



BLOODY BRUTAL AND BARBARIC?

Online Appendixes



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Appendix A

ROYAL-FAMILY EQUIVALENCY

APPENDIXES A, B, AND C take the evidence for hyperbole further. If you are reading this continued discussion, you likely have a keen interest in the topic. At an earlier point (chapter twelve) we offered reasons for understanding the relationship between drive-out and total-kill language as one of shared-goal equivalency. Driving out the Canaanites and defeating them in (hyperbolic) total-kill battles were two means for achieving the same goal: the exclusive worship of Yahweh within the sacred space of a new-Eden *terra sancta*.

In this essay we present evidence for yet another means of accomplishing the same battle goal: *capturing and killing the enemy king* (and secondarily his family, key leaders, and army). First, we will see that ancient kings were viewed as the heads of giant households. As the leader of a national-level household, the king stood for and even personified his people. Second, we examine how ANE battle accounts could depict the actions of the people or army as the actions of the king himself. Meanwhile, the capture, defeat, or death of an ANE king could serve as the functional equivalent of killing his entire army. The third stage of this process examines how Israelite authors viewed the capture and killing of an enemy king as the defeat of his entire army and the neutralization of an enemy threat. Consequently, biblical writers could depict a decisive victory in warfare by describing the capture and/or death of an enemy king *as if* they had destroyed an enemy population. Finally, we will consider how royal-equivalency capture/death provides some better answers to questions about Israel's wars against the Canaanites.

KINGS AS RULERS OF NATIONAL "HOUSEHOLDS"

In the biblical world, kings not only represented their people, but could also embody them because ancient societies were structured as giant households.

Several observations support this assertion. First, the household, the “father’s house” (*bêt ’āb*), served as the primary unit of identity in the ancient world. Second, all of Israelite society was viewed as a series of interconnected, nested households. Third, the institution of kingship was deeply embedded in the matrix of Israel’s household structure. Fourth, not only did Israel view its kings within this household framework, but other foreign nations also viewed Israel’s kings as ruling over national-level households. It is within this framework that the fate of an entire nation (or national household) could be wrapped up in and embodied in the person of the king.

In the ANE, people were identified by the household to which they belonged. Each household was headed by a father, who represented and directed their combined interests. Unlike our modern North American context, in ancient Israel individuals were identified first in a corporate sense, as members of a father’s household (*bêt ’āb*). That is why when a male is introduced in the Bible, it is almost always in terms of the household to which he belongs (as “X the son of Y”).¹ For example, the book of Isaiah begins, “The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw” (Is 1:1), and the judge Barak is introduced as “Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali” (Judg 4:6). Females are likewise identified in relation to their father’s household: Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel (Gen 24:15); Bathsheba, daughter of Eliam (2 Sam 11:3). The household was the fundamental unit of identification and identity in the biblical world. Individuals within these households were deeply tied to the identity of the head of the household—the father.

Second, not only were individuals viewed in light of their connection to the households of ancient Israel, but ancient Israel’s entire social structure was a set of interconnected and expanding household-like relationships. Just as a household was composed of a relational web of parents, children, grandchildren, unmarried aunts, and servants, with the father as the head of this network, so the clan was composed of its constituent households and led by the heads of those households—the elders (Deut 5:23; 21:2-4).² Tribes were

¹To refer to someone by only his patronymic, “son of X,” was considered an insult. See David J. Clark, “‘Surnames’ in the Old Testament? Or: How to Be Rude Politely,” *BT* 56 (2005): 232-38.

²See Shunya Bendor, *The Social Structure of Ancient Israel: The Institution of the Family (Beit ’Ab) from the Settlement to the End of the Monarchy*, *Jerusalem Biblical Studies* 7 (Jerusalem: Simor, 1996), 255-59.

composed of their constituent clans and were led by a chief (Num 1:16; 7:2). The people of Israel were composed of their constituent tribes. In this way, Israel's entire social structure could be thought of as like a series of Russian nesting dolls, with Yahweh as the encompassing father of the households of Israel.³ Each level of social relationship is replicated by its constituent parts. David Schloen remarks, "The household model is replicated throughout the social hierarchy because each political subject is himself a patriarchal ruler whose domain differs in scale but not in structure from that of his master."⁴

Third, the establishment of the institution of kingship did not fall outside Israel's household social structure but grew out of it and was deeply integrated into it. We can see this in the biblical descriptions of the roots of the monarchy. Israel's first king, Saul, is chosen by (1) Yahweh, through a selection process that narrows from (2) the assembly of all of *the people* of Israel, to (3) the *tribe* of Benjamin, to (4) the Matrilineal *clan*, and then to (5) the *household* of Kish, until an *individual*, (6) Saul, is finally chosen (see fig. A.1; 1 Sam 10:19-21; see also Josh 7:13-18). Each step in the selection process fittingly involves another level of Israel's social structure, because the king ruled over each level (2-6) of Israelite kinship, with Yahweh as ultimate father



Figure A.1. Transformation in Israel's social structure

³In theological perspective, Israel is adopted as God's people (Ex 6:6-7; see also Ex 4:22-23; Hos 11:2). The people of Israel are then collectively described using kinship imagery (Deut 1:30-31; 8:5; 32:6-7; Hos 1:10-11). See Lawrence Stager, "The Archaeology of the Family," *BASOR* 260 (1985): 25; Philip J. King and Lawrence Stager, "Of Fathers, Kings and the Deity," *BAR* 28, no. 2 (2002): 42-45, 62; King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, LAI (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 37.

⁴J. David Schloen, *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol: Patrimonialism in Ugarit and the Ancient Near East*, SAHL 2 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2001), 67; see also Lawrence Stager, "The Patrimonial Kingdom of Solomon," in *Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past: Canaan, Ancient Israel, and Their Neighbors from the Late Bronze Age Through Roman Palaestina*, ed. William Dever and Seymour Gitin (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 63-74.

over the people of Israel (e.g., 1 Chron 17:14; Jer 12:7-8). With the introduction of kingship, the fundamental social structure of Israel did not change—another level of household relationship was simply added to the existing network of relationships (see fig. A.1). Saul (later David and Solomon) ruled as leader over the combined tribal household of Israel under Yahweh. The king's place in Israel's household structure is reinforced by the father-son language used to describe his unique relationship with Yahweh. In 2 Samuel 7:14, Yahweh describes his relationship with David's son using kinship language: "I will be his father, and he will be my son." Psalm 2 reinforces this description, saying that Yahweh has installed his king on Mount Zion and proclaimed to him, "You are my son; today I have become your father" (Ps 2:7; see also Ps 89:27-28). Thus, the kings of the combined people of Israel, and particularly the kings of Judah, were viewed as sons of God who ruled with Yahweh's authority over the household of Israel.

Second Kings 17:21 refers to the combined twelve tribes as the house of David, and 1 Chronicles 28:4 relays how Yahweh's selection of David as king moved through the various levels of Israel's household structure in a similar manner to the selection of Saul: "The LORD, the God of Israel, chose me from my whole family to be king over Israel forever. He chose Judah as leader, and from the tribe of Judah he chose my family, and from my father's sons he was pleased to make me king over all Israel." After the division of the combined twelve-tribe nation of Israel into two nations (Judah and Israel), Judah is repeatedly described as a household over which the king presides (e.g., 1 Kings 12:21, 23; 2 Chron 11:1; see also 2 Sam 2:10; Jer 3:18; 5:11; 9:25; 11:10, 17; 12:14; 13:11; 1 Chron 28:4; 2 Chron 22:10; compare 2 Sam 2:4, 7, 11). Thus, Israel's kings were viewed within the framework of the household structure of Israelite society and ruled over Yahweh's people as his (adoptive) sons. This framework is crucial for understanding how a king could embody his people. The household structure, with a father serving as key focal point of identification, was replicated throughout Israelite society. The king, as the ruler over the national-level household, naturally served as the focal point of identity and identification for the people within the nation and outside it.

Fourth, the king's role as focal point of identity is evidenced in how other nations viewed ancient Israel and Judah as an expanded household.

Ben-Hadad's advisers indicate that they have "heard that the kings [of the household] of Israel are merciful" (1 Kings 20:31).⁵ The late ninth-century Tel Dan inscription commemorates the victory of an Aramean king (possibly Hazael of Damascus) over "the house of David," likely a reference to the combined forces of Israel and Judah.⁶ Just as Judah was seen as the house of David, so Israel was viewed by the Assyrians as the household of Omri (or the household founded by Omri). Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III says that he took into exile the land of the house of Omri (Bit-Ḥumria) despite the fact that Omri's dynasty had ended almost a century earlier.⁷ Sargon II has a similar perspective, while Shalmaneser describes the Israelite King Jehu as "(the man) of Bit-Ḥumri [Omri]" despite the fact that Jehu ended the reign of Omri's dynasty in a bloody coup and founded a new dynasty.⁸ Moreover, a summary inscription by Tiglath-pileser III indicates that the land of Israel was also viewed as the possession of the king, for the inscription mentions several cities that are at the border of Bit-Ḥumria (the house of Omri) and that he carried "the land of Bit-Ḥumria" into exile.⁹ These examples show that like Israel itself, other nations around Israel also viewed it as the extended household of its king, with the king as the embodied representative of the people.

ANE KINGS AS THE EMBODIMENT OF THEIR PEOPLE/ARMY

The conception of ancient Israel and Judah as extended households represented in the king and his actions has parallels in extrabiblical descriptions of the actions of the state or the army as the actions of the king.¹⁰ This

⁵The reference to "household" is omitted in the NIV, NASB, and NLT but is included in the ESV, KJV, and NRSV, which follow the MT more closely here.

⁶COS 2:39, 161. A reconstruction from the Mesha Stele may provide a second ANE reference to the house of David. See A. Lemaire, "'House of David' Restored in Moabite Inscription," *BAR* 20, no. 3 (1994): 30-37.

⁷COS 2:117C, 288; 2:117E, 291; 2:117G, 292.

⁸Sargon: COS 2:118F, 297; 2:118G, 298; 2:118H, 298. Shalmaneser: COS 2:113C, 267; 2:113D, 268; 2:113E, 268; 2:113F, 270.

⁹COS 2:117C, 288; 2:117E, 291; see also COS 2:117G, 292. Sargon II also calls Israel the "land of Bit-Ḥumria," COS 2:118F, 297; 2:118G, 298; 2:118H, 298. This view would be in concert with the Late Bronze Age view in Ugarit, Mari, Emar, and Alalakh that saw the land as the property of the king (and thus part of his household). See Schloen, *House of the Father*, 230-31, 268.

¹⁰The concept of the king as embodiment of his people is perhaps strongest in ancient Egypt and was present from the establishment of its first dynasty. Henri Frankfort points out that

practice is particularly evident when describing an ANE king's achievements in warfare because the army was viewed as the personal possession of the king and an extension of the king's personal power.¹¹ For example, the Calah Annals indicate that the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III personally devastated the land of Damascus, saying, "I destroyed 591 cities of sixteen districts of Damascus like mounds of ruins after the Deluge."¹² Clearly Tiglath-pileser did not destroy these cities by himself, but as head of the army of Assyria he could claim their victories for himself. Similarly, in one summary of his campaign against Merodach-Baladan of Babylon, Assyrian king Sennacherib says, "I besieged, I conquered, I plundered" eighty-eight fortified towns and 820 villages in Babylon, though this was as leader of his army.¹³ In his Ten-Year Annals the Hittite king Muršili says, "I defeated Piyama-LAMMA, son of Uḫḫaziti, with his infantry and his horse-troops, and I destroyed them."¹⁴

A variant of this type of depiction can be found in Egypt, where the king was sometimes portrayed as fighting the enemy all on his own.¹⁵ The Gebel Barkal Stele of Pharaoh Thutmose III says: "*He is a king who fights alone, without a multitude to back him up. He is more effective than a myriad of numerous armies. An equal to him has not been, (he is) a warrior who extends his arm on the battlefield, no one can touch him. He is one who immediately overwhelms all*

the representative nature of the king is evidenced when comparing the depiction of individuals on the (preunification) Gebel el Arak knife and Hunter's Palette with the (postunification) Narmer Palette. On the Gebel el Arak knife and the Hunter's Palette, warring armies are depicted on equal size and scale. But on the Narmer Palette, the king is the dominating figure, with the crown prince, commander of the army, and the army itself portrayed in increasingly diminished sizes. From the founding Egyptian dynasty onward, "The representation of the community by the single symbolical figure of its ruler" is typical of Egyptian ideology (p. 7). While not quite as stark in Mesopotamian ideology, the king still played a vital role in representing the people before the gods and was held responsible for their behavior. For example, a king could be subject to ritual shaving in order to avert a possible earthquake that had been related through an omen. See Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 7-9, 259-61.

¹¹For example, note the repeated references to "my army" on the Rassam Cylinder of Ashurbanipal (*ANET*, 294-96) or the Egyptian account of the battle of Qadesh between Muwatallis II of Hatti and Ramses II of Egypt with its references to "my troops" (*COS* 2:5A, 32).

¹²*COS* 2:117A, 286.

¹³*COS* 2:119A, 301.

¹⁴*COS* 2:16, 85. The examples above may simply be a form of synecdoche (a literary device where a part [the king] stands for the whole [the army]). Nevertheless, such a literary device feeds into the concept of the king as the embodiment of his army.

¹⁵This portrait is likely influenced by the Egyptian ideology of Pharaoh as divine.

foreign lands while at the head of his army.”¹⁶ This inscription suggests that Thutmose overcame multiple armies singlehandedly, which is clearly stylized language meant to exalt and legitimate the king. In each of these cases, the actions of the entire army are attributed to the king himself, because he embodies his army, and the army is conversely viewed as an extension of the king’s persona.

The king’s position as the head and personification of his people also meant that defeat could be signaled in a battle account by noting the flight, capture, and/or death of the king himself (with no mention of the death/destruction of all his people). In fact, many ANE conquest accounts take a particular interest in the fate of the king or leader of the opposing force. K. Lawson Younger points out,

When one peruses ancient Near Eastern conquest accounts one quickly realizes that it is very common in the transmission code of these accounts to narrate an open field battle in which the enemies are defeated and from which the king, kings, and/or people flee and take refuge in some place (whether high mountain, mountain cave, or across the sea). In some instances, the kings are captured; in others, they are not.¹⁷

The inscription of Akkadian king Narām-Sîn highlights the key role that the capture of the king played in the rhetoric of conquest:

When “the four quarters (of the earth)”
together rose up against him,
through the love Ištar held for him,
he won nine victories in a single year
and captured the kings whom (the rebels)
had brought (to the throne).¹⁸

Victory is often expressed relative to the kings captured and not the armies defeated, the populations killed, or cities and lands annexed.

Similarly, Ninurta-kudurrī-ušur, the neo-Assyrian governor of the land of Suḫu and the land of Mari, recounts his victory over the Ḫatallu tribal confederation by focusing on the fate of their leader, Šamaḡamni, saying,

¹⁶COS 2:2B, 14-15 (italics added).

¹⁷K. Lawson Younger Jr., *Ancient Conquest Accounts: A Study in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical History Writing*, JSOTSup 98 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 220-21.

¹⁸Jean-Jaques Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, ed. Benjamin R. Foster, SBLWAW 19 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 4.

“This is a single defeat that Ninurta-kudurrī-ušur, governor of the land of Suḫu and the land of Mari, inflicted upon the Ḫatallu [tribesmen]. Šamaʿgamni, the herald [*nāgīru*] of the Sarugu [clan], their leader, the dishonest servant whom the land of Suḫu, the land of Assyria and my fathers rejected, *I captured him. When I killed him, my heart calmed down.*”¹⁹ A decisive defeat can be signaled by reporting the capture and/or death of the opposing king, for if the king—the embodiment of his people—has been captured or killed, then the threat represented by his forces has been neutralized (at least temporarily).

In ANE texts, the rhetoric of kingship can portray kings in such a way that their actions stand for the actions of their army or people, and conversely, the army’s actions can be attributed to the king. Consequently, a key signal of the decisive defeat of an enemy is the capture, flight, or death of the enemy’s king from the theater of battle. Decisive defeat may also be signaled by the plundering of a king’s family, palace, city (predominantly), and people (less so), for they are all extensions of the king’s persona.

BIBLICAL KINGS AS THE EMBODIMENT OF THEIR PEOPLE/ARMY

As we have seen in the previous sections, the idea that ancient kings could represent and even embody their people in warfare was grounded in understanding ancient societies as enormous households. That this was also true in ancient Israel becomes apparent where biblical authors express the defeat/destruction of an entire people group by describing the defeat, capture, and/or death of a king. For example, the prophet Jeremiah indicates that the Lord sent multiple prophets to alert his people to the consequences of their obstinate disobedience and idolatry (Jer 25:4-7). Jeremiah warns that the Lord will send the king of Babylon against all the people of Judah to “*completely destroy* [*hāram*—Hiphil] them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and *an everlasting ruin*” (Jer 25:9). This is the same type of destruction brought against the Canaanites (see Deut 7:2; 20:17). Jeremiah 39 then relates how, after a protracted siege, Jerusalem is finally captured and razed by Nebuchadnezzar. Yet he does not execute the entire population of Jerusalem (as threatened in Jer 25). Instead he “slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before

¹⁹COS 2:115B, 280 (italics added).

his eyes and also killed all the nobles of Judah. Then he put out Zedekiah's eyes and bound him with bronze shackles to take him to Babylon" (Jer 39:6-7; see also Jer 52:10-11).

The king's army is defeated, the king is captured and taken into exile, and his family along with the nobles of his court are killed before the city of Jerusalem is razed. The surviving citizens of Jerusalem are left alive to be taken into exile in Babylon (Jer 39:9; see Jer 52:15) or resettled in Judah (as is the case for the poorest of the poor—Jer 29:10; see Jer 52:16). So, while Jeremiah's threat of total destruction is directed at the general populace of Judah, it is the king and his court whose deaths are reported in these passages. Total destruction of the king (along with his family and key leaders) is equivalent to the total destruction of the entire people because the king is considered the embodiment of the people. The people who survive the siege of Jerusalem suffer terribly and must endure the humiliation of exile, but they are not killed en masse. Hyperbole is clearly in play here, but so is the enmeshed identity of the people with their king.

Some might maintain that this example is not helpful since it describes a (slightly) less violent approach to warfare exercised by a foreign army *toward* God's people, rather than a move away from the total war outlined earlier in the Bible *by* God's people.²⁰ But this reverse holy war (i.e., against Israel itself) context uses the same total-kill language found in Deuteronomy and Joshua for Israel's wars against the Canaanites. That only the king is killed, and not the entire population of Judah, should spur us to consider the same possibility for Israel's wars against the Canaanites.

The book of Joshua also provides examples of how the defeat, capture, and death of kings served as a functional equivalent to total-kill destruction of the Canaanites. When we examine the evidence for royal-equivalency kill in Israel's battles against the Canaanites, we find four different ways in which the book of Joshua describes the total defeat of the Canaanites. The first is by describing a generalized application of total kill to a region, along with its kings and entire population (region + all inhabitants + king). The

²⁰While this example depicts a foreign power's exercise of a more merciful treatment of war captives, the Old Testament writers themselves did not divorce this act from the Lord's ultimate causation, for Nebuchadnezzar is called Yahweh's servant (Jer 25:9; 27:6; 43:10) and these events happen by Yahweh's direction (see Jer 52:3).

second is by describing the conquest of a city and the total kill of the city's population along with the death of its king (city + all inhabitants + king). A third references the defeat of a city and the death of its king without mention of the destruction of its population (city + no mention of inhabitants + king), while a fourth way describes the defeat and death of the Canaanite kings of cities without any mention of population-wide total kill at all (king only). All four convey the (hyperbolic) total kill of the Canaanites and are expressed in relation to the king.

The book of Joshua depicts the total defeat of the Canaanites in the first way (region + all inhabitants + king) in *the regional summaries of Israel's battles*. The campaign summaries in Joshua 10–11 also describe Israel's actions against the Canaanites in terms of leaving no survivors or the total destruction of all who breathed (Josh 10:40), as well as extermination without mercy (Josh 11:20). But these same campaign summaries also describe Israel's victories in terms of *the capture and death of the Canaanite kings* (Josh 10:40, 42; 11:16–18). In these summaries, there are no descriptions of total kill against specific cities and their populations.

The second way to relate the total destruction of the Canaanites is by describing the defeat of a city in conjunction with the total kill of all of its inhabitants as well as the death of its king. For example, after defeating the city of Libnah, readers are told that “the city and everyone in it Joshua put to the sword. He left no survivors there. And he did to its king as he had done to the king of Jericho” (Josh 10:30; see also Josh 8:22, 24, 29; 10:28, 37, 39; 11:10–11).

The third way in which the book of Joshua can express the total annihilation of the Canaanites is by narrating *the defeat of a city plus its king without mentioning the total kill of its inhabitants*. In several instances, the book of Joshua refers to total defeat of a group of Canaanites by mentioning a previous action against a city and its king without specifying the total destruction of the inhabitants. For example, Joshua 8:2 says, “You shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king” (see Josh 10:28, 30, 39; 11:12). In these cases, the defeat of a city (and not necessarily the people of the city) and its king signal total defeat.

The fourth way of describing total defeat of the Canaanites is by simply narrating *the defeat/death of a city's king*. Joshua 12 itemizes the lands captured

on the eastern side of the Jordan (Josh 12:1-6) and on the western side of the Jordan (Josh 12:7-24), and it does so not in terms of place names or geographical borders (unlike the descriptions of the territorial allotments of Josh 13-19) but solely in terms of defeated kings and cities.²¹ In these instances (Josh 12:9-24), the names of cities function solely to provide a point of identification for the king (“the king of X”) rather than indicating the death of both the king and his city. The choice of the thirty-one kings included in the list is likely representative, yet when combined with the geographical dispersion of these kings throughout the land, it signals the total defeat of the Canaanites.²² No population-wide total-kill statements are used. Total defeat is signaled only through description of the defeat/death of each city’s king.²³

These four overlapping ways to depict the total defeat of the Canaanites indicate that the defeat and death of the enemy king was functionally equivalent to the total kill of an enemy population. Each description could be used to say that Israel came to possess the land. All were equally legitimate ways of thinking about and describing the sound defeat of an enemy.

The equivalency between killing the king and destroying the population is also evident in an expression of reverse holy war against Israel in Hosea 10. It describes how God will discipline Israel for its sin. Hosea indicates that warfare will be Israel’s punishment for its promotion of idolatry and injustice. Its altars will be destroyed and the nation will be put in shackles (Hos 10:8-11), but in this oracle, it is only the king who suffers the ultimate fate of death (Hos 10:7). To emphasize this point, the oracle concludes by setting out the doom of the king (and not the destruction of the people): “When that day dawns, the king of Israel will be completely destroyed” (Hos 10:15). The destruction of the king of Israel signals the punishment of the entire people.

²¹Younger notes that generally summary lists in the ANE that are like those in Josh 12 focus on *conquered cities* (*Ancient Conquest Accounts*, 230). But as Trent Butler notes, Josh 12 emphasizes the position of the *kings* of the land (*Joshua 1-12*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014], 526-27).

²²Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Joshua*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 362; Richard D. Nelson, *Joshua*, OTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 159.

²³Deuteronomy 2:24-3:7 describes the total destruction of the Amorites ruled by Sihon and Og (see Josh 2:10). However, other passages refer to that event by referring to the death of the king, his family, and his army (Num 31:35) or simply just the king with no mention of the complete destruction of the entire population: Deut 1:4; 4:46-47; 29:7; 31:4; Josh 9:10; 13:12, 21; Judg 11:19-21; Neh 9:22; Ps 135:10-11; 136:17-22.

The paramount importance of *killing the king* but not all the people provides further evidence for royal-kill equivalency. Here are several examples. First, in 1 Kings 20, Ben-Hadad king of Aram (outside the land) attacks Ahab king of Israel. Ahab's forces kill one hundred thousand Aramean soldiers in battle, while the collapse of a city wall kills an additional twenty-seven thousand people, apparently soldiers who have fled the battle (1 Kings 20:29-30).²⁴ Ahab allows King Ben-Hadad to escape with his life in exchange for captured Israelite cities and trade agreements (1 Kings 20:34). An unnamed prophet reveals Ahab's folly: "This is what the LORD says: 'You have set free a man I had determined should die [literally, "the man of my *hērem*"]'. Therefore it is your life for his life, your people for his people'" (1 Kings 20:42).²⁵ Ahab's release of Ben-Hadad was a significant failure: "In letting Ben Hadad go free, Ahab was neglecting his God-given responsibility to . . . put an end to the war by the logical means of killing the king."²⁶ Interestingly, the exercise of total kill (*hērem*) here is directed only toward the king (not the entire people group). Moreover, this royal focus comes at Yahweh's directive. With the failure to eliminate Ben-Hadad, the religious and political threat posed by the Arameans for Israel and Judah remains and eventually becomes reality when Ben-Hadad's successor Hazael becomes king in Damascus and torments Israel (2 Kings 8:12; 10:32; 12:17-18; 13:3, 22).

A second example can be seen in the king of Aram's orders to his chariot commanders to focus their attention on killing the king of Israel only: "Do not fight with anyone, small or great, except the king of Israel [Ahab]" (2 Chron 18:30 // 1 Kings 18:22). The paramount importance of killing the king is highlighted in this instance by the overstatement about killing only the king. This order makes sense if defeating the king equals the decisive defeat of the whole army. However, the Aramean charioteers mistakenly pursue Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, but turn away (2 Chron 18:31-32 // 1 Kings

²⁴The text emphasizes the killing of the soldiers (an extension of the king) and not all adult males in the city as directed by Deut 20. Also, for the possible hyperbolic nature of the large numbers used in biblical narratives, see chapter eleven under "Second Look: Some Arguments for Hyperbole."

²⁵The use of the word *hērem* here may be playing off the two meanings of the word: (1) devoted to destruction and (2) net. See Philip D. Stern, "The *Hērem* in 1 Kgs 20,42 as an Exegetical Problem," *Biblica* 71 (1990): 43-47.

²⁶Stern, "Hērem in 1 Kgs 20,42 as an Exegetical Problem," 46.

22:32-33) because he is not the *right* king. When Ahab, king of Israel, is wounded by a random arrow and withdraws from combat, the battle continues to rage all day (2 Chron 18:34 // 1 Kings 18:35), seemingly because the king of Israel had not (yet) been killed by the Arameans. It is only at sunset, after the king's death, that the narrator indicates the battle has ceased (1 Kings 18:36).

A third example (this one within the land) further demonstrates the crucial importance of killing the enemy king, far more so than the entire population. The sparing of Agag, king of the Amalekites, illustrates how the total-kill (*hērem*) command may similarly be focused on the king (1 Sam 15). Saul claims to have done all that Yahweh asked, but he has left alive the best of the plunder and the Amalekite king (1 Sam 15:20). Our discussion of this text in chapter eleven argues the probability that Saul's claim to have fully obeyed Yahweh falters, *not* because he failed to put to death every last Amalekite man, woman, and child, but because he had left standing the embodiment of the Amalekite people—their king.²⁷ The tension is resolved only when Samuel kills king Agag (not all his people), since Agag is the embodiment of the Amalekite people (1 Sam 15:32-33).

ETHICS AND ROYAL-FAMILY EQUIVALENCY

Royal-family equivalency meant that the king and his “extensions” (his immediate family, key leaders, and army) were often used in war rhetoric as standing in the place of the entire nation. If the king and his extensions fell, the entire nation was thought to be destroyed. Moderns especially in the West do not think this way because we do not share the same family-nested societal structures or the heavy emphasis on collectivism. Nevertheless, this royal-family equivalency as part of ancient-world thought and language must inform our ethical reflections about biblical warfare, and it suggests the following implications.

Further evidence for hyperbole. If royal kill (and its extensions) was viewed as equivalent to nation kill in the war rhetoric of the Bible, then we have uncovered yet another stream of evidence that supports the hyperbole

²⁷The Amalekite people continue on long past Saul's death (1 Sam 27:8; 30:1, 13, 18; 2 Sam 1:8; 1 Chron 4:43).

thesis. The ancient biblical writers could talk about the killing of the king and his family (and any resisting army forces) in terms that included the entire nation, though that entire nation was obviously not killed in any literal sense. This dichotomy between rhetoric and reality adds one more piece of evidence for understanding the total-kill war language of Scripture as hyperbolic.

Hyperbole made good cultural sense. Like the old “fish in water” comparison, culture often affects us without our awareness. Culture surrounds us and permeates everything we do, say, and think. As a result, current readers do not “get it” or “see it” (that royal kill equals nation kill) because our surrounding environment (our water) is so different. However, once we venture back in time with an essay like this and see the collectivism and family-nested aspects of the Israelite society, we can say, “Oh, okay. I see it now.” Societal structuring affected ancient war rhetoric in profound ways. It was normal and easy for ancient societies to talk about the destruction of an entire nation or people group when the literal reality was confined to the death of the king (and perhaps his family and/or army). The king embodied the nation, and that cultural and conceptual background spilled over into their understanding of war destruction. So far (to this point in the book), we have explained the hyperbole of total-kill rhetoric as expressing a sound military defeat with the intent of communicating an important emotive dimension. But now this essay on royal-family equivalency permits us to go further. We can now add that war hyperbole in the biblical texts also reflected the collective interplay within ancient societal structure between the king and his people. In short, total-kill hyperbole made good cultural sense in the world of the biblical authors.

Greater accountability of kings/leaders. The cost of losing military battles affected the entire people group. Every stratum of society was touched in painful ways. However, the greatest and often most severe impact of war befell the king, his family, key leaders, and captured soldiers (see chapter thirteen). If we are reading the Bible through the traditional (literal) total-kill lens, we can easily think that everyone—the entire population—died in these battles. In other words, women, children, and the elderly perished by the sword just as much as the king and his army. But, as seen in this essay, killing in biblical warfare, as in most ANE battles, was strategically directed toward

the king, other key leaders, and his army. This emphasis on strategic killing was good in the sense that it placed greater accountability on those with greater decision-making influence about going to war.

This greater-accountability point, however, applies to Israel *and* to the war practices of the ancient world around it. Broadly shared, it thus functions as a baseline ethical observation. We are not singling out biblical ethics as better developed on this limited basis. Where the biblical war ethic shines exceedingly bright involves how these more accountable persons—the king, his family, and captured soldiers—were killed. The restraint of the biblical war ethic is nothing short of incredible when viewed alongside the practices of its day. Other ANE nations saved for these targeted leaders a catalogue of utterly painful and shameful means of death—torturous methods of death that give us nightmares by simply reading about them. See more on this in chapter thirteen.

Ethical implications from previous hyperbole discussion. We ended chapter nine by outlining several ethical implications that flowed out of the hyperbole thesis: (1) reduced severity, (2) no genocide, (3) baseline ethical evaluations that allow us to see redemptive elements more clearly, and (4) better ethical answers compared with traditional ones. The evidence from royal-family equivalency further strengthens each of these important ethical implications.

EXCURSUS: PRIESTLY EQUIVALENCY

Israel's use of royal-kill equivalency in Canaanite warfare finds a counterpart in priestly-kill equivalency within reverse holy war. In both cases the killing of a smaller group of more responsible persons represents a punitive action toward the whole people group. The destruction of an entire people group is accomplished through a smaller, representative action.

Priestly-kill equivalency is anticipated in the way in which priests and Levites represented the whole of Israel in their service to Yahweh. The Pentateuch makes it clear that the Levites and priests represent the people of Israel before Yahweh. In response to the Levites' zeal for Yahweh, they are set apart for special religious duties on Israel's behalf (Ex 32:29) and serve in place of Israel's firstborn before Yahweh (Num 3:12, 41, 45-46; 8:12, 18-19;

16:9; 18:6; Deut 10:8-9). Similarly, the high priest represents all Israel on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16).

In the case of reverse holy war (see appendix C), Yahweh engages in military actions against his people. If Israel worshiped other gods, they could expect the complete ruin of their nation. The covenant curses make clear that infidelity will result in the destruction of Israel (Deut 28:20, 21, 24, 45, 48, 51, 61, 63). Numerous other passages specify that worshiping other gods will result in total kill for the entire nation (see also Lev 26:25, 28-31; Deut 4:23-26; 30:15-18):

If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that *you will surely be destroyed*. Like the nations the LORD destroyed before you, *so you will be destroyed* for not obeying the LORD your God. (Deut 8:19-20)

Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them. Then the LORD's anger will burn against you, and he will shut up the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and *you will soon perish from the good land* the LORD is giving you. (Deut 11:16-17)

But just as all the good things the LORD your God has promised you have come to you, so he will bring on you all the evil things he has threatened, until the LORD your God has *destroyed you from this good land* he has given you. If you violate the covenant of the LORD your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, the LORD's anger will burn against you, and *you will quickly perish from the good land* he has given you. (Josh 23:15-16)

In each of these examples, Yahweh is addressing the nation as a whole. All of the people of Israel are threatened with destruction if they engage in idolatry or the worship of other gods. However, when we see instances of God's actual judgment for idolatry during the period of the monarchy, the entire nation is not destroyed. Instead, kings are sometimes killed, and particularly during instances of profound idolatry, the priests are killed, but not the entire population. The killing of the priests (those more responsible/accountable) functions as a representative action against the whole people.

While rooting out rampant Baalism introduced by Ahab, Jehu kills Ahab's family, his advisers, and his priests as well (2 Kings 10:11, 19, 25). The people

themselves are not destroyed. When stamping out the Baalism introduced into Judah by Ahab's daughter Athaliah, only Athaliah and the leading priest of Baal are killed (2 Kings 11:18). Josiah tears down the idols of his predecessors and scatters their broken pieces on the graves of those who sacrificed to them. He then burns the bones of the priests on the altars that the people used for their idolatrous worship (2 Chron 34:4-5), thereby linking the people with their idolatrous priests. Yet during these religious purges, the only ones killed are the idolatrous priests of the high places (2 Kings 23:20; 2 Chron 34:5)—the nation itself is not put to death. The idolatrous priest of Bethel, Amaziah, is promised exile and death (Amos 7:17), while the people are threatened with exile (not total kill). More pointedly, Yahweh threatens to destroy the city of Jerusalem just as Samaria was destroyed (2 Kings 21:13). Yet at the point when the ruin of Jerusalem is finally enacted by King Nebuchadnezzar, only the king's family and his officials, as well as the key priests, are executed (2 Kings 25:18-21; see Jer 52:10-11, 24-25); the people are taken into exile.

In sum, Israel was threatened with complete destruction should it violate its covenant with Yahweh, particularly if it engaged in the idolatrous worship of other gods. Given the way in which the Levites and priests could represent the people before Yahweh, when it came to the enactment of judgment on the nation, the execution of the priests (and sometimes other key leaders) could stand in place of the destruction of the entire people. The death of the priests, the prime functionaries of illegitimate worship, could thereby serve as another way to express the total kill of the entire people.

CONCLUSION

The focus on royal-family equivalency in this essay shows that the defeat, capture, and/or death of a king could function as if the entire nation had been destroyed. In support, we examined intertwined lines of evidence that tied the king to his people and saw that the household was the fundamental and primary marker of identity in ancient Israel. The identity of individuals within a household (*bêt 'āb*) was tied to and represented by the head of that household, the father. Given the importance of the household in Israel's social structure, it is not surprising that Israel's entire social matrix was conceived of as a set of nested households. Kingship grew up from and was

deeply embedded in this household social structure. The king's rule and role was comparable to that of a father's leadership of his household, where he was viewed as representing his people to those inside and outside his national household.

Within this framework the capture and death of a king (and/or the extensions of his household) could be understood as if his entire nation had been defeated and destroyed. This provides a third way in which Israel could (and did) express the total defeat of the Canaanites (and others), along with descriptions of total-kill warfare (expressed through hyperbole) and of driving Canaanites out of the land.

We concluded our observations about royal-kill equivalency by reflecting on its implications for understanding Israel's warfare practices. Royal-kill equivalency further supports the hyperbole thesis but also helps to show *why* the (hyperbolic) biblical total-kill statements made sense in ancient Israel's cultural context. The representative nature of kingship meant that there was greater accountability for kings. Decisions to go to war placed the king at the forefront of the enemy's focus and energies in battle. But it also meant that the focus on killing a representative target group for the entire nation often resulted in horrific actions against those people (the king, his family and officials, and captured soldiers). Understanding royal-kill equivalency helps solidify the hyperbole thesis, but it also foreshadows one of the most redemptive elements of Israel's war actions, namely, how Israel treated these targeted war captives when compared with the ANE nations around them (chapter thirteen).

Appendix B

INSIDER-OUTSIDER REVERSALS

SO FAR THREE LINES OF EVIDENCE have supported the conclusion that Israel did not commit an ancient form of genocide in its battles with the Canaanites. First, the biblical authors used heightened or emotive (hyperbolic) language to describe their battles with the inhabitants of the Promised Land. This hyperbolic language indicates decisive defeat rather than complete annihilation of an enemy population (chapters eight through eleven). Second, as an alternative to decisively defeating Canaanites in battle, Israel could drive them from the land (chapter twelve). Third, Israel could also describe a decisive defeat by narrating the overthrow and death of the enemy king and extensions of his persona (his leaders and army) without any literal total kill of the general Canaanite population (appendix A).

This essay offers a fourth line of evidence that the biblical authors do not describe a Canaanite genocide in their accounts of Israel's battles. This becomes clear from seeing that Israel's opponents in the land of Canaan are not a monolithic ethnic group but a collection of different peoples. Only groups living on what Israel understood to be Yahweh's *terra sancta*, sacred-space land, are directly engaged in warfare by Joshua and the Israelites. Moreover, many Canaanite "outsiders" become Israelite "insiders," who are integrated to varying degrees into ancient Israelite society. The widespread integration of Canaanites into the people of Israel argues against an ethnically focused Canaanite genocide. Conversely, Israelite insiders can become outsiders, liable to the same fate as the Canaanites. If the Israelites could be treated in the same manner as the Canaanites, this significantly increases the likelihood that Israel's actions against the inhabitants of the land were not ethnically driven.

In sum, these converging lines of argument show that Israel's battles against the Canaanites were not an attempt to exterminate or eradicate the Canaanites. Rather, as we have argued earlier, Israel's efforts centered on fostering the exclusive worship of Yahweh in his sacred space, new Eden land.

WHO IS A CANAANITE?

One challenge in understanding Israel's actions involves the term *Canaanite*. The biblical authors could use the word in four ways: (1) to refer to people living in the land of Canaan (*geographical focus*), (2) as a designation for a specific ethnic group known as the Canaanites (*ethnic focus*), (3) for a collection of interconnected yet distinct ethnic groups called Canaanites (*collective focus*), and (4) to refer to the offspring of Noah's grandson Canaan (*genealogical focus*). Not all four of these groups are targeted in Israel's battles in the book of Joshua. This provides one line of evidence showing that Israel's battles against the Canaanites were not ethnically driven but instead driven by geography. Let's look at the evidence for these four ways of describing a Canaanite.

The Amarna Letters, between the Egyptian court and various kings in the land of Canaan, show that ancient authors could use the term *Canaanite* to describe people who lived within the geographical region known as the land of Canaan (*geographical focus*). Similarly, the Bible refers to Canaan as a well-known geographical area—the land of Canaan (Gen 12:5; 46:31; Josh 14:1).¹ A Canaanite was thus any inhabitant of the geographical region known as the land of Canaan—no ethnic focus is necessitated by this designation.

The term *Canaanite* could also describe a member of a specific ethnic group who lived in the land of Canaan (*ethnic focus*). For example, in Exodus 13:5, Moses relays Yahweh's intent to bring the Israelites out of Egypt and into the land he promised their ancestors, "The land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Hivites and Jebusites." Here the Canaanites are one of several groups, indicating that they were viewed as a distinct people group—a subset—within the larger population of Canaan.

The word *Canaanite* could be used in a third way, as an umbrella term for the diverse people groups that lived in the land of Canaan (*collective focus*). While Exodus 13:5 mentions Canaanites as one among several distinct

¹A. F. Rainey, "Who Is a Canaanite? A Review of the Textual Evidence," *BASOR* 304 (1996): 1-15.

groups, a few verses later that entire collection of people groups is said to be living in “the land of the Canaanites” (Ex 13:11). In this case, the word *Canaanites* refers to the collective ethnic groups living in the land that Yahweh promised to the patriarchs. The word *Canaanite* is used in the same way with reference to the diverse groups spread across the land of Canaan in Judges 1:1, “Who of us is to go up first to fight against the Canaanites?” Later verses show that Israel’s Canaanite opponents included a variety of people groups.²

The difficulty of identifying Israel’s opponents (collective focus) is further exacerbated by the multitude of ways in which the subgroups that comprise “the Canaanites” could be identified by the biblical authors. A quick glance at table A.1 shows eight variations for designating Canaanite groups. Since the exact makeup of “the Canaanites” was rather fluid, the Canaanites engaged

Table A.1.

Genesis 10:15-19; 1 Chronicles 1:8	Genesis 15:19-21	Exodus 3:8, 17; 23:23; 33:2; 34:11	Exodus 13:5	Exodus 23:28	Deuteronomy 7:1; Joshua 3:10; 24:11	Deuteronomy 20:17; Joshua 12:8; Judges 3:1	Nehemiah 9:8
Canaan	Kenites	Canaanites	Canaanites	Canaanites	Hittites	Hittites	Canaanites
Sidon (Phoenicians)	Kenizzites	Hittites	Hittites	Hivites	Girgashites	Amorites	Hittites
Hittites	Kadmonites	Amorites	Amorites	Hittites	Amorites	Canaanites	Amorites
Jebusites	Hittites	Perizzites	Hivites		Canaanites	Perizzites	Perizzites
Amorites	Perizzites	Hivites	Jebusites		Perizzites	Hivites	Jebusites
Girgashites	Rephaites	Jebusites			Hivites	Jebusites	Girgashites
Hivites	Amorites				Jebusites		
Sinites	Canaanites						
Arkites	Girgashites						
Arvadites	Jebusites						
Zemarites							
Hamathites							

²Compare Judg 1:1, where the Israelites ask who should lead their campaign against the Canaanites, with Judg 1:4-5, where Judah and Simeon defeat the Canaanites and Perizzites. Judges 1:16 indicates that another Canaanite group, the Kenites (see Gen 15:19) settled among the Israelites, while Judg 1:21 notes the failure of Benjamin to conquer the Jebusites (see Ex 13:5), and Judg 1:34-36 indicates that the Amorites (see Ex 33:2) proved difficult to conquer. Each of these people groups is listed separately as inhabitants of the land, but they can all also be called Canaanites, as in Judg 1:1.

by Israel in battle were not a tightly defined ethnic group. They are better understood as a loose collection of ethnic/people groups who inhabited territory known as the land of Canaan.

The fourth and broadest understanding of a Canaanite (genealogical focus)—as a descendant of Canaan, Noah’s grandson—is found in Genesis 10:15-20. There the offspring of Canaan include the Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites, as well as Sidonians (the Phoenicians), the Arvadites, and the Hamathites.³ Genesis 10:18 says that the Canaanite clans were scattered. In this fourth understanding of the term *Canaanite*, not all the Canaanites lived in the geographical area known as Canaan. These four ways of referring to Israel’s opponents have important implications for understanding the nature of Israel’s battles under Joshua and the judges (to be explored below).

CANAANITE OUTSIDERS BECOMING INSIDERS

A second line of evidence indicates that Israel’s battles against the Canaanites were not ethnically motivated. While Israel is instructed to engage in total-kill warfare against those living in the land of Canaan, many Canaanites are instead assimilated into Israel. Some Canaanites are described as being enfolded into Israel *before* the battles of Joshua, others became insiders *during* the era of Joshua and the judges, while still others remain autonomous *until the period of the monarchy*, when they are eventually incorporated into the people of Israel.

Several Canaanites are enfolded into the people of Israel even before they fight a battle in the Promised Land. Exodus 12:38 says that a group from various nations (a “mixed multitude”), which included at least some Canaanites, comes up out of Egypt with Israel as they journey to the land of Canaan. We know this group includes Canaanites because, in addition to Moses’ Midianite (Ex 18:5) and Cushite (Num 15:1) wives, Numbers 32:12 reveals that the entire wilderness generation will pass away “except Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite.” Caleb is a Kenizzite, one of the Canaanite peoples (Gen 15:18-21), and yet he is folded into the people of Israel. In fact,

³The Arvadites are linked to the Phoenicians (Ezek 27:8). The Hamathites lived in the city-state of Hamath in northern Syria; see Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 226.

this Canaanite's exemplary service, along with that of Joshua, is recognized through a specific inheritance in the land (Josh 14:14).

A second group of Canaanites is assimilated into the people of Israel during the days of Joshua and the judges. Rahab is just the sort of Canaanite the total-kill commands of Deuteronomy seem to have in mind—she is a Canaanite prostitute in Jericho. Yet Rahab's protection of the two Israelite scouts, her confession of Yahweh, and her pact with the scouts (Josh 2:5-21) secure her survival and that of her entire household so that they live "among the Israelites to this day" (Josh 6:25). Rahab even holds a spot in Jesus' genealogy (Mt 1:5). Robert Ellis notes, "Rahab's story, then, announces at the beginning of the book [of Joshua] that movement is possible from the outgroup to the ingroup and that ingroup participation is fundamentally based on obedience to the hierarchical authority rather than such issues as ethnicity, geography, or even the divine election of Abraham's descendants."⁴

Similarly, though the Canaanites of Gibeon pretend to live far away when they actually live within the land, the Israelites spare them from destruction, using them as laborers in Yahweh's house (Josh 9:27). They remain in the service of the tabernacle as a liminal group until at least the time of David (2 Sam 21:1-3).⁵ Daniel Hawk points out,

The stories of Rahab and the Gibeonites make a strong case for extending Israel's internal boundaries. Although condemned by the rhetoric of Moses (Deuteronomy 9:5), the inhabitants of the land are here accorded humanity. . . . The transformation of Canaanites from others into marginal Israelites thereby issues an implicit challenge to the exclusivistic boundaries set out in Deuteronomy and validates the expansion of those boundaries.⁶

A third group of Canaanites lives autonomously until integrated during the period of the early monarchy. Several of these Canaanites even take on key leadership roles within Israel. The list of assimilated peoples is quite extensive:

⁴Robert E. Ellis, "The Theological Boundaries of Inclusion and Exclusion in the Book of Joshua," *RevExp* 95 (1998): 241.

⁵In Joshua, other Canaanite groups that lived among the Israelites because of Israel's inability to conquer or drive them out are the Geshurites and Maacathites (Josh 13:13), the Jebusites (Josh 15:63), the citizens of Gezer (Josh 16:10), and the citizens of Beth Shean, Ibleam, Dor, Endor, Taanach, Megiddo, and their surrounding villages (Josh 17:12-13).

⁶L. Daniel Hawk, "The Problem with Pagans," in *Reading Bibles, Writing Bodies: Identity and the Book*, ed. Timothy K. Beal and David M. Gunn (New York: Routledge, 1997), 161.

- ▶ The Kenites are a Canaanite people (Gen 15:19), yet they coexist with Israel in the land. Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, even strikes the decisive blow against Sisera, the Canaanite war leader from Hazor (Judg 4:17; see Judg 1:16; 5:24; 1 Sam 15:6; 27:10; 30:28; 1 Chron 2:55).
- ▶ The Hittites are among the proscribed people groups of Canaan (Gen 15:20; Deut 20:17; Josh 3:10), yet Uriah the Hittite serves as one of David's thirty elite warriors (2 Sam 23:24, 39), and Ahimelek the Hittite becomes one of David's trusted warriors (1 Sam 26:6).
- ▶ The Amorites are to be subjected to total-kill warfare (Deut 20:17), but Israel later makes peace with them (1 Sam 7:14), and David honors Joshua's pact with the Amorites from the city of Gibeon (2 Sam 21:2).
- ▶ The Jebusites hold the city of Jerusalem until the time of David (2 Sam 25:6-8 // 1 Chron 11:4-7), but even after the conquest of the city, Arunah the Jebusite can continue to farm the strategic high ground above Jerusalem until it is acquired by David (2 Sam 24:16). This suggests that the Jebusites are peacefully incorporated into Israel. The assimilation of the Jebusites even becomes a standard of comparison to mark how the Philistines will one day be integrated into the people of God (Zech 9:7).
- ▶ The city of Shechem, in the heart of Canaan, serves as the site of Joshua's covenant renewal ceremony (Josh 8:30-35) and final charge (Josh 24:1). The city is the seat of Abimelech's ill-conceived kingship (Judg 9) and Rehoboam's selected coronation site (1 Kings 12:1), yet there is no biblical evidence of the city's conquest. It seems to be incorporated into Israel without battle.
- ▶ The Hivites are another proscribed Canaanite group (Deut 7:1), but Judges 3:1 says that Yahweh leaves the Hivites to test the Israelites who have not experienced war. The inclusion of Hivite towns in David's census (2 Sam 24:7) implies the Hivites eventually become incorporated into the people of Israel.
- ▶ The Arkites in Genesis 10:17 are included among the offspring of Canaan, but Hushai the Arkite plays a vital role in David's restoration to the throne during Absalom's rebellion (2 Sam 15:32; 16:16; 17:5, 14).

Each of these examples illustrates the nonviolent incorporation of Canaanites into Israel's orbit. Some from these diverse Canaanite ethnic groups became fully assimilated insiders, while others lived in various states of integration.

ISRAELITE INSIDERS BECOMING OUTSIDERS

On the other hand, Israelite insiders are liable to be treated as if they are Canaanite outsiders when they disobey Yahweh's commands. When Achan takes several items consecrated to Yahweh from Jericho, his actions threaten both his entire family and all Israel. Achan is an Israelite insider, but his theft of the objects placed under the *hērem* results in the death of his entire family. Achan's actions mean that he and his family are treated as if they are Canaanite outsiders (Josh 7:25-26). Moreover, Israel's inability to defeat the Canaanites in the first battle of Ai is traced back to Achan, so that the entire nation has "been made liable to destruction [*hāyû ləhērem*]" (Josh 7:12). For a short while, the entire people of Israel have become outsiders, susceptible to the same kind of destruction as the Canaanites.

At one point, the Cisjordan Israelite tribes suspect the Transjordan tribes of building a forbidden altar (Josh 22). This would have constituted rebellion against Yahweh and imperiled all Israel in a manner similar to Achan's sin (Josh 22:20). Just as Achan's sin turned him and his family into outsiders, the questionable altar could transform the Transjordan tribes from insiders into outsiders. As a result, Israelites west of the Jordan gather for war against their kinfolk (Josh 22:11-12). The situation is resolved only when the Cisjordan tribes are assured that the altar is simply a memorial marker. The stories of Achan and of the questionable altar in Joshua 22 illustrate how even Israelite insiders in the book of Joshua can become outsiders, liable to destruction.

The period of the judges also illustrates a pattern of rebellion against Yahweh as Israelite insiders engage in increasingly Canaanite-like patterns of behavior.⁷ The downward spirals of rebellion, foreign oppression, a cry to Yahweh, and finally deliverance under the leadership of a judge (Judg 2:11-19) exemplify how Israelite insiders can quickly become outsiders. The process

⁷Daniel I. Block, "The Period of the Judges: Religious Disintegration Under Tribal Rule," in *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration*, ed. Avraham Gileadi (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 39-57.

of “Canaanization” progressed to the point that, by the end of the book of Judges, the Israelites treat one of their own tribes as they would Canaanite outsiders (Judg 20:18; see Judg 1:1). The Israelites decimate the tribe of Benjamin in an action reminiscent of the second battle against the Canaanite town of Ai (Judg 20:33-43; see Josh 8:3-22). In a topsy-turvy world where all do what is right in their own eyes, Israel further exacerbates the devastation of the tribe of Benjamin through a series of ad hoc “solutions.” In the mad scramble to find brides for the remaining Benjaminites, the town of Jabesh Gilead becomes the ultimate outsider town. The Israelites enact the total kill (*hērem*) reserved for Canaanite towns against this city for its failure to attend a tribal assembly (Judg 21:11). Yet again, insiders become outsiders, particularly when Israel abandons Yahweh’s statutes.

ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

The determination of who is a Canaanite and insider/outsider considerations hold ethical implications for our assessment of Israel’s Canaanite battles. The first implication is that *Israelite warfare should not be viewed as ancient-world genocide*. Both the ethnicity factor and the hyperbole factor should dissuade us from using such ill-informed and ill-fitting labels. With four ways of identifying a Canaanite in the Old Testament, Israel does *not* battle against the most comprehensive (genealogical focus) level of Canaanite opponents. Rather, they fight with various people groups within the Promised Land. One could say theirs are far more land-focused than people-focused battles. The Canaanites who live *outside the land* (such as the Arvadites and the Hamathites) are *not* engaged in Israel’s conquest battles. Thus, ancient Israel’s wars in the Promised Land are based in large part on geographical, not ethnic, considerations. We can further support this geographical (rather than ethnic) focus of Israel’s battles by noting that one of Israel’s key opponents *in the land*—the Philistines—are themselves *not* Canaanite in origin (Gen 10:14).⁸ Israel continues to battle the Philistines long into the days of David until there is sufficient rest for building Yahweh’s temple (2 Sam 7:1; 8:1). Thus, Israel’s battles have far more to do with geography than ethnicity.

⁸We could include other non-Canaanite groups such as the Amalekites and Midianites to make the same point about Israel’s war enemies within the land.

Second, the incorporation of Canaanite individuals and groups into the people of Israel quietly *confirms the hyperbole thesis*. That significant numbers of Canaanites are not annihilated but instead assimilated into the people of Israel provides additional support for the use of hyperbole in the total-kill passages of Deuteronomy and Joshua.

Third, that Israelite insiders, and even the entire nation, could be viewed as Canaanite outsiders emphasizes *Yahweh's evenhanded treatment of all parties* (regardless of ethnicity). Neither Yahweh nor the nation of Israel is driven by xenophobic zeal. The balanced treatment of Israel by Yahweh, devoid of ethnic bias, removes the basis for a *carte blanche* declaration of genocidal intent. We will develop this insight further in appendix C.

CONCLUSION

Israel's battles in the book of Joshua are not fought with the genocidal intent of wiping a specific ethnic group from Planet Earth. Rather, they are fought against eight or nine different ethnic groups (not one) and with a limited geographical focus (not outside a specified region). Israel fights against the *various ethnic groups living within the geographical region* of the Promised Land. Furthermore, many ethnic Canaanite outsiders are incorporated into the people of Israel, some of them even occupying leadership positions. Meanwhile, some ethnic Hebrew insiders become Canaanite outsiders when they disobey Yahweh. Even so, this essay adds helpful support for the hyperbole thesis, showing how even with the use of total-kill language, many Canaanites are enfolded into Israel.

In short, geography (not ethnography) is paramount. Israel does not pursue and kill every ethnic Canaanite group *outside the Promised Land*, but only those peoples of various ethnicities occupying a limited geographical region. Conversely, Israel also fights non-Canaanite groups (e.g., Philistines) *within the Promised Land*. This essay advances the hyperbole thesis by showing how many ethnic Canaanites are enfolded into Israel. Contemporary labeling of Yahweh as a "genocidal god" by new atheists misrepresents the hyperbolic nature of the biblical language (widely shared in the ANE world) and the geographic (not ethnic) nature of the battles.

Appendix C

REVERSE HOLY WAR (AGAINST ISRAEL) WAS WORSE

THIS ESSAY INVESTIGATES REVERSE HOLY WAR (herein RHW), that is, holy war in which Yahweh fights against his own Israelite people. It contributes to understanding biblical holy war by showing that the Canaanites were not uniquely singled out for divine punishment. The same kind of total war that Israel waged against the Canaanites was later waged against the Israelites. In fact, what happened to Israel was in some ways far worse than what Israel did to the Canaanites.¹ RHW raises its own set of ethical issues (Yahweh uses Assyria and Babylon to perform horrific war acts against Israel), requiring an understanding of war rhetoric and the ethics of truncated causation. Accordingly, this appendix revolves around these three points: (1) RHW was the *same* kind of total war, (2) RHW was in some ways *far worse*, and (3) RHW used *truncated causation* in its rhetoric and ethics. This essay also further confirms the hyperbole thesis developed in chapters eight through twelve (see also appendixes A and B), as the biblical authors portray Yahweh's RHW actions with the same kind of hyperbolic language (total-kill rhetoric does *not* mean everyone dies) that depicts Israel's wars against the Canaanites.

REVERSE HOLY WAR WAS THE SAME KIND OF TOTAL WAR

Some remarkable similarities surface when comparing what *Yahweh does to the Canaanites* by the hand of Israel with what *Yahweh does to Israel* by the

¹In saying this, we do not intend to diminish the treatment of one group by another. We know that it is difficult to quantify pain and suffering, especially in the case of war. Moreover, the biblical descriptions of Israel's battles against the Canaanites are not a complete diary of all that happened. However, there are elements in the biblical descriptions of how Israel wages war that we can compare with the accounts of the way Israel is treated by its enemies.

hand of Assyria and Babylon (plus other minor RHW scenarios). These similarities show that Yahweh exercises judgment in an evenhanded manner, not singling out one group of people (the Canaanites) in his global war judgments. As threats, charges, and consequences demonstrate, Yahweh does not play favorites in administering war justice.

Israel under the same threat. Israel's selection as Yahweh's unique covenant people does not exempt them from the same potential fate as the Canaanites. In fact, their covenantal relationship places a greater responsibility on the Israelites to obey Yahweh, for just as Yahweh fought for Israel at the crossing of the Red Sea and at Jericho, he will also fight against them when they violate their covenant relationship. This becomes clear when shortly after Israel ratifies its covenant with Yahweh, they construct an idolatrous golden calf (Ex 32), tantamount to committing adultery on their honeymoon night!² Because of this flagrant transgression, Yahweh is ready to wipe out the Israelites and begin again with Moses (Ex 32:10; Deut 9:8, 14). This immediate threat of destruction gives significantly *less* leeway to Israel than the Canaanites are given when Abram is told his descendants will not inherit the land of Canaan until generations later, because "the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure" (Gen 15:16).

The curses of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 warn Israel that covenant violations will result in their destruction and their expulsion from the land. Yahweh says, "I myself will lay waste the land, so that your enemies who live there will be appalled. I will scatter you among the nations and will draw out my sword and pursue you. Your land will be laid waste, and your cities will lie in ruins" (Lev 26:32-33; see Deut. 28:20, 36, 45).³ Their adoption of Canaanite-like practices will result in Israelite expulsion, just as it did for the Canaanites: "If you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you" (Lev 18:28). These Pentateuchal warnings of destruction and expulsion are echoed in the prophetic corpus: "Take warning, Jerusalem, or I will turn away from you and make your land desolate so no one can live in it" (Jer 6:8); "I will pour out my wrath on you and breathe out

²Walter Moberly, "Exodus, Book of," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer et al. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 214.

³Deuteronomy 28 emphasizes Israel's doom using the formula "until you are destroyed" and its variants nine times (Deut 28:20, 21, 22, 24, 45, 48, 51 [2×], 61).

my fiery anger against you; I will deliver you into the hands of brutal men, men skilled in destruction. You will be fuel for the fire, your blood will be shed in your land, you will be remembered no more; for I the LORD have spoken” (Ezek 21:31-32). Israel is never given a free pass. The danger of destruction by war hangs over their heads.

Israel charged with the same transgressions. In addition to the general charges of wrongdoing leveled against the Canaanites, the biblical authors also level numerous specific charges against the Canaanites. Despite receiving repeated Pentateuchal and prophetic warnings, the Israelites are guilty of the same types of infractions as the Canaanites (see table A.2).

Table A.2.

Charge	Canaanite Culpability	Israelite Transgressions
Worshipping other gods	Ex 23:24, 33; 34:14-15; Deut 6:14; 7:16; 12:2, 30-31; 13:6-8; 20:18; Josh 24:14-15; Judg 2:12; 6:10; 1 Chron 5:25	Judg 2:12; 6:10; 10:6; 1 Sam 8:8; 1 Kings 11:4; 2 Kings 17:7; 22:17; 1 Chron 5:25; Jer 1:16; 7:9; Hos 3:1
Worship at illegitimate altars	Ex 34:13; Deut 7:5; 12:3; Judg 2:2; 2 Kings 21:42; 2 Chron 33:4	Judg 6:25; 1 Kings 12:32-33; 16:32; 2 Kings 16:10-15; 21:3; 23:12; 2 Chron 14:3, 5; Jer 11:13; Ezek 6:4; Amos 3:14
Worship at sacred stones	Ex 34:13; 23:24; Deut 7:5; 12:3; 1 Kings 14:23; 2 Kings 17:10	1 Kings 14:23; 2 Kings 17:10; 23:14; 2 Chron 14:3; 31:1; Hos 10:1-2; Mic 5:3
Worship of idols	Ex 34:17; Num 33:52; Deut 7:5, 25; 12:3; 1 Kings 21:26; 2 Kings 17:15, 16; 21:11; Ps 106:36	1 Kings 14:9; 15:12; 2 Kings 17:12, 15-16; 21:11; 22:17; 23:24; Is 2:20; 31:7; Jer 7:30; 8:19; Ezek 6:13; Hos 13:2; Mic 5:13
Worship at illegitimate high places	Num 33:52; Deut 12:2; 1 Kings 14:23; 2 Kings 17:11; 2 Chron 28:4; 33:3	1 Kings 13:32-33; 22:43; 2 Kings 17:9, 32; 23:5; Jer 17:2-3; Ezek 6:3, 6; Hos 10:8
Canaanite daughters will lead Israelites astray	Gen 24:3-4, 37-38; 27:46; 28:1-2, 7-9; Ex 34:16; Deut 7:4; Judg 3:6; 1 Kings 11:1-2; Ezra 9:1-2	Judg 3:6; 1 Kings 11:1-2; Ezra 9:1-2
Worship of Baals and Asherah/Ashtoreth	Judg 2:13; 3:7; 2 Kings 17:16; 21:3, 7; 2 Chron 33:3	Judg 2:13; 3:7; 10:7; 1 Sam 7:3-4; 12:10; 1 Kings 11:5; 2 Kings 17:16; 21:3, 7; 2 Chron 33:3; 34:4
Incest	Lev 18:3-30; 20:1-27; see also Gen 9:22	2 Sam 13:11-14; Ezek 22:10-11
Bestiality	Lev 18:3-30 (esp. Lev 18:23); Lev 20:1-27 (esp. Lev 20:15-16)	
Passing children through the fire (child sacrifice)	Deut 12:31; 18:10; 2 Chron 28:3	2 Kings 17:31; Jer 7:31; 19:5; Ezek 16:20-21; 20:31
Cultic prostitution	1 Kings 14:24	1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7; Hos 4:14
Divination, witchcraft, sorcery, omen reading	Lev 20:27; Deut 18:10-14; 2 Kings 17:8, 17; 21:2, 6; 2 Chron 33:2, 6	1 Sam 28:7; 2 Kings 17:8, 17; 21:2, 6; Is 2:6; Jer 27:9; 2 Chron 33:2, 6
Swearing by the name of foreign gods	Josh 23:7	Ps 16:4
Worshipping the stars	2 Kings 21:3; 2 Chron 33:3	2 Kings 17:16; 21:3, 5; Amos 5:26

Israel suffers the same war consequences. Considering the way Israel's guilt mirrors that of the Canaanites, we should expect, in the interest of fairness, that Israel will suffer the same fate as the Canaanites. In fact, the Old Testament uses the same terminology to describe what will (and does) happen to the Israelites. The now-familiar war language includes the same range of military actions: totally destroy, wipe out, drive out, take over their land, and show no mercy.

Totally destroy them. Deuteronomy 7:2; 20:17 call for Israel to engage in total-kill (*hērem*) warfare against the Canaanites, just as it had against the Amorite kings on the eastern banks of the Jordan River (Deut 2:34; 3:6). The book of Joshua recounts how the Israelites do exactly as instructed on the western banks of the Jordan River (Josh 6:21; 8:26; 10:28, 35, 37, 39, 40; 11:11, 12, 21).

Total-kill warfare is soon directed against the Israelites, however. In Joshua 7, Israel itself becomes the object of Yahweh's *hērem* warfare: "That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies; they turn their backs and run because they have been made liable to destruction [*hērem*]" (Josh 7:12).⁴ In Jeremiah's prophecy of the coming Babylonian exile, Yahweh says that in response to Israel's repeated covenant violations, the Babylonians will engage in *hērem* warfare against the Israelites: "I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon,' declares the LORD, 'and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy [*hāram*—Hiphil] them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin'" (Jer 25:9).

Yahweh uses the same type of total-kill warfare against his own people that he did against the Canaanites.⁵ In keeping with the hyperbole hypothesis, *hērem* warfare against Israel results in utter defeat by Nebuchadnezzar, but not the death of all the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Wipe them out. In addition to the use of *hērem* warfare against the Canaanites, the book of Deuteronomy uses other similar language of destruction to describe what Israel must do to the Canaanites. The prophets,

⁴Note here, in line with the hyperbole hypothesis, Israel is soundly and decisively defeated by the people of Ai (Josh 7:4-5), but only thirty-six of the three thousand men who attack Ai are actually killed. Similarly, in the mayhem at the end of the book of Judges, the Israelites engage in *hērem* warfare against the city of Jabesh Gilead (Judg 21:10-11) but spare four hundred virgins.

⁵Again, it is important to note that, in line with the hyperbole hypothesis, the use of *hērem* warfare against Israel results in their complete and total defeat at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, but it does *not* result in the death of every last inhabitant of Jerusalem.

however, make it clear that Israel will not be treated any differently when they violate the covenant (see table A.3).

Table A.3.

The Destruction of the Canaanites	The Destruction of the Israelites
Israel will consume (<i>'ākal</i>) her enemies: Deut 7:16	Israel is consumed (<i>'ākal</i>) by her enemy: Is 1:19-20; Jer 2:30; 8:16; 10:25; 12:12; 30:16; Ezek 7:15; Hab 1:8
Even the survivors will perish (<i>'ābad</i>): Deut 7:20; see also Deut 8:20	Israel will perish (<i>'ābad</i>): Deut 8:19, 20; Josh 7:7; 23:13, 16; 2 Kings 24:2; Is 27:13; Jer 9:11; 27:10, 15; Mic 7:1
Israel will slowly make an end (<i>kālā</i> —Piel) of the Canaanites: Deut 7:22	Israel's enemies will make an end (<i>kālā</i> —Piel) of her: Josh 24:20; Jer 5:3; 9:16; 10:25; 10:14; Lam 2:22; Ezek 20:13; 43:8
Israel will destroy (<i>šamad</i>) the Canaanites: Deut 7:23, 24; see also Deut 9:3; 31:3; Josh 9:24; 24:10; 1 Chron 5:25	The enemies of Israel will destroy (<i>šamad</i>) her: Deut 4:26; 7:4; Josh 23:15; Amos 9:8; Mic 5:14
God will cut off (<i>kārat</i>) the Canaanites: Deut 9:3; see also Deut 19:1	Israel's enemies will cut (<i>kārat</i>) her off: Jer 44:11; Ezek 14:8, 13-21; 17:17; 21:3-4

Yahweh calls for exactly the kind of war destruction on his own people that he did for the Canaanites. Once again, Yahweh has no favorites.

Drive them out. While the total-kill language in the Pentateuch and Joshua (understandably) catches the attention of modern readers today, driving the Canaanites out of the land is another way (see chapters three and twelve) by which the Israelites will come to possess the land. For example, Exodus 23 makes no mention of total-kill warfare, but Yahweh instead says, “I will establish your borders from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, and from the desert to the Euphrates River. I will give into your hands the people who live in the land, and you will drive them out [*gāraš*] before you” (Ex 23:31).⁶

When we look at what Yahweh will do in response to Israel's repeated covenant violations, we find the same type of drive-out language. Israel's king Jehoshaphat complains to God that the Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites will soon drive (*gāraš*) God's people from the land of their inheritance (2 Chron 20:11; see Hos 9:15). Rezin king of Aram similarly clears out (*nāšal*—Piel) the Judahites from the city of Elath (2 Kings 16:6).

Take them over. The Assyrian army defeated the ten northern tribes of Israel in 721 BC. After deporting and resettling the Israelite population en

⁶See other passages noting the driving out (*gāraš*) of the Canaanites: Ex 23:28, 29, 30, 31; 33:2; 34:11; Deut 7:1, 22; Judg 6:9; Ps 78:55; 80:8.

masse elsewhere within the empire, the Assyrians “brought people from Babylon, Kuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim and settled them in the towns of Samaria to replace the Israelites. They took over [*yāraš*—Qal] Samaria and lived in its towns” (2 Kings 17:24; for Yahweh’s dispossession of the Israelites see Jer 49:1-2; Ezek 7:24; Hab 1:6). In this case, turnabout is fair play, for this is the same thing that the Israelites did to the Canaanites as they went into the land to “dispossess [*yāraš*—Qal] nations greater and stronger than you, with large cities that have walls up to the sky” (Deut 9:1; see Gen 22:17; Lev 20:24; Num 33:53; Deut 1:21; 11:23, 31; 17:14; 19:1; Josh 1:11; 12:1).

Show them no mercy. Israel is to engage in total-kill warfare against the Canaanites and do so showing “no mercy” (*lo’ ḥānan*) to them (Deut 7:2). Likewise, the covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28:49-50 indicate that Israel should expect no mercy when they violate Yahweh’s covenant. In looking at the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem, Lamentations grieves that “the priests are shown no honor, the elders no favor” (*lo’ ḥānan*; Lam 4:16). Even those most typically shown honor receive no compassion in the aftermath of Jerusalem’s destruction. Jeremiah uses similar (though not identical) terminology to describe the doom of Judah and Jerusalem. The Babylonians will come at the Judahites “armed with bow and spear; they are cruel and show no mercy” (*rāham*; Jer 6:23). Before giving Jerusalem to the Babylonians, Yahweh says to the Jerusalemites, “I myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and a mighty arm in furious anger and in great wrath” by sending a deadly plague to strike down both people and animals. But that is only the beginning. Yahweh will then “give Zedekiah king of Judah, his officials and the people in this city who survive the plague, sword and famine, into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and to their enemies who want to kill them. He will put them to the sword; he will show them no mercy [*hūs*] or pity [*hāmal*] or compassion [*rāham*]” (Jer 21:5, 7).

Idolatry, violence, and injustice are particularly flagrant covenant violations (Ezek 8:17; 9:9). In response, Yahweh says that he will judge Jerusalem, sending men throughout the city, each with a weapon in hand, as he says, “I will not look on them with pity [*hūs*] or spare [*hāmal*] them, but I will bring down on their own heads what they have done” (Ezek 9:10). When Yahweh’s people violate their covenant relationship, they receive the same kind of

treatment as the Canaanites—they are rebellious vassals who have brazenly reneged on their covenant obligations with an ANE king.⁷

As we can see, the Old Testament uses the same total-destruction language for the Israelites as for the Canaanites. Like the Canaanites, the Israelites are not totally wiped out. Survivors are exiled to Assyria and Babylon, while a remnant remains behind (2 Kings 24:14; 25:12; Is 10:21). As in chapters eight through twelve (see also appendixes A and B), this hyperbole finding should be expected, given the same emotive component. Moreover, even when using total-destruction language, in the next breath Yahweh says that he will leave survivors (Is 4:3; 11:16; Jer 23:1; Ezek 14:22; Amos 5:15). Hyperbolic intent in the total-kill language of Scripture and the ANE should now be obvious.

RHW AGAINST ISRAEL WAS FAR WORSE

Despite the dominant similarities between what happened to the Canaanites and what happened to the Israelites, some differences are worth noting. In our understanding, Yahweh's RHW against Israel was even more devastating than Israel's war with the Canaanites. The second part of this essay argues that *in some ways* RHW against Israel was worse.

If the same type of total-destruction language is common to the experience of both people groups, how can RHW be worse than what Israel did to the Canaanites? Let us clarify that we do not intend to minimize the gruesomeness of violence against the Canaanites (or ancient Israel for that matter). In pointing out ways in which Israel's experience of RHW was worse than what the Israelites did to the Canaanites, we are acknowledging that Yahweh does not show favoritism and that the covenant responsibilities taken on by Israel placed greater demands on them than what was expected of other nations.

So how would Israel's experience of RHW have in some ways been worse (or far worse) than what Israel inflicted on the Canaanites? In addition to

⁷For example, note the following text from Egypt (*AEL* 1:105):

God will attack the rebel for the sake of the temple,
 He will be overcome for what he has done,
 He will be sated with what he planned to gain,
 He will find no favor on the day of woe.

facing the horrors of battlefield warfare (fighting that takes place between two well-defined opposing armies), Israel also faced siege warfare, with its greater devastation across blurred battle lines, unimaginable family horrors (watching one's children die), and a host of other war atrocities, including captivity and exile.

Siege warfare: Greater devastation across blurred lines. Siege warfare was a test of will and preparation. Cities could prepare for a siege by ensuring access to water and storing food supplies and weapons. Besieging armies had to be able to wait out the inhabitants of a city. Until the enemy breached a city's walls or the siege was lifted, the citizens of a besieged city were liable to suffer food shortages (famine) and disease (plague). When access to water was cut off, food supplies exhausted, or the city walls breached, conventional hand-to-hand combat began, and still the entire population fought. When a besieged city was finally conquered, troops were often under orders to sack the city, one of the few times that military commanders would allow indiscriminate violence.⁸ Thus, "The stakes in ancient siege warfare were *higher* than in field battles."⁹ One factor that raised the stakes in siege warfare exponentially was the presence of women and children. Paul Bentley Kern writes,

Women and children were an essential part of siege warfare. Their presence threatened the notion of war as a contest between warriors, undermined the conventional standards of honor and prowess that governed ancient warfare, and paradoxically made war less restrained by creating a morally chaotic cityscape in which not only the walls collapsed but deeply rooted social and moral distinctions as well.¹⁰

The book of Joshua indicates that the Israelites lay a seven-day siege on the city of Jericho—enough time to cause at least some degree of hardship if the city lost access to its water supply and food stores. This is unlikely, as Rahab's comments to the spies imply knowledge of the coming invasion (Josh 2:9). By contrast, the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem under Nebuchadnezzar lasts eighteen months—that is an excruciating 540 days.¹¹ Jeremiah

⁸Paul Bentley Kern, *Ancient Siege Warfare* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 3.

⁹Kern, *Ancient Siege Warfare*, 3 (italics added).

¹⁰Kern, *Ancient Siege Warfare*, 4.

¹¹For a defense of an eighteen-month siege of Jerusalem see Oded Lipshitz, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem: Judah Under Babylonian Rule* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 73-75.

and Ezekiel both prophesy an impending siege, saying anyone living in Jerusalem will “die by the sword, famine or plague” (Jer 21:9; see also Jer 14:12; 21:7, 9; 24:10; 27:8, 13, 17, 18; 32:24, 36; 34:27; 38:2; 42:17, 22; 44:13; Ezek 5:12; 6:11, 12; 7:15; 12:16; 28:23) or the sword, famine, plague, and wild beasts (Ezek 5:17; see also Ezek 14:21). These experiences are also in line with the covenant curses leveled in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.¹² RHW entailed the additional terror of siege warfare with its accompanying starvation and disease, which are absent from the biblical descriptions of Joshua’s campaigns. In much greater measure, siege warfare spread the suffering across blurred lines of combatant and noncombatant.

Family horrors: Watching your children die. The biblical descriptions of RHW brought an added layer of suffering to the Israelites that was part of siege warfare: *watching one’s own children die*. Another horror followed soon after: *eating the child you watched die*. The psychological trauma for families is unimaginable. Siege warfare resulted in behavior unthinkable at any other time. The covenant curses foresee Israel engaging in actions so horrific that it can only be imagined as the last and most desperate act of someone in the end stages of a siege. In response to Israel’s rebellion, God says,

I myself will be hostile toward you and will afflict you for your sins seven times over. And I will bring the sword on you to avenge the breaking of the covenant. When you withdraw into your cities, I will send a plague among you, and you will be given into enemy hands. When I cut off your supply of bread, ten women will be able to bake your bread in one oven, and they will dole out the bread by weight. You will eat, but you will not be satisfied.

If in spite of this you still do not listen to me but continue to be hostile toward me, then in my anger I will be hostile toward you, and I myself will punish you for your sins seven times over. You will eat the flesh of your sons and the flesh of your daughters. (Lev 26:24-29)

Similarly, Deuteronomy 28 paints a graphic portrait of the desperation caused by a siege:

For a defense of a thirty-month siege see Abraham Malamat, *History of Biblical Israel: Major Problems and Minor Issues* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 324, 335, and Abraham Malamat, “The Last Kings of Judah and the Fall of Jerusalem,” *IEJ* 18, no. 3 (1968): 137-56.

¹²Sword/besieging army = Lev 26:17, 25; Deut 28:52-53; plague = Lev 26:16, 25; Deut 28:21-22, 59-61; famine = Lev 26:26; Deut 28:23-24; wild animals = Lev 26:22; Deut 28:26.

Because of the suffering your enemy will inflict on you during the siege, you will eat the fruit of the womb, the flesh of the sons and daughters the LORD your God has given you. Even the most gentle and sensitive man among you will have no compassion on his own brother or the wife he loves or his surviving children, and he will not give to one of them any of the flesh of his children that he is eating. It will be all he has left because of the suffering your enemy will inflict on you during the siege of all your cities. The most gentle and sensitive woman among you—so sensitive and gentle that she would not venture to touch the ground with the sole of her foot—will begrudge the husband she loves and her own son or daughter the afterbirth from her womb and the children she bears. For in her dire need she intends to eat them secretly because of the suffering your enemy will inflict on you during the siege of your cities. (Deut 28:53-57)

Prophetic texts that describe the period of Jerusalem's fall to the Babylonians reflect the city's imminent downfall and the severe depravations brought on by the siege of the city (Jer 32:24; 37:21; 38:2; Ezek 4:1-17; see also Lam 1:11, 20; 2:11-12; 5:4, 9). Reflecting on that period, the writer of Lamentations paints a grim picture of the siege of Jerusalem. In searching for answers to the suffering, the lamenter asks, "Should women eat their offspring, the children they have cared for?" (Lam 2:20). He goes on to say, "Those killed by the sword are better off than those who die of famine; racked with hunger, they waste away for lack of food from the field" (Lam 4:9). The next verse once again captures the grim desperation most fully: "With their own hands compassionate women have cooked their own children, who became their food when my people were destroyed" (Lam 4:10). It is hard to fathom the physical and psychological suffering that would bring people a point where they are ready to consume their own children in order to survive just a little longer. Consequently, in contrast to Israel's prolonged and profound experience of suffering because of siege warfare, the lamenter writes, "The punishment of my people is greater than that of Sodom, which was overthrown in a moment without a hand turned to help her" (Lam 4:6).

Without question, the Israelite campaigns described in the biblical book of Joshua would have inflicted some level of hardship and suffering on the Canaanites. However, the biblical descriptions of the siege of Jerusalem portrays an exponentially greater degree of psychological and physical suffering

on God's own people that, as far as we can tell from the extant evidence, was not present when Israel fought the Canaanites.

Additional war atrocities. A third and final way in which Israel's experience of RHW is worse than their battles with the Canaanites involves the additional war atrocities to which Israel is subjected. As we saw in chapter thirteen, ANE warfare was a brutal affair. Shock-and-awe tactics were often used by ANE armies during and after battle as psychological warfare designed to intimidate and humiliate their enemies. Hebrew authors describe how Israel is often the object of these tactics.

- ▶ war rape (Lam 5:11)
- ▶ bodily mutilation (Judg 16:21; 1 Sam 11:2; 2 Kings 25:7 // Jer 39:7; 52:11; Ezek 23:25)¹³
- ▶ public humiliation by shaving off body hair (Is 7:20)¹⁴
- ▶ being stripped naked (Lam 1:8; see also Ezek 16:36-39)
- ▶ killing family before their eyes (2 Kings 25:7; Jer 37:6; 52:10)
- ▶ desecrating the bones of the dead (Jer 8:1-3; Ezek 6:5; see also Jer 50:7)
- ▶ placing a hook in the nose (Chron 33:11; Ezek 19:4, 9; Amos 4:2; Hab 1:15)¹⁵
- ▶ ripping open pregnant mothers (2 Kings 8:12; Hos 13:16)

When subjected to the battle and postbattle practices of the nations, Israel describes its own experience at the hands of its enemies in some of the most gruesome and grisly terms. On the other hand, the descriptions of Israel's battles against the Canaanites do not contain these same atrocities. Israel puts its enemies to the sword but does not torture captives. Neither do Joshua's battles include descriptions of mutilation or the humiliation of

¹³E.g., gouging out of eyes, cutting off ears, hands, etc.

¹⁴The shaving in this passage is figurative but reflects real-world realities designed to produce fear in Isaiah's audience of a similar real-world experience.

¹⁵This is not a reference to a nose ring as adornment. In these postbattle contexts, the Assyrians placed hooks in a captured king's nose or lip as he was paraded before the masses as a way to publicly degrade and humiliate him, treating him as though he were merely an animal to be led around by the nose; see the examples in Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 238. Note for example how Ashurbanipal says of the king of Uate': "I put the ring to his jaw, placed a dog collar around his neck and made him guard the bar of the east gate of Nineveh" (*ANET*, 300).

enemies (see chapter thirteen for further discussion). When we compare Israel's experience of RHW with its wars against the Canaanites, the Israelites received worse than they gave.

TRUNCATED CAUSATION IN REVERSE HOLY WAR

A final matter requires pondering. In this book, we have intentionally selected two war problems—genocide and war rape—as the most difficult ethical issues within biblical holy war. We have selected these two because they are *Israel's* war actions against its enemies. Some might be inclined to add “eating one's own children” to the list of Yahweh's war crimes because Yahweh clearly brings about this horrific judgment against Israel in RHW. However, the eating of one's own children, while directed by Yahweh, is an action produced by *Assyria and Babylon's war actions* against Israel. In the latter case, we encounter a scenario where multiple layers of causation have been condensed (truncated causation) by the biblical authors to describe the unfolding of Yahweh's war actions through Assyria and Babylon. The same cannot *as easily* be said of Yahweh's war actions through Israel against the Canaanites. In the case of Canaanite war slaughter, direct communication and covenant relationship *seem* to infer a one-to-one correlation between Israel's war actions and Yahweh's war actions. Theirs were his and his were theirs. Yet here is where Christians need to do a closer reading of the biblical text and its subversive war portrait of Yahweh as an uneasy war God. There is more distance—much more holy distance—between Yahweh and Israel in warfare against the Canaanites than most readers pick up on. Truncated causation plays a role in these war actions as well. Readers need also to see God wearing his accommodating hip waders in Israel's war actions against the Canaanites. See chapter fourteen.

Most readers recognize that Yahweh is *not* guilty for the war actions of Assyria and Babylon against the Israelites. Assyrian and Babylonian armies must own the evil of their actions. God can accomplish his redemptive ends—justice and salvation (even if enacted imperfectly)—through the evil actions of any human being (remember Joseph's brothers) without becoming culpable for their evil.¹⁶ This is God wading (hip waders fully on) into the

¹⁶Imperfect justice in this fallen world is not the end. The justice/salvation story is not finished until the eschaton. See this book's conclusion.

sewer water of our fallen world. The *rhetoric* of biblical authors truncates (tightens into short form) a complex causation package that involved a much larger *reality*. For more on this topic see appendix G.

CONCLUSION

When we compare the Old Testament's depiction of holy war against the inhabitants of the land of Canaan with what Israel itself experienced at the hands of its enemies in RHW, there is a clear parallel with numerous similarities. Israel is warned by Yahweh that if it acts in the same ways that the Canaanites did, they will experience the same treatment as the Canaanites. Each aspect of warfare that Israel uses against the Canaanites is in turn used against the Israelites themselves. Yahweh's war judgment does not exclusively single out the Canaanites. He is evenhanded in his dealings with both the Canaanites and Israel.

That the same terminology describes war against the Canaanites and what happens to the Israelites in RHW furthers the hyperbole hypothesis (see chapters eight through twelve, appendixes A and B). Israel is not annihilated or obliterated in any literal sense, despite the use of total-kill terminology. This provides yet another clue for how to understand the instructions to wipe out the Canaanites and the later descriptive narratives. The purpose of the total-kill instructions is not to engender the genocide of the Canaanites as an ethnic group. Rather than annihilation, the language signals defeat with no threats remaining.

Nevertheless, Israel's experience of RHW is in some ways markedly worse than the descriptions of Israel's battles against the Canaanites. Eight or nine war atrocities seem to be part of what Israel experiences that were not part of Canaanite war suffering. The practice of extended siege warfare produced horrifying actions, typified in parental pain and suffering: watching one's child die, followed by eating that child. These components of additional terror in RHW show how Israel's covenantal responsibility brought greater war judgment than in the case of the Canaanites.

Appendix D

CORPORATE (IN)JUSTICE

The Ancient-World Context of Joshua 7

THIS APPENDIX EXPLORES THE IDEA of corporate or collective punishments. By corporate/collective punishments we mean that *the punishment for a crime falls on a larger sociological group of people than the one(s) who committed the crime*. We will argue that the collective/household punishments of the ANE world provide a window through which to look at certain war texts, especially Joshua 7, and hopefully to better understand them.¹ While *not justifying* the ethics of what happens in the biblical text, the severe punishment on Achan and his entire household is at least *culturally understandable* within an ANE world. The use of collective or entire-family punishments was a normative way of making a pronounced or severe statement, often for purposes of broader social control. This appendix provides yet another example of the culture-laden aspects of biblical justice that often have an element—in this case a significant element—of *injustice embedded within its justice*. Calling this appendix “Corporate (In)Justice” captures the fallen-world, embedded component of injustice.

COLLECTIVE PUNISHMENT IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

As strange as it seems within our contemporary Western world, collective or household punishments functioned as a dominant part of an ANE world. Instead of penalizing *only* the perpetrator of a crime, punishments for a

¹Within this book on biblical war texts the pattern of collective or entire-household punishments provides helpful insight into Josh 7:24-26 and 1 Sam 22:18-19 (see chapter nine). While beyond focused treatment by this book, the broader issue of unjust elements within collective punishments obviously affects an ethical assessment of many biblical texts: Gen 3:24-25; Ex 32:10; Num 14:12, 28-30; 32:13-15; Deut 13:12-18; 20:17; 23:3-4; 1 Sam 6:19; 2 Sam 21:1-6; 24:12-16; 1 Kings 15:29; 16:34; 21:29; 2 Kings 1:1-15; 9:26; 20:16-19; 21:9-16.

crime were often intentionally imposed on a *broader* sociological group—generally a family or household (whether literally or conceptually framed).² Frankly, from our contemporary Western vantage point this kind of ANE perspective on crime and punishment appears surreal. Such a world—one that executes entire family groups for an individual’s crime—seems so foreign and repugnant to our modern sensibilities.

Egyptian collective punishment. Collective punishment dominated the Egyptian landscape. Curse oracles by dead kings often warn not simply of destruction for any offending adult (male) but also of the destruction of his entire household. As a threat against the crime of stealing the king’s goods in the afterlife, one Pyramid Text warns of a gruesome end for the thieves: their entrails will be eaten by the birds of the sky, their heirs doomed to poverty, their houses set on fire, and their courtyards overwhelmed by flood.³ In another Coffin Text the king invokes a similar curse on the tomb-raiding offender and his offspring: “He who shall lay a finger on this pyramid . . . his case shall be heard by the Ennead and he will have nothing and no house [i.e., his family is obliterated]. He is one accursed, he is one who eats his own body.”⁴

Beyond mere threat, however, collective/household punishment was actually carried out. At the level of Egypt’s relationship with other countries (whether in parity or suzerain-vassal relationships), the idea of punishing both the rebel leader/offender *and* his children or servants was very much a part of the ancient world (see table A.4).

Even so, collective punishments filtered down to all levels of Egyptian society. Similar to the punishments imposed on rebellious leaders/vassals of other countries, local justice enacted on Egyptian citizens contained an element of collective/household punishment. The samples in table A.5 are found in Egyptian royal wisdom literature, annals, and court documents.

²For variations in the household-like configuration see appendix A as well as examples in this appendix.

³James P. Allen, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, ed. Peter Der Manuelian, SBLWAW 23 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 44: §W 165. For helpful secondary sources outlining Egyptian punishments see David Lorton, “The Treatment of Criminals in Ancient Egypt,” in *The Treatment of Criminals in the Ancient Near East*, ed. J. M. Sasson (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 2-64; Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Ancient Near Eastern Themes in Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 138-65.

⁴Raymond O. Faulkner, *Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 202 [§§1278-79]. See also Allen, *Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, 167: §P 843.

Table A.4.

Crime of Revolt [insubordinate vassal]	Punishment + Others/Family Members
A chief revolts against Pepi II	Put to death + his children are killed ^a
A rebel leader revolts against Ahmose I	Rebel leader slain + his servants killed ^b
Chief of Cush revolts [against Thutmose II]	Chief killed + all children slain (except one) ^c
Prince of Hatti revolts against Ramses II	His family taken captive and killed; prince submits ^d
Chief of the Meshwesh revolts [against Ramses III]	Chief fettered + his son, wife and family are slain before his eyes [phalli cut off, symbolic of no remaining household] ^e
The one who breaks a treaty [with Ramses II/Egypt and Hatti]	One thousand gods from each country will make his house, land, and subjects desolate ^f

^aARE 1:163 [S358].

^bARE 2:9 [S16]. It is likely that servants were killed where no children were available.

^cARE 2:49-50 [S121-22]. One child was taken prisoner for display.

^dARE 3:142 [S314].

^e"Their people and their heirs upon the earth have vanished," ARE 4:61 [S103]. For the cutting of phalli see ARE 4:21, 29 [S52, 54] and Ramses III's boast that his "seed is no longer," ARE 4:21, 52 [S39, 87]. See also the biblical account of Zedekiah, who is captured by the Babylonians; they slaughter his sons before him, place him in chains, and blind him (2 Kings 25:7).

^fARE 3:172 [S387].

Table A.5.

A Citizen's Crime (Husband/Father)	Punishment + Others/Family Members
A "hothead" mischief maker [i.e., a rebel]	Kill him + erase his name, destroy his kinsfolk ^a
Magistrate who does not confiscate property from those who steal from the temple or harm statues	Loss of position and property + children have no claim to father's property ^b
Man caught stealing an animal from the royal foundation	Death by impaling + seizure of his wife, children, and property for the foundation ^c
Officials who do not prosecute [above] crime of theft	Beating of one hundred blows; deprived of his office and becomes a cultivator + wives and children do not receive ritual burial ^d
Soldier deserts the army	All his people [family and servants] detained in prison ^e
Perjury by witness	Reduced to forced labor + confiscation of his house [family and property] ^f

^aSee William Kelley Simpson, ed., *Literature of Ancient Egypt* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 181. See also COS 1:62-66 [S25-140].

^bDavid Lorton, "The Treatment of Criminals in Ancient Egypt," in *The Treatment of Criminals in the Ancient Near East*, ed. J. M. Sasson (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 11 [KDAR, 214f.].

^cLorton, "Treatment of Criminals in Ancient Egypt," 26-27.

^dLorton, "Treatment of Criminals in Ancient Egypt," 27.

^eLorton, "Treatment of Criminals in Ancient Egypt," 37. See also AEL, 172 §8.

^fLorton, "Treatment of Criminals in Ancient Egypt," 44.

Whether suppressing the rebellion by the "house of the foreign king" or when handing out penalties to local Egyptian criminals, the above samples demonstrate that a collective or household approach to penalties was not an uncommon occurrence.

Babylonian collective punishment. Collective punishments are also found in Babylonian literature. After surfacing some examples from society (table A.6), we will look briefly at the use of collective punishment within Babylonian theology.

Table A.6.

Father/Husband's Crime	Punishment + Others/Family Members
Man steals temple goods	Death penalty + all recipients of the stolen goods are put to death [likely included family members at times] ^a
Man refuses to serve in king's army	Death penalty + family property given to informant [widow and children left destitute] ^b
Father/husband unable to repay a debt or criminal sentence requiring payment for damages	Repay part + his wife, son, or daughter is forcibly seized (as insurance) or sold into debt service ^c

^aLH ¶¶6-7. See Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, 2nd ed., SBLWAW 6 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 71-142. For a comprehensive source, see vol. 2 of *COS*. A focused investigation of ancient-world punishments has been compiled by Elisabeth Meier Tetlow, *Women, Crime, and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society*, vol. 1, *The Ancient Near East* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 1-338.

^bLH ¶26.

^cLH ¶¶114, 117.

Closely related to collective punishment was the vicarious extension of punishment to the offender's household. (1) If a man physically abused a debt slave who was another citizen's son or daughter, and that debt slave died, the man was punished vicariously through the death of his own son or daughter.⁵ (2) If a man struck a pregnant woman and she died, his own daughter was killed.⁶ (3) If a man (builder) constructed a faulty house and it collapsed, killing a son who lived there, the builder's son was killed.⁷ While vicarious punishments highlight the feature of talion (punishment mirroring the crime) and do not directly punish the offender (other than through relationship), they nonetheless illustrate an ancient world where punishment for a father/husband's wrongful actions fell on innocent family members.

Such collective justice also became incorporated into Babylonian theology. A classic part of the closing section (the epilogue) of their legal codes included the king calling for curses by the gods on those who flagrantly broke their code and particularly on citizens who rebelled.⁸ These curses called not only for bad things to befall the perpetrator, but also for a much broader collective or family punishment. The curses unashamedly invoke the gods to

⁵LH ¶¶115-16. The physically violated person is known as a "seized person" (a distrainee) who acts as insurance for the repayment of incurred damages or unpaid debts. The distrainee functions like a debt slave but with wider application.

⁶LH ¶210.

⁷LH ¶230.

⁸The earliest collective curse (criminal + family members) texts are from King Sargon of Akkad, who threatens no progeny on the offender, and from Lipit-Ishtar, who extends punishment to the offender's heirs, born or yet unborn. See Douglas Frayne, *Sargonic and Gutian Periods [2334-2113 BC]*, RIM.EP 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 27-29, no. 11.38-48, and LL ¶¶ Epilogue xxi.49-xxii.52 and LX ¶¶ Epilogue; Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, 2nd ed., SBLWAW 6 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 34.

bring about the demise and/or obliteration of the criminal's family: blotting out his name and memory from the land, burning his peoples with raging fire, and depriving the offender of any heirs or human offspring.⁹ Hammurabi's closing curse is directed toward rebellious foreign kings, their families, and their nation/household: "Curse that one, his seed [family], his land, his troops, his people and his army with a terrible curse."¹⁰ The collective or family/household focus of these curse punishments is blatantly clear and seen as the prerogative and functioning of divine retribution.

Table A.7.

Father/Husband's Crime	Punishment + Others/Family Members
Man commits treason [conspiracy to overthrow king]	Conspirators put to death + family members [seed] obliterated ^a
Man steals three hundred sheep from the crown, kills the shepherd, and is unable to pay for sheep or blood money for shepherd	Man seized + his land and family seized [either death or slavery] ^b
A man who has [seen but] not reported the theft of palace goods (gold, silver, precious stones)	Douse his head with hot oil + his sons made palace slaves ^c
Man commits a crime [unknown] and is unable to pay the whole fine of one mina	Man repays partial amount + family and other household members given to creditor as debt slaves ^d
Man required to hand over another man by a certain date	If not, he must pay the "fine of his house" [most likely his household, i.e., members of his family will be taken] ^e
Penalty clause in contract, if broken [for sale of house, land, and four slaves]	Twelvefold fine + burning firstborn son to death before god Sin and burning eldest daughter before goddess Belet-serif ^f
Penalty clause in contract, if broken [content of sale missing]	Forced to burn firstborn son in temple of Adad ^g
Cavalry officers do not report on time for urgent duty	Officers impaled + their household watches impaling; sons and daughters then put to death ^h

^aElisabeth Meier Tetlow (*Women, Crime, and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society*, vol. 1, *The Ancient Near East* [New York: Continuum, 2004], 163, 295) notes: "The official who wrote the letters urged the king . . . to obliterate their seed, which implied collective punishment of the offender and his or her innocent children." For the texts see Mikko Luukko and Freta Van Buylaere, eds., *The Political Correspondence of Esarhaddon*, SAA 16 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2002), 52-56, nos. 59-60; Frances Reynolds, *Babylonian Correspondence of Esarhaddon*, SAA 18 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2003), 83-84, no. 102.

^bRemko Jas, *Neo-Assyrian Judicial Procedures*, SAAS 5 (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Judicial Procedures, 1996), 8-11, no. 1; Theodore Kwasman and Simo Parpola, *Legal Transactions of the Royal Court of Nineveh, Part 1*, SAA 6 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2000), 212, no. 264.

^cMAPD ¶230. The text is somewhat fragmented. I have drawn on Roth's textual reconstruction: Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, 2nd ed., SBLWAW 6 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 199. This is an important example because it parallels temple theft in LH ¶¶6-7 and is two persons removed from the actual thief: (1) someone steals the goods, (2) a craftsman receives the goods, and then (3) someone sees the goods on the craftsman. One could surmise that if a case arose against (1), the collective punishment would be even more severe and certain.

^dJas, *Neo-Assyrian Judicial Procedures*, 54-55, no. 33. As noted by Tetlow (*Women, Crime and Punishment*, 160), the debt-slave status could be permanent if family members were given (as) in payment for the full value of the criminal debt.

^eJas, *Neo-Assyrian Judicial Procedures*, 77-78, no. 49.

^fKwasman and Parpola, *Royal Court of Nineveh, Part 1*, 90-92, nos. 101.r.3-7, 102.r.3-8.

^gKwasman and Parpola, *Royal Court of Nineveh, Part 1*, 229-30, no. 285.r.1-2.

^hSimo Parpola, *Correspondence of Sargon I, Part, 1 Letters from Assyria and the West*, SAA 1 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1987), 22, no. 22.

⁹LH ¶¶ Epilogue xlix 53-80; li 24-49.

¹⁰LH ¶¶ Epilogue li 70-83.

Assyrian collective punishment. Like in Egyptian and Babylonian society, the Assyrians also resorted to collective and vicarious punishments of innocent family members.

The impact of patriarchy within the ANE world meant that collective punishment generally fell along the top-down lines of the household structure. In other words, the “sins” or crimes of the father/husband affected the larger family unit, but the sins/crimes of the mother/wife generally did not. In Middle Assyrian Laws either temple theft or disgraceful speech by a wife does not require a punishment on anyone else in the household unit; she alone bore her punishment.¹¹ This delimiting of collective punishment for a wife’s crime does not amount to a protest against collective punishment methods. Rather, it simply confirms that the use of collective/household punishments generally flowed downhill *with* (not against) the slope of social power and dominance.

Like collective punishment, vicarious penalties for a father/husband’s crimes also fell on innocent family members. For example, a widow was responsible for any criminal monetary penalties for which her deceased husband had been sentenced (financial repayment) and could possibly even stand in place of her husband for execution (death penalty) even though the husband had already died; if a husband raped another man’s virgin daughter, he was punished vicariously through the offender’s wife being raped; the man who beat the wife or child of another was punished by the beating of his own wife or child.¹²

¹¹MAL A §§1-2. Chen misses the gender/patriarchy element in MAL A §2 and thus incorrectly attributes these laws about the wife to a movement toward individualism within Assyrian law similar to Deut 24:16 and Ezek 18. His point might be correct if (and only if) MAL A §§1-2 were describing the offense of a male (father/household leader). See Paul Li-Tah Chen, “Familial Guilt and Responsibility in Light of the Biblical *Hērem* with Special Reference to Joshua 5:13–8:29” (PhD diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2001), 297-98. The collective element generally worked within the household structure in a manner that reflected its top-down hierarchy (as was also the case with kings and slave owners); it does not generally flow bottom up. An exception would be MAL A §§3-4, 6, where the wife’s penalty for household theft is extended to anyone who receives stolen goods from her (slaves or those outside the family). Nevertheless, even here the objective is to preserve patriarchal interests and keep the male’s property intact (much like temple and royal-court property collective penalty laws). Whether or not the receiver knew that the goods were stolen, the collective-type punishment significantly strengthened patriarchal control of the household.

¹²MAL A §§32, 55; Elisabeth Meier Tetlow, *Women, Crime, and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society*, vol. 1, *The Ancient Near East* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 140. Tetlow suggests

Hittite (Anatolian) collective punishment. The Anatolian region is located northwest of Israel in the area later known as Asia Minor or present-day Turkey. While Israel had less direct interaction with the Hittites than with Egypt, Babylon, or Assyria, their legal codes and royal instructions from the Old Hittite period (ca. 1650–1500 BCE) and the Middle Hittite period (ca. 1500–1180 BCE) are nonetheless important because they help to expand the portrait of what we have already encountered above. Their use of collective punishments on innocent family members is evident in their everyday lives and their theology. As typical of this entire survey, Hittite household justice was administered by powerful persons in society such as kings, magistrates, temple officials, and masters, as shown in table A.8.

Table A.8.

Father/Husband's Crime	Punishment + Others/Family Members
Kitchen staff anger the king	Those guilty by river ordeal get death penalty + death for their wives and children ^a
Without informing the king, royal shoemaker uses leather not from palace	Death penalty + death for his wife and children ^b
Man uses magic against the crown prince	Property confiscated + wife and children taken ^c
Man does not deliver up a sorcerer to the royal court	It will go badly for that man + for his family ^d
Soldiers warned at their induction of any harm to king or queen	Made blind and deaf + executed his wives, children, and clan ^e
Temple slave angers his master	Mutilation or death + death of wife, children, brothers, sisters, and other relatives ^f
Temple herder takes young fattened animal for himself substitutes an inferior one for the god	Put to death + death of wife and children
Temple worker takes best piece of sacrificial meat for himself, giving the god an inferior piece	Oath of denial or death + death of wife and children
If a man refuses to obey the judgment of a king or a magistrate	His head cut off + his "house" will become a heap of ruins, i.e., the man's family and other household members will be killed ^g

^aANET, 207-8. The river ordeal determined which of the staff were guilty; the guilty ones and their families were put to death. Two elements of collective punishment are present: (1) *part* of the staff (infraction) leads to the *whole* staff being punished, and (2) the "guilty" staff are put to death along with the death of their wives and children.

^bANET, 207-8.

^cAmélie Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East: C. 3000–330 B.C.* (London: Routledge, 1995), 1:247; Harry A. Hoffner, "Legal and Social Institutions of Hittite Anatolia," in *CANE*, 1:564-65.

^dTelipinu Edict ¶50 (Hittite Laws) in Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, 2nd ed., SBLWAW 6 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 237-38.

^eANET, 353-54.

^fThe next three examples—temple slave, shepherd, and worker—come from ANET, 207-10, nos. 2-3, 5-6, 8, 10, 14, 18-19. See also *COS* 1:83.

^gHtL ¶173a. The parallelism between magistrate and king suggests at least that death was also the penalty in the case of the king.

the potential transference of all types of punishments from the deceased husband to the wife. Given the prominence of collective capital punishment involving families, such transferred death penalty culpability in a noncollective case is certainly possible (*Women, Crime, and Punishment*, 134).

Collective/household punishment ideology affected Hittite theology. When the Hittites took oaths in a legal, military, or social setting, they often swore to the gods that if they should break the oath, the god must make them childless or extinguish their existing wives and children.¹³ In the Plague Prayers of Muršili the king laments the crimes of his father as a ruling king and the resultant impact of divine punishment in a local disaster: “My father sinned and transgressed the word of the Storm-god of Hatti, my lord. But I did not sin in any way. But so it happens: The sin of the father devolves upon his son. The sin of my father has devolved upon me.”¹⁴ In another text the assumption of divine collective punishment appears to be normative and so, correspondingly, the Hittite king prays: “Let not the good perish with the wicked! If it is one town, or one [house], or one man, O gods, let that one perish alone!”¹⁵

It is not surprising that collective punishment within society, as with other ANE cultures, thus yields the analogical framework for divine judgment. Human crime and punishment is a reflection of divine patterns of justice, yet with a “how much more” sense of pronounced power and necessity for careful submission. The Hittite text *Instructions to Priests and Temple Officials* provides the human illustration of a master who, when angered by a servant, either mutilates him or puts him and his family to death: “If he [the servant] dies, he does not die alone. His family [is] also included with him.” Immediately afterwards, the text describes how the gods at times require collective family punishment: “If, however, someone angers the mind of a god, does the god seek it [revenge] only from him alone? Does he not seek it from his wife, [his children,] his descendants, his family, his male and female servants, his cattle, his sheep and his grain? He utterly destroys him with everything.”¹⁶

In sum, collective punishment of innocent family/household members for the crimes of their male heads was very much a part of the ANE world.

¹³Fiorella Imparati, “Private Life Among the Hittites,” *CANE*, 1:574-75. At the end of one soldier’s oath the “oath deities” are invoked to seize whoever breaks the oaths and take their life along with the lives of their wives and children. See *COS* 1:167 [A rev. 10’-19’].

¹⁴*COS* 1:158 [§16]. See the Hittite proverb “The sin of the father devolves upon his son,” *COS* 1:215 [§5].

¹⁵*ANET*, 396: “Plague Prayers of Mursilis [b],” last paragraph.

¹⁶*COS* 1:218 [§§2-3].

Egyptian, Babylonian, Assyrian, and Hittite kingdoms made it a core part of their justice practices, whether in domestic courts or foreign battlefields.

AN ETHICAL EVALUATION

The ancient world was not completely unaware of the ethical tension and injustice of killing innocent people for the crime of others. In the first-century *Annals*, for instance, Tacitus records the Roman elite invoking the “ancient custom” of executing both a slave and his entire household (all those living under the same roof) for the action of one person killing a master.¹⁷ The punishment in this case included the execution of several hundred women and children. Most in the Roman Senate viewed this exemplary punishment as creating an obvious injustice for the innocent women and children, but they went ahead with the mass execution anyway because it was necessary for controlling the slave population. In their words, the use of this exemplary, collective punishment always contains injustice for some who are killed collectively but it is needed to keep down the “scum” of society.

Through Tacitus’s record we can eavesdrop on the Roman Senate as they deliberated this collective punishment. One of the arguments that the Senate used for this kind of collective exemplary punishment was by way of analogy with another well-known collective practice of punishing Roman soldiers when they lost a battle. The soldiers were numbered off from one to ten, and every tenth soldier was killed—beaten to death by the other nine soldiers within the group. The argument by analogy, as voiced in the Senate, draws attention to the blatant and obvious *injustice* of this practice in that the death penalty might fall on a good soldier who fought valiantly as easily as it could on a lazy, weak, or fearful one. Nevertheless, that did not stop the Senate from ordering the collective killing of the slaves; four hundred or so were marched to their execution. By invoking the Roman-army analogy the Senate confirmed the value (in their minds) of collective/exemplary death punishments, despite their embedded injustices: severe punishments were needed in their world to motivate and control both groups of slaves and soldiers. Thankfully, Tacitus preserves this fascinating window through which we can

¹⁷Tacitus, *Annals* 14.42-44. See Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, trans. Michael Grant, rev. ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 332-34.

peer into the ancient Roman world and its use of collective/household punishments. We learn that not all ancients were blinded to or unaware of an element of injustice within the justice of their world. From this tiny window we could speculate that many ancients (perhaps more than we might think) recognized to some extent the profound injustice of killing innocent people that was part of their collective/household justice.

Unfortunately, what the ancients probably did *not* see in their day are other injustices in their collective/household punishments. First, to some extent the ancient world was probably not as keenly aware of a principle in our present-day law, namely, the law of proportionality as a guide for *all justice to be measured and not disproportional to the crime*. While the ancients were aware of an eye-for-an-eye approach to law, their strong collectivism (a good value in moderation or balance) at times blinded them to how much they were violating this proportionality principle. The killing of innocent babies for any adult's crime amounts to grotesque overkill. Furthermore, the ancients most likely did not see (at least not to the same extent that we do) the degree to which their collective/household killing practices had within them another double-sided injustice—they were generally self-serving in terms of *preserving the power structures of the elite*, and the method often inflicted the greatest penalty on those who were already the most vulnerable in society.

COLLECTIVE PUNISHMENTS IN OUR CONTEMPORARY WESTERN WORLD

Our contemporary Western world has largely abandoned the extremely harsh collective punishments that we have surveyed above. Even if there exist some positive elements within ancient collective punishments, the weight of abhorrent ethical liabilities makes a good case for moving any society away from such practices.¹⁸ Thankfully we no longer live in a world that would gather together and watch the public execution of women and children simply because the father within a household had been convicted of a crime.

¹⁸Some of the positive aspects of collective punishments within the ancient world were that they (1) at least brought *some* form of justice against a crime, (2) expressed the good value of collective identity within the group, (3) helped as a deterrent and thus stabilized social order, and (4) provided a sufficiently strong enough punishment (in a heavy-handed world to begin with) to make an impact.

Nevertheless, our Western context has retained *some* collective punishments, but with comparatively softer and more gentle forms. While writing this essay, I (Bill here) began to ponder numerous examples of collective punishment that we sometimes impose today in our social setting. One instance came very close to home. I began to think about the ethical rightness (or wrongness?) of one of our parenting techniques. What came to mind was the practice of collective punishment that Marilyn and I regularly used when disciplining our children in what came to be called our “grocery store” method. We did not normally use collective punishments, but in grocery stores, where temptation to misbehave abounds, we did. If *one* of our three children acted badly or even asked for something in the store, *all of them* got nothing; but if all three of them were good and also asked for nothing while in the store, then we would reward them on a random basis (not every time) by buying them a little something special. As I write elsewhere, “Since the grocery store is such a temptation zone for misbehavior, we would use this added form of [collective] disciplinary action. Our children began to monitor their own behavior, and at times you could hear them whispering to each other to help one another keep quiet. Ah, kind of nice when the parent does not have to say a thing.”¹⁹

Strangely enough, my mind automatically began to compare our collective punishment at the grocery store and ANE punishments. For one thing, Marilyn and I obviously did not *kill* all three of our children when one of them acted up. Also, because the grocery-store collective punishment was short lived and pedagogically focused, over time our children experienced far less of its negative consequence and enjoyed far more of the positive outcomes that reinforced their good behavior in stores. Once the misbehavior was corrected, it helped establish a normal pattern of wonderful visits to a variety of stores. Finally, unlike the ANE scene, our use of collective punishment over multiple incidents was distributed among all three of our children in terms of which one was the “criminal” and which two were the “innocent victims.” Somehow, they managed to keep things roughly even. Had one child consistently been the rebel, we would have had to address that imbalance.

¹⁹William J. Webb, *Corporal Punishment in the Bible: A Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic for Troubling Texts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 158.

This family experience along with further research on the topic opened my eyes to see all kinds of contemporary Western use of collective punishments. Here is a sample list of occasions in our Western culture that illustrate our use of collective punishments:

- ▶ *Education:* Skilled teachers often require the whole class to be quiet before proceeding. Or teachers give a special Friday pizza-lunch celebration, longer recesses, or early dismissal based on whether everyone in the class has been reasonably good that week.
- ▶ *Sports:* Teams have their whole season canceled, are tossed out of the Olympics, or are penalized in some fashion even if only some athletes on the team (not all) are caught doping. Or after practice the coach requires the whole team to run extra laps or do more pushups because of the tardy or lazy actions of a few.
- ▶ *Politics:* The electorate punishes entire parties by voting them out of office even if the “crime” or scandal involves a select subgroup within the party.
- ▶ *Corporations:* Sometimes a business chooses to reward its employees collectively (or withholds rewards) based not on individual performance but on group or collective bottom-line outcomes.
- ▶ *War crimes:* While war crimes are prosecuted at an individual level, many studies have shown how the actions of the Third Reich brought collective guilt, shame, and (to some degree) punishment on the entire German nation for years.
- ▶ *International sanctions:* When wanting to influence political change in foreign countries due to the crimes of their leaders, Western countries often impose sanctions that impact the entire population, not just the perpetrators of the crime (e.g., trade sanctions, foreign aid, etc.).
- ▶ *Taxation:* Even though certain products cause only part of a user group to contract an illness (cancer from smoking tobacco; alcoholism or liver failure from excessive alcohol), governments often place significant taxation penalties on all consumers to curb or change social behavior.

- ▶ *Hell's Angels and mob families*: This notorious motorcycle gang has captured a significant percentage of the prostitution market in North America. One of their extremely effective ways of controlling their prostitutes is by a verbalized threat that they give (and carry out) of killing the prostitute's family members—children, parents, and/or siblings—if they misbehave or rebel. Similarly, the mob at times kills the person/offender and his family as an expression of “justice” and control in their world.

The last of these examples (Hell's Angels) obviously breaks with the other Western collective-punishment examples in significant ways. Nevertheless, it is a very real part of our present-day world and an example worth reflecting on since ironically it provides the *closest* contemporary example within our world compared to the severity of ANE collective punishments.

Even a brief pondering of these Western examples should dispel certain myths about collective punishment.

- ▶ *Myth 1: All collective punishments are bad and individual punishments are good.* This was my naive view before looking into this topic. However, I have come to realize that such a polarized perspective is far too simplistic. Obviously, some of the Western examples listed above demonstrate the use of collective punishment in constructive, responsible ways with little or no adverse effects on the individuals within the groups.
- ▶ *Myth 2: The contemporary Western world has moved completely to individual (no collective) punishments.* This also is wrong. It is more accurate to say that both worlds—the ancient and the modern Western—use(d) individualistic and collective forms of punishment. Individualism and collectivism are not necessarily antithetical concepts in the ancient world any more than they are automatic enemies in our present world. While coexisting with a certain amount of tension and with a different proportionality (collective justice was greater in the ANE; individual justice is more pronounced in our modern Western setting), they nevertheless dwell side by side in both worlds.

Dispelling these myths helps us discover the real ethical issue. The core of the ethical issue is not collectivism per se (or individualism per se); it is not

advocating for individualism over collectivism (or vice versa). Rather, the crucial focus in evaluating the ethical liabilities of collective punishments is the degree to which they show (or do not show) a series of values or principles: fairness, proportionality, remedial/constructive focus, educational, other-person serving, nonexploitation of vulnerable persons, and so on, and, conversely, the degree to which they are driven by self-serving interests and the preservation of elite power structures.

CONCLUSION

In our contemporary Western setting justice has thankfully changed dramatically from the ANE world. The fact that the Hell's Angels in our society have somehow missed this ethical development and continue to practice brutal household or collective killings tells the tale. It was and still is about a barbaric means of social control. Western societies have come to recognize that numerous injustices and ethical liabilities are embedded within the more excessive forms of collective/household punishments (killing criminals + their families), whether found within the ancient world or the Bible.

An ethical assessment of ancient-world collective/household punishments surfaces at least four embedded injustices: (1) innocent people were killed for a crime they did not commit; (2) the punishment was grotesquely disproportional to the crime, with the killing of even helpless children and infants; (3) the killings were often for the self-serving preservation of the elite and powerful; and (4) they frequently fell on those most vulnerable in society. One could go on and add more injustices. But these are sufficient to make our point. This ethical evaluation of collective (in)justice should inform our understanding of both the ANE world and biblical texts where we encounter such phenomenon.

Our collective-punishments appendix contributes to the better answers of this war book in several ways. First, it helps us moderns at least *understand* the highly cultural, ancient-world component of justice within biblical texts that we have discussed in chapter nine (Josh 7:24-26; 1 Sam 22:18-19). The killing of Achan's immediate family along with the actual perpetrator of the crime (Achan) was a common way of making a pronounced and severe judgment statement in the ancient world. This appendix explains

why collective killings of families and children in the biblical text, which make contemporary readers feel nauseous, would have functioned to a large extent under the ethical radar within the ancient world. The original readers would not have been as attuned to the ethical hazards. Second, the highlighting of *embedded injustices* ought to inform Christian evaluations of the complex ethics of biblical texts where collective punishments are found and the degree to which they represent fallen-world (not perfect) enactments of justice. Third, this appendix sets up the overwhelming need for the final better answer of this book, namely, the *individualized* (not collective) kind of justice that God will bring at the final (pristine) judgement. In that future day, he will right all wrongs—even the wrongs of deeply embedded injustices that were part of the (in)justice of a fallen world.

Appendix E

WHY DID GOD USE AN INCREMENTAL ETHIC?

IN COURSES THAT INCLUDE a prolonged discussion of an incremental ethic within Scripture, students inevitably raise the question of this appendix. We generally postpone this lecture on why God used an incremental ethic in the formation of Scripture to the very end as something of a postscript because one needs to have wrestled sufficiently with enough difficult (ethically troubling) biblical texts to appreciate the discussion. This question often takes three forms:

QUESTION ONE: Why did God use an incremental ethic?

QUESTION TWO: Why did God not simply state the ultimate ethic?

QUESTION THREE: Why did God not give us both the incremental ethic and ultimate ethic?

Our initial or introductory answer to these three interrelated questions can be put quite briefly. Answer(s): *He did*. God did give us the ultimate ethic. The ultimate ethic in the Bible comes in two parts: love God and love people.¹ At least at an *abstracted* level within Scripture, we must conclude that God has given us the ultimate ethic. Therefore, we need to revise our question slightly to ask something more along these lines:

REVISED QUESTION: Why did God *not* give us an ultimate ethic at the concrete-specific level of meaning for every situation?

This revised question is much better since it recognizes that at one level we *do* have the ultimate ethic contained within Scripture. Here are three short answers.

¹Furthermore, God has given us a picture of what that love looks like in Jesus' sacrificial love.

- ▶ Answer one: *Too big*. For God to have written what an ultimate ethic might look like at a concrete-specific level for every situation would take the Library of Congress to house such a thing (and that still would not be enough!). It would have to include every situation, every culture, every change in every era. One would end up with Mishnah upon Mishnah, Talmud upon Talmud.
- ▶ Answer two: *Too overwhelming*. The selective examples that we do have from Jesus tend to blow the disciples out of the water. They find Jesus' teachings on divorce and forgiveness quite unsettling.
- ▶ Answer three: *Enough good examples*. The New Testament gives us sufficient good examples (e.g., Jesus' Sermon on the Mount) with canonical redemptive movement to help us wrestle through other areas.

The revised question has an obvious flip side that must also be answered:

REVISED FLIP-SIDE QUESTION: Why *did* God give us an incremental ethic at the concrete-specific level of meaning for only some situations?

Ah, there it is. This revised flip-side question is what students push for all semester or all week long (in a one-week intensive) when they repeatedly ask, "Why did God use an incremental ethic?" Our opening response is simply to say, "Let's adjust the question—just a little." We should modify our question to ask, "Why did God use an incremental ethic in many cases at the concrete-specific level of biblical instructions?" This flip-side, revised question is important for setting the direction of our reflections because we do not want to lose sight of a very important matter, namely, that within Scripture God has already given us the ultimate ethic. This crucial recollection clarifies what Scripture has already answered and what exactly we are (or should be) asking.

Why did God use an incremental ethic in many cases at the concrete-specific level of many biblical instructions?

Having reminded ourselves that Scripture unambiguously communicates an ultimate ethic, we can now address the more clearly focused question. When asking the short-form question of this appendix, "Why did God use an incremental ethic?" we should infer the longer question, "Why did God use an incremental ethic in many cases at the concrete-specific level of

many biblical instructions?” This appendix offers an abbreviated explanation of what could easily form the subject matter for an entire book.

So why did God use an incremental ethic? Here is our briefly stated collection of answers:

1. BEST ANSWER . . .

Our best answer is this: *we do not know*. There is considerable mystery here. We do not presume to know the complexities of how a most holy God interfaces with a fallen world. It would be foolish to suggest otherwise since our tiny planet is but a piece of dust in a universe of more than thirty billion trillion stars (many with their own planetary systems), and that number is simply a present-day count based on the current state of magnification technology and the light years of distance that star images must travel toward us. God pitches his tent over all his creation and considers everything at once. As in Dr. Seuss’s *Horton Hears a Who*, we are like Cindy Lou and her microscopic community of persons living in Whoville.² The expanse and grandeur of God’s universe is staggering, as is the comprehensiveness of his understanding.

Earthbound humans obviously have a very limited horizon. For us to think that we understand how this cosmic God relates to our world makes assumptions about another horizon—one that we cannot fully comprehend. Our answers to why God communicates in Scripture with an *incremental ethic* fall into the category of our best guesses. We know a few things. We can speculate on other reasons. But we need to openly acknowledge that we are looking through a glass dimly.

2. HARDNESS OF HUMAN HEARTS

Matthew 19:1-12 makes it clear that the instructions of Scripture are at times expressed in an incremental ethic with partial (but not complete) redemptive qualities because of the hardness of human hearts. Not getting divorced (i.e., staying married for life) is the ultimate ethic. God’s legitimization of

²Even the *Horton Hears a Who* analogy wobbles since the proportionality of the elephant (Horton) to the child (Cindy Lou) could be measured under a microscope. The proportional differences between our planet and the whole of God’s creation include a journey from the tiniest invisible microbe to the farthest (now invisible) star.

divorce and its grounds (Deut 21:10-14; 24:1-4) are thus very much caught within the ethics of a fallen world. In this world of hardened hearts there will always be variance (sometimes at quite a distance) between what we encounter within Scripture and what might be considered a most loving or least hardened heart.

3. VESTED INTERESTS

Sometimes change is difficult because of vested interests. Think about why it has taken so long to change the laws around smoking, environmental pollution, or alternative energies. For many years the medical community knew that secondhand smoke was killing people. The issue is an ethical one because one party is incurring damages in the lives of others. Making concrete changes was extremely difficult because of those with vested interests. Changes came in slow, incremental steps: putting the skull and crossbones on the back of a package, banning sales to minors, increasing taxes to offset communal health-care costs, and eventually banning smoking in workplaces and restaurants. Someday the redemptive trajectory of these laws will push further to protect children who are often still vulnerable to adult smokers and incapable of speaking in their own defense. Similarly, changing the laws and societal ethics around slavery or war (both issues within Scripture) has been a long and arduous journey. Those with vested interests are often the most resistant to change.

4. COMPLEX, EMBEDDED SOCIAL SYSTEMS

This is the octopus or domino phenomenon. Sometimes an issue has tentacles reaching in every direction, and ethical change is difficult because it affects so many things. Think about why it has been hard (almost impossible) for our contemporary society to turn the corner on fossil-fuel energies. So much of our infrastructure is built around cars, trains, and planes that consume fossil fuels. The movement toward renewable energies has been painfully slow. Why can't everyone drive a Tesla car and use shingles on their house roofs to supply their homes and vehicles with energy? Pollution is an ethical issue because (1) we are damaging the planet (God's workmanship) and (2) we are hurting the poorest people on the planet, who

are most susceptible to its effects (the wealthy can buy means of protection—filtered water, air cleaners, and so on). Making changes in this one area of our social sins and injustices is difficult because the implications for existing infrastructure are massive and far reaching.

5. LIMITED RESOURCES

The adage “pick your battles” applies here. It is difficult to make progress on every area of life simply because of limited resources. This is true for individuals, families, and societies. Making significant ethical changes often requires concerted financial, time, and emotional resources. Entire empires end up in the dust because they have lived as if they had unlimited resources. Sometimes making even a dent of change—one small advance in a good ethical direction—requires a great deal of collective energy. Canadians are presently trying to make some hard but good changes in our treatment of indigenous peoples. But changing our laws, correcting past wrongs, and taking concrete steps to improve their future takes resources. The challenge of limited resources should never stymie change, but surely it is part of the answer to why change is often incremental.

6. CERTAIN CHANGES FOR CERTAIN TIMES

Incremental ethical change means that we must pick certain things to change because they are strategically important. We need to read the landscape wisely and select among multiple options what comes first. Changing inequality between Jew and Gentile in the redemptive story line of Scripture needed to happen long before the abolition of slavery or equality for women. Without resolving the Jew-Gentile equality issue, there would be no universal gospel.³ The more pressing or time-sensitive issues often get the more immediate attention.

7. PASTORAL GENTLENESS

This is the elastic-band phenomenon. Most good pastors know exactly what ethical changes are most acutely needed in their churches, and yet they also

³Jesus and the new Twelve/Seventy community expanded the Promised Land/sacred space to encompass the whole world. See chapter three.

know how far and how fast to stretch their people. I (Bill) remember working as a pastoral intern in Dallas during the race tensions of the 1980s and watching Pastor Gene Getz take some very deliberate steps in helping his all-*white* Plano church build life-changing relationships with an all-*black* church in south Dallas. Was it a stretch? Yes. But a good pastor knows how much his/her people can stretch without snapping.

8. CONCENTRIC CIRCLES OF INFLUENCE

Change is easier within smaller circles. The larger the circle, the harder the change. Bringing the gospel and its implications for female equality to certain Muslim communities today may require moving slowly—starting in less public settings with small circles and often behind closed doors. It is interesting that the place where Paul made his most pronounced concrete change in the decision-making power of women was in the bedroom (1 Cor 7:1-5). The decision to have sex or abstain from sex for prayer (and fasting—KJV) was based on mutual agreement, not hierarchy. This behind-closed-doors change challenged the patriarchy of the day (as well as Num 31), within which men typically held the greater power when it came to vows for prayer (and fasting) and far greater power in the sexual domain.⁴

9. REALISM VERSUS IDEALISM

Within a fallen world the tension between realism and idealism is a never-ending battle. We all struggle some days with *seeing* the glass half-full when it sure *feels* half-empty. Within the biblical vision, this is known as the already-not-yet tension. Understanding this tension and living with it in a constructive way will keep us from the extremes on either end: (1) stumbling into pessimism or, worse yet, cynicism; or (2) being driven by overly idealistic ideology. Even within a more centrist approach, we have all experienced days where brutal realism has sucked the wind out of our ideal-world sails. The real-ideal tension shapes our daily decisions about taking incremental steps in a redemptive direction.

⁴In Num 31 a husband could overturn the vows of his wife as easily as he could his daughter's vows. In a community such as Israel *religious* vows would have included fasting and prayer (and refraining from sexual intercourse).

10. HORIZONS AFFECT ETHICAL RADAR

A friend of ours is an ethical vegan. That means he does not eat meat or dairy products, and most importantly, he has chosen this path for ethical reasons—animal-treatment issues and global sustainability. While conceding the validity of his arguments, this ethical issue is simply not (as yet) on our radar because other issues crowd it out. We are making a few incremental steps in the right direction (reducing meat intake, checking out the treatment of animals, increasing vegetable consumption, and so on). Before our friend started to influence our thinking regarding animal ethics, this issue was simply *not* part of our horizon. Frankly, we never even thought about it. Other ethical issues loomed larger. We still love the occasional good steak or barbecued chicken (hard to change that taste). The ethical-radar phenomenon plays a role within this book because *horizons affect our ethical radar*. Given the larger ancient-world war horizon, wherein a captured enemy was treated with extreme malice and a variety of horrifying tortures, the biblical authors and original audience would hardly have seen *our* comely Geneva/Hague war concerns. They would likely have viewed their own Yahweh-initiated incremental changes as dramatic ethical improvement over war actions of other nations. Sometimes existing horizons (for any number of reasons) blind us to the need for taking further incremental steps in good directions along a redemptive path we have partway traveled. Someone always must speak up, like the prophet Amos—who addressed what he considered the war excesses of his day—and start or restart the journey; others need to carry the mantle further.

11. ESCHATOLOGICAL FORECLOSURE

For God to speak redemptively into our world *without* an incremental ethic means that everything must move all the way. Without an incremental ethic, God would be yanking us all the way to the eschaton. If there is a need for the extended duration of this present fallen world (and apparently there is), then of necessity God must either not speak into this world (deism) or, if he does, he must help take it forward with incremental steps (theism). When God speaks *completely* into this world, it will bring eschatological foreclosure. Welcome to the new heavens and new earth.

12. CHARACTER FORMATION AND GOD'S REDEMPITIVE STORY

God uses a partially realized, incremental ethic in Scripture and its (remaining) ethical struggle in this world as an opportunity for character formation. God seems more interested in who we are and what we become in our character than in our polished careers and successful portfolios. Struggle in this fallen world is the cocoon of metamorphosis (2 Cor 3:18; see also 2 Cor 4:1-18). Why did God use an incremental ethic in Scripture? One reason is that in so doing he hands off the baton to us. He has already helped guide some of the important initial steps of redemptive movement. Now it is our turn to join in the redemptive story and with God's help to carry the baton further. The story of *The Velveteen Rabbit* (a well-worn and torn but much-loved rabbit) as a metaphor suggests that only with the struggles of this life do we become real and experience love to the fullest. An incremental ethic is God's invitation for his people to partner with him in the redemptive story, and ironically, in the process of intense struggle and pain furthering the kingdom of God, we end up being transformed ourselves as well.

We could go on. But twelve answers are probably enough. Some of them may have merit.

Appendix F

PLAN A

How God Actually Wanted Israel to Fight

AS WE READ THE BIBLICAL and ANE descriptions of warfare, there is something deep within us that cries out, “This is not how it is supposed to be!” Many redemptive elements in the Bible move at least incrementally away from the darkest aspects of ancient warfare and toward less violence and greater dignity in the treatment of one’s enemies. Based on things like (1) this redemptive trajectory in biblical war texts, (2) situations where Yahweh fights *for* Israel (Ex 14–15), (3) passages such as 2 Kings 6:8–23 (serving the enemy a meal rather than killing them), and (4) the eschatological hope of ultimate peace, some Christians argue that God’s ideal/preferred method for Israel taking the Promised Land—God’s plan A (which Israel severely thwarted)—would have been through a variety of *completely nonviolent* means.¹

Both of us (Gord and Bill) are very attracted to this “absolutely no violence” view.² Our proposed position is *close* to the no-violence view (as close as we can

¹“If the Israelites could have only trusted Yahweh to be their ‘shield’ and ‘glorious sword’ (Deut 33:29), they would never have needed to fight with physical shields and swords” (Gregory A. Boyd, *The Crucifixion of the Warrior God* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017], 741). Others argue for an ideal of complete nonviolence based on elements listed above: John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Behold the Man! Our Victorious Lamb*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 76–88; Yoder, *The War of the Lamb: The Ethics of Nonviolence and Peacemaking*, ed. Glen Stassen, Mark Thiessen Nation, and Matt Hamsher (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009), 67–75; Millard C. Lind, *Yahweh Is a Warrior: The Theology of Warfare in Ancient Israel* (Kitchener, ON: Herald, 1980); Willard M. Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War and Women: Case Issues in Biblical Interpretation* (Waterloo, ON: Herald, 1983), 96–149; Lois Barrett, *The Way God Fights*, Peace and Justice Series 1 (Waterloo, ON: Herald, 1987); John A. Wood, *Perspectives on War in the Bible* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 104–39; David A. Leiter, *Neglected Voices: Peace in the Old Testament* (Waterloo, ON: Herald, 2007); John C. Nugent, *The Politics of Yahweh: John Howard Yoder, The Old Testament, and the People of God* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011).

²We hold the “absolutely no violence” view as our *default* (what if we are wrong) position—i.e.,

come), especially when compared to the traditional view, which often fails to critically evaluate the ethics of war violence within Scripture. Our proposed plan A view could be expressed as the use of *the least violence possible* given the complexities of fallen-world circumstances. Even this realigned-traditional definition of plan A is quite removed from the path of warfare and violence (contra Yahweh) that Israel chose. Not surprisingly, we would hold the same perspective of a least-violence-possible ethic with respect to our local Canadian police forces and would thus be critical of any violence beyond what is absolutely necessary.

Here are the reasons why we keep a step or two back from the “absolutely no [human] violence” view for God’s plan A in taking the land.

1. Scripture’s redemptive trajectory is fully realized only in the eschaton. We believe that a no-violence plan A is good as an ultimate ethic but, unfortunately, is only *fully* realized in the eschaton. As much as we love pacifism’s rootedness in the eschaton and its bold extension of the redemptive trajectory (already begun within Scripture’s war texts), we simply cannot shake the sense that an absolutely-no-violence view pushes us into an overrealized eschatology of peace within this present world. Nevertheless, we (Gord and Bill) have come a long way toward pacifists’ no-violence view in the writing of this book and readily confess the faults of our formerly held traditional thinking: the more grievous error of nonpacifistic Christians (ourselves included for many years) is the lack of *any* influence by Scripture’s redemptive trajectory present within its war passages and a *total* disconnect of our present-day ethic from the peace of the eschaton. While deficient in the eyes of absolutely-no-violence proponents, our view that God’s plan A includes the least violence possible and the greatest dignity and love toward one’s enemy amid fallen-world circumstances can at least be moving in a direction that takes the redemptive spirit of Scripture’s war texts *to Hague/ Geneva and well beyond* that significant milestone.

Our remaining points will be more briefly stated. Here are some additional reasons why we affirm a least-violence-possible approach but cannot quite make it all the way to an absolutely-no-violence view.

our position of second choice. We affirm with greater certainty our struggle with the traditional view. The journey of this book simply does not permit us to go back to a noncritical (completely accepting) view of war violence within Scripture and the world around us.

2. *Ad hoc unveiling of plan A within biblical war texts.* While it is clear that Israel did *not* follow God's plan A of lesser violence and it was drawn into an ancient world of war violence further than God's liking, it is not clear to us that plan A would have been *complete* nonviolence. There are no clear biblical statements of God's plan A for Israel, nor do we have explicit criteria from which we could unambiguously determine what that plan might have looked like. Attempts to justify a posture of complete nonviolence for ancient Israel seem to strain the evidence.

3. *Unrealistic for larger people groups.* While it may be possible for some individuals (or even small groups) to completely eschew violent conduct, this strategy is not likely to work for entire nations such as the Israelites, especially living within a fallen and violent world. God calls for trust but never denounces Israel's participation in fighting at some level.

4. *God's participation in war violence through natural or angelic means.* Sometimes in biblical war texts God fights the enemy with the Red Sea, hailstones, flood waters, angelic warriors, and so on. If this approach could completely curtail Israel's participation in killing fellow humans, one could make the case for lessened psychological trauma, which affects *all* human beings who participate in war.³ However, it begs the lingering question of divine violence and why the reduced human violence that God initiates in some cases (Gideon's troop reduction from 32,000 to 300) was not taken all the way. For some reason (we are not told why) Yahweh often required at least partial or representative human participation in his battles.⁴

5. *The greater good.* The threat or exercise of the least-possible violence is at times necessary to forestall greater violence and create stability. While not an explicit reason within the biblical text, our present world certainly teaches us this lesson (even United Nations peacekeeping forces at times use protective violence).

6. *The tension between abstract and pragmatic.* While one might postulate the ideal of complete nonviolence (we agree that this is the *theoretical* best course of ethical conduct), we must still come to grips with the fact that

³Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*, rev ed. (New York: Back Bay Books, 2009), 31, 53, 193-94.

⁴Perhaps it is due to the pragmatic need for legitimization of Israel's leaders within a fallen, ancient world. See chapter eleven.

Israel lived in an ANE war-filled culture where combat was ubiquitous. God could encourage his people toward *less violence* in their war practices, but Israel's fallen, ancient-world context makes their achieving a completely non-violent possession of the Promised Land in toto unlikely. While God *could* have driven all the Canaanites out of the land with mere audio effects (2 Kings 7:6-7), his reluctance to do so (likely) reflects his accommodation to fallen-world pragmatics.

7. *Injustice(s) remain within many nonviolent approaches.* Even with the good of nonviolent forms of war conduct, expulsion from the land would still incur its own forms of injustice. For example, even if God drove the Canaanites from the land without war killing, this nevertheless would have involved elements of injustice (leaving developed vineyards, houses, etc.) that would adversely affect innocent children and the mentally ill, infirm, or elderly.

Appendix G

TRUNCATED CAUSATION

Simple Rhetoric but Expanded-Causation Reality

TRUNCATED CAUSATION DESCRIBES the way biblical writers can depict an action of God (1) with an intentionally simplified (truncated) sequence of causation in their *rhetoric* when (2) in space-and-time *reality* the actual unfolding of the action involved much greater moral complexity and many more (unstated) layers of causation. Biblical authors rely on their readers to work out the various layers of causation behind their descriptions of God's actions.

At times the Bible *closely connects* God's actions with Israel's conduct on the battlefield. The biblical authors often link what happens in war to God's direct involvement through a tightly portrayed cause-and-effect type of relationship. Sometimes God's intervention in defeating an enemy took the form of working through the forces of nature. In such a case, the biblical writers attribute to God actions that could not be explained by any natural means, either because they were something no human could control (such as a hailstorm or a flood) and/or because of their timing (Josh 10:11; Judg 5:20-21; see also Judg 4:14-15).¹ It is understandable that these "acts of God" are directly ascribed to God's causation.

However, there are other times when we might hear a declaration of God's impending judgment against Israel or its enemies, as when Yahweh says, "I

¹We are sometimes told in the Bible of God's miraculous intervention in Israel's battles. But the biblical writers recognize that God's intervention on their behalf was often mediated through naturally occurring phenomena. In Josh 4:23, Joshua instructs Israel to tell future generations that "the LORD your God dried up the Jordan before you." However, earlier in the passage we learn how the narrator knows that the waters dried up because the Jordan had been cut off upstream, where it piled up at Adam (likely after a landslide common to the region). See Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 344n186, following B. G. Wood, "Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho? A New Look at the Archaeological Evidence," *BAR* 16, no. 2 (1990): 54.

will destroy Daughter Zion” (Jer 6:2). In this case, the destruction of Jerusalem is also tied to Yahweh’s causation. But in this example, if we understand Yahweh’s causation *in the same way* as we do in the first example mentioned above, we badly misunderstand the situation.

Let us explain. When we say that Yahweh used the forces of nature to defeat an enemy army, we are implying a direct relationship between Yahweh’s actions (the cause) and the event (the effect). Jeremiah 6:2, however, is an example of *truncated causation*, where we collapse a number of intermediate steps into one seeming cause-and-effect scenario. In the case of Jeremiah 6:2 it becomes clear that Yahweh will not directly destroy Zion/Jerusalem through an act of God. His decree will be implemented by human beings, for later in that same chapter, we are told how the destruction of Daughter Zion will take place—through an army from the north (Jer 6:22-23). Similarly, Yahweh says that he will scatter the people of Judah and Jerusalem among the nations (Jer 9:16), but Jeremiah elsewhere makes clear that it is the Babylonians who actually do the scattering (Jer 43:1-5; 50:17; 52:15, 28, 30; see also Ezek 36:19). In these cases, Yahweh is the ultimate mover, but his causation is filtered through a number of levels of human action and response.

It is not enough, however, to recognize that there might be one or two degrees of separation between God’s causation and the actual effect. In most cases, there are *many* intermediate steps between Yahweh’s ultimate causation and the actual implementation of an action. For example, we have already seen that God’s declaration to destroy Jerusalem in Jeremiah 6:2 will be implemented by human intermediaries (the Babylonians). But the process of the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in the book of Jeremiah has at least eleven different stages of implementation (we could add more).

1. proclamation that God will destroy Zion/Jerusalem (Jer 6:2)
2. God brings an army from the north to destroy the city (Jer 6:22-23)
3. God will give the city into the hands of the king of Babylon (Jer 20:4)
4. the king’s army lays siege to the city (Jer 6:6; 52:4-5; see also 2 Kings 25:1-2)
5. the food supply runs out (Jer 52:6)

6. Babylon's army breaches the walls (Jer 52:7)
7. the Israelite army flees and scatters (Jer 52:7-8)
8. Babylon's army captures Israel's leaders (Jer 52:8-11)
9. Babylon's army burns the city and breaks down its wall (Jer 52:13-14)
10. Babylon's army plunders the city and its temple (Jer 52:19-23)
11. Jerusalem's leaders and population are taken into exile (Jer 52:15, 27-30)

On first reading of Jeremiah 6:2, it appears Yahweh directly causes the destruction of Jerusalem. But a closer reading and further reflection shows that there were numerous layers of human involvement in the execution of Yahweh's decree.

Understanding truncated causation has important implications for our ethical reflections on God's role in warfare. Though the Bible describes God's involvement in Israel's wars against the Canaanites and in reverse holy war against Israel, God's involvement does not necessarily bless all the acts of the human agents.

As we saw above, with the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, Yahweh uses human agents to accomplish his purposes. These human agents are even described in very positive terms. For example, Nebuchadnezzar is called the "servant of Yahweh" three times in the book of Jeremiah—a title normally reserved only for the most respected leaders of Israel, such as Moses, Joshua, and David (Jer 25:9; 27:6; 43:10; see Deut 34:5; Josh 24:29; Judg 2:8; 2 Kings 18:12; 2 Chron 24:6; Ps 18:1; 36:1). But these human agents are sinful, fallen agents. Just because Yahweh uses approved human agents to accomplish his will does not automatically mean that he approves of all their activities or that their actions reflect his fullest ethical ideals. These flawed human agents use fallen-world tactics and practices while accomplishing Yahweh's *ultimate* purposes.² We can observe this reality in the book of Jeremiah and elsewhere in the Bible when Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon come under Yahweh's judgment for their war conduct against

²See Joseph's comments on his brothers' attempt to sell him into slavery: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Gen 50:20).

Jerusalem (e.g., Jer 50-51; Is 14; 47; Dan 2:29-45; 4). Moreover, while the Babylonians accomplish God's purpose of destroying Zion/Jerusalem, their tactics and methods include extreme acts of violence that fall far *below* the incremental and accommodated (minimal) ethical standards for war conduct given to Israel. The biblical writers emphasize Babylonian wickedness by pointing to their practice of battlefield rape (Lam 5:11), torture (Lam 5:12), and the blinding of King Zedekiah (Jer 52:10). These are all war atrocities that are condemned by Yahweh (see chapter thirteen). Yahweh accomplishes his stated intention through fallen-world agents who use fallen-world tactics (i.e., God has his hip waders on). Just because the Bible attributes an action to God does not guarantee that its fulfillment is ethically untainted when it is accomplished by sin-filled human agents.

If Yahweh's involvement does not necessarily bless all the actions taken by the Babylonians in their battles against Judah and Jerusalem, the same holds true for Israel's war actions. Yahweh's involvement in Israel's wars does not automatically bless all of the ways in which Israel conducts its wars. This can be difficult to wrap our minds around because Yahweh's participation in Israel's wars appears to be more direct and with fewer degrees of separation between Yahweh's decrees and their implementation. However, it is at this point that we come back to one of our six initial theses: God's involvement with Israel's wars is *accommodated* to ANE war practices and does not reflect the fullest ethical expression of war conduct possible. In Israel's case, however, Yahweh curbs *some* of the most offensive practices of ANE warfare and nudges Israel toward more incrementally redemptive practices in the conduct of war. Moreover, the numerous biblical passages that subvert typical ANE and Israelite war practices stand as signposts pointing toward the hope for greater shalom, a shalom that will only come with the full establishment of Yahweh's kingdom.

Appendix H

MORE SUBVERSIVE WAR TEXTS

IN ADDITION TO SELECT OLD TESTAMENT TEXTS discussed in chapter fourteen, other biblical texts also undercut the typical war ideology of the ANE and ancient Israel. War leaders in the ancient world sought to increase the size of their army, to accumulate the tools of war (horses, chariots, and weapons), and to defeat the enemy at (almost) any cost. The following passages, however, emphasize alternative warfare practices by Yahweh that undercut Israel's kings' ability to build extensive armies and that aspire to not just the absence of conflict but a lasting and pervasive shalom. Thus, we are not surprised to see that while Yahweh participates in Israel's battles, this participation is an *accommodation* to the fallen-world setting that heavily affects Israel's thinking about war (often in ways not aligned with Yahweh's perspective).

The additional examples below vary in their strength of antiwar or subversive-war perspective. Nevertheless, their collective weighting helps us understand Yahweh better as *an uneasy war God*.

- ▶ *No postbattle exploitation: 2 Chronicles 28:15 (see also 2 Kings 6:8-23).* Captives and plunder were often showcased in degrading victory parades through the capital cities of victorious ANE armies. In 2 Chronicles 28:15, Judahite captives are not only sent home but are fed, clothed, and healed, and the weak are even provisioned for the journey back to their homeland, thereby subverting the typical postbattle exaltation of Israelite soldiers who had taken spoil and plunder.
- ▶ *Newlywed war-participation moratorium: Deuteronomy 24:5 (see also Deut 20:7).* Yahweh's legislation establishing a one-year moratorium on warfare participation for newlywed husbands reduces the number

of potential warriors available for battle. As a result, the law makes it at least marginally more difficult for Israel's kings to field a sizable army for aggressive warfare.

- ▶ *The new-house exception clause: Deuteronomy 20:5.* Before a battle, Israel's new homeowners are exempted from fighting, thereby reducing the number of men available for battle and subverting a war leader's ability to field a maximal fighting force.
- ▶ *The new-vineyard exemption: Deuteronomy 20:6.* Deuteronomic legislation allows anyone who has just planted a vineyard to opt out of battle in order to enjoy its fruits. This exemption may have removed potential fighters from military service for multiple years, as it takes several years for a newly planted vineyard to produce fruit. This impeded a war leader's ability to field a maximally sized army, which (again) decreased the chances of success.
- ▶ *A pass for the fearful: Deuteronomy 20:8.* It is difficult to say how many potential battle participants would have taken advantage of Deuteronomy 20:8. This law instructs war leaders to allow the fearful to leave for home before a battle begins so that his compatriots will not also grow afraid. Peer pressure to remain was doubtless a factor, but this legislation gave legitimacy to any number of factors that might make soldiers fearful and want to opt out of battle. This open-ended exemption again reduced the size of the army.
- ▶ *No battle frenzy: Proverbs 16:32.* Proverbs 16:32 emphasizes character qualities such as patience and control over one's emotions (or spirit). Such control stands *in contrast* to warriors who psych themselves up into a frenzy before battle (see 2 Chron 28:9). The proverb thereby instills the greater value of peaceful traits and characteristics.
- ▶ *Trust in Yahweh, not warriors and weapons: Psalms 20:7; 33:16-22; 44:6-8; 46:9-11; 147:10-11; Isaiah 7:4-9; 37:5-20; 2 Chronicles 32:7-8.* These passages lift up those who hope and delight in Yahweh instead of the typical images of comfort and strength—the horse and the warrior. By shifting Israel's ideals away from valorizing images of war, these passages undermine an aggressive, machismo-filled warrior culture.

- ▶ *A call for more ethical war practices: Amos 1–2.* Amos’s oracles call out Israel and the surrounding nations for their war crimes, showing that the extreme violence of warfare has ethical boundaries even within the ancient world. Knowing that acts committed in war will be brought to judgment should have a deterring and restraining effect on the practice of war. The spirit and logic of Amos’s cry—“you have gone too far”—speaks to over-the-top or excessive violence and calls for similar critiques within our day, whether that be thinking through more peaceful (less violent) policing measures within a nation or military interventions between nations. Yet, the same *spirit and logic* critiques (even if to a lesser extent “war crimes” addressed by Amos) biblical war actions themselves.
- ▶ *Troop reductions: Judges 7:1-8 (see also 2 Chron 25:5-10).* The reduction of Gideon’s troops from thirty-two thousand to three hundred fosters faith in Yahweh for victory (rather than the size of the army), forestalls the boasting that often accompanies ANE battle victories, and undercuts any expansionistic war aspirations.
- ▶ *Laying down the sword in Jesus’ kingdom: Matthew 26:51-56; Mark 14:47-48; John 18:10-11.* Peter attempts to defend Jesus with his sword, but Jesus rejects the use of weapons as a means of securing the kingdom of God. God’s kingdom is not established by violent revolution but by God himself absorbing the full weight of human sin and violence.
- ▶ *Funky war weapons: Exodus 17:9-11; Judges 3:31; 4:21-22; 5:21; 15:15-17; 1 Samuel 17:40, 50.* Several Old Testament figures use very unconventional and arguably weaker weapons, such as a staff, an ox goad, a tent peg, mud and rain, a donkey’s jawbone, and a slingshot, to defeat their enemies. The use of these weaker weapons clearly argues for trust in God rather than weapons. When combined with the prohibition against stockpiling ancient weapons of mass destruction such as horses and chariots, this phenomenon limits expansionist war policies, for these exceptional (and weaker) weapons do not normally result in victory.
- ▶ *Israel passive, Yahweh active: Exodus 14–15.* Yahweh’s deliverance of Israel out of slavery from Egypt culminates with his defeat of Pharaoh’s

army by drowning them in the Red Sea. Yahweh's actions here do not remove the difficulties of warfare, but they do shield his people from the psychological trauma of perpetrating war violence. Furthermore, Yahweh's action restricts the violence to the destruction to Pharaoh's army (not the entire population).

- ▶ *The futility of military alliances: Isaiah 20:5; 30:1-5; 31:1-3; Ezekiel 17:15-17; Hosea 14:3.* Alliances foster a dependence on foreign (military) aid rather than Yahweh's provision. These treaties also obligate Israelite war leaders to enter battle when they are called on to aid a foreign military power. Undercutting alliances limits the number of wars that Israel would have to fight to support someone else's war aspirations.
- ▶ *Divine battle initiative: Joshua 6:2; 8:1; 10:8; 11:6; 1 Kings 12:23-24.* As was the common ANE military practice, battles ought only to be embarked on with divine approval. While this places responsibility for warfare in the hands of Yahweh, it also allows him to limit and turn Israel away from battle (e.g., 1 Kings 12:23-24).
- ▶ *Delegitimizing revenge warfare: Judges 9.* The citizens of Shechem support Abimelech in his use of violence and murder to become their king. When the Shechemites rebel against his kingship, Abimelech attempts to avenge himself by annihilating the city. However, Yahweh's intervention resulted in mutually assured destruction, as both parties were eventually destroyed, highlighting the recklessness of revenge warfare.
- ▶ *Battle-less conquest: Joshua 8:30-35; 24:1; Judges 9.* Shechem was a key Canaanite city, yet Joshua holds major covenant-renewal ceremonies at this site. The Old Testament mentions no military conquest of this major Canaanite enclave. Shechem suggests that nonviolent conquest is possible.
- ▶ *Divine psychological operations: 2 Kings 6:24-7:20.* When the Aramean king Ben-Hadad lays siege to Samaria, the capital of Israel, Yahweh uses something like contemporary psychological operations to lead the Arameans to believe that they heard the approach of horses, chariots, and a great army. When the Arameans flee, no casualties

result on either side, pointing toward Yahweh's predisposition to avoid the shedding of blood in battle (for both sides) whenever possible.

- ▶ *Hoping for a Prince of Peace and for a peaceful new Eden: Isaiah 9:1-7.* Isaiah looks forward to the reign of the Prince of Peace, when the instruments of war will no longer be needed, thereby pointing to the *ultimate* value of peace over war. The hope of a return to Eden-like conditions, including a new covenant wherein the instruments of warfare have been abolished and all creation can rest in peace (Hos 2:18; see also Is 2:2-4; 11:1-9; 65:17-25; Mic 4:1-4), emphasizes how warfare is part of our fallen-world condition and *not* God's ideal for his creation. This hope of ultimate eschatological realities ought to affect *our present-day trajectories of war ethics* if/when such incremental shaping is possible in this present world. To the extent that we take measures (even if partial ones) to live with *less* violence and *more* peaceful ways (in our incremental trajectories), we fuse ourselves with the eschaton.³

³Such trajectories toward peace ought to affect our redemptive-movement thinking with incremental steps to minimize violence in policing actions (within nations) and war actions (international).

Appendix I

MORE APOCALYPTIC QUESTIONS

THIS APPENDIX ADDRESSES three or four lingering questions from chapter sixteen on Jesus as apocalyptic warrior.

QUESTION ONE: IS NOT THE RHETORIC OF JOHN'S HOLY WAR LANGUAGE STILL VIOLENT?

Answer: Yes. The rhetoric of John's holy war language is still violent even if its reality is transformed into something quite different. Nevertheless, several considerations are helpful here. First, we have come face-to-face with what might be called the Wittgenstein phenomenon—all language is in some respect analogical.¹ Just try talking about God and theology *without* invoking the language and imagery of our fallen world. It is almost impossible because that *is* the world around us. If all language is analogical, and these analogies are derived from aspects of our fallen world, then this phenomenon inevitably affected biblical authors in their theological statements. We live in a world of fallen-language analogies, and we all use ethically problematic linguistics: “I hope such and such a sports team slaughters the other one!” The biblical writers talk about God being a slave owner and a master in heaven, or Jesus himself as a slave or a king or a sacrifice. Each of these word pictures in some way carries a tainted sense and has ethical problems embedded within the rhetoric itself. However, we should not be overly disturbed by this

¹As a philosopher and linguist Ludwig Wittgenstein has brought to our attention the profoundly analogical nature of (nearly) all language. While his contributions to modern philosophy go well beyond this, our reference to Wittgenstein is in this limited sense. For an overview of his life and philosophy see A. C. Grayling, *Wittgenstein: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

analogical phenomenon because it is an inevitable part of discourse within a fallen world, even discourse about God.

Instead, this analogy-of-language insight should temper our thinking. Given the analogical reality of theological reflection, it is helpful to (1) add the word *like* to these portraits (God is master-*like*, Jesus is slave-*like*, etc.) and (2) season our conversations about God and theology with a touch of epistemological humility. We simply cannot climb the Wittgenstein ladder into heaven to see exactly what part of the analogy carries over and what part does not.²

Second, we need to appreciate the positive, pastoral impact of the war language in the Apocalypse for the original reader during first-century imperial Rome. The rhetoric had communicative value. Yes, the war rhetoric in Revelation is violent, but so was the world in which the audience lived. Thus, the language conveyed something helpful to ancient readers, who in their real-time world faced both the rhetoric and the reality of the sword. For them the rhetoric connected with *their* questions about when God was going to avenge their blood (Rev 6:9-11). The war language was a way of speaking meaningfully with an audience about their felt needs; they wanted to see God do something to overturn the injustice in their world (this is yet another of the ways in which God accommodated his self-revelation to the language, culture, and context of the original audience). They were not particularly concerned about whether certain linguistic contaminants crept into the cracks of the rhetoric. The problem is ours, not theirs.³

²Even in discourse/conversations between two human beings, there is often a need to untangle exactly what part(s) of the analogies carries over and what part(s) does not.

³We should not be too hasty to remove or diminish the war rhetoric of Revelation. For example, numerous scholars seem overly anxious to see the blood on Christ's blood-stained robe in the white-horse battle (Rev 19:13) as a referent to Christ's own blood (or perhaps the blood of the saints): David J. Neville, *A Peaceable Hope: Contesting Violent Eschatology in the New Testament Narratives* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 236; Loren L. Johns, *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John: An Investigation into Its Origins and Rhetorical Force*, WUNT 2/167 (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 184; Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, BNTC (London: Continuum, 2006), 275-76; Michael J. Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly: Uncivil Worship and Witness; Following the Lamb into the New Creation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), 143. That the bloodstain comes sequentially *before* the battle creates the possibility for seeing the referent as prebattle action (such as the death of Christ). But the kaleidoscope of images in Revelation, often not in any chronological sequence, provides no sure footing for this view. We should probably not push the chronology.

Rather, the evidence favors taking the blood to be that of the enemy—those slain in battle.

QUESTION TWO: DOES NOT EVERYONE GET KILLED IN THE FINAL BATTLE (INCLUDING WOMEN AND CHILDREN)?

Answer: Yes, everyone gets “killed” (note our quotation marks) in the final battle. But, the rhetoric has changed from the Old Testament, which explicitly enumerates the elderly, women, and children as part of the slaughter. In the book of Revelation, the explicit war language specifies *only those with the choice* to follow the Lamb or, alternatively, to follow the beast. The players in the final battle are all identified as adults and as part of fighting armies. Also, everyone gets “killed” in the sense that they pass from this mortal coil into their resurrection body. There is no explanation about the transition from battle rhetoric to the descriptions of the resurrected state other than it happens with the final word of Christ. The inference is that those alive “die” in the sense that they pass from this life into the next and await the judgment of Christ before his throne.

(1) The strength of the detailed war imagery of the section as a whole—white horse, armies following, a sword, blood spills like wine-pressed grapes, dead people scattered on the ground, carcasses becoming food for the birds, and so on—suggests the most probable referent to the blood-spattered/-soaked garment is enemy blood. (2) The blood on Christ’s blood-soaked garment (Rev 19:13) reflects a similar idea to treading the winepress (Rev 19:15), which is war rhetoric from the harvesting domain that itself refers to enemy blood. Enemy blood conveyed through the winepress image is simply an alternative or augmenting metaphor to the blood-spattered/-soaked garment of Rev 19:13. The blood of the enemy (not Christ’s blood) is elsewhere in the book (Rev 14:19-20) explicitly linked with this winepress imagery and God’s wrath, as it is here in Rev 19:15. (3) The source background from Is 63:1-6 and the bloodstains on the messianic warrior (once again combined with the red-grape and winepress imagery) further favors taking the blood as enemy blood in Rev 19:13. See Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 682-83; G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 957-60; Craig S. Keener, *Revelation*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 453-54; David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 1057.

Nevertheless, affirming a “blood of the fallen enemy” reading for the stained robe in Rev 19:13 simply adds one more element within the war *rhetoric*. It changes nothing about the *reality* of a nonviolent, spoken-word transition to the next phase of salvation history. Furthermore, since the broader theology of the book of Revelation teaches that the saints and Christ conquer through the blood of the Lamb, this juxtaposition in concepts encourages readers to ask the delightfully ironic question about the Rev 19 battle: *Whose blood is (actually) spilled in the white-horse battle?* Despite the answer of the war rhetoric/imagery (enemy blood), this correct surface-layer reading is overpowered by the deeper answer at a reality level of the story line (the blood of the Lamb). The ultimate or deep story-line answer, if you will, is Christ’s blood and perhaps the saints’ blood in the sense that their blood sets the ticking clock of theodicy (Rev 6:9-11); God has a specific number of slain saints (perhaps representative of the composite whole of suffering he will permit) in mind before he takes final action. Reading Rev 19:13 within the broader theology of the book of Revelation does not change the war rhetoric of a robe dipped in blood, but it surely changes the reality of how that war rhetoric unfolds.

QUESTION THREE: DO NOT THE TWO WITNESSES (A MOSES-LIKE FIGURE AND AN ELIJAH-LIKE FIGURE) IN REVELATION 11:5 USE FIRE TO DESTROY THEIR ENEMIES?

Answer: Yes, that is correct. The text of Revelation 11:5 reads: “If anyone tries to harm them [the two witnesses], fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die.” From the text of Revelation 11:5 it appears that there is violence against enemies that results in their death. However, several considerations suggest that this killing of enemies is extremely limited and strategically protective or defensive in nature. First, Revelation 11:5 is the *only* text in Revelation that speaks of violence by Christians against non-Christians within the book. The normal response of Christians is to “fight” the cosmic battle through their own martyrdom and faithfulness to Christ. So this is a dramatic exception. Second, a literary parody exists between the two witnesses and the two beasts: both sides are given control over fire (Rev 11:5; 13:13) and perform great signs (Rev 11:6; 13:13). The fire imagery thus acts as a foil to accentuate the larger struggle or conflict between Christ/God and the great dragon. Third, the fire-destruction from the two witnesses is an action that *only* the two leading witnesses perform; their unusual powers are not extended to all followers of Jesus.

Fourth, the violence by the two witnesses is not that of aggression but of defense (Rev 11:5); it gives the two witnesses some protection and is used only against those who seek to harm (and kill) them. It buys time for their very public act of witness to the God of heaven and gives these two individuals opportunity to call on all humans to worship the true God. Contrastively, the two evil beasts kill not as an action of defensive self-preservation but in wanton offensive aggression: they slaughter nonviolent followers of Jesus who refuse to worship the image of the beast (Rev 13:14-15) and invoke economic sanctions against those who do not take his mark (Rev 13:17). This is clearly aggressive violence (lethal and economic) against helpless, nonviolent persons. Fifth, even with protective powers the two witnesses die anyway by the hand of the beast from the abyss, and their bodies are left in the streets for three days. This “street death” scene sets up the obvious conclusion for Christians that physical fighting is futile: “If anyone is to be killed

with the sword, with the sword they will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God's people" (Rev 13:10). The ultimate death of these two witnesses suggests the normative path of martyrdom, not physical violence, for the followers of Jesus. Sixth, if the fire from the mouth is metaphorical and not literal (i.e., the metaphor most likely depicts the two prophets speaking the word of God), then its outcome—the enemies' death—even if intended to be literal, does not establish the exact means of their death. The fire metaphor may infer divine intervention in some unexpressed manner: God will protect his two leading prophets from death (even by bringing death on attackers) until such time as he permits their death.⁴

**QUESTION FOUR: ASIDE FROM THE WAR RHETORIC,
DOES NOT JOHN'S APOCALYPSE DEPICT GOD
USING OTHER FORMS OF VIOLENCE?**

Answer: Yes, and its pictures of cosmic violence can be frightening. However, on a close reading of Revelation, certain considerations offset much of the ethical problem: (1) often the issue is at the level of rhetoric and not reality (like the holy war issue); (2) the genre of apocalyptic frequently used figures of speech that were intended to say something on an emotive level even if packaged in highly overstated or extravagant terms because the figures are a way of "screaming out to the reader" in the loudest voice possible about the importance of the choices they make; and (3) the causation patterns shaping the violence are much more complex than simply drawing a direct line to God.⁵

A full response would be quite lengthy. So a few examples from John's apocalypse must suffice.⁶

⁴Benjamin Steen Stubblefield, "The Function of the Church in Warfare in the Book of Revelation" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 188. See Stubblefield's comment on the meaning of Rev 11:13 regarding the "nine-tenths repentance" of earth dwellers in the evil capital city—a stunning reversal of what might be expected.

⁵On the second point: The figures of speech in apocalyptic literature may be described as *hyper-hyperbole* or figures of speech *on steroids*. Psalm 1 uses typical figures of speech that compare studying Torah to a tree planted by the water's edge. We know what a tree planted beside a source of water is. The figures of speech used in apocalyptic writings often moved well beyond the norms of this world: multiheaded beasts with ten horns, tails that sting like scorpions, etc.

⁶The four points that follow represent a Revelation-specific version of the material in appendix G on truncated causation.

The language of cosmic catastrophe. In Revelation, the language of cosmic catastrophe—stars falling from the sky, the earth collapses, and so on—is often a concern for contemporary readers. However, this cosmic language is frequently material drawn from Old Testament texts describing a transition among world powers (Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, Persia, etc.). As far as we know, none of it happened literally in the Old Testament context. Rather, it was an apocalyptic way of proclaiming, “The world as we know it will never be the same (*as if* the stars fell to earth). A grand, power-shifting change—a transfer in kingdoms of cosmic proportions—is coming.”⁷ The cosmic language was built around a transition of powers, which of course lies at the very heart of Revelation: “The [evil] kingdom of the world has become the [glorious] kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever” (Rev 11:15). This change-of-kingdoms language does not mean that the world will be literally rolled up like a scroll and the sun turned blood-red or black (see Is 13:1-10; 34:1-8; Ezek 32:1-12; see also Joel 2:10, 31-32; Judg 5:19-21).

The divine passive. The passive voice in Revelation at times hints that God permits something to be done but that the actual causation is by no means direct. God hands the individual over to some catastrophe that was of their own making or a natural consequence of their twisted desires.⁸

Demonic agency. Some of the harshest fallout of the seals, trumpets, and bowls, even if announced by good angels, is accomplished by the hand of evil, demonic forces or by the hand of evil, power-drunk human beings acting under the influence of and in conjunction with the great dragon (Satan; Rev 9:1-21).

Human agency and evil restrained until an appointed time. The four apocalyptic horsemen of Revelation 6:1-8 are likely opponents of God and reflect human authority and agency without restraint. The four cascade in an unfolding or domino-like cause-and-effect relationship that is easily enough

⁷While perhaps overstated, Richard A. Horsley correctly notes, “‘Apocalyptic’ texts are not about the end of the world but the end of empires” (*Revolt of the Scribes: Resistance and Apocalyptic Origin* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 2009], 1).

⁸Often the language of “being given/granted” takes on this sense: Rev 6:2, 4, 8, 11; 7:2; 8:3; 9:1, 3, 5; 11:1, 2; 13:5, 7, 14, 15; 16:8; 19:8; 20:4. E.g., James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 49-50.

contained within the realm of human agency.⁹ Also, good angels within Revelation often function to hold back the evil forces of the world (human and demonic) until an exact moment at the end when God deems so; the evil of the world has grown to the point where releasing even more evil grants people the desires of their corrupt hearts (Rev 9:15). Eventually the evil of the apocalyptic world implodes on itself; she who was once so powerful ultimately destroys herself in a cannibalistic manner (Rev 17:1–18:24).

⁹The authority to conquer (first horseman) brings war (second horseman). Wars of conquest lead to economic chaos (third horseman), which in turn usher in death and plagues (fourth horseman). See Roy R. Millhouse, "Re-Imaging the Warrior: Divine Warrior Imagery in the Book of Revelation" (PhD diss., Baylor University, 2012), 382.