוּ מְאֹד וַיִּצְעֲקוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־יְהוָה, “When Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites lifted their eyes and the Egyptians were setting out after them. They were greatly afraid so the Israelites *cried out* to Yahweh” (Exod 14:10). Based on the use of צַעַק, it appears that this text stands outside of the protest tradition. צַעַק does not record a wilderness protest in any other circumstance and this episode occurs as the last element in the escape from Egypt.⁶⁴² It is clear, however, that the text, in its extant form, employs this episode of protest in Exod 14 to serve as a bridge between the exodus from Egypt and the wilderness stories. The Israelites are no longer in Egypt, but they are also not yet in the wilderness. This text connects to earlier texts in Exodus as the צַעַק, “cry” of the people is what precipitates Yahweh’s intervention on behalf of the Israelites. This occurs in Exod 3:7 when Yahweh says, וְאַתָּה צַעַקְתֶּם שְׁמִיעָתִי מִפְּנֵי נְגִשְׁוֹי כִּי יָדַעְתִּי אֶת־מַכְאֲבֵיו, “I have heard their cry because of their oppressors, for I know of their sufferings.”⁶⁴³ On the other side, Exod 14:10, and therefore צַעַק, serves as a bridge because it also connects to the murmuring stories. This is clear as we read the stereotypical refrain of these murmuring stories concerning the desire to return to Egypt in Exod 14:11–12, which appears immediately after the Israelites “cry out” to Yahweh.⁶⁴⁴ The language of this episode connects to both the Exodus and the wilderness stories, meaning it now

⁶⁴² It comes close in Num 11:2, but in this context the focus on the expression of grief as people suffer rather than on a particular grievance. It is recording a lament in this case. As we will discuss below, lamentation and protesting have connections, but they are not identical.

⁶⁴³ See also Exod 2:23; 3:9; Deut 26:7. The pronominal suffixes are third person masculine singular but are better translated in English with the pronoun “their” due to the collective intention of these suffixes referring to all of Israel.

⁶⁴⁴ As noted above this may be a redactional addition. Moses’ response in Exod 14:13 appears to ignore their comment about Egypt, meaning the redactor placed it here to connect it with the other episodes. The comment about Egypt, which no doubt connects to the other protest texts helps confirm that צַעַק, “to cry out” in this context is akin to the words recording the later protests.

serves as the initial protest.⁶⁴⁵ As noted above, this episode of protesting is accepted by Moses and Yahweh, which is consistent with the usage of צעק throughout the Hebrew Bible. צעק is a common word often recording the cries of people in distress. Yahweh almost always responds favorably to these cries, as we may learn if we now consider the word elsewhere in the Bible.

The first and most prominent context in which צעק appears is to record the outcry of personal or communal distress. This often appears in laments.⁶⁴⁶ Crying out or lamenting to Yahweh occurs frequently enough within the Hebrew Bible that Claus Westermann said, “The cry to God out of deep anguish accompanies Israel through every stage of her history... in like manner the distress and suffering of the individual is expressed in the personal laments that pervade the whole of the Old Testament.”⁶⁴⁷ Reflection on biblical laments, their use of צעק/צעק, and Yahweh’s responses, demonstrates that crying out and expressing grief are legitimate, or even necessary, actions.

The frequent use of laments demonstrates that the Hebrew Bible sees it as part of human nature to lament, and the favorable responses of God show that it is part of his nature to be concerned about human cries of distress.⁶⁴⁸ These cries of distress occur at pivotal points throughout Israel’s history. Ee Kim outlines these moments and says, “The outcry of distress, the language of the afflicted is an immediate and underlying motive by which Yahweh’s mighty acts are provoked in Israel’s history of salvation and is said to be the keynote of Israel’s theology of *Heilsgeschichte*.”⁶⁴⁹ As noted above, a cry occurs to precipitate the Exodus event (Exod 2:23–24;

⁶⁴⁵ Vervenne said something similar when he said, “Here the scheme... belongs to a composition which is to be situated at the border between the Exodus and the Wilderness wanderings.” Vervenne, *The Protest Motif in the Sea Narrative (EX 14, 11–12): Form and Structure of a Pentateuchal Pattern*, 267–68.

⁶⁴⁶ See Ps 22:6; 107:6, 13, 19, 28; 142:2, 6; Job 35:9; Lam 3:8; Neh. 9:28.

⁶⁴⁷ Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, trans. Keith R. Crim and Richard N. Soulen (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 262.

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 264.

⁶⁴⁹ Ee Kon Kim, “‘Outcry’ Its Context in Biblical Theology,” *Interpretation* 42 (1988): 229–39.

3:7–10; Deut 26:5–9). Following this, the outcry appears in the wilderness stories (Num 11:2, 4–6), throughout the book of Judges (Judg 3:7–9; 4:1–4; 6:7–8), in the book of Samuel when the Israelites cry to Yahweh to save them from the Philistines (1 Sam 7:8–9), with Elijah in 1 Kings (1 Kgs 17:20–22), with Hezekiah in 2 Kings (2 Kgs 19:1–7; 20:3–7),⁶⁵⁰ and finally, in reflection on Israel’s history, the outcry appears in Neh 9:28. The pattern in these episodes is a cry (צַעַק) to Yahweh followed by deliverance. In each episode, God gives relief when he hears the cry of his people. This occurs even after Yahweh punishes the people for disobedience—so in Num 11:2 and throughout the book of Judges. These comments show that the writers of the Hebrew Bible see Israel’s outcry as a central, or even necessary, part of their history. Gabriel Mendy believes the latter is the case. He states, “Israel had to cry out to God throughout her history before God could act on her behalf.”⁶⁵¹ These cries give Yahweh the chance to show the people who He is and further force them to rely on Him.

Reflection on the use of צַעַק in these cries of distress and the connection to protesting should not be surprising. The acts of lamenting and protesting have much in common. Both acts involve a feeling of frustration and an expression of that frustration to a higher authority in hopes that the situation will change. Therefore, the use of צַעַק, “to cry out” can express both laments and the occasional protest.⁶⁵²

Examples of צַעַק outside the wilderness tradition and outside of the lament context provide situations where individuals “cry out” as they bring their complaints to a leader or king

⁶⁵⁰ The episodes of Elijah and Hezekiah do not use צַעַק to indicate the cry, but as Kim suggests they do belong to this pattern of outcry followed by salvation. Ibid., 236–37.

⁶⁵¹ At this point, Mendy was reflecting on Westermann’s comments, meaning this is what he saw Westermann as demonstrating. Gabriel Mendy, “The Theological Significance of the Psalm of Lament,” *American Theological Inquiry* 8 (2015): 64. In this same discussion, Mendy also says, “in Westermann’s view, it is impossible for God to hear without responding to the psalmist’s prayer for help.”

⁶⁵² The overlap is also clear in Num 11:2 where the people first complain about their situation and once they are punished, they respond by “crying out” in an attempt to stop the protest. In this case, the use of צַעַק appears to be a lament over grief, but it is also part of the protest story.

in a legitimate fashion. These episodes occur with some frequency. Admittedly, the episodes are slightly different from a protest, since they typically record individual rather than collective action. Nevertheless, the episodes have enough similarities to further advance a connection between *צעק* and protesting. This further suggests that some protests are legitimate and that making demands of a leader was often acceptable in ancient Israel. This is consistent with how the protest words appear in Exodus. Moses and Yahweh respond positively when the people ask for resources. It is only when the protests persist and the people start protesting over issues of power that it transforms into something sinful. These comparable requests before a king or leader appear in the Deuteronomistic history in 1 and 2 Kings (1 Kgs 20:39; 2 Kgs 4:1; 6:28; 8:3–5).

In 1 Kgs 20:38–39 a prophet stands on the side of the road waiting for the king. He presents himself not as a prophet, but disguises himself to appear as a member of the army. The prophet calls himself the king’s servant (*עבדך*). As the king passes by the text reads, *וְהוּא צָעַק אֶל-הַמֶּלֶךְ*, “He cried out to the king” (1 Kgs 20:39). The word indicates in this case a request to the king for a response to a complaint. As Levine states, *צעק* may entail “a formal grievance brought to the attention of a king or other person in authority.”⁶⁵³ In this case, it is not a protest over a matter he feels the king has neglected, but a request for a legal ruling. While the use of *צעק* is different from what appears in Exodus and Numbers—with their focus on the leaders’ ability to protect, provide, or change policy—it does show that citizens could make requests of their leader. A similar situation occurs in 2 Kgs 4:1 when the wife of a prophet *צעקה*, “cries out” to Elisha for a ruling related to a creditor. Elisha, in this case, serves as the leader who responds to the requests of the people.

Elsewhere, an anonymous woman *צעקה*, “cries out” to an unnamed king in 2 Kgs 6:24–31. She appeals to the king over a dispute between her and another citizen. The king responds to

⁶⁵³ Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, 320.

the woman stating that he can do nothing for her in the difficult siege environment they are facing. That he responds suggests it is his duty to adjudicate when people petition him. Cogan and Tadmor note that she uses “the legal term of appeal” *צָעַקָה אֵלָיו*, “she cried out to him” as she makes the request.⁶⁵⁴

Further analysis of this story in 2 Kgs 6:24–31 will confirm that it is the king’s duty to respond. Matthews says what this unnamed king does is “shift the responsibility for redress away from himself in the hope that he can avoid making a decision or taking any further risks.”⁶⁵⁵ The king lacks the wisdom to adjudicate the conflict the woman is facing. His lack of wisdom is confirmed if we note the contrast between this story and the story of Solomon and the prostitutes in 1 Kgs 3.⁶⁵⁶ Solomon provides a wise ruling in a very similar situation, while the king in 2 Kgs 6 fails to deliver what is requested. The explicit literary and thematic connections and contrasts between these two stories present the anonymous king of 2 Kgs 6 in quite a negative light. This confirms that it is the king’s responsibility to respond to the “cries” of the people.⁶⁵⁷

In 2 Kgs 8:3–5 another woman makes an appeal to the king over a land dispute. The narrator again employs *צָעַק* in the phrase *לְצַעֵק אֶל-הַמֶּלֶךְ*, “to cry out to the king” to record the request. Absalom’s actions prior to his rebellion also demonstrate that people expected the king to hear their requests. In 2 Sam 15:3, Absalom attracts people to his cause by suggesting that David had been negligent in fulfilling his duty to provide an avenue for the people to make requests of the king. As Absalom’s story develops, many people begin to support him because of these claims.

⁶⁵⁴ Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, 79.

⁶⁵⁵ Victor Matthews, “Taking Calculated Risks: The Story of the Cannibal Mothers (2 Kings 6:24–7:20),” *BTB* (2013): 8.

⁶⁵⁶ Stuart Lasine, “The Ups and Downs of Monarchical Justice: Solomon and Jehoram in an Intertextual World,” *JOT* 59 (1993): 37–53.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.* A similar situation appears in Gen 41:55 when the people cry out to the Pharaoh during the famine.

These examples demonstrate that individuals have a legal right to “cry out” to the king and that it is his duty to respond. The linking of צעק to the wilderness story in Exod 14:11–12 is quite significant because it shows a connection between protesting in the wilderness and these legitimate requests made before a ruler.⁶⁵⁸ The appearance of צעק in both contexts suggests that protesting can indeed be a legitimate action just as צעק often is.⁶⁵⁹ This connection serves to strengthen the points made above about the legitimacy of some of the protests in the wilderness and further suggests that these episodes are not episodes of rebellion.

Conclusion

The present chapter has focused on several words appearing primarily in the wilderness stories of Exodus and Numbers. We have looked at the meaning of these words and phrases especially as they relate to the idea of protesting. Protesting is not rebellion, but it was necessary to analyze these words and phrases because many scholars refer to the actions behind many of them as rebellions. Additionally, protesting might be considered by some as rebellious action, and, as the analysis of Num 14 demonstrated, a protest has the potential to be the first stage of a rebellion. Analyzing words and phrases that come close to rebellion and have the potential to develop into a rebellion, helps to clearly define what is and what is not a rebellion within the biblical text. Thus, an analysis of protesting helps define the system of rebellion terminology present within the Hebrew Bible and further demonstrates how it is connected to similar forms of collective

⁶⁵⁸ In addition to the examples listed above, we see this phrase in Num 11. As the Israelites are receiving punishment, they cry out and Yahweh stops punishing them. Moses often petitions Yahweh as he attempts to respond to these protests and this is the typical word (Exod 15:2; 17:24; Num 12:13). See also Exod 8:8, when Moses seeks Yahweh’s help in dealing with Pharaoh and also Num 20:16 recording the memory of the Israelites crying out to Yahweh because of Egyptian bondage. The people remember that Yahweh responded favorably to their cry. We could also consider use of צעק in Gen 4:10; 19:13. Both of these texts record episodes that beg for intervention on the part of Yahweh. This is not to say that protesting and these cries of distress are always identical. Protesting is more specific than a cry of distress. Protests deal with a push for policy changes that might involve distress, but they do not have to. The usage of צעק in these two types of scenarios is, therefore, not identical.

⁶⁵⁹ There are no circumstances within the Hebrew Bible where צעק/צעק is negative. The closest it comes is in Exod 14:15, when Yahweh questions why Moses’ cries out, but he immediately responds by aiding the Israelites as they cross the Red Sea.

action.

The chapter began by defining a protest as “public group activity utilizing confrontation politics to apply stress to specific targets for the purpose of affecting public policy.”⁶⁶⁰ The cumulative picture presented by the protest words discussed in this chapter demonstrates how remarkably appropriate the definition is to the action behind these terms.⁶⁶¹ The first part of the definition notes the presence of public group activity; two of the words discussed above focus on the group nature of this activity. This is the case with קהל, “to assemble” and יעד, “to gather,” which describe non-military activity akin to a demonstration. Additionally, the subjects of the words are the Israelites, all the people, or in Num 12 and 16, specific groups. This further confirms the group nature of the action the Israelites are involved in while in the wilderness.

Second, protesting involves “confrontation politics.” The two words just mentioned קהל and יעד, do not necessarily imply a confrontation per se, but do so when they are followed by the preposition על, “against.” A similar meaning applies to the verb לון, “to grumble,” because the term is also joined with על, “against.” The preposition על indicates the target of opposition at which the associated verbs are directed. Speaking hostilely against someone (דבר ב) is another form of confrontation politics because the point of it is to challenge the target through speech.

The most important point to note regarding the meaning of confrontation politics is that the goal of this is to apply stress or pressure to the intended target through various methods. It does not have to entail military or forced action. In a protest, pressure is applied to the leader as the medium through which change will occur. Protestors themselves do not possess the power to enact change so they must pressure those who have it. Gathering against someone (קהל), leveling grievances at them (לון), contending with or accusing them over a dispute (ריב), weeping (בכה),

⁶⁶⁰ See the discussion on page 246-247 and footnote 485 above.

⁶⁶¹ We chose this definition of protesting prior to seeing this connection.

crying out (צעק), and speaking hostilely against someone (דבר ב), are all ways to put stress on the target in the hope that they will act in accordance with your wishes. The only word appearing that could potentially move beyond political pressure to indicate military activity is ריב, but the context always makes it clear whether this is the case (cf. Judg 11:27; Ps 35:1). Neither Exod 17 nor Num 20 indicates violence or a military conflict, but rather both focus on the presence of a dispute or accusation.⁶⁶²

Further, the groups involved always want the leaders to address societal problems or, in modern terms, public policy issues. The complaints or disputes of the wilderness period center on the provision of material goods, safety and security, the structure of society/government, and lastly how the leaders respond to some of these protests. The people are looking for changes in the most fundamental issues every government should concern themselves with. While some of these protests center on issues of power, not one of these events records a group forcibly attempting to make the requested changes. The exception occurs in Num 14, but this is why מרד, “to rebel” appears in this chapter. Not one of the words outside of מרד suggests an action that reaches the level of rebellion. It is strange that so many refer to these episodes as episodes of rebellion despite a distinct set of terms employed in these episodes.

As we have seen, various comments throughout the chapter demonstrate that the stories in Exodus and Numbers (Exod 15–17; Num 11–21) are intentionally organized to create a protest cycle with increasingly hostile levels of action and counteraction. This occurs until the leaders finally end these protests with violent responses. This organization has influenced how scholars have understood the terms and episodes. As we have seen, there has been a tendency to think of

⁶⁶² While the combined picture of these words fits with a protest, we must admit that a rebellion also often involves group activity, and rebellions also involve confrontation and a dispute between two parties. Further, the lack of a word for rebellion in a particular episode does not in itself mean that the events are not rebellions; it is rather the actions to which the words refer and the goals behind them that show this. As the above paragraph shows, these words and the associated goals are not connected to forcible changes. They rather indicate the application of pressure in the hopes that the target, the leader, will make the requested change. Even Korah obeys Moses’ command as he lets him prove who has priestly authority (Num 16:17–18).

all of the terms in the wilderness texts as recording illegitimate and aggressive events because the Israelites are condemned at the end of the cycle and by other writers. However, if we isolate the events in Exodus, we can see that not all of these events are condemned nor are they particularly aggressive. The negativity associated with these terms arises due to the presence of the cycle in Exodus and Numbers. We should therefore recognize the presence of this cycle and how it impacts our perception of these texts and terms.

The various responses on the part of the leaders raise questions regarding the appropriateness of this action as understood by these writers.⁶⁶³ Leaders are never happy about protests because they signal that people are questioning their ability and legitimacy. Not surprisingly, in all of the protest stories there is some associated negativity. This is the case even in Exod 14–17, which contains positive responses. This is likely another reason why scholars condemn these events. However, it appears the leaders can accept protesting as a legitimate action without praising or endorsing the action. The leaders in these stories take active steps to respond to some protests by providing resources, installing additional leaders, and establishing laws. Once the people continue to protest despite these provisions and start to challenge the leaders' power, the protests quickly become illegitimate as made clear by the violent responses recorded in Num 14, 16, 17, 21. As is the case with rebellion, it appears that the form of collective action, which I have here labelled protest, also has an inherent ambiguity and the writers struggle with this. The negativity of the stories in Exodus shows an uneasiness with these events, but the positive responses show that they are accepted in a few cases. The ambiguity is not unexpected as one thinks about a protest from the leader's perspective.

⁶⁶³ The biblical text does not outline specific criteria for judging these actions, we can only base the legitimacy or illegitimacy of these events on Yahweh's responses. We can assume that if Yahweh allows the action it is acceptable and if it is punished it is unacceptable.

Table 8. The Terms of the Wilderness Texts

Text	Protest Term(s)	The People's Concern and Goal	Negative Elements	Result	Punishment
Exod 14:11–12	צעק	Fear of Pharaoh and the Egyptian army; they are pushing Yahweh to save them	Desire to return to Egypt (Exod 14:12); Yahweh asks why Moses cries out to him. (Exod 14:15)	Yahweh saves the people by drowning the Egyptians.	None
Exod 15:22–27	לון על	Bitter water; they push the leaders to provide water	None	Yahweh provides potable water.	None
Exod 16	לון על	Lack of food; they push the leaders to provide food	Recollection of Egypt and the wish that they had previously died (Exod 16:3); Disobedience over gathering manna (Exod 16:20)	Yahweh provides Manna (Exod 16:4, 8, 12).	None
Exod 17:1–7	לון על ריב עם	Lack of water	The people question why Moses brought them out of Egypt (Exod 17:3). Why do you test Yahweh (Exod 17:7)?	Yahweh provides water from the rock; He establishes elders to help with the protests (Exod 18).	None
Num 11:1–3	אנן	General misfortune (רע)	Complaining to Yahweh	Yahweh becomes angry	Fire destroys the edges of the camp.
Num 11	בכה	Unhappy over the type of food; not a real protest but individual frustration	Equated to a rejection of Yahweh (Num 11:20)	Provision of food and the establishment of elders to help Moses	A few are punished for their role, but most are given an overabundance of food.

Table 8 (Continued).

Num 12	לדבר ב	Moses has more power than Miriam and Aaron; the subordinates attempt to undermine Moses and gain power.	Miriam and Aaron are speaking against the person Yahweh speaks with.	Yahweh defends Moses and the protestors drop their challenge.	Miriam's hand is diseased.
Num 14	לון על יעד על (מרד rebellion term)	Fear of the Canaanites and the belief they will fall in battle; military preparedness	Yahweh brought them into the wilderness to die (Num 14:3); attempt to choose a new leader (Num 14:4); attempt to stone Moses and Aaron (Num 14:9); continual protesting (Num 14:27)	Yahweh forces the people to wander in the wilderness for forty years until the protestors die.	Future death sentence for all (Num 14:35); an immediate plague for those who brought the unfavorable report (Num 14:37)
Num 16:1-11, 16-24, 26-27, 35 (Korah and the 250)	לון על קהל על יעד על	The question of who can approach Yahweh, all the people or Aaron? (Num 16:3, 11); Korah and the others pressure Moses to relinquish power.	It is a rejection of the way Yahweh has organized society. The Levites already have a special role and should not ask for more (Num 16:9).	Moses engages in a show of legitimacy to prove where priestly authority lies (Num 16:6-7, 17).	Fire breaks out and consumes those engaged in this challenge and now offering incense (Num 16:35).
Num 16: 1-2, 12-15, 25, 27-34 (Dathan and Abiram)	ויקומו לפני	Not specified; they are upset that Moses is ruling over them (Num 16:13), and perhaps claim he is taking their goods (Num 16:15).	They choose not to obey Moses' request that they come before him.	Moses preforms a demonstration to show that these individuals are in the wrong and that he has not wronged them.	The earth opens and swallows them.

Table 8 (Continued).

Num 17	לֹחַץ עַל קֹהֵל עַל	The accusation of repression (killing the people of Yahweh) Num 17:6 (Eng. 16:41); they hope to stop the killing.	Challenging how Yahweh governs; continual protesting (Num 17:20, 25)	Yahweh's authority is established.	Yahweh sends a plague that kills thousands (Num 17:10–14; Eng. 16:45–49).
Num 20:1–13	רִיב עִם	A lack of water	Moses calls the people disobedient (מִרְדָּה).	Moses gets angry at the people but provides water.	Moses is punished and excluded from Yahweh's promised land.
Num 21:4–9	לִרְבֹּב בַּ	The people detest the miserable food and push the leaders to provide different food.	Stated to be against God as well as Moses, the leaders have provided food but the people still complain	The leaders seek to end the protests with violence and establish themselves as the rulers.	Punishment occurs as snakes arrive to kill thousands.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

This dissertation set out to define and analyze the various terms which the writers of the Hebrew Bible employ to describe episodes of political rebellion. In doing so, it asked three basic questions regarding these terms. The focus of this work was on the first question: to what extent are these terms organized into a type of system that provided writers with a group of interrelated rebellion terms they could employ in specific contexts? The second related question was whether this set of terms can help us determine the extent to which the biblical writers had in mind an overarching category of rebellion. The third question focused on how a recognition of this set of terms and the episodes that make up the larger category of rebellion can help us understand the various attitudes toward rebellion among the writers of the Hebrew Bible. This dissertation addressed these questions by studying the many rebellion terms in the Hebrew Bible, along with the associated episodes, in light of modern social science definitions.

Reflection on these questions demonstrates that the biblical writers did have a network of interrelated rebellion terms, a type of system, which reveals their understanding of an overall category of rebellion. Thus, they had an idea of rebellion similar to that behind the definition presented in the introduction: “an act by a group or individual that refuses to recognize, or seeks to overturn, the authority of the existing government.”⁶⁶⁴ For the biblical writers, political rebellion is more than an act of disobedience. Rebellion within the biblical text focuses on the forcible overthrow of a political authority. One point of emphasis is that a rebellion does not have to involve violence even if it often does; it can include only a renunciation of the political authority. This is the case with some of the rebellions narrated with either *מרד* or *פשע*, which do not always involve violence (e.g. 2 Kgs 8:20). An analysis of the rebellion terms in the Hebrew

⁶⁶⁴ See the comments on page 19.

Bible also shows that the biblical writers had ambivalent feelings about the phenomenon of rebellion. They understood that rebellion could at times be a sin, while at other times it could bring about freedom from oppression. The analysis of this set of terms, along with their interconnectedness, shows how the biblical writers dealt with the inherent ambiguity of rebellion through the meticulous use of terminology. They engaged in a form of political thought, which is expressed through their use of various rebellion terms.

A Terminological System to Discuss Rebellion

The presence of this distinct set of interrelated terms will come into sharper focus as we reflect on the discussion here and in the previous chapters. These writers are intentional in their word choice as they describe different types of rebellions, and their choices are arranged within a system. Thus, when the biblical writers want to narrate a rebellion and focus on whom the rebels are rebelling against, they employ a descriptive word for rebellion, מרד, פשע, or קשר, as discussed in chapter two. When they want to describe a failed rebellion that contrasts with either פשע or קשר, they employ one of the following descriptive phrases: שלח יד ב, רום יד ב, or נשא יד ב, as discussed in chapter three. When these writers want to present their group as the ones rebelling and to focus on liberation from oppression, they employ the unequivocally positive terms נצל and ישע. A discussion of the latter terms served as the focus of chapter four. The biblical writers also have the option of employing the term for an offense (הטא), as discussed in chapter five. They employ הטא to demonstrate how the ruler in a rebellion story felt about rebellion and how a failed rebel might try to avoid death or punishment for a previous rebellion.

The biblical writers' system for discussing rebellion also stands out by noting the alternative terms these writers employ to describe similar yet different forms of collective action. Rebellion is a form of collective action that is often similar to and confused with the related action of protest. Both are collective actions, but the goal of a rebellion is to attempt a forcible

overthrow of the leader. A protest, on the other hand, focuses on pressure for policy changes, and not a forcible change to the authority. In the Hebrew Bible, both rebellion and protest use a separate set of terms, as discussed in chapter six. The use of the protest terms *לון על*, *ריב עם*, *דבר*, *ב*, *קהל על*, *יעד על*, and *צעק*, in contrast to *מרד*, *פשע*, and *קשר*, serves to demonstrate that the writers of the Hebrew Bible recognize and have a method to distinguish among different types of social actions, including rebellion. Some biblical writers also appear to distinguish between political rebellion and other forms of disobedience directed at the deity, as noted in regard to Ezek 20 and the words *מרד* and *מרה*.

Admittedly, there are examples, such as 2 Kgs 17, that appear to fall outside of this terminological system. Nevertheless, the particular usage of *קשר* in 2 Kgs 17 demonstrates that it has a relationship to the other rebellion terms and that the writers are contemplating a set of terms they can interchange depending on the perspective. Because 2 Kgs 17:4 comes from the perspective of the imperial ruler, Shalmaneser V, the writer must have felt it appropriate to make the imperial ruler the agent of a verb that typically indicates a domestic rebellion. The interchanging of terms shows an awareness of a larger group to which they all belong along with the attempt to modify that group to make a point. The implication of employing *קשר* in 2 Kgs 17 is that an imperial ruler could present any rebellion against him as a domestic rebellion due to the breadth of what he controls.

Another example of a writer employing a rebellion term in a situation that appears to fall outside of the system occurs in 2 Chronicles. The Chronicler in one case, 2 Chron 13:6, employs the term *מרד* to describe Jeroboam's initial rebellion against Solomon instead of the expected phrase *רום יד ב*. The parallel passage in Kings (1 Kgs 11:26–27) records the phrase *רום יד ב*, and the comparable rebellion term *פשע* appears in 1 Kgs 12:19 and 2 Chron 10:19 to mark Israel's rebellion against Judah. Here, the interchanging of terms shows that while the late text of

Chronicles may not have recognized the distinctive meaning of **מִרְדָּב**, it understands that **מִרְדָּב** is a term to mark a rebellion against a political ruler similar to **פְּשַׁע**.

Evidence for an Overarching Category of Rebellion

The presence of this system and the differences in the terms employed for rebellion need further consideration if we are to suggest that the writers of the Hebrew Bible understand these terms to be part of a larger category of rebellion. First, it is worth repeating that these writers intentionally employ select rebellion terms in select contexts. The situation the writers are discussing and the message they want to portray govern their choice of words, providing evidence that there is a framework in place to discuss rebellion. The biblical writers make their decisions quite similarly to the way in which political philosophers do—using terms in specific ways for different contexts. They are either consciously or unconsciously classifying the events they are discussing and placing them into categories. These categories can be as simple as a word to describe a specific type of rebellion, as in **מִרְדָּב** or **קִשְׁרָב**, or an attempt to make the rebellion appear both positive and legitimate, as with **יִשַׁע**. Moreover, these terms are coordinated with one another within the larger corpus and the significance of each term stands out far more when it is compared and contrasted with the others.

One way to highlight the coordination of rebellion terms is to examine why one rebellion term appears at the expense of another. The specific use of a term such as **יִשַׁע** demonstrates that the writers make a conscious decision about their word choice to help obscure the presence of aggression by avoiding the term **פְּשַׁע**. This is one way in which these ancient writers, in a veiled way, engage in something similar to political philosophy. This appears prominently in the book of Judges and also in Exodus. Thus, the biblical writers often use words for salvation when they believe the rebellion to be legitimate. Based on the ways in which they describe the background of these political situations, the Deuteronomistic editors of Judges see the episodes in this book

as parallel with episodes in which words for rebellion appear explicitly. This helps to mark the larger category the terms are a part of. The key difference when the word **ישע** appears compared to when a term such as **פשע** appears to mark the rebellion is who is in the subordinate position. **פשע** occurs in situations when either Israel or Judah is in the dominant position, while **ישע** appears when Israel or Judah is in the subordinate position. As evidenced by their word choice, the authors/editors make conscious decisions about legitimizing some rebellions when their party is involved and experiencing oppression.⁶⁶⁵ And so they appear to function like modern theorists, who also vary their word choice to legitimize or protest against certain political situations. The criteria, of course, are not always the same when it involves justifying rebellion, including the fact that the ancient writers also focus prominently on the activity of the deity.

In other contexts, the biblical writers switch between rebellion terms within one story, depending on where in the episode of rebellion a certain term appears. Thus, the narrators, in their discussion of Absalom's rebellion, alternate between **קשר** and **נשא יד ב**. Absalom initially proves successful in removing David from the throne, and the expectation is that the usurper will attempt to kill his father, the reigning king. The writer employs the term **קשר** (2 Sam 15:12) to describe the rebellion at this point. However, once it fails the writer employs **נשא יד ב** (2 Sam 18:28) to describe the action in retrospect. A similar situation appears in the narration of the North's rebellion against Judah and its kings, Solomon and Rehoboam. As Jeroboam begins the rebellion and fails—demonstrated by his flight to Egypt—the phrase **רום יד ב** appears (1 Kgs 11:26–27). In the following chapter, when the North is successful in breaking from the South, the writer uses the term **פשע** (1 Kgs 12:19). Taking both the Absalom and the Jeroboam cases into account shows that two descriptive rebellion terms (**פשע** and **קשר**) alternate with similar

⁶⁶⁵ The biblical writers do not legitimize every rebellion their party engages in. Both Ezekiel and Jeremiah condemn Zedekiah's rebellion against Babylon (Jer 27; Ezek 20). The Chronicler also makes a similar statement (2 Chron. 36:13).

idiomatic phrases (נָשָׂא יָד בֹּ or רוּם יָד בֹּ) when the rebellion fails. The similarity and the pattern present in these two episodes that employ either פָּשַׁע or קָשָׁר reveal the writers' recognition of a larger category of rebellion to which both episodes and the terms employed in them belong. This discussion also helps to demonstrate how these terms are coordinated within the system.

As chapter five demonstrated, a similar alternation of rebellion terminology occurs between the term הָטָא and the more descriptive rebellion terms such as מָרַד. For example, when the Deuteronomistic writer of 2 Kgs 18 describes Hezekiah's rebellion he employs the term מָרַד (2 Kgs 18:7). The term for rebellion, however, switches when the narrator describes Hezekiah as speaking directly to the king against whom he had rebelled. Hezekiah speaks to Sennacherib and declares that he had committed an offense (הָטָא) in 2 Kgs 18:14. A similar alternation of terms occurs in the story of David's rise. Saul twice declares that David is rebelling (קָשָׁר) against him (1 Sam 22:8, 13). However, the term for the rebellion switches as David speaks directly to Saul and attempts to avoid punishment (1 Sam 24:11). As David speaks, the narrator now employs הָטָא to describe the rebellion. This alternation continues to show that the rebellion terms that make up this system are often coordinated within these texts. Their interrelatedness reveals their inclusion in the larger category of rebellion.

Connections Among The Rebellion Terms and the Associated Contexts

Another way to demonstrate the existence of a larger category of rebellion is to demonstrate connections among the many episodes of rebellion previously discussed. Studying these episodes reveals that while the word to mark the rebellion is often different in individual contexts, the authors will sometimes employ similar terms as well to mark subordination in the surrounding contexts. Thus, subordination to a foreign ruler is commonly described with the word עָבַד, "to serve," for example, in texts such as Gen 14:4; Judg 3:8, 14; 2 Kgs 18:7 and 2 Kgs 24:1. Then to accompany עָבַד, Judges 3:9 uses a word for salvation (יִשַׁע) to mark the rebellion, while Gen

14:4; 2 Kgs 18:7 and 2 Kgs 24:1 use the verb מרד. Jeroboam is also described in 1 Kgs 11:26 as Solomon's servant (עבד).⁶⁶⁶ His rebellion is described with the phrase רום יד ב. Another phrase that often appears in conjunction with a rebellion term is תחת יד, "under the hand of," which declares that the side rebelling is no longer under the control of an overlord once they rebel. This occurs in Exod 18:10; 2 Kgs 8:20, 22; 13:5. This phrase is associated with נצל in Exod 18, פשע in 2 Kgs 8:20, 22 and ישע in 2 Kgs 13:5. Lastly, many of the subordinates who rebel against an overlord are first depicted as bringing tribute to their respective rulers. The Israelites pay tribute to Eglon in Judg 3; Mesha pays tribute to Israel in 2 Kgs 3; and Hezekiah pays tribute to Sennacherib in 2 Kgs 18. Each episode employs a different term for the associated rebellion. Judges 3 employs ישע to focus the text on Yahweh; 2 Kgs 3 uses פשע to mark Mesha's choice to break with the ruling power; and in 2 Kgs 18, מרד occurs to narrate Hezekiah's rebellion. The various writers recognize that all of these events involve the subjugation of one territory or person to another. Following the note of subordination, the texts record that the subject group breaks the yoke of the ruler by using one of the rebellion terms. One can thus group these texts and terms together into a larger category.

Additionally, at least two of the three main rebellion terms occur together in additional contexts. Both מרד and פשע can indicate rebellion or sin against Yahweh and sometimes occur together, as in Ezek 2:3; 20:38. Such a connection, even a pairing as in Ezek 2:3 and 20:38, suggests that some ancient writers see מרד and פשע as part of a larger group, namely, the general category of rebellion. As we have seen, both מרד and פשע also describe the overthrow of a ruler in some cases. It is harder to establish that קשר is part of this category; it only indicates a crime

⁶⁶⁶ Jeroboam is not a vassal to Solomon but is rather one of his officials. This is a different type of subordination, but he is nonetheless ruled by another. A similar description occurs to mark those who rebel against Amon in 2 Kgs 21:23-24. These individuals are also referred to as "servants." The rebellion term in this case is קשר.

against Yahweh when that crime is narrated from Yahweh's perspective.⁶⁶⁷ However, we should not expect קָשָׁר to describe a rebellion or sin against Yahweh, because Israel's deity is viewed as analogous to an imperial ruler rather than to the king of an individual state. Since קָשָׁר describes rebellion against the king of an individual state, when a person rebels against Yahweh they are rebelling against the world/cosmic power, not the ruler of a small state. קָשָׁר does, however, substitute for מָרַד in one case where the imperial ruler describes a rebellion against himself (2 Kgs 17:4). This demonstrates that the two words, מָרַד and קָשָׁר, are linked by their meaning to describe the overthrow or replacement of a leader and could be interchanged to provide the perspective of a character in the story.

The Limits of our Knowledge

We need to be careful not to overstate our claim that there is only one system to discuss rebellion within the entire Hebrew Bible. Only the texts comprising the Deuteronomistic history contain all of the terms discussed in this study in their distinctive usages to describe rebellion. A text such as Amos, for example, contains only one rebellion term, קָשָׁר. Thus, while the text of Amos does employ קָשָׁר in a way similar to its usage in the books of Kings and Chronicles, it is impossible to determine if it would have done the same with the additional rebellion terms discussed above. A similar comment could be made regarding the book of Genesis, which employs the rebellion terms מָרַד (Gen 14:4) and הָטָא (Gen 41:9) in ways consistent with their respective usages elsewhere. The prophetic texts of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel do not discuss a regional rebellion and thus do not use פִּשְׁעַת as a rebellion term. They do, however, employ מָרַד (Isa 36:5; Jer 52:3; Ezek 17:15) to describe imperial rebellion similar to its usage elsewhere.

⁶⁶⁷ This assumes that rebellion is not inherently wrong and is only wrong in certain circumstances. It should not, therefore, be automatically deemed an iniquitous action. The one exception is in Jer 11:9, where the rebellion קָשָׁר is associated with Yahweh, and this text is narrated from his perspective, which explains the usage. See chapter two for more on this example.

Further, the Chronicler appears to avoid the phrase **ג יד ב** to describe Jeroboam's rebellion (2 Chron 13:6), which suggests that he may have been working with a slightly different system from what appears in the Deuteronomistic History. All of this represents a note of caution regarding what we can state about the extent of one terminological system in the Hebrew Bible. For, while the evidence suggests that the system outlined here is what predominates within the Hebrew Bible, the limited usage of rebellion terms in some biblical texts means that we cannot rule out minor differences to this system, or even slightly different systems among our biblical writers.

Likewise, we need to caution against declaring that rebellion is a clearly defined category for the biblical authors. Rebellion is not a clearly defined category, but one with blurred lines that likely came into focus over time because of the similarity of the actions. It is not as clearly defined in the Hebrew Bible as it is in the modern world. We do not have evidence that ancient Israelite writers wrote treatises on political topics, and so we should not expect a clearly defined concept in the ancient writings that we have.⁶⁶⁸ The word **קשר** can help demonstrate this. The original meaning of the term as “to tie” or “to bind” suggests that it originally had no conceptual connection to a word such as **מרד**. Based, however, on 2 Kgs 17, which employs **קשר** in a context where **מרד** is expected, it appears that the two terms were eventually brought together and could be alternated. Alternation among terms within a larger category happens often in the modern world and so we should also expect it in the ancient world.

Attitudes Toward Rebellion

This analysis of rebellion terminology also reveals the various attitudes that exist toward rebellion among the writers of the Hebrew Bible. There are texts within the Hebrew Bible that condone a rebellion, while there are others that condemn a particular rebellion. However, there

⁶⁶⁸ Hamilton, *A Kingdom for a Stage*, 3.

are no texts that would categorially define political rebellion, in its various forms, as legitimate or illegitimate. This analysis of rebellion terms serves as an aid in thinking about the ways in which people understand this common phenomenon. Within ancient Israelite society, the words employed to discuss the topic help demonstrate that rebellion had for some an ambiguity. This ambiguity is present amidst all types of rebellions in the Hebrew Bible. Our position contrasts with that of Carroll, who is one of the few scholars to write an article devoted solely to this topic. He suggests, as we have seen, that the ancient Israelites understood rebellion to be sin,⁶⁶⁹ which is the case in some but certainly not in all episodes of political rebellion described in the Hebrew Bible. By outlining the system that we have found, we have been able to show that the terms appearing to describe these rebellions suggest that these writers made decisions about when it was positive and when it was negative. Such decisions are similar to how political philosophers evaluate political phenomena. The words the writers employ to describe rebellion and the contexts in which these words appear also suggest that the texts of the Hebrew Bible struggle with this ambiguity. The biblical writers recognize the potentially disruptive and negative aspects of rebellion, but in many cases discuss its origins in the divine sphere. They recognize that while rebellion can be destructive, it can also serve positively to punish an oppressive or disobedient monarch, or in other cases to bring freedom.

The ambiguity surrounding rebellion appears, for example, in the employment of the verb **פָּשַׁע**. This is a word that is overwhelmingly connected to criminal or sinful action in the Hebrew Bible. Yet, occasionally when **פָּשַׁע** appears to mark a rebellion, the writers provide divine justification for the rebellion. Thus, the North's secession from the South is legitimized by way of the prophet Ahijah, who speaks the word of Yahweh (1 Kgs 11), and by way of the Chronicler justifying the rebellion of Edom and Libnah against Jehoram, because of the latter's

⁶⁶⁹ Carroll, "Rebellion and Dissent in Ancient Israelite Society," 176–204.

abandonment of Yahweh (2 Chron 21:8–10). In these two episodes, the choice of **פִּשְׁע** recognizes a negative aspect of the rebellions, yet the writers make sure to legitimate it. This demonstrates their ambivalent feelings toward the episodes. Yahweh, as Israel's deity, has the ability to sanction what had the potential to be, and certainly was in the eyes of some, considered an illegitimate event.⁶⁷⁰ Despite this, the negativity associated with these episodes does not entirely disappear, as an Israelite reader would recognize that his people have lost territory and that a foreign ruler is no longer bringing them tribute. This must have been the case when the Edomites rebelled against Jehoram and set up their own king in 2 Chron 21.

The ambiguity of rebellion is further highlighted by the avoidance of the specific rebellion terms (**קִשְׁר**, **פִּשְׁע**, **מִרְד**) in certain episodes. The writers recognize that a term for rebellion could be perceived as negative, while a word for liberation or salvation will always be positive. For this reason, when it is their party successfully rebelling against a neighboring power with the aid of their deity, they choose to avoid a term such as **פִּשְׁע** and focus on words that are connected to liberation. The focus on liberation is not an outright denial that a rebellion is at work, but rather their recognition that rebellion often brings freedom from the domination of a foreign power. These writers recognize that rebellion could serve a positive function for their society. Especially in the episodes in Judges and the early chapters of 1 Samuel, it is the liberation aspect of rebellion that the writers choose to emphasize. In sum, the avoidance of a rebellion term demonstrates a certain discomfort with the topic of rebellion, but should not be read as an outright condemnation of it.⁶⁷¹

⁶⁷⁰ Much of this centers on the issue of historiography. The writers are attempting to explain why the Davidic kingdom lost most of its territory to the northern tribes.

⁶⁷¹ The episode of David and Saul also shows a certain discomfort with the terminology of rebellion. While Saul claims that David is rebelling against him (1 Sam 22:8, 13), David specifically avoids any rebellion terminology and denies that he is trying to kill Saul (1 Sam 24:6). This is despite the command from Yahweh that Samuel anoint David as king at the expense of Saul. Samuel is indeed condoning a rebellion, but the texts avoid admitting this outright.

An overall analysis of the many episodes of rebellion and the many words employed to describe rebellion also helps to demonstrate its ambiguity. There are episodes in which the authors of the Hebrew Bible positively evaluate a rebellion—notably Hezekiah’s rebellion from Assyria in 2 Kgs 18—and episodes in which they declare that Yahweh commissions his prophets to legitimize a rebel and, therefore, his rebellion, as in 1 Kgs 11–12 with Jeroboam.⁶⁷² In contrast to these episodes, there are rebellions that the biblical authors condemn outright—notably Ezekiel’s analysis of Zedekiah’s rebellion in Ezek 17:15. Thirdly, in many episodes of rebellion, the authors do not condemn but just mention the rebellion (e.g. Gen 14:4). This threefold treatment of episodes in the Hebrew Bible occurs also with the individual terms used. As is now clear, there are terms for rebellion that often contain a negative connotation (פִּשְׁעַ, מַחָדָּ); and other terms that are unequivocally positive (יָשַׁע); and still others that suggest neither a positive nor a negative sentiment, as is the case with קָשָׁר. This dissertation has shown that there is nothing within the Hebrew Bible to suggest that the biblical writers or the society that they are writing about universally equated rebellion with sin or a crime. It is much more complex. Of course, if the rebellion is directed against Yahweh or involved a sin against Yahweh, who is often viewed as a political ruler, then the rebellion is wrong. However, the act of rebellion against a human king, from the perspective of the biblical writers, is not categorically illegitimate.

The ambiguity of rebellion can also be demonstrated if we think more generally about the historical results of a rebellion and move beyond a study that focuses on the words for rebellion. Rebellion was a constant feature of the ancient Near East. Rebels and those leading rebellions were also often successful, as this dissertation has made clear. The biblical writers could not

⁶⁷² See 1 Sam 16; 2 Sam 12:10–11; 2 Sam 16:11, 22; 1 Kgs 11:11; 2 Chron 10:15; 1 Kgs 15:29; 1 Kgs 16:12; 1 Kgs 21:21–24; 2 Kgs 8:13–15; 2 Kgs 9:1–3; 2 Kgs 15:12; 2 Chron 21:10–11 for examples of Yahweh’s involvement in episodes of rebellion.

ignore this reality, and from the perspective of many in the ancient Near East, victory entailed legitimacy. Victory, however, was not necessarily positive and could entail a further ambiguity surrounding the phenomenon of rebellion.

An example of a rebellion being legitimized by the results but leading to negative consequences appears in 2 Kgs 8:7–15. Elisha declares in this text that Hazael will become king of Aram at the expense of Ben-Hadad. Elisha recognizes the legitimacy of Hazael's usurpation, but weeps over it because of what this will entail. Hazael's enthronement will lead to the death of many Israelites (2 Kgs 8:12). The ambiguity of this rebellion centers on the historical reality with which the writers are grappling. They are wondering why Hazael, a violent and murderous king, especially against Israel, is allowed to take the throne of Ben-Hadad.⁶⁷³ They provide no answer other than recognizing that it is the reality Yahweh has set in place. Thus, they do not condemn his taking the throne even if they are distressed over the outcome.⁶⁷⁴

The Reasons for the Ambivalent Presentation of Rebellion

Overall, the ambiguity and struggle with rebellion are largely rooted in the ancient Israelites' constantly shifting position within their Near Eastern world. The Hebrew Bible records times when the Israelites ruled over their neighbors and times when a more powerful polity ruled over them. In the book of Exodus, the Israelites are depicted as subordinate to the Egyptians; in the book of Judges they are subordinate to the Moabites, Canaanites, Midianites and the Philistines; in the books of Kings they are periodically subordinate to the Assyrians, the Babylonians, and also to the Egyptians for a short time. It also appears that Judah was occasionally subject to the northern kingdom of Israel. In all of these cases, the mechanism through which the Israelites

⁶⁷³ Hazael's status as a usurper is known from one of Shalmaneser's texts which refers to him as "Hazael, son of a nobody" *mār la mammāna*. This was a common way within the Neo-Assyrian texts to refer to usurpers. Yamada, *The Construction of the Assyrian Empire*, 188. For further examples of this phrase see M. J. Seux, *RLA* 6, 152.

⁶⁷⁴ This is similar to the situation with Jeroboam. The southern writers are not happy about the North's rebellion, but through Ahijah's prophecy in 1 Kgs 11, they recognize its legitimacy.

could gain freedom is rebellion. As they consider their subordinate status and the way to free themselves, they would be irrational to repudiate all episodes of rebellion. On the other side of this spectrum, there are times when the Israelites ruled over their neighbors as Judah did over Edom (2 Kgs 8), or Israel over Moab (2 Kgs 3). No state with power over another wants to relinquish that power and stop receiving tribute. They likely fear that relinquishing power would enable their subjects to take power over them. This sentiment is reflected in Jehoram's statement in 2 Kgs 3:7 in which he declares war on the Moabites because of their rebellion. Also, no king of an individual state wants his officials or another member of the court to kill him and rule in his stead. This is why Saul attempts to kill David (1 Sam 18:6–16; 19:1; 23:15; 1 Sam. 26:2), and why Solomon kills Adonijah (1 Kgs 2:13–25). There are times when it is obvious that a rebellion is deemed as wrong, but the issue is contextual, depending on the perspective of the text and the type of rebellion. It is natural that writings that emerge from the perspective of a small state would have an ambivalent attitude toward rebellion. This small state will at times need and want to rebel. If this is the case, rebellion cannot be illegitimate in every circumstance or universally considered a “sin.” This holds even if there are times when this same state declares it a sin or criminal endeavor because of their desire to retain the power they have or to retain the status quo.

This ambiguous picture of rebellion in the Hebrew Bible contrasts with the portrayal of rebellion emanating from the imperial powers. Richardson begins his book on rebellion in the cuneiform world by noting that mention of rebellion appears in the texts from Mesopotamia, but always to report its failure.⁶⁷⁵ The Mesopotamian royal inscriptions bring up rebels and rebellion

⁶⁷⁵ Richardson, “Introduction: The Fields of Rebellion and Periphery,” xvii. As noted in the introduction, the view of rebellion in the myths and epics of Mesopotamian is not as monolithic. We also might find some commonality with what appears in the Hebrew Bible if we had texts from the Mesopotamian world that emerged from kings who experienced a rebellion against themselves and were defeated. There are cases where an imperial ruler comes to the throne by defeating a rival, who may have had a better claim to the throne and was actually ruling. This is an issue of what survives and one that deserves further study. This may have been the case with Sargon II, who was perhaps a usurper, and Shalmaneser V (and perhaps his offspring), whose texts do not exist. For this possibility see, Josette Elayi, *Sargon II, King of Assyria*, *Archaeology and Biblical Studies* 22 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 25-32.

to condemn them and to demonstrate how the imperial ruler is able to crush all rebellions and thus keep order and peace in the world. Their position as the world power results in a more consistent picture of rebellion as a crime. The language surrounding rebellion in the imperial texts is also decidedly negative. The imperial powers often fail to mention or discuss episodes in which the smaller states are successful in rebelling against them. The Hebrew Bible, however, is not coy about mentioning both successful and failed rebellions, which only substantiates the claim that it has an ambivalent attitude toward rebellion. Events such as rebellions that are depicted as creating chaos from the perspective of the imperial power can be life-giving for the smaller nation, but this often changes as the situation switches and as the smaller state becomes dominant. This contrast reaffirms the position that the view of rebellion depends on perspective. The political perspective of ancient Israel was often in flux, creating the proper environment that would lead a society to struggle with the legitimacy of rebellion.

A second reason that the presentation of rebellion is ambiguous within the Hebrew Bible is the variety of voices represented. The texts in the Hebrew Bible do not all originate with the kings or their courts, but sometimes from other elites; or perhaps the texts are records of those who oppose the ruling authorities.

The two prophetic texts of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, for example, present a position on rebellion that contrasts with what emerges from the contemporaneous king of Judah and his court.⁶⁷⁶ Zedekiah chose to rebel against the Babylonians, and we can assume, based on his actions, that he and his officials viewed rebellion in this episode as a legitimate endeavor (cf. Jer 27). In contrast, Ezekiel condemns Zedekiah's rebellion based on religious grounds, noting how

⁶⁷⁶ Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel have been referred to as enemies of the state. Christopher A. Rollston, "Jeremiah as State-Enemy of Judah: Critical Moments in the Biblical Narratives about the 'Weeping Prophet,'" in *Enemies and Friends of the State: Ancient Prophecy in Context*, ed. Christopher A. Rollston (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2018), 339–58; Stephen L. Cook, "The Prophet Ezekiel: State Priest, State Enemy," in *Enemies and Friends of the State: Ancient Prophecy in Context*, ed. Christopher A. Rollston (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2018), 395–410.

Zedekiah broke an oath with God (Ezek 17:15–20), while Jeremiah focuses on additional factors. Jeremiah’s disapproval of the rebellion appears, at least in part, based on a rational analysis of the situation. He believes that rebellion will lead to destruction while submission will lead to peace. Jeremiah 27:8, 17 states that all nations should serve (עבד) the Babylonian king and submit to his yoke (על). These are common terms to mark submission and indicate the prophet’s opposition to a potential rebellion.⁶⁷⁷ Jeremiah 27:13 also argues that rebellion will lead to the death of many from Judah. Jeremiah asks, לָמָּה תָּמוּתוּ אַתֶּם וְעַמְּךָ בְּחַרְבַּב בְּרָעָב וּבַדָּבָר כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה, “Why will you and your people die by the sword, famine, or disease, as Yahweh has spoken concerning the nation who will not serve the king of Babylon?” While the text of Jeremiah recognizes the role of Yahweh in international affairs (Jer 27:10–11; 28), it also recognizes that submission will lead to life, while rebellion will lead to death. There is a sense in which the text appeals to divine causation along with presenting a rational analysis of foreign policy that contrasts with what Zedekiah must have been arguing for.

Further, there are numerous texts within the Hebrew Bible that are critical of the behavior of an individual king. If these texts present the voices of those opposed to a king or believe a previous king to be illegitimate based on his actions, it is likely that these individuals would have believed rebellion to be a legitimate action. It is through a rebellion that one can remove a wicked and oppressive king.⁶⁷⁸

Another matter that has the potential to complicate the picture of rebellion in the Hebrew Bible concerns the connection between rebellion and the role of the deity in political events.

⁶⁷⁷ For more on the yoke as an expression of vassalage see, Moshe Anbar, “To Put One’s Neck Under the Yoke,” in *Essays on Ancient Israel in its Near Eastern Context: A Tribute to Nadav Na’aman*, eds. Yairah Amit et al., (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 17–21; Edward Silver, “Performing Domination/Theorizing Power: Israelite Prophecy as a Political Discourse Beyond the Conflict Model,” *JANER* 14 (2014): 186–216.

⁶⁷⁸ This comment applies to the mention of prophets who anoint individuals within Israel or Judah to take the throne, while another king is on the throne. This occurs with David and Samuel against Saul (1 Sam 16), Ahijah and Jeroboam against Solomon (1 Kgs 11), and Elisha and Jehu against Jehoram (2 Kgs 9).

Much of the ancient Israelite concern with rebellion centers on the involvement of the deity in political affairs. I have talked about this issue throughout but in particular contexts, so here I want to gather these contexts together and make some general observations. Carroll's point that rebellion is a sin focuses on the deity's control of the political order. When one breaks the established order set by the deity, it is naturally deemed a sin. The problem with this position is that just as easily as the deity establishes the political order, he can change that political order through the anointing of a new ruler. Complication arises because, as the story in Jer 27–28 (cf. 1 Kgs 22) declares, the diviners and prophets who reveal the deity's intentions will often disagree. Individuals, therefore, will not always be sure of what the deity's decision is until the event ends and one side triumphs over the other. They must, therefore, make their decisions based on additional factors, which are often implicit in the texts.

Furthermore, the words employed for rebellion are not always directly connected to the action of the deity. This is sometimes the case with קָשַׁר, leaving the reader to think about implicit connections to the role of the deity within a rebellion. Amon, for example, is killed by his palace officials in a coup, and the writers do not directly state that Yahweh is the cause of this rebellion (2 Kgs 21:23–24). While there is good reason to assume that the text presents his death as reprisal for his wickedness (2 Kgs 21:21–22) and as a turning caused by Yahweh (cf. 1 Kgs 12:15; 2 Chron 10:15), this is not based on the word קָשַׁר but the additional details.⁶⁷⁹ The writers of the Hebrew Bible also do not always directly connect מָרַד to the action of a deity (e.g. Gen 14:4). Additionally, even in those episodes in which the writers employ the term חָטָא for a rebellion, they do not always mention that this involved an offense against a deity. In some

⁶⁷⁹ For a study of rebellion as a turning caused by Yahweh in select episodes, see Peter Machinist, "The Transfer of Kingship: A Divine Turning," in *Fortunate the Eyes That See: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Astrid B. Beck et. al (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 105–20.

cases, the reader can infer that from the context (e.g. Num 14), but in other cases—Gen 40–41, 2 Kgs 18—the connection is at most implicit and the writer may be intentionally leaving out mention of the deity, which must be the case in 2 Kgs 18. Here, the action would have been an offense against Aššur, which is a point the biblical writer would not admit. These details demonstrate that while rebellion involved the deity—of this there is no doubt—the writers sometimes avoid mentioning this directly. The tension and interplay within these texts between the earthly and divine causes of rebellion has the potential to create further ambiguity surrounding these events.

This dissertation addressed some of these issues (e.g., the presence of foreign oppression and that it was Yahweh causing this), but due to our focus on the meaning of the rebellion terms, we could not address the interplay between the divine and human causes of rebellion—i.e., the issue of dual causality—in every episode. We should, however, recognize that in addition to appealing to divine causation, ancient writers thought on the human plane of rationality and often weighed the events they discussed based on additional factors. Those in the ancient Near East evaluated the likely outcome of a potential rebellion and often responded to external factors like the presence of foreign oppression, perceived weakness in a foreign state, or their ability to create powerful alliances. Some saw the potential benefits of rebellion, while others focused on the potential disaster it could bring. *Realpolitik* was a reality in the ancient world as it is in the modern world.⁶⁸⁰ For this reason, there is still room for a study that focuses specifically on the issue of dual causality, human and divine, as it applies to rebellion and the ambiguous ways in which the biblical writers could view it.

⁶⁸⁰ Richard Nelson, “Realpolitik in Judah (687–609),” in *Scripture in Context II: More Essays on the Comparative Method*, ed. William W. Hallo, James C. Moyer, and Leo G. Perdue (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 183. This is a difficult topic to discuss, because we must recognize that within the ancient world there was never a strict bifurcation between the divine and the human causes. Both types of causes exist, but they are always intricately intertwined.

In conclusion, analyzing the numerous terms for political rebellion allows us to define clearly what is and what is not rebellion within the biblical text. It is our hope that this will spark further discussion on this topic. Scholars have previously talked about individual rebellions within the Hebrew Bible and commented on a specific text's view of a rebellion, but there has been little work, as we have tried to do here, in analyzing and defining the terms the biblical writers employ to describe the topic. Moreover, the significance of these terms stands out far more than earlier scholars have appreciated when we understand them as part of a terminological system—a system that we have attempted to work out in this dissertation. Placing these terms in coordination is imperative because it provides modern scholars with a more inclusive grasp of the phenomenon of rebellion than before and a clearer picture of what actions are involved and how these ancient writers understood them. It further allows us a chance to see the intellectual thought process of these writers and how they engaged in systematic reflection on political events.

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