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King of Kings: God, the Foreign Emperor, and Discourse on Sovereignty in the Hebrew Bible

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An abstract of  
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## Abstract

### King of Kings: God, the Foreign Emperor, and Discourse on Sovereignty in the Hebrew Bible

By Justin L. Pannkuk

Beginning in the 8th century BCE and continuing through the Maccabean crisis in the 2nd, ancient Israel and Judah were threatened or manifestly dominated by a series of foreign empires. This study analyzes the theological responses to these experiences of imperial domination in the Hebrew Bible, especially as they came to expression in discourse about the relationship between YHWH and the figure of the Gentile king. This relationship provided a crucial—even necessary—locus for thinking theologically about empire. For if the unrivaled political sovereignty of the Gentile king was not to dislodge YHWH from his position of ultimate supremacy, this sovereignty somehow had to be assimilated into a Yahwistic theological framework. The key texts analyzed in this study do just this, establishing sets of relations between YHWH and the Gentile king that provide models for making sense of Gentile empire theologically. In order to understand the content and character of these models, this study pursues three central research questions: (1) How did key biblical texts configure the relationship between YHWH and the Gentile king at pivotal junctures in the history of Judah? (2) How did these configurations change over time and in response to different political circumstances and ideological challenges? And (3) how did the responsive nature of this discourse influence the historical development and presentation of beliefs about YHWH? In answering these questions, the study identifies common discursive strategies for making theological sense of Gentile imperialism, including the assimilation of the activities and power of the Gentile king within an exclusively Yahwistic framework by the contestation of effective agency and the construction of hierarchies of relative sovereignty, which over time contributed to the development of monotheistic discourse in ancient Judah and ideas about the kingdom of God in early Jewish eschatology. The analyses also demonstrate how the discursive constructions of reality emerging from both sides of the imperial encounter interacted with one another, producing what postcolonial theorists describe as “hybrid” discourses. The study thus shows how the biblical presentation of YHWH was, by necessity, influenced by the imperial encounter through the process of response.

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## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Our experience teaches us that traditional religion is always in danger of being ambushed by the intractable data of experience.

– Joseph Blenkinsopp<sup>1</sup>

Jewish society is unique in this respect. It has had many massive national catastrophes visited upon it and still survived; and in each case the reconstruction was undertaken in significant measure by the exertion of the Hebrew literary imagination ... It is the story of the transcendence of catastrophe rather than of the catastrophe itself which is compelling.

– Alan Mintz<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the warmer months of 701 BCE, King Sennacherib of Assyria marched his troops across the southwestern flank of his vast but fledgling empire.<sup>3</sup> Incited by rebellion among the subordinate states of Syria-Palestine, the king aimed to extinguish, once and for all, the desperate hopes for political independence that had flared up in the region after his accession to the throne a few years earlier. Sennacherib, the self-styled “Bridle-that-Controls-the-Insubmissive,” was not gentle.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Isaiah 40–55: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 19A (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 105.

<sup>2</sup> *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), x.

<sup>3</sup> For careful considerations of the historical issues related to these events, especially as they came to bear upon Judah, see William R. Gallagher, *Sennacherib’s Campaign to Judah: New Studies*, *Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East* 18 (Leiden: Brill, 1999); Robb Andrew Young, *Hezekiah in History and Tradition*, *VTSup* 155 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 61–87; Nazek Khalid Matty, *Sennacherib’s Campaign against Judah and Jerusalem in 701 B.C.: A Historical Reconstruction*, *BZAW* 487 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016). See also Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, *SBT* 2/3 (London: SCM, 1967); R. E. Clements, *Isaiah and the Deliverance of Jerusalem: A Study of the Interpretation of Prophecy in the Old Testament*, *JSOTSup* 13 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980), 52–71; and now the essays treating the legacy of this encounter in reception history in Isaac Kalimi and Seth Richardson, eds., *Sennacherib at the Gates of Jerusalem: Story, History and Historiography*, *CHANE* 71 (Leiden: Brill, 2014). See further §2.2.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., the Chicago/Taylor prism, I 8–9 (A. Kirk Grayson and Jamie Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria [704–681 BC], Part 1*, *RINAP* 3/1 [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012]); among the Neo-Assyrian kings, this epithet appears to be unique to Sennacherib and occurs some 22x in his inscriptions).

According to his own account of the campaign, Sennacherib channeled much of his wrath towards King Hezekiah of Judah, a key architect of the resistance.<sup>5</sup> The Assyrian troops, with their battering rams and siege engines, swept across the Judean countryside like a torrent of terror (cf. Isa 7:7–8), overwhelming some forty-six fortified cities and villages “without number.”<sup>6</sup> The royal annals count the captives by the hundreds of thousands.<sup>7</sup> Leaving this trail of destruction in its wake, the torrent eventually surged up to the walls of Jerusalem itself. There, Sennacherib boasts, he kept Hezekiah shut up in his royal city “like a bird in a cage.”<sup>8</sup> Whether the Judean king would continue to sound even a chirp of resistance against his Assyrian overlord would have to answered (cf. Isa 10:14).

The biblical tradition preserves a vivid remembrance of the encounter at the walls of Jerusalem and all that was at stake (2 Kings 18–20 // Isaiah 36–39). The tradition recalls that the conflict came to a head as high-ranking members of the Assyrian royal administration, backed by a large army, stationed themselves along the conduit of the upper pool outside of Jerusalem. There they were to deliver a message from their king, “the Great King, the King of Assyria.” The message had an obvious end: to persuade Hezekiah to capitulate without a battle. Such appeals were undoubtedly common, and often met with success.<sup>9</sup> The carnage produced by the Assyrian

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<sup>5</sup> III 18–49.

<sup>6</sup> III 19–21.

<sup>7</sup> III 23–25.

<sup>8</sup> III 27–28.

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., A. Kirk Grayson, “Assyrian Rule of Conquered Territory in Ancient Western Asia,” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Jack M. Sasson, vol. 2 of (New York: Scribner, 1995), 960–1, who points to a parallel in rhetoric in a letter delivered by Tiglath-pileser III’s officers when the Assyrian army had surrounded Babylon after a rebellion by the Chaldean Mukin-zeri. See also Peter Dubovský, *Hezekiah and the Assyrian Spies: Reconstruction of the Neo-Assyrian Intelligence Services and Its Significance for 2 Kings 18–19*, BibOR 49 (Rome: Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 2006), 162–3.

war machine, its carefully propagated reputation for brutalizing the resistant, and the calculated psychological terror that these tokens of destruction produced in the next potential target frequently induced preemptive surrender. What could spur pragmatism like an existential threat? And yet, as the biblical tradition remembers that confrontation, Sennacherib did not ground his message, loaded with the threat of oblivion as it was, in an appeal to mere political calculation. His message was also theological.

In the hearing of Hezekiah's advisors and those peering out from the wall, Sennacherib's Chief Cup-Bearer, the Rabshakeh, conveyed the message of his king in the language of the people:

On whom do you now rely, that you have rebelled against me? ... Do not let Hezekiah make you rely on YHWH by saying, "YHWH will surely deliver us, and this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria" ... Do not listen to Hezekiah when he misleads you by saying, "YHWH will deliver us." Has any of the gods of the nations ever delivered its land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Where were the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah? Have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? Who among the gods of the countries have delivered their countries out of my hand, that YHWH should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand? (2 Kgs 18:20, 29–30, 33–35; NRSV, with slight modifications)

The rhetoric attributed to the Rabshakeh could hardly have been more theologically acute.<sup>10</sup> For the rapid encroachment of the Neo-Assyrian empire into the West in the preceding decades had, in fact, raised a giant question mark over the city of David, its king, and the deity who dwelled therein. Was Zion really inviolable?<sup>11</sup> Would a son of David really sit on the throne in Jerusalem forever?<sup>12</sup> Was YHWH any different from the gods of the neighboring nations that had already

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<sup>10</sup> On the diplomatic tactic of gathering and exploiting "insider" knowledge for the adaptation of rhetoric for psychological warfare, see Dubovský, *Hezekiah and the Assyrian Spies*, 25–27.

<sup>11</sup> See Pss 46:2–8 [1–7]; 48:4–8 [3–7]; 76:4–6 [3–5]; cf. Isa 14:32; 17:12–13; Mic 3:11.

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., Ps 89:20–38, 49 [19–37, 50]; 2 Sam 7:16.

fallen into the hands of the Assyrian king? Would the people of YHWH not suffer the same fate as those other peoples, failing, along with their patron deities, to survive the age of empires that was now dawning? The new kind of power possessed and expressed by Sennacherib, king of the world's first true empire, raised an unprecedented challenge to the traditional Judean royal theology.<sup>13</sup> No wonder Hezekiah tore his clothes on that day he called a “day of distress” (2 Kgs 19:1–3)!

Somehow, Judah managed to survive that confrontation with Sennacherib, and even the Neo-Assyrian empire itself.<sup>14</sup> But the political and theological challenges presented by the power of Gentile kings did not pass away with the Neo-Assyrians. Over the next six centuries, the people of YHWH would have to negotiate their precarious existence in drastically different contexts as the great empires of the Near East rose and fell. In the early 6<sup>th</sup> century, the Neo-Babylonian empire would also march upon Jerusalem, but this time the capital would suffer utter catastrophe: King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon eventually razed the city and its temple, destroyed its most vital political and cultural institutions, and deported key sectors of its populace across far-flung regions of his empire. Only a half-century later, the meteoric rise of the Persian empire under Cyrus the Great would bring with it an entirely new set of prospects: as the

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<sup>13</sup> The era of systematic provincialization inaugurated under Tiglath-Pileser III (745–727 BCE), in which the Assyrian state began to extend *direct* control over territory beyond its traditional borders, reducing the autonomy of subjugated states and repopulating their territories to the extent necessary to do so, represented a novel form of political dominance and hegemony that could be described accurately as imperialism; see Marc Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East ca. 3000–323 BC*, 2nd ed., Blackwell History of the Ancient World (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 242, 252; Mario Liverani, *The Ancient Near East: History, Society and Economy*, trans. Soraia Tabatabai (New York: Routledge, 2014), 412. For a more detailed description of these political innovations, see §2.2.

<sup>14</sup> As Hayim Tadmor points out, so far as we know, only Tushpa, the capital city of King Sarduri of Urartu, and Hezekiah's Jerusalem appear to have defied Assyrian imperial policy with the success of survival (“Assyria at the Gates of Tushpa,” in *Treasures on Camels' Humps: Historical and Literary Studies from the Ancient Near East Presented to Israel Eph'al*, ed. Mordechai Cogan and Dan'el Kahn [Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2008], 266–73). Sizable tribute, however, was no doubt a factor in Hezekiah's case.

ascendant regime set its sights upon Babylon, hopes for a return from diaspora and national restoration in exchange for political allegiance could find a new object. And in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century, when the cultural stability of the *Pax Persica* was torn asunder by Alexander the Great and the bloody battles of his Successors, the cultural upheavals of the Hellenistic age presented yet another set of challenges that would climax in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century with the full-on persecution of Judaism by Antiochus IV Epiphanes. At each of these critical junctures, the people of YHWH were forced to respond and adapt to the conditions of Gentile imperialism that were largely beyond their control. Their very survival as a people depended on it.

### 1.1. THE AIM AND FOCUS OF THIS STUDY

My aim in this study is to understand the content and character of the theological responses to Gentile empire in the Hebrew Bible, especially as these responses took shape in discourse about YHWH's relationship to the Gentile king. The writings of the Hebrew Bible preserve discursive responses to the political conditions and ideological challenges presented by Gentile imperialism at key stages in the history of Judah.<sup>15</sup> These discursive responses provide what is far and away our best evidence for observing how the prophets and sages of YHWH's people made sense of the new and often shifting circumstances of Gentile imperialism over the course of the 8<sup>th</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> In this study I employ the term "discourse," and its adjectival form "discursive," in the non-technical sense of all the ways a subject might speak or write in order to communicate about a given topic. To the extent that the texts analyzed in this study participate in communicating about the same topic (YHWH's relationship to the Gentile king) and do so actively by responding to previous utterances about that topic, they together could be said to comprise a larger discourse, in this case, what ultimately became "biblical" discourse on the topic. The commonsensical working-definition of the term, however, is sufficient for describing the object of my analyses.

<sup>16</sup> The extra-biblical dataset for studying communities in Judah and diaspora during the age of empires does provide us helpful resources reconstructing general conditions on the ground for some communities at certain times (archaeological reconstructions; onomastic evidence; the witness to Jewish life in papyri from Elephantine and the Marashu tablets from near Nippur), but hardly anything about how they thought about empire. Fortunately, the

In several important cases, the responses preserved in biblical tradition foreground the relationship between YHWH and the figure of the Gentile king as a topic of discourse. This relationship provided a crucial—even necessary—locus for thinking theologically about empire. For the sovereignty possessed and expressed by the Gentile king, that singular representative of imperial power, raised a theological question that demanded resolution: How could beliefs about YHWH’s sovereignty and agency in the world be reconciled with the manifest political sovereignty claimed and exercised by the figure of the Gentile king? If the unrivaled political sovereignty of the Gentile king was not to dislodge YHWH from his position of ultimate supremacy, this sovereignty somehow had to be assimilated into a Yahwistic theological framework. The discursive responses preserved in the biblical texts do just this, establishing sets of relations between YHWH and the Gentile king that provide models for making sense of Gentile empire theologically. And yet, despite the widely recognized role that Gentile empires played in shaping the socio-political and ideological contexts in which the writings of the Hebrew Bible took shape, there has been no comprehensive study of the models for making sense of Gentile imperialism or how they developed over time in response to different historical circumstances, imperial ideologies, and patterns of imperial practice.<sup>17</sup> There is a story yet to be

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biblical dataset begins to be supplemented in the early Hellenistic era by early Jewish texts that were not ultimately included in the Hebrew Bible; I engage the evidence provided by these texts whenever possible (see, e.g., §6).

<sup>17</sup> To the best of my knowledge, the only study that focuses on the discourse about God’s relationship to the Gentile king across the Hebrew Bible is the article-length discussion by Carol A. Newsom, “God’s Other: The Intractable Problem of the Gentile King in Judean and Early Jewish Literature,” in *The “Other” in Second Temple Judaism: Essays in Honor of John J. Collins*, ed. Daniel C. Harlow et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 31–48. Newsom organizes her analyses, however, by common ideological strategies for dealing with the Gentile king as “the other” (Elimination; Elimination Plus Domination; Domination and the Strategy of False Consciousness; Assimilation—and a Hope for Elimination; Assimilation Only), which are adapted from the categories put forth by Miroslav Volf in *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 75 (Elimination; Domination; Assimilation; Abandonment), rather than by diachronic considerations. Although organized differently, Alexandria Frisch’s recent monograph also offers an analysis of the question of God’s relationship to Gentile empire in Danielic discourse that is informed by postcolonial criticism, and

told here. By focusing on the discourse about YHWH's relationship to the Gentile king in the Hebrew Bible, this study marks an attempt to tell an important part of it.

Toward that end, the study is driven by three central questions: (1) How did the key biblical traditions configure the relationship between YHWH and the Gentile king at pivotal junctures in the history of Judah? (2) How did these configurations change over time and in response to different political circumstances and ideological challenges? And (3) in what ways did the responsive nature of this discourse influence the historical development and presentation of beliefs about YHWH? Answering these questions will contribute to our understanding of the content, character, and theological consequences of the discursive responses to Gentile imperialism in the Hebrew Bible.

## 2. STRUCTURE, METHOD, AND GOALS OF THE RESEARCH

### 2.1. The Chapters of the Story

In order to approach these questions, the chapters of this study generally follow a common structure. I begin by setting up the historical and ideological context in which the discursive responses took shape, giving special attention to (1) the nature of relations between the imperial powers and the petty states like Judah that were under their subordination and (2) the imperial ideologies of rule that served to support these relations. Fortunately, Assyriologists, classicists, and biblical scholars alike have documented much about the great Near Eastern empires and the nature of their relations with subordinate populations. This body of research provides a solid foundation on which to contextualize the biblical discourse, making it possible to delineate the

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she situates her analysis with a brief diachronic analysis of previous biblical discourse on Gentile empire; see *The Danielic Discourse on Empire in Second Temple Literature*, JSJSup 176 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 1–51, 102–24.



political and ideological conditions to which the biblical authors responded in their discourse about YHWH and the Gentile king.<sup>18</sup> I then analyze how the biblical authors model the relationship between YHWH and the Gentile king, attending especially to how they assimilate the novel conditions of imperialism within a Yahwistic framework and thus render them theological meaningful. In order to facilitate my historical and exegetical analyses, I make use of key concepts developed by postcolonial theorists as an analytical apparatus.<sup>19</sup> Postcolonial theory provides a helpful set of concepts for recognizing, naming, and analyzing the complex dynamics at work when the discourses of politically dominant and subordinate groups work themselves out in relation to one another. As I aim to describe in a number of chapters, the discursive constructions of reality emerging from both sides of the imperial encounter are partially shaped by the other, producing what postcolonial theorists would describe as a “hybrid” discourse.<sup>20</sup> By

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<sup>18</sup> As the engagement with secondary scholarship in the following chapters make clear, scholars have done much to contextualize these biblical texts, and have even begun to analyze how the texts respond to the rhetoric of the dominant imperial powers. At the same time, however, it is also fair to say that the imperial contexts of biblical texts have not always been a central concern of research, even if these contexts are widely recognized as crucial for understanding the texts. In a blurb for the recent book by Andrew T. Abernethy et al., eds., *Isaiah and Imperial Context: The Book of Isaiah in the Times of Empire* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), e.g. Hugh Williamson observes: “Various parts of the book of Isaiah were written when Israel and Judah lived under imperial domination. It is therefore surprising that this multi-faceted topic has not been the subject of extended analysis before.”

<sup>19</sup> There is nothing strictly “post-” or “colonial” about the contexts in which the biblical texts were produced, but this is of little consequence for this study: the biblical texts were produced in contexts in which groups of unequal power negotiated power through ideological discourse. For this reason, the discourses emerging from the imperial encounters feature the dynamics noticed by postcolonial theorists. As John W. Marshall rightly proposes, “[w]hile modern and early modern empires undoubtedly provided the context for the literary fiction in which the impulses of postcolonial analysis first arose and to which the initial theoretical apparatus was applied, it should be clear that the narrative of the birth of postcolonial analysis does not set the limit on the theory’s application” (“Postcolonialism and the Practice of History,” in *Her Master’s Tools? Feminist and Postcolonialism Engagements of Historical-Critical Discourse*, ed. Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner, GPBS 9 [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005], 98).

<sup>20</sup> The concept of hybridity was developed in the work of Homi K. Bhabha, most influentially in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 102–22. A helpful summary of how this concept has developed within postcolonial theory is provided by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, who gloss the term in its common usage as “the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization” (*Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 3rd ed., Routledge Key Guides [New York: Routledge, 2013], 135–39, quotation from 135). One of the clearest accounts of hybridity is offered by John W. Marshall, “Hybridity and Reading Romans 13,” *JSNT* 31 (2008): 157–178, esp. 163–67.

making use of the concept of hybridity, I try to show how the biblical presentation of YHWH was influenced by the imperial encounter through the process of response and, in doing so, help make the case for the methodological utility of drawing on postcolonial theory for the historical-critical study of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>21</sup>

With regard to scope, the texts taken up in the chapters of this study include all of those that respond to the conditions of Gentile imperialism through discourse about YHWH's relationship to the Gentile king, beginning with the Neo-Assyrians in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE and continuing through the Antiochene crisis in the 2<sup>nd</sup>. These include the discursive responses about God's relationship to the king of Assyria in Isaiah 1–39 (§2), Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in the oracles of Jeremiah (§3) and the court tales of Daniel (§5), Cyrus the Great in Second Isaiah and other texts from the dawn of the Persian period (§4), and the Hellenistic kings in the apocalyptic discourse of Daniel (§§5, 6). Because my concern is to understand the theological responses to

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<sup>21</sup> In my judgment, the most methodologically sophisticated discussion of how postcolonial theory might contribute to the historical-critical interpretation of biblical texts is articulated in Marshall, "Postcolonialism and the Practice of History." As a general trend, postcolonial studies of the Hebrew Bible have been concerned with (1) the ways in which texts have been received in colonial contexts, (2) the preservation and voicing of readings by colonial subjects or those "from the margins," and (3) the relevance of such readings for contemporary political advocacy; see Stephen D. Moore and Fernando F. Segovia, "Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Beginnings, Trajectories, Intersections," in *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections*, ed. Stephen D. Moore and Fernando F. Segovia, *The Bible and Postcolonialism* (London: T&T Clark International, 2005), 1–22. The self-conscious application of insights from postcolonial theory to understand biblical texts in the historical-critical mode has occurred mostly among New Testament studies (see Moore and Segovia, "Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Beginnings, Trajectories, Intersections," 7–8; Alexandria Frisch, *The Danielic Discourse on Empire*, 11–12). This imbalance has been rectified in recent years in several important studies that have used postcolonial theory as an analytical apparatus for interpreting traditions in the Hebrew Bible within their historical contexts, including David Janzen, *The Necessary King: A Postcolonial Reading of the Deuteronomistic Portrait of the Monarchy*, HBM 57 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013); Christopher B. Hays, "Isaiah as Colonized Poet: His Rhetoric of Death in Conversation with African Postcolonial Writers," in *Isaiah and Imperial Context: The Book of Isaiah in the Times of Empire*, ed. Andrew T. Abernethy et al. (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), 51–70; Carol A. Newsom and Brennan W. Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014); Carol A. Newsom, "'Resistance Is Futile!': The Ironies of Danielic Resistance to Empire," *Interpretation* 7 (2017): 167–77; Göran Eidevall, "Propagandistic Constructions of Empires in the Book of Isaiah," in *Divination, Politics, and Ancient Near Eastern Empires*, ed. Alan Lenzi and Jonathan Stöckl, ANEM 7 (Atlanta: SBL, 2014); Leo G. Perdue and Warren Carter, *Israel and Empire: A Postcolonial History of Israel and Early Judaism*, ed. Coleman A. Baker (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015); Frisch, *The Danielic Discourse on Empire*.

conditions of imperialism at particular stages in the history of Judah, I do not dedicate a chapter to the discourse about the Egyptian Pharaoh in Exodus 5–12, which is exceedingly difficult to historicize within a particular context and which does not respond directly to a contemporary imperial power, even if Egyptian hegemony made itself felt in the Levant during the Iron Age. Documenting how the highly contextual responses taken up in chapters 2–6 perform symbolic work on the problems presented by the Gentile king will, however, offer insights for interpreting the discourse about Pharaoh in Exodus 5–12 (see §§4.3.2.1.3; 7.2.2).

## 2.2. The Story of the Chapters

In addition to analyzing the content and character of the theological responses preserved in discrete texts, this study also aims to tell the larger story of the development of discourse about God’s relationship to Gentile emperors over time. The chapters are thus arranged chronologically—rather than by common themes, genres, or discursive strategies—in order to facilitate a longitudinal analysis of the responses as they took shape over the course of the 8<sup>th</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE. Charting lines of continuity and discontinuity among the responses will allow us to observe and trace the development of discourse about YHWH’s relationship to the Gentile king in the Hebrew Bible. More specifically, it will allow us to identify (1) the common themes and discursive strategies running throughout the chapters and (2) the impact that responding to Gentile king(dom)s had on the depiction and historical development of ideas about YHWH in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>22</sup> My central argument here is that the common strategies for making theological sense of Gentile imperialism, especially the assimilation of the activities and political power of

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<sup>22</sup> A few recent studies have begun to trace this kind of theological impact in certain oracles or books within the Hebrew Bible; see Baruch A. Levine, “Assyrian Ideology and Israelite Monotheism,” *Iraq* 67 (2005): 411–27; Frisch, *The Danielic Discourse on Empire*, 15–16.

the Gentile king within an exclusively Yahwistic framework by the contestation of agency and the construction of hierarchies of relative sovereignty, contributed to the development of (1) monotheistic discourse in ancient Judah and (2) ideas about the kingdom of God in early Jewish eschatology. But it is only possible to trace this developmental story in light of its discrete chapters. And so to those we must now turn.

## CHAPTER 2

“WOE, ASSYRIA—THE ROD OF MY ANGER!”  
 GOD AND THE FOREIGN EMPEROR IN FIRST ISAIAH

“Do you think that mere words are strategy and power for war?”  
 – *The Chief Cup-Bearer of Sennacherib, at the walls of Jerusalem* (Isaiah 36:5)

“[I]n truth, response may be the clearest form of influence.”<sup>23</sup>  
 – *Baruch Levine*

## 2.1. INTRODUCTION

The middle of the 8th century BCE saw the dawning of a new age in the ancient Near East. Beginning with the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (745–727 BCE), the kingdom of Assyria began to extend its rule far beyond its traditional boundaries, rapidly conquering the petty states of Syria-Palestine and incorporating them into a centrally administrated empire. My aim in this chapter is to analyze the response to this new era of Assyrian dominance in the West found in First Isaiah (Isaiah 1–39), especially as it comes to expression in discourse about the relationship between YHWH and the figure of the Assyrian king.<sup>24</sup> Though several passages in this collection are concerned with negotiating the political realities brought by Assyria’s encroachment into the region, the oracle preserved in Isa 10:5–15, more than any other, engages directly with the meaning of Assyria’s activities and does so by working out the relationship between YHWH and the Assyrian king. My analysis therefore focuses on this oracle and the character of its response

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<sup>23</sup> Levine, “Assyrian Ideology and Israelite Monotheism,” 413.

<sup>24</sup> The classic tripartite division of Isaiah has rightly been problematized in recent decades; for a concise summary of these developments, see Ulrich Berges, “Isaiah: Structure, Themes, and Contested Issues,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Prophets*, ed. Carolyn J. Sharp (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 153–70. In this chapter I retain the nomenclature of First Isaiah to refer to Isa 1–39 not as a way of defining this collection as a monolithic entity, but out of the recognition that only this section of the book contains materials stemming from the period of Assyria’s dominance over Judah.

to Assyrian aggression. Before turning to the materials in Isaiah, it will first be helpful to offer a brief sketch of the key developments that shaped the political and ideological challenges to which they respond.

## 2.2. 745 BCE: A SHADOW IN THE EAST AND THE BEGINNING OF THE END

In the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III inaugurated a new era in the political history of the ancient Near East.<sup>25</sup> At the time of his accession to the throne in 745 BCE, Assyria had undergone a period of internal decline marked by political stagnation and territorial disaggregation. Since the achievements of his predecessors Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BCE) and Shalmaneser III (858–824 BCE) a century earlier,<sup>26</sup> provincial governors within “Greater Assyria” had gained increasing levels of independence and autonomy at the expense of the centralized power.<sup>27</sup> The internal decline was matched by increasing external pressure from neighboring states like Urartu to the north and the ever-problematic Babylonians to the south.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> For overviews of this new phase in Neo-Assyrian history, see Mario Liverani, *The Ancient Near East: History, Society and Economy*, trans. Soraia Tabatabai (New York: Routledge, 2014), 475–84 and Van De Mierop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 229–46. A helpful and concise sketch of the key events for contextualizing Isaiah 1–39 may be found in John H. Hayes and Stuart A. Irvine, *Isaiah the Eighth-Century Prophet: His Times and His Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), 17–49, esp. 17–28.

<sup>26</sup> The initial consolidation of the traditional Assyrian heartland began earlier, during the reigns of Ashur-dan II (934–912 BCE) and Adad-nirari II (922–891 BCE), but was largely completed by Ashurnasirpal II. This in turn paved the way for Shalmaneser III to expand beyond the traditional borders unto the Mediterranean; see Mario Liverani, *The Ancient Near East: History, Society and Economy*, trans. Soraia Tabatabai (New York: Routledge, 2014), 479–81.

<sup>27</sup> Most describe this period as one of political decline. Amélie Kuhrt, however, has argued that the evidence can “be slanted differently,” to suggest that “although powerful, the governors essentially maintained the Assyrian empire, by ensuring its survival in the areas which it had conquered in the course of the ninth century, and defending its frontiers” (Amélie Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East c. 3000–330 BC*, 2 vols., *Routledge History of the Ancient World* [London: Routledge, 1995], 2:492). But the steps taken to reduce the power of these governors beginning with the reforms of Tiglath-pileser suggest that their strength or independence at the least posed a threat toward the unification of centralized power.

<sup>28</sup> For a concise account of Tiglath-pileser’s dealings with these states, see A. K. Grayson, “Assyria: Tiglath-Pileser III to Sargon II (744–705 B.C.),” in *The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. 3, Part 2, Assyrian and*

But upon his assumption of the throne, Tiglath-pileser was determined to restore and extend the prestige of Assyria.<sup>29</sup> Through a series of ambitious reforms, the king initiated a new phase of internal consolidation and external expansion that would transform Assyria into a full-fledged empire.<sup>30</sup>

Along with a number of shrewd administrative reforms, which served to secure control over the Assyrian heartland by reducing the power of its provincial governors,<sup>31</sup> Tiglath-pileser initiated a new era of Assyrian expansion that would drastically affect the smaller kingdoms beyond the bounds of Greater Assyria, especially those west of the Euphrates. To be sure, Assyria had made its presence felt beyond its borders in former eras, submitting states to “the Yoke of Assyria” (*nīr Aššur*) through aggressive military campaigns aimed at acquiring tribute. In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, Ashurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III had crossed the Euphrates and extended

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*Babylonian Empires and Other States of the Near East, from the Eighth to the Sixth Centuries B.C.*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 74–77, 80–83.

<sup>29</sup> See Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 248–50; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 19 (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 100.

<sup>30</sup> As Van De Mieroop notes, “only the second phase” of Assyria’s rise, beginning with Tiglath-pileser and continuing through 612 BCE, “displays a conscious and systematic approach toward the formation of a unified empire” (*A History of the Ancient Near East*, 229). See also A. K. Grayson, “Assyria 668–635 B.C.: The Reign of Ashurbanipal,” in *The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. 3, Part 2, Assyrian and Babylonian Empires and Other States of the Near East, from the Eighth to the Sixth Centuries B.C.*, ed. John Boardman, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 161.

<sup>31</sup> Such reforms included decreasing the size of provinces, thereby reducing the power of those who governed them (see A. K. Grayson, “Assyrian Civilization,” in *The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. 3, Part 2, Assyrian and Babylonian Empires and Other States of the Near East, from the Eighth to the Sixth Centuries B.C.*, ed. John Boardman, 2nd ed. [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991], 204) and the appointment of eunuchs to key positions, which had the effect of separating the positions from hereditary or dynastic claims to authority; see Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 248; Karen Radner, “Royal Decision-Making: Kings, Magnates, and Scholars,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture*, ed. Karen Radner and Eleanor Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 359–61; Karen Radner, “Revolts in the Assyrian Empire: Succession Wars, Rebellions Against a False King and Independence Movements,” in *Revolt and Resistance in the Ancient Classical World and the Near East: In the Crucible of Empire*, ed. John J. Collins and J.G. Manning (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 44–45.

Assyria's reach so far as to secure a connection to the Mediterranean.<sup>32</sup> But Tiglath-pileser's revival of these practices marked the beginning of a new era of westward expansion that exceeded the aggressive ventures of his predecessors in scope and administration.<sup>33</sup>

In the course of several unprecedented military campaigns beginning in 738 BCE, Tiglath-pileser began to extend *direct* Assyrian control over the western states in Syria-Palestine. As with his predecessors, the driving goal was to acquire tribute and resources to feed the imperial center.<sup>34</sup> But subjugated states were no longer merely forced to submit to Assyria's economic yoke; beginning with Tiglath-pileser, the very independent existence of such states was reduced to the extent necessary to secure Assyrian control over their territory and its resources.<sup>35</sup> The degree to which the Assyrians reduced the autonomy of subjugated states depended on their compliance to Assyrian demands and its continuation. In cases where local rulers submitted willingly, Assyria would impose vassalage upon them, demanding a heavy annual tribute. But when such rulers would not comply, the Assyrians would depose them and set up in their stead a puppet ruler more amenable to their imperial ambitions. In places where rebellion persisted, as in Samaria leading up to 722 BCE, the local government would be eliminated entirely and the area transformed into an Assyrian province ruled directly by an Assyrian governor. In the last case, the Assyrians would go so far as to systematically repopulate

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<sup>32</sup> See Liverani, *The Ancient Near East*, 479.

<sup>33</sup> As Van De Mieroop observes, beginning with Tiglath-pileser, "... the policy toward the region changed fundamentally" (*A History of the Ancient Near East*, 248). In the former era, states beyond the traditional Assyrian borders "remained independent, keeping their original rulers, and only had to provide tribute. There was ... no attempt at this time to expand the boundaries of the Assyrian state" (*Ibid.*, 242).

<sup>34</sup> See Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 252.

<sup>35</sup> See Liverani, *The Ancient Near East*, 412; Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 248–50. Van De Mieroop notes that this process of provincialization "actually may not have been Assyria's initial intention but was forced upon it by the resistance of the local populations" (*Ibid.*, 248).



the area in order to secure compliance.<sup>36</sup> This process of provincialization beginning in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE marked a new era of Assyrian imperial domination in the West.<sup>37</sup>

The implementation of Assyria's expansion was the work of its unrivaled and practically unassailable army, led in annual campaigns by its commander-in-chief, the king.<sup>38</sup> In most cases, the threat of Assyria's military and its well-earned reputation for brutalizing the resistant were so overwhelming that cities submitted to its heavy demands without a fight.<sup>39</sup> Given the high cost of pitched battles and siege warfare, diplomatic coercion was preferred by the Assyrians as well.<sup>40</sup> If a city did not yield to diplomatic measures, however, the Assyrians would turn to violent ones, unleashing a torrent of terror on the inhabitants and landscape of the surrounding countryside.<sup>41</sup> The onslaught, so vividly depicted in Assyrian celebratory iconography and recounted in the royal annals, was merciless: cities and villages were destroyed, their inhabitants were brutally murdered and raped, their bodies mutilated and displayed "as gruesome testimony to what the Assyrians could do."<sup>42</sup> Agricultural and other life-support systems were also destroyed: fields

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<sup>36</sup> See A. Kirk Grayson, "Assyrian Rule of Conquered Territory in Ancient Western Asia," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Jack M. Sasson et al., vol. 2 (New York: Scribner, 1995), 2:961.

<sup>37</sup> Liverani, *The Ancient Near East*, 505.

<sup>38</sup> See Grayson, "Assyrian Rule," 2:960; Grayson, "Assyrian Civilization," 217. As Grayson notes, such campaigns were not always conducted on an annual basis nor always with the presence of the king; but such was the principle, at least as the royal annals tend to assume and purport (*Ibid.*, 219).

<sup>39</sup> Grayson, "Assyrian Rule," 964.

<sup>40</sup> For a summary of how this tactic of siege-craft would unfold, see Shawn Zelig Aster, "Transmission of Neo-Assyrian Claims of Empire to Judah in the Late Eighth Century B.C.E.," *HUCA* 78 (2007): 40. See also Grayson, "Assyrian Civilization," 221. For a description of psychological warfare through diplomatic means, see Dubovský, *Hezekiah and the Assyrian Spies*, 10–27, 161–87.

<sup>41</sup> See the description in Grayson, "Assyrian Rule," 961.

<sup>42</sup> Grayson, "Assyrian Civilization," 221; Liverani, *The Ancient Near East*, 421; Van De Mierop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 213. See also the careful analysis of the Assyrian strategy of public impalements in Karen Radner, "High Visibility Punishment and Deterrent: Impalement in Assyrian Warfare and Legal Practice," *ZABR* 21 (2015): 103–28. For a description of the ritualized aspects of this kind of "killing of cities" in the ancient Near East, see Jacob L. Wright, "Urbicide: The Ritualized Killing of Cities in the Ancient Near East," in *Ritual*

were sewn with salt, orchards cut down, irrigation systems demolished.<sup>43</sup> The “calculated frightfulness” produced by such acts of physical and psychological violence would usually induce the capital to capitulate, as Hezekiah did after the destruction of Lachish and other sites in the Judean countryside.<sup>44</sup> If not, however, the army would starve out a city or lay siege to it with skill and relentless determination.<sup>45</sup> In the end, no state or even coalition of states managed to withstand Assyrian aggression.<sup>46</sup>

The western ambitions and aggressive policies of Assyria came full-force upon the smaller states of Syria-Palestine. Isaiah’s likening of the King of Assyria to a mighty river inundating the region (8:7–8) provides an apt image: within a mere quarter-century,<sup>47</sup> from the

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*Violence in the Hebrew Bible: New Perspectives*, ed. Saul M. Olyan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 147–66.

<sup>43</sup> See Jacob L. Wright, “Warfare and Wanton Destruction: A Reexamination of Deuteronomy 20:19–20 in Relation to Ancient Siegecraft,” *JBL* 127 (2008): 423–458, esp. 427–30; Steven W. Cole, “The Destruction of Orchards in Assyrian Warfare,” in *Assyria 1995: Proceedings of the 10th Anniversary Symposium of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project: Helsinki, September 7–11, 1995* (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997), 29–40. The destruction of such resources could have devastating long-range consequences for the economy, demography, and morale of conquered territories; see Avraham Faust, “Deportation and Demography in Sixth-Century B.C.E. Judah,” in *Interpreting Exile: Interdisciplinary Studies of Displacement and Deportation in Biblical and Modern Contexts*, ed. Brad Kelle, Frank R. Ames, and Jacob L. Wright, SBLAIL 10 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 97; Liverani, *The Ancient Near East*, 412, 506.

<sup>44</sup> See 2 Kgs 18:13–16. The phrase “calculated frightfulness” is employed by Van De Mierop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 231 and Grayson, “Assyrian Civilization,” 221; see also Grayson, “Assyrian Rule,” 2:960; Gojko Barjamovic, “Propaganda and Practice in Assyrian and Persian Imperial Culture,” in *Universal Empire: A Comparative Approach to Imperial Culture and Representation in Eurasian History*, ed. Peter Fibiger Bang and Dariusz Kołodziejczyk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 46.

<sup>45</sup> As Grayson notes: “Siege warfare became a highly specialized technique in the Neo-Assyrian period and many of the skills developed by the Assyrians were subsequently adopted, improved upon, and expanded by later imperial powers including the Romans,” (“Assyrian Civilization,” 220). The siege of Samaria, which according to 2 Kgs 17:5 took three years, is a case in point.

<sup>46</sup> As Grayson states: “The Assyrian army was the mightiest that the ancient world had ever seen and no other people could resist it, at least not for long” (“Assyrian Rule,” 2:966). Similarly, Baruch A. Levine, “The Wars of Yahweh: Biblical Views of Just War,” in *Just War in Religion and Politics*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Bruce D. Chilton, and R. E. Tully, *Studies in Religion and the Social Order* (New York: University Press of America, 2013), 81.

<sup>47</sup> As Liverani notes: “Within 25 years, from Tiglath-pileser III to Sargon II, all the areas surrounding the kingdom of Israel, namely, Megiddo, Dor and Gilead (734 BC), and Qarnaym and Hauran (733 BC) became

initial encroachment of Tiglath-pileser into the West in 738 BCE through Sargon II's campaigns in Philistia in 712 BCE, the Assyrians extended their control over most of Syria-Palestine, reaching as far as Nakhal Muşri at the Egyptian border. By the end of Sennacherib's third campaign of 701 BCE, the entirety of the western front had been subsumed under Assyrian control (see Figure 2.1).<sup>48</sup>

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Assyrian provinces. Then, it was the turn of the heart of Israel, namely, Samaria (722), and Ashdod (722 BC)" (*The Ancient Near East*, 412).

<sup>48</sup> As Liverani observes, from 705–640 BCE, the period after Sargon II's annexations, "Assyria ruled an empire ... that could not expand further" (*Ibid.*, 491).

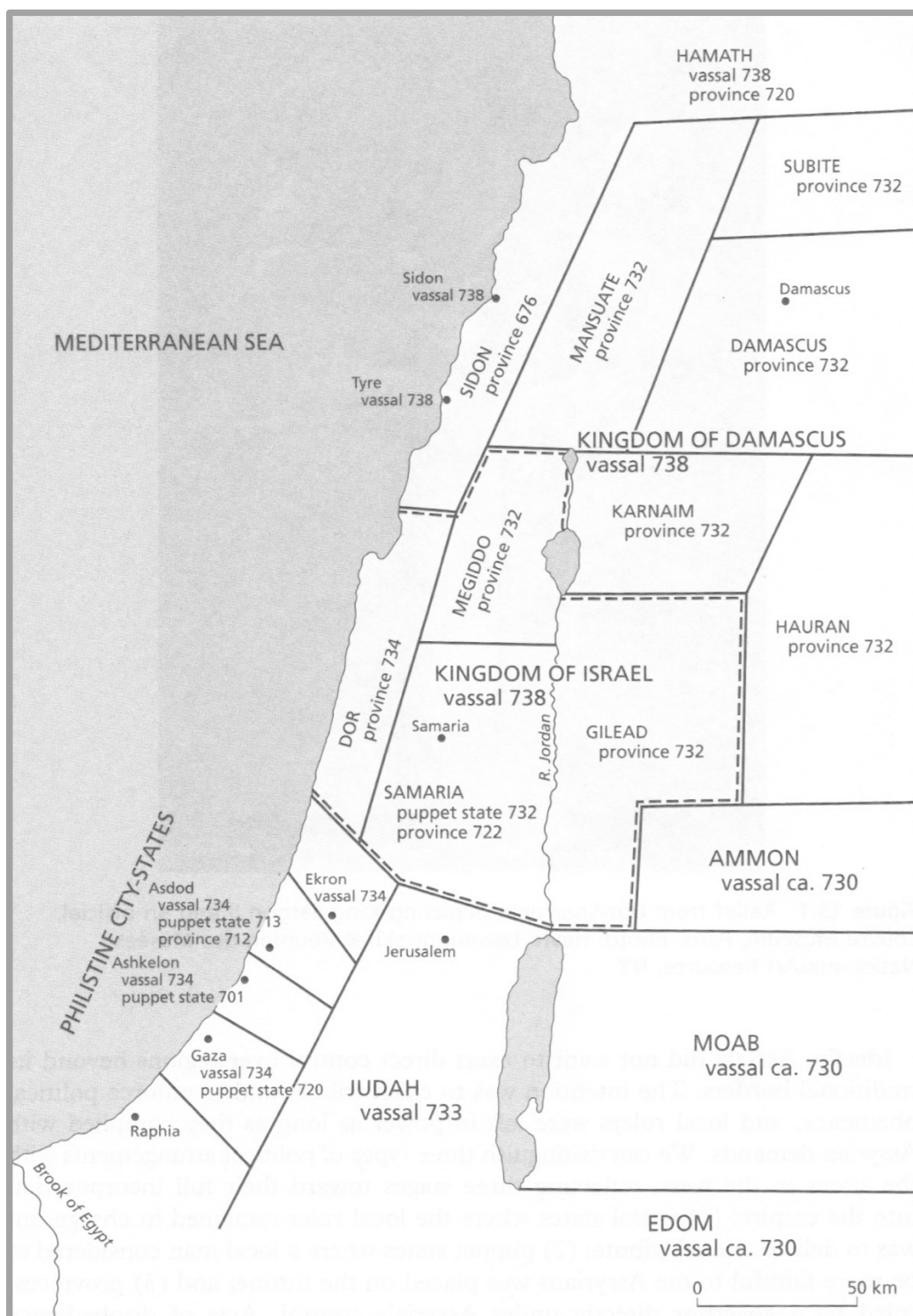


Figure 2.1: Assyria's Annexation of the West<sup>49</sup>

In short, the systematic extension of Assyrian control and administration over territory beyond its traditional boundaries that began under Tiglath-pileser marked the beginning of a new imperial age in the ancient Near East. But for the petty kingdoms of Syria-Palestine, who had enjoyed a more or less autonomous existence during the first centuries of the second millennium, it meant, quite simply, “the beginning of the end.”<sup>50</sup> The imperial shadow from the East had eclipsed their moment in the sun, and despite all hopes, it would not recede.<sup>51</sup>

### 2.3. GOD AND THE FOREIGN EMPEROR IN FIRST ISAIAH

Of the traditions preserved in the Hebrew Bible, those associated with Isaiah ben Amoz (active ca. 740–700 BCE) in Isaiah 1–39 relate the most direct engagement with the new political realities and ideological challenges brought by Assyria in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century. Admittedly, the compositional history of Isa 1–39 is riddled with uncertainties, not least in questions of authorship and the identification and relative stratification of redactional layers.<sup>52</sup> But much of the collection demonstrates an “intimate awareness” of Assyrian relations with Palestine in the 8<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>53</sup> This is particularly the case for the prose accounts of the major political events in

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<sup>49</sup> Map from Van De Mierop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 249 (after Benedikt Otzen, “Israel under the Assyrians,” in *Power and Propaganda: A Symposium on Ancient Empires*, ed. Mogens Trolle Larsen, Mesopotamia: Copenhagen Studies in Assyriology 7 [Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979], 252).

<sup>50</sup> Reinhard G. Kratz, *The Prophets of Israel*, trans. Nathan MacDonald and Anselm C. Hagedorn, *Critical Studies in the Hebrew Bible 2* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 36. Peter Machinist, “Assyria and Its Image in the First Isaiah,” *JAOS* 104 (1983): 721–22.

<sup>51</sup> As Gerhard von Rad commented: “From this time onwards there could be no more peace for the still independent nations of Palestine” (Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology, Volume II: The Theology of Israel’s Prophetic Traditions*, OTL [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001], 148).

<sup>52</sup> For a helpful consideration of the methodological challenges and prospects of identifying pre-exilic materials in Isaiah, see H. G. M. Williamson, “In Search of the Pre-Exilic Isaiah,” in *In Search of Pre-Exilic Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. John Day, JSOTSup 406 (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 181–206.

<sup>53</sup> Machinist, “Assyria and Its Image,” 722.

which the prophet was purportedly involved,<sup>54</sup> including the so-called Syro-Ephraimitic War (735–733 BCE; Isa 7–8; 2 Kgs 16),<sup>55</sup> the Ashdodite rebellion against Assyria (713–711 BCE; Isa 20:1–6), and Sennacherib’s punitive campaigns in Judah and Jerusalem itself (705–701 BCE; Isa 36–38 // 2 Kgs 18–19).<sup>56</sup> For their part, the oracular materials also speak of Assyria in many places and often evince a close familiarity with Assyrian rhetoric and ideology, which they interact with in various ways.<sup>57</sup> Thus despite the difficulties entailed in reconstructing the compositional history of First Isaiah, the collection provides a critical resource for examining the response to Assyrian aggression in Palestine as it took shape during the late 8<sup>th</sup> century and the period of Assyrian imperial domination more generally.

Several passages in First Isaiah are concerned with negotiating the political realities brought by Assyria, but none take up and reflect on the meaning of Assyrian aggression more

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<sup>54</sup> As Blenkinsopp observes, “Except for obvious glosses ... and ‘on that day’ additions ... these accounts give the appearance of having been composed close to the events described” (*Isaiah 1–39*, 91.).

<sup>55</sup> For a helpful reconstruction of these events based on Assyrian and biblical sources, see Stuart A. Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis*, SBLDS 123 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 23–109.

<sup>56</sup> There have been several careful considerations of the historical issues related to these events; see, e.g., William R. Gallagher, *Sennacherib’s Campaign to Judah: New Studies*, Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East 18 (Leiden: Brill, 1999); Young, *Hezekiah in History and Tradition*, 61–87; Matty, *Sennacherib’s Campaign against Judah and Jerusalem in 701 B.C.: A Historical Reconstruction*. Classic studies include Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, SBT 2/3 (London: SCM, 1967); R. E. Clements, *Isaiah and the Deliverance of Jerusalem: A Study of the Interpretation of Prophecy in the Old Testament*, JSOTSup 13 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980), 52–71. See also now the essays treating the legacy of this encounter in reception history in Kalimi and Richardson, *Sennacherib at the Gates of Jerusalem: Story, History and Historiography*.

<sup>57</sup> See, e.g., the landmark study by Machinist, “Assyria and Its Image”; Levine, “Assyrian Ideology and Israelite Monotheism”; Michael Chan, “Rhetorical Reversal and Usurpation: Isaiah 10:5–34 and the Use of Neo-Assyrian Royal Idiom in the Construction of an Anti-Assyrian Theology,” *JBL* 128 (2009): 717–733; Friedhelm Hartenstein, “JHWH und der ‘Schreckensglanz’ Assurs (Jesaja 8,6–8). Traditions- und religionsgeschichtliche Beobachtungen zur ‘Denkschrift’ Jesaja 6–8\*,” in *Schriftprophetie: Festschrift für Jörg Jeremias zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Friedhelm Hartenstein, Jutta Krispenz, and Aaron Schart (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2004), 83–102; Friedhelm Hartenstein, “Unheilspredigt und Herrschaftsrepräsentation. Zur Rezeption assyrischer Propaganda im antiken Juda (8./7. Jh. v. Chr.),” in *Israel zwischen den Mächten: Festschrift für Stefan Timm zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Michael Pietsch and Friedhelm Hartenstein, AOAT 364 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2009), 121–43; Friedhelm Hartenstein, *Das Archiv des verborgenen Gottes: Studien zur Unheilspredigt Jesajas und zur Zionstheologie in der Psalmen in assyrischer Zeit*, BThS 74 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2011), 63–96.

directly than the oracle in 10:5–15.<sup>58</sup> As it stands, the oracle is part of a larger collection of passages about the threat posed by Assyria and its resolution by YHWH’s judgment (10:16–19, 20–23, 24–27a, 27b–34).<sup>59</sup> The oracle in 10:5–15 is foundational for this collection. The passage establishes a set of relations between YHWH and the Assyrian king that provides the theological framework for making sense of Assyrian aggression, and this framework, in turn, supplies the grounds on which the other oracles of the collection develop the theme of judgment against the king (esp. 10:16–19, 24–27a). The oracle in 10:5–15 thus provides a useful prism through which to analyze the theological response to Assyria in First Isaiah as a whole as it took shape in discourse about God and the Assyrian king.

Though for my purposes it not especially important who wrote Isaiah 10:5–15, there is a fairly strong consensus that this oracle was composed in the final decades of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, and, for that reason, likely by the prophet himself.<sup>60</sup> Based on the itinerary of defeated cities in 10:9,

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<sup>58</sup> For oracles most obviously related to Assyria or the political conditions of the Assyrian period, see 5:26–30; 7–8; 14:24–27; 17:12–14; 20:1–6; 22:1–14; 29:1–8; 30:1–5, 27–33; 31:1–3, 4–9; 36–38; cf. also 1:4–9; 33:7–9. For texts that are often assigned to the period of Josiah’s rule, when anticipation of Assyria’s downfall was rising, see §2.3.4 below.

<sup>59</sup> See Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 252. For the most part, scholars agree on the division of these passages; there is more divergence regarding their relative stratification. Though most commentators analyze 10:5–15 as a unit, some scholars express the view that vv. 16–19 belong to the original core of the oracle and are therefore not secondary. Citing formal parallels to “the use of the rhetorical question ... followed by comment” in other prophetic texts (Amos 3:3–8; 6:12; Hos 13:10, 14; Mic 1:5; 2:7; Isa 29:16; Jer 2:11, 14; 13:12), Blenkinsopp argues that the units should be divided as 10:5–14, 15–19 (Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 255.). Others have thought 10:24–27a to be the original conclusion to the oracle, since it continues the imagery of the rod/staff (see most recently J. J. M. Roberts, *First Isaiah*, Hermeneia [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015], 172). In my judgment, 10:5–15 is a coherent unit that provides the formal grounds for the judgment against the Assyrian king that we find developed in passages such as 10:16–19 and 10:24–27a. This judgment against the king is pre-loaded in the ironic “*hōy!*” uttered against Assyria in 10:5, which, with its funerary association, “*proleptically* announces the death of its object” (Christopher B. Hays, *Death in the Iron Age II and in First Isaiah*, FAT 79 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011], 259–62). Whether or not the oracle originally continued beyond v. 15 is therefore of only limited consequence for my purposes here.

<sup>60</sup> As Hans Wildeberger observed in his exhaustively researched commentary: “Disregarding vv. 10–12, no one has questioned this as an authentic passage from Isaiah ...” (*Isaiah 1–12: A Commentary*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp, CC [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991], 415). So also Hermann Barth: “Daß der ... *Grundbestand von V5–15* von Jesaja selbst stammt, ist in der Forschung mit Recht kaum je bezweifelt worden” (Hermann Barth, *Die Jesaja-Worte in der Josazeit: Israel und Assur als Thema einer produktiven Neuinterpretation der Jesajaüberlieferung*, WMANT 48 [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1977], 26).

whose destruction can be dated relatively securely,<sup>61</sup> and the apparent threat looming over Jerusalem (explicit in 10:10–11), nearly all scholars date the core of the oracle to various points between the destruction of Samaria (722 BCE) and Sennacherib’s march against Jerusalem (701 BCE).<sup>62</sup> In my judgment, only the prose transition in 10:12a is conspicuous enough to assign confidently to a period after the crisis of 701 BCE. This diachronic development is significant, for the re-contextualization of the oracle around YHWH’s “work” in Jerusalem serves to reframe the vision it casts of Assyria within the plan of YHWH (see §2.3.4 below). Overall, however, the redactional filleting of the passage is of only limited consequence for my purposes here.<sup>63</sup> For what I am interested in understanding is the model the oracle articulates for understanding the problem of Assyrian aggression in Palestine as it took shape throughout the period of Assyrian expansion and continued dominance in the region.

The book of Isaiah itself does not provide any explicit information about the context in which the oracle was first uttered and received. For that reason, attempts to define the rhetorical situation in which the oracle originally functioned are necessarily speculative and must draw from what we can reconstruct about Isaiah’s prophetic ministry more generally. Our two best sources for doing so are the narrative account of Isaiah’s activity in Isa 36–38 // 2 Kgs 18–20 and

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<sup>61</sup> Calno was defeated by Tiglath-Pileser in 738 BCE; Carchemish by Sargon II in 717; Arpad by Tiglath-pileser in 740; Hamat by Tiglath-pileser in 738 and again by Sargon in 720; Damascus by Tiglath-pileser in 732 BCE; and Samaria by Shalmaneser V (727–722 BCE) in 722 BCE.

<sup>62</sup> See the summary in Wildeberger, *Isaiah 1–12*, 415 and *passim*. Roberts has recently made the argument that the oracle originally stemmed from the Syro-Ephraimitic crisis and was updated after the destruction of Samaria, which helps to explain the problematic grammar of vv. 10–11 (*First Isaiah*, 166.); Cf. Levine, “Assyrian Ideology and Israelite Monotheism,” 420–2, who argues that the oracle is best explained as a retrospective on the events of 701 BCE; in my judgment, the retrospective argument fails to supply an adequate stimulus for the redactional supplement in 10:12a (which, Levine, admittedly, does not identify as secondary).

<sup>63</sup> For examples of elaborate redactional reconstruction of the oracle, see, e.g., the analyses of Ernst Haag, “Jesaja, Assur und der Antijahwe: Literar- und traditionsgeschichtliche Beobachtungen zu Jes 10,5–15,” *TTZ* 103 (1994): 18–37, esp. 19–21, and Friedrich Huber, who reconstructs the text as 10:5–6 a.7 a.13–15 + 14, 24–25 a.26–27 (*Jahwe, Juda und die anderen Völker beim Propheten Jesaja*, BZAW 137 [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1976], 43–50).



Isaiah's message about Assyria elsewhere within the book bearing his name. These sources indicate that the prophet served within the royal court in Jerusalem for nearly four decades (ca. 740–700 BCE) and that he advocated—unsuccessfully—for a policy of non-alignment with those who would rebel against Assyria (e.g., 22:1–14; 28:7–13; 30:1–5, 8–17; 31:1–3).<sup>64</sup> If we are to locate the oracle of 10:5–15 within Isaiah's message of advocacy for patient trust in YHWH's action, the oracle would not have served to encourage Hezekiah's anti-Assyrian political alliances or the rebellion in the years leading up to 701 BCE; rather, it would have provided grounds for anticipating that *YHWH* would act to punish the Assyrian king on account of his hubristic arrogance, which was typified in the boastful claims of royal rhetoric to which the prophet clearly responds. Though the speech attributed to the Assyrian Rabshakeh at the walls of Jerusalem provides the closest parallel to the kind of rhetoric taken up in the oracle (cf. the prophetic response in Isa 37:6, 27, 29),<sup>65</sup> the prophet could have been responding to the stereotypical claims of the Neo-Assyrians at any time in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>66</sup> What the limited set of evidence allows us to suggest is that the oracle was composed in response to Neo-Assyrian aggression and royal rhetoric in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE and intended, at least in part, to encourage those in the royal court of Jerusalem to trust in YHWH's eventual judgment of Assyria and its king, that figure whose power posed an unprecedented threat to Judah. The fact that the oracle was preserved and transmitted in the Isaianic tradition, however, suggests that its

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<sup>64</sup> See, e.g., Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 38, 68; Reinhard Müller, *Ausgebliebene Einsicht: Jesajas "Verstockungsauftrag" (Jes 6,9–11) und die jüdische Politik am Ende des 8. Jahrhunderts*, BThS 124 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2012), 32–70. See also Levine, "Assyrian Ideology and Israelite Monotheism," 414.

<sup>65</sup> For a helpful overview of research comparing the oracles to the speech of the Rabshakeh, see Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah*, 76–77.

<sup>66</sup> For a discussion of the channels of exposure to Neo-Assyrian royal rhetoric, see below.

usefulness transcended the initial context in which it was formulated and thus provided an enduring and contextually flexible model for understanding the meaning and significance of Assyrian aggression throughout (and beyond) the period of Assyrian hegemony.

The oracle in Isa 10:5–15 does this rhetorical work by constructing a complex set of relations between YHWH and the figure of the Assyrian king that provides a model for understanding the meaning of Assyrian aggression and the grounds for anticipating YHWH's eventual judgment of the Assyrian ruler. What follows marks an attempt to understand the content and character of this model as a response to the reality of Assyrian imperial domination. My analysis unfolds in two steps. I begin by establishing the basic claims of the oracle, especially as it thematizes and works out the relationship between YHWH and the Assyrian king. As I aim to show, this relationship is constructed largely through a series of counterclaims by which the activities of the king are subsumed under the effective agency of YHWH. After describing the content of this rhetorical move, I then offer an analysis of its character as an ideological response to imperial aggression. Here I maintain that the oracle represents an attempt to encompass the new political realities by assimilating them into a Yahwistic framework, which thus renders them meaningful. At the same time, however, the struggle between ideologies has left an indelible mark on the oracle's construction of reality, especially in its presentation of YHWH. In this way the discourse of the oracle features what post-colonial critics would identify as "hybridity." Considering the content and character of this oracle will help us to understand the response to the new era of imperial domination in Syria-Palestine as it took shape in First Isaiah.

### 2.3.1. Isaiah 10:5–15: English Translation<sup>67</sup>

- 5 Woe, Assyria—the rod of my anger!  
The staff in their hands is my fury!<sup>68</sup>
- 6 Against a godless nation I send him,  
And against a people of my wrath I command him,  
To take booty and to seize plunder,  
And to tread it down like the mire of the streets.
- 7 But this is not what he intends,  
Nor does his mind think this way.  
For it is in his mind to destroy,  
And to cut off nations not a few.
- 8 For he says: “*Are not my commanders all kings?*  
9 *Was not Calno like Carchemish?*  
*Was not Hamath like Arpad?*  
*Was not Samaria like Damascus?*  
10 *As my hand has reached to the kingdoms of the idols,*  
*whose divine images were greater than Jerusalem and Samaria,*  
11 *Is it not the case that, just what I did to Samaria and her idols,*  
*so I will do to Jerusalem and her images?”*
- 12 —But when the Lord has finished all his work on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem—I<sup>69</sup> will  
punish the fruit of the greatness of mind of the king of Assyria and his haughty pride.
- 13 For he says: “*By the strength of my own hand have I done it—*  
*and by my wisdom, for I have understanding.*  
*I have removed the boundaries of peoples,*  
*and their treasures I have plundered,*  
*Like a bull<sup>70</sup> I have brought down inhabitants.<sup>71</sup>*  
14 *My hand has found, like a nest,*  
*the wealth of the peoples,*  
*and as one gathers abandoned eggs,*

<sup>67</sup> The translation is my own. For recent overviews of text-critical issues in this passage, see especially Willem A. M. Beuken, *Jesaja 1–12*, HThKAT (Freiburg: Herder, 2003), 274–76. Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 164–65.

<sup>68</sup> The Hebrew of 10:5b (וּמַטֵּה הוּא בְיָדָם זַעֲמִי) is notoriously difficult. For a list of possible renderings, see Beuken, *Jesaja 1–12*, 274. I have chosen, along with Blenkinsopp and Chan, to dismiss the הוּא.

<sup>69</sup> In order to preserve the coherence of v. 12, most scholars amend the 1<sup>st</sup> pers. masc. sing. verb of the MT to the 3<sup>rd</sup> pers. masc. sing. (so the LXX); but see my analysis of v. 12 below.

<sup>70</sup> Heb.: כַּאֲבִיר. Following the *ketiv* (כַּאֲבִיר; see below); see Stuart A. Irvine, “Problems of Text and Translation in Isaiah 10.13bb,” in *History and Interpretation: Essays in Honour of John H. Hayes*, ed. M. Patrick Graham, William P. Brown, and Jeffrey K. Kuan, JSOTSup 173 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 133–44. Irvine, however, translates *ka’bir* as “mighty one.”

<sup>71</sup> Or “those who sat on thrones” (Heb. יוֹשְׁבֵי־מַנְדִּיבִים); so the NRSV.

*I myself have gathered all the earth.  
And none so much as fluttered a wing,  
or opened its mouth and cheeped.”*

- 15 Shall the ax boast against the one who hews with it?  
Or the saw magnify itself over the one who handles it?  
As if a rod should lift the one who raises it!  
As if the staff should lift the one who is not wood!

### 2.3.2. Contesting Agency by the Instrumentalization of the Assyrian King (10:5–6)

The oracle of Isa 10:5–15 establishes and works out a set of relations between YHWH and an unnamed Assyrian king. The leading trope is established in the opening lines (vv. 5–6), which identify Assyria, in the figure of its king,<sup>72</sup> as (merely) an instrument that is wielded by YHWH (see v. 15). In the first bicolon, YHWH declares “Assyria” to be the “rod” (שבט) of his anger (v. 5a) and identifies the “staff” (מטה) in their hands as his own fury (v. 5b). The use to which YHWH puts this instrument is clarified in 10:6: YHWH sends (שלח) and commands (צוה, *piel*) the Assyrian king (“him”) against a godless nation/people who are the object of his divine wrath (v. 6a–b) for the express purpose of destroying and despoiling (v. 6b; cf. v. 13bβ; 8:1). Although some scholars have identified Israel or Judah as *the* godless nation mentioned in 10:6a–b (cf. 9:8–21),<sup>73</sup> the scope of YHWH’s commission is better understood as multinational: the Assyrian king is sent to enact YHWH’s wrath against *any* nation that provokes his anger (cf.

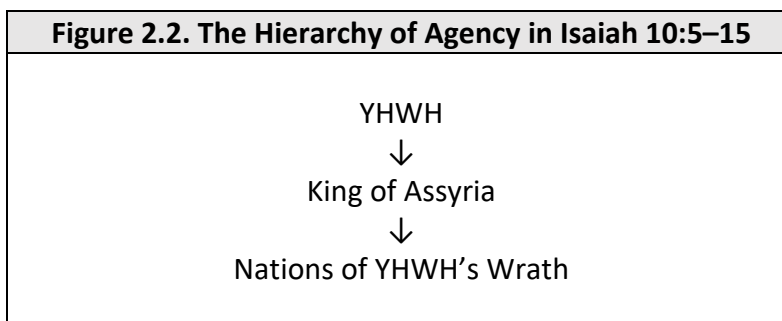
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<sup>72</sup> See Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 252.

<sup>73</sup> So, e.g., Johannes Fichtner, “Jahves Plan in der Botschaft des Jesaja,” *ZAW* 63 (1951): 24–25; Levine, “Assyrian Ideology and Israelite Monotheism”; Clements, *Isaiah and the Deliverance of Jerusalem*, 38; Wildeberger, *Isaiah 1–12*, 417; Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz, and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis*, 257 and *passim*. In favor of the identification of Israel is (1) the association of Israel with the adj. חנף in 9:16 [17] and (2) the play on words with the naming of Isaiah’s child as *Maher-shalal-hash-baz* in 8:1–4. The poetry is polyvalent and invites this identification; just as contemporary readers are want to identify Israel or Judah as such nations, so too were ancient readers likely to make this association.

37:26–27).<sup>74</sup> The “woe!” is directed against Assyria not because of the king’s aggression against Israel or Judah specifically, but because the king has misunderstood and exceeded his commission (vv. 7–14), intending to destroy “nations not a few” (גוים לא מעט; vv. 7, 8–11).<sup>75</sup> The multinational scope of the king’s Yahwistic commission is important to recognize, because it allows us to apprehend the full extent of YHWH’s claim: namely, that he is the effective agent behind *all* of the militaristic endeavors of the Assyrian king, whom he wields for his own geopolitical purposes.

Together the trope of THE KING AS INSTRUMENT (v. 5) and the delineation of the king’s Yahwistic commission (v. 6) configure YHWH and the Assyrian king into a hierarchy of agency.



The king is (1) the instrument wielded by YHWH (v. 5a) and (2) the implements wielded by the king are identified as YHWH’s own wrath (v. 5b).<sup>76</sup> As we shall see, when set against the arrogant claims of the king (vv. 13–14), YHWH’s declarations represent an explicit *contestation* of the agency behind the king’s activities. The king possesses a false consciousness about the

<sup>74</sup> With Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 165. Similarly, Wildeberger, *Isaiah 1–12*, 414.

<sup>75</sup> So Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 165.

<sup>76</sup> According to Michael Chan’s formulation, “the Assyrian king is imaged as *both the weapon and the weapon-bearer of Yhwh*” (“Rhetorical Reversal and Usurpation,” 721.).

agency behind his successes, which he attributes to his own power, and the hubris that follows from this misapprehension provides the grounds for YHWH's judgment.<sup>77</sup>

But there is some subtler business going on here in 10:5–6 as well. As others have begun to observe, in self-identifying as the one who wields and sends the king for these purposes, YHWH assumes the role played by Assyrian deities—and especially the imperial deity Aššur—in Assyrian royal ideology.<sup>78</sup> Widely attested in the royal inscriptions are the fundamental notions that the militaristic actions of the king are commissioned, authorized, and carried out by the imperial deity. A remarkably close parallel to the imagery in 10:5–6 is found in a stele of Esarhaddon (680–669 BCE) from Zinçirli:

When the god Aššur, the great lord, (wanted) to reveal the glorious might of my deeds to the people, he made my kingship the most glorious and made my name greatest of the kings of the four quarters, made my hands carry a rod of anger [*šibirru ezzu*] to strike the enemy, (and) empowered me to loot (and) plunder [*ana habāti šalāli*] (any) land (that) had committed sin, crime, (or) negligence against the god Aššur ...<sup>79</sup>

As Michael Chan has documented most thoroughly, the tropes of the Assyrian king as (1) WEAPON WIELDED BY THE DEITY and (2) WIELDER OF DIVINE WEAPONS occur frequently in the Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions.<sup>80</sup> The parallels between the model articulated in 10:5–6 and the

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<sup>77</sup> Machinist, “Assyria and Its Image,” 734.

<sup>78</sup> Chan, “Rhetorical Reversal and Usurpation,” 722–26; see also Machinist, “Assyria and Its Image,” 734; Moshe Weinfeld, “The Protest against Imperialism in Ancient Israelite Prophecy,” in *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations*, ed. S.N. Eisenstadt, SUNY Series in Near Eastern Studies (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1986), 176.

<sup>79</sup> Rev. lines 30b–34 (Erle Leichty, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680–669 BC)*, RINAP 4 [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011], 185). As far as I can tell, this parallel was first flagged by Moshe Weinfeld in “The Protest against Imperialism in Ancient Israelite Prophecy,” 176. The parallel is noted also by Frisch, *The Danielic Discourse on Empire*, 36.

<sup>80</sup> Chan adduces number of parallels in the Assyrians inscriptions where these motifs are attested (“Rhetorical Reversal and Usurpation,” 721). For one example, with regard to the trope of the king as WEAPON WIELDED BY THE DEITY, Chan cites Ashurnasipal II's self-description as “strong king, king of the universe ... beloved of the gods Anu and Dagan, destructive weapon [*kašūš*] of the great gods” (Ninurta Temple Inscription,

Assyrian propaganda suggest that the oracle here offers a rhetorical “inversion” or “reversal” of Neo-Assyrian ideology.<sup>81</sup>

<b>Figure 2.3. Hierarchies of Agency in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions and Isaiah 10:5–15</b>	
<u>Assyrian Model</u>	<u>Isaiah 10:5–15</u>
Aššur	YHWH
↓	↓
King of Assyria	King of Assyria
↓	↓
Nations of Wrath	Nations of Wrath

To be sure, the model in 10:5–6 does not set YHWH and Aššur in relation to one another explicitly; the Assyrian deity is nowhere mentioned.<sup>82</sup> But insofar as YHWH is portrayed as the deity who commissions, equips, and sends the Assyrian king against nations of his wrath, he assumes the role of the imperial deity in Neo-Assyrian ideology.

There is certainly an aspect of this rhetorical inversion that is ideologically subversive.

The ideological foundation of imperial aggression is challenged by an implicit counterclaim: it is

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obv. line i11 [RIMA 2:194]). According to Chan, the trope of the king as WIELDER OF DIVINE WEAPONS is more frequent in the corpus (723); for example, we also read in Ashurnasirpal’s Ninurta Temple inscription: “with the fierce weapons which Aššur, (my) lord, gave to me I mustered (my) weapons (and) troops (and) marched to the pass of the city of Babitu” (obv. lines 26–27 [RIMA 2:203]). Another clear example of this motif is found in Sennacherib’s Nebi Yunus inscription: “The god Aššur ... made my weapons greater than (those of) all who sit on (royal) daises. He gave me a just scepter that widens borders (and) he put in my hand a merciless rod to fell enemies” (lines 3b–6; transl. RINAP/3). The hierarchy of agency in Assyrian thought is further illustrated in a phrase in Sargon II’s inscriptions from Khorsabad: “by means of the power of Aššur, Nabû (and) Marduk, the great gods, my lords, who have raised my weapons, I slew my enemies” (“Die ‘Kleine Prunkinschrift’ des Saales XIV,” obv. line 21; Andreas Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II. aus Khorsabad* [Göttingen: Cuvillier, 1993], 77; English translation by Chan, “Rhetorical Reversal and Usurpation,” 724).

<sup>81</sup> See Machinist, “Assyria and Its Image,” 734; Chan, “Rhetorical Reversal and Usurpation,” 721–26.

<sup>82</sup> Levine, “Assyrian Ideology and Israelite Monotheism,” 422.

not the Assyrian deity who sponsors and directs the king's actions, but rather YHWH.<sup>83</sup> As Chan suggests, this strategy could be characterized as a sort of “theological and rhetorical coup d'état.”<sup>84</sup> In effect, YHWH deposes Aššur from his place in Assyrian ideology and assumes the role of the one who commissions, authorizes, and empowers the king for his actions on the global scene. There are two related consequences of this counterclaim that warrant further discussion.

First, as Baruch Levine has argued, the response to the ideological claims and rhetorical forms characteristic of Assyrian propaganda was *theologically generative*.<sup>85</sup> The “global horizon” that emerged in Neo-Assyrian royal propaganda and that was exercised in their expansionism elicited a response by which YHWH, in the form of a counterclaim, became conceptualized as the sole director of events on the international stage:

What makes Isaiah 10:5–19 so remarkable within biblical literature is its global horizon. We read that Yahweh, the national God of Israel, a small and powerless people, is using Assyria, the global empire, as a punitive tool [vv. 5–6] ... In effect, the Israelite response has risen to the dimensions of the triumphal claims of the Assyrians, and it is he who has granted the kings of Assyria their many victories and conquests [see v. 9] ... First Isaiah is the first to state the matter in such terms.<sup>86</sup>

Such a conception may have already been latent in Yahwistic thought (cf. Amos 9:7–8). But the concrete encounter with Neo-Assyrian propaganda led to a counterclaim by which YHWH was explicitly depicted as the sovereign agent orchestrating transnational events (see also Isa 37:23–

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<sup>83</sup> As Chan observes, “the king, contrary to the claims in his annals, is not an imperial implement in the hands of the *Assyrian gods*, but rather is an implement of judgment in the hands of *Yhwh*, the Israelite god” (“Rhetorical Reversal and Usurpation,” 725).

<sup>84</sup> Chan, “Rhetorical Reversal and Usurpation,” 726.

<sup>85</sup> “Assyrian Ideology and Israelite Monotheism.”

<sup>86</sup> Levine, “Assyrian Ideology and Israelite Monotheism,” 422.



37). As Levine argues, it is “at the point when YHWH was declared to be the sole sovereign over all nations” that we can begin to speak of monotheism.<sup>87</sup> Levine’s argument is compelling but could be nuanced: the response elicited by Assyria’s own imperial rhetoric produced what could arguably be described as the first *functionally monotheistic discourse* in the Hebrew Bible. The oracle does not deny the existence of other deities as the explicitly monotheistic oracles of Second Isaiah would later do (see §4.3.2.3). But it does offer a model for understanding the purpose and orchestration of transnational events within an exclusively Yahwistic framework. The exclusive character of this framework implicitly fences out the agency of other deities while extending the realm of YHWH’s sovereign activity beyond the bounds of his people’s traditional territorial holdings.<sup>88</sup> The process of countering the universalizing claims of the Neo-Assyrian king(dom) thus contributed to the development of functionally monotheistic discourse in ancient Judah.<sup>89</sup>

And second, though the subversive response to Neo-Assyrian rhetoric may have been theologically generative, this development also came with ideological costs. The image of the Assyrian deity has left its imprint on YHWH, who is now depicted as the one who directs the

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<sup>87</sup> Levine, “Assyrian Ideology and Israelite Monotheism,” 416.

<sup>88</sup> For discussions of the value of “implicit monotheism” as a heuristic category in the recent debates about the usefulness of “monotheism” as a term and concept in the study of the Hebrew Bible, see Martin Leuenberger, “*Ich bin Jhwh und keiner sonst*” *Der exklusive Monotheismus des Kyros-Orakels Jes 45,1–7*, Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 224 (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2010), 10; Christian Frevel, “Beyond Monotheism? Some Remarks and Questions on Conceptualising ‘Monotheism’ in Biblical Studies,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 34 (2013): 6.

<sup>89</sup> As Christopher B. Hays reflects: “Even if one prefers the older consensus that Deutero-Isaiah is the true, original locus of monotheism, it [the oracle of Isaiah 10:5ff.] certainly echoes and transposes the rhetoric of empires. Thus monotheism, typically viewed as a great spiritual achievement of the Old Testament is a product of postcolonial thinking” (“Isaiah as Colonized Poet: His Rhetoric of Death in Conversation with African Postcolonial Writers,” in *Isaiah and Imperial Context: The Book of Isaiah in the Times of Empire*, ed. Andrew T. Abernethy et al. [Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013], 69–70). See also Hartenstein, *Das Archiv des verborgenen Gottes*, 66.

Assyrian army to destroy and despoil nations of his wrath (v. 6).<sup>90</sup> Relocating the agency behind Assyria's activities under the royal hem of YHWH makes him directly responsible for Assyria's aggression and the trauma that followed in its wake. In another oracle with close thematic connections to 10:5–15, but which is now directed at Sennacherib specifically, YHWH explicitly claims responsibility for Assyria's destructive activities as part of his predetermined plan:

Have you not heard  
     that I determined it long ago?  
 I planned from days of old  
     What now I bring to pass,  
 that you should make fortified cities  
     crash into heaps of ruins,  
     while their inhabitants, shorn of strength,  
     are dismayed and confounded;  
 they have become like plants of the field  
     and like tender grass,  
 like grass on the housetops,  
     blighted before it is grown. (37:26–27 [NRSV]; cf. 14:24–27)

The strategy of contesting agency thus introduces an ideological double bind: on the one hand, the meaning of Assyria's activities is successfully relocated within a Yahwistic framework; on the other hand, however, YHWH becomes responsible for the very destruction and trauma that elicited the response in the first place. At this point a considerable tension emerges in the model articulated in 10:5–15, for the oracle does not wish to offer a blanket authorization of the king's activities. In vv. 7–11 a conflict is introduced between YHWH and the king that provides the grounds for YHWH's judgment against the monarch.

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<sup>90</sup> For a more general discussion of the impact of this engagement on the depiction of YHWH in Isaiah, see Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 109–10.

Before turning to that conflict, however, it is important to consider a final aspect of this discursive strategy. Though the contestation of agency could function as a subversive ideological move, it could also be exploited by the imperial power. The Neo-Assyrians appear to have been happy to exploit the readiness of subjected peoples to understand their imperial activities as having been commanded by their own deities.<sup>91</sup> The most compelling illustration of this comes from a speech purportedly delivered by the Assyrian Rabshakeh at the walls of Jerusalem, which is recorded in both Isaiah 36:4b–10 and 2 Kgs 18:19b–25.<sup>92</sup> As part of his effort to persuade the leaders and inhabitants of Jerusalem to surrender without resistance (see §2.2 above), and indeed that any resistance would prove futile, the Rabshakeh declares that Sennacherib’s encroachment to Jerusalem was commanded by YHWH himself:

Moreover, is it without YHWH that I [Sennacherib] have come up against this land to destroy it? YHWH said to me: “Go up against this land, and destroy it!”  
(Isa 36:10 // 2 Kgs 18:25)

Through his diplomat, Sennacherib purports to have received a prophecy from YHWH himself commanding him to attack Jerusalem. The Assyrian diplomat constructs the same hierarchy of agency as the oracle in 10:5–15.

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<sup>91</sup> See the seminal discussion in Morton Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Judah, and Israel in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries B.C.E.*, SBLMS 19 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1974), 9–21; for a more recent consideration, see Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 471–72.

<sup>92</sup> Even if the speech attributed to the Rabshakeh is not historically accurate, it at least resonates with the rhetoric they employed elsewhere and reflects the Judean memory of how the Assyrians could have, or did, argue; see, e.g., Ehud Ben Zvi, “Who Wrote the Speech of the Rabshakeh and When?,” *JBL* 109 (1990): 92. See also Dubovský, *Hezekiah and the Assyrian Spies*, 25–27.

<b>Figure 2.4. Hierarchies of Agency in Isaiah 10:5–15, the Speech of the Rabshakeh, and Assyrian Royal Inscriptions</b>		
<u>Isaiah 10:5–15</u>	<u>Rabshakeh's Model</u>	<u>Assyrian Model</u>
YHWH	YHWH	Aššur
↓	↓	↓
King of Assyria	King of Assyria	King of Assyria
↓	↓	↓
Nation(s) of Wrath	Jerusalem	Nation(s) of Wrath

As a diplomatic policy, the Neo-Assyrians were willing to concede some space in their ideological justifications for dominance to those whom they dominated. In this case, the space is conceded by the attempt to authorize their own imperial aggression by engaging with the Yahwistic beliefs and values of the Jerusalemites. This is a useful diplomatic method, for it attempts to legitimize their domination within a framework held up by the subordinate culture, which could in turn limit resistance to its ambitions.<sup>93</sup> In doing so, however, the Assyrians expose a crack in the foundation of their own construction of reality. However dominant they might have been, they could not have ridden roughshod over the entire region, or at least not as efficiently as they did, had they not persuaded much of it to capitulate without resistance. Their dominance depended, at least in part, on the participation of the subordinate peoples. Each side of the imperial encounter thus engages in a negotiation of reality in which the ideology of the other is exploited. The grandiose rhetoric of the empire is vulnerable to a responsive

<sup>93</sup> This is recognized clearly by Hartenstein, who points out that this accommodation is already built into the very structure of the Assyrian vassal treaty, which framed Assyrian punishment for breaking the treaty as simultaneously the punishment of relevant local deity (*Das Archiv des verborgenen Gottes*, 69, 72–73). Here, however, the Assyrian king grounds his activities in a direct message from YHWH rather than in the stipulations of the covenant treaty. See also Dubovský, *Hezekiah and the Assyrian Spies*, 25–27.

counterclaim that could in turn embolden ideological resistance, as the oracle in 10:5–15 attests. At the same time, the willingness of subordinate peoples to understand their subjugation within their indigenous ideological frameworks could be exploited by the imperial power. What emerges at this interface is a hybrid discourse in which the ideologies of each culture interact with and influence the other. In the case of Isa 10:5–15, the hybridity of the discourse had a significant impact on its presentation of YHWH. In the act of contesting the claims of the Assyrians, the ideological construction of reality behind these claims came to frame the depiction of YHWH. Much like the imperial deity Aššur, YHWH becomes depicted as the one who sends the Assyrian king for his international purposes, including the spoliation and destruction of the petty kingdoms of Syria-Palestine.

### **2.3.3. Misaligned Intentionality and Imperial Hubris (10:7–11)**

The reasons for the “woe!” uttered in 10:5 emerge in vv. 7–11, which begin to introduce the conflict between YHWH and the Assyrian king. According to v. 7, the conflict arises because the king’s intentionality is misaligned with his divine commission. His intent is to destroy and cut off nations, “not a few,” that is, in excess of what YHWH has authorized. The oracle does not rob the king of his agency entirely, for he possesses his own intentionality. At this point the metaphor of the KING AS (MERE) INSTRUMENT begins to stretch under its own weight. But the attribution of a misaligned intentionality to the king provides a sort of ideological escape hatch: it allows YHWH to claim the agency behind the king’s actions in general (vv. 5–6, 15) while also condemning those actions that could be understood as unauthorized (v. 7c–d), even if the latter are not specified.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Cf. von Rad’s observation that Isaiah “is able to separate between that which Jahweh had intended and the guilty human addition, the element imported into it by man’s high-handedness” (*Old Testament Theology*, 163).

The thoughts and intentions of the king's mind are then given expression in the form of a soliloquy consisting of a series of rhetorical questions (vv. 8–11). These questions, which each invite an answer in the affirmative, serve to express the king's confidence in the superiority of Assyria over the petty kingdoms of Syria-Palestine and the inevitability of his dominating Jerusalem just as he dominated cities greater than it. The first musing attributed to the king in 10:8 contains a clever paronomasia that begins to illustrate his hubris. He wonders: *Are not my commanders all kings?* (*hālo' sārāy yaḥdāw mālākīm*). The play is on the Hebrew *sār*, meaning “royal official,” and its Akkadian cognate *šarru* “king,” with the Hebrew *melek*, “king.” The king's point is that his inferiors are commensurate with the highest superiors, or kings, of other states.<sup>95</sup>

The king then provides additional evidence for his superiority by recounting a chain of cities that each suffered the same fate under Assyrian aggression in the region (v. 9; cf. 37:12–15). The theme of the inevitability of Assyria's march is continued into vv. 10–11, where Jerusalem comes into view as an Assyrian target. The king adduces his past successes in defeating kingdoms with divine images greater than those of Jerusalem and Samaria as evidence that he will do the same to Jerusalem (see also 36:18–20; 37:11–13). His speech recalls the common ancient Near Eastern practice of “godnapping,” whereby victorious armies would capture and deport deity statues and other cultic appurtenances of a conquered city for their material and socio-political capital.<sup>96</sup> Quite apart from the question of whether Jerusalem was in

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<sup>95</sup> So Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 165. See also Machinist, “Assyria and Its Image,” 734–35.

<sup>96</sup> The term “Godnap” was coined by Alasdair Livingston (“New Dimensions in the Study of Assyrian Religion,” in *Assyria 1995: Proceedings of the 10th Anniversary Symposium of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, Helsinki, September 7–11, 1995* [Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997], 168). For a masterful discussion of this practice, see Steven W. Holloway, *Aššur Is King! Aššur Is King!: Religion in the Exercise of Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire*, CHANE 10 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 123–51, and the foundational study of Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, 9–41, 116–21; see also Zainab Bahrani, *Rituals of War: The Body and Violence in Mesopotamia* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 159–75; Angelika Berlejung, “Notlösungen—

fact aniconic at this time, the king's presumption that Jerusalem has "idols" and "images" just like other nations presents him as arrogantly misapprehending the nature of Jerusalem's deity, YHWH, who is sovereign over him (vv. 5–6, 15).<sup>97</sup>

### 2.3.4. A Temporal Gloss and YHWH's Promise of Punishment (10:12)

Following the king's musings over the fate of Jerusalem, the narrator takes up the topic of the city in the form of prose (10:12). For a variety of reasons, most commentators understand v. 12

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Altorientalische Nachrichten über den Tempelkult in Nachkriegszeiten," in *Kein Land für sich allein: Studien zum Kulturkontakt in Kanaan, Israel/Palästina und Ebirnâri für Manfred Weippert zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Ulrich Hübner and Ernst Axel Knauf, OBO 186 (Freiburg; Göttingen: Universitätsverlag; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 196–230; Bob Becking, "Silent Witness: The Symbolic Presence of God in the Temple Vessels in Ezra-Nehemiah," in *Divine Presence and Absence in Exilic and Post-Exilic Judaism: Studies of the Sofja Kovalevskaja Research Group on Early Jewish Monotheism Vol. II*, ed. Nathan MacDonald and Izaak J. de Hulster, FAT 2/61 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 267–281; and now Shana Zaia, "State-Sponsored Sacrilege: 'Godnapping' and Omission in Neo-Assyrian Inscriptions," *JANEH* 2 (2015): 19–54. In other biblical literature, this practice is associated with the deportation of the temple vessels from Jerusalem by the Babylonians and their eventual return during the Persian period (2 Kgs 24:13; 25:13–17; Jer 27:16–22; 28:1–9; 52:17–23; 2 Chr 36:7, 10, 18; Ezra 1:8–11; 5:14–15; 6:5; 7:19; 8:25–33; Neh 13:9; Dan 1:2; 5:2–3, 23; 1 Esd 1:41–54; 2:10–14; 4:43–44, 57; 6:18–26; 8:17, 55–60; Jdt 4:3; cf. 1 Sam 4:2–7:1). On this motif, see P. R. Ackroyd, "The Temple Vessels—A Continuity Theme," in *Studies in the Religion of Ancient Israel*, VTSup 23 (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 166–81; Isaac Kalimi and James D. Purvis, "King Jehoiachin and the Vessels of the Lord's House in Biblical Literature," *CBQ* 56 (1994): 449–57; Robert P. Carroll, "Razed Temple and Shattered Vessels: Continuities and Discontinuities in the Discourse of Exile in the Hebrew Bible," *JSOT* 75 (1997): 93–106; John Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth: Divine Presence and Absence in the Book of Ezekiel*, Biblical and Judaic Studies 7 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 103–24, 157–170; Jacob L. Wright, "The Deportation of Jerusalem's Wealth and the Demise of Native Sovereignty in the Book of Kings," in *Interpreting Exile: Interdisciplinary Studies of Displacement and Deportation in Biblical and Modern Contexts*, ed. Brad Kelle, Frank R. Ames, and Jacob L. Wright, SBLAIL 10 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 105–30; Justin L. Pannkuk, "The Preface to Old Greek Daniel 5: A Formal Approach," *VT* 67 (2017): 213–26.

<sup>97</sup> As Roberts observes, this misapprehension is "part and parcel of Assyria's total failure to recognize what was really taking place, namely, that it was only a tool in the LORD's hand" (*First Isaiah*, 139).

as a whole to be a secondary addition to the passage.<sup>98</sup> In my judgment, however, there are good reasons for separating 12a from 12b and retaining the latter as an integral part of the oracle.<sup>99</sup> To begin with, setting aside 12a allows one to read the 1<sup>st</sup> pers. sing. verb of the MT in 12b without emendation: “I will punish (אֶפְקֹד) ... the King of Assyria, for he says ....” Preserving the 1<sup>st</sup> person in turn maintains the strictly binary conflict between YHWH and the king without the interruption of a 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrator. Moreover, as Childs and Barth recognized, 12b serves as a fitting introduction to the king’s second soliloquy (vv. 13–14), which differs from the first in both form and content (see below).<sup>100</sup> In 12b YHWH declares that he will punish the Assyrian king on account of his arrogance and haughty pride, and these very characteristics of the king are then demonstrated in his self-aggrandizing speech (vv. 13–14).<sup>101</sup> What becomes clear when one retains 12b is that the king is attributed with two different speeches (vv. 8–11, 13–14), which each serve to illustrate the charges made directly by YHWH (vv. 7, 12b):

10:5–6	Woe to Assyria, YHWH’s instrument
10:7	The king’s misaligned intentionality and exceeding aggression
10:8–11	King’s speech demonstrating his misaligned intentionality and aggression
10:12b	YHWH’s declaration of judgment against the king’s arrogance and pride
10:13–14	King’s speech demonstrating his arrogance and haughty pride
10:15	Assyria, YHWH’s (arrogant) instrument

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<sup>98</sup> The reasons for relegating v. 12 to a later glossator are numerous: (1) its form as prose departs from the rest of the oracle; (2) it interrupts the king’s soliloquys, which some think were originally a single speech (vv. 8b–11, 13b–14 or 8b–9, 13b–14); (3) its 3<sup>rd</sup> person discourse (a) clashes with the 1<sup>st</sup> pers. verb in 12b and (b) interrupts the binary dialogue between the speeches of YHWH (vv. 5–8a, [12b–13a], 15) and the Assyrian king (vv. 8b–11, 13b–14); and (4) it anticipates the resolution of the conflict in Jerusalem in a way that is perhaps retrospective (see also 10:16–19; 37:29). Even von Rad, who articulated arguably the most profound understanding of Isaiah’s conception of YHWH’s “work” in Jerusalem in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, understood v. 12 to be oddly situated in the oracle (Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 163 n. 21).

<sup>99</sup> Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 43. So also Barth, *Die Jesaja-Worte in der Josiazeit*, 22–25.

<sup>100</sup> Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 43. See also now Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 92.

<sup>101</sup> Similarly Barth, *Die Jesaja-Worte in der Josiazeit*, 25.



According to the oracle, the Assyrian king will be punished by YHWH (vv. 5, 12b) at some indeterminate time on account of his (1) exceeding YHWH's commission due to his misaligned intentionality (vv. 7–8) and (2) his arrogant pride (v. 12b) in attributing his successes to his own power (vv. 13–14) rather than to YHWH, the agent in whose hands he is merely an instrument (vv. 5–6, 15).

The gloss in 12a modifies this model significantly. Most importantly, it delimits the use for which YHWH employs Assyria as an instrument before he will dispose of it. The king will face YHWH's punishment "when the Lord has finished all his work in Jerusalem and on Mount Zion." Some commentators understand this "work" in Jerusalem to refer to its destruction by the Babylonians in 586 BCE, so that this gloss stems necessarily from the post-exilic period and "Assyria" stands in for "Babylonia."<sup>102</sup> No doubt such a reading was invited in the aftermath of that destruction and during the period of restoration in Judah. It is more likely, however, that the gloss entered the text during the reign of Josiah, when the anticipation of Assyria's demise is often thought to have made a significant impact on the collection.<sup>103</sup> Like several texts that are usually assigned to this period, the glossator speaks in anticipation of YHWH's supernatural judgment against Assyria (10:16–19, 24–27a, 27b–34; 14:24–27; 17:12–14; 29:1–4, 5–8; 31:4–5, 8–9, see also 37:26–29). At least in retrospect, Assyria's threat against Jerusalem and the city's

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<sup>102</sup> So Barth, *Die Jesaja-Worte in der Josiazeit*, 27 and *passim*; see also Wildeberger, *Isaiah 1–12*, 423–24.

<sup>103</sup> The idea of a major "Assyrian" (Barth, *Die Jesaja-Worte in der Josiazeit*) or "Josianic" (Clements, *Isaiah and the Deliverance of Jerusalem*) redaction of the collection has had a favorable reception; see the recent comments of Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 92. See also Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39 with an Introduction to Prophetic Literature*, FOTL 16 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 57–59. Regarding the particular texts of this redactional strand, Barth identified 8:23b–9:6b; 10:16–19; 14:4b–21; 14:24–27; 30:27–33; and 31:5b, 8b–9; Vermeulen identified redactional supplements related to Josiah in 2:2–4; 7:15; 8:23b–9:6a; 11:1–5; 22:19–23; Sweeney identifies further texts, including 7:11; 27; 32; 36–39 and those about the return of exiles in 11:11–16; 19:18–25; 27:6–13.

deliverance were both understood as an integral part of YHWH's providential plan for Zion.<sup>104</sup>

The gloss in 12a thus delimits YHWH's use for the Assyrian king in two important respects: First, it focuses it around YHWH's work "on mount Zion and in Jerusalem," which is narrower than the international vision cast elsewhere in the oracle (v. 6). And second, it sets this work within a more definite temporal horizon: when his work on Zion is completed, YHWH will dispose of his instrument.

### **2.3.5. The King's False Consciousness and Hubris (10:13–14)**

After YHWH's declaration of forthcoming judgment (12b), the second speech by the king (vv. 13–14) continues to develop the central themes of the oracle: YHWH's agency over the king's activities and the arrogant failure of the monarch to recognize this fact. The statements are no longer cast as rhetorical questions but consist of a series of boastful claims in the 1<sup>st</sup> person. In light of what the audience already knows about the Assyrian king, namely, that he is an instrument in YHWH's hand, the king's boastful statements betray his misapprehension of the agency behind his successes. His explicit claim to his own agency is thus highly ironic: "*By the strength of my own hand have I done it—and by my wisdom, for I have understanding*" (10:13a). According to the oracle, the king does not, in fact, have understanding. He possesses a false consciousness about the source of his own agency. This theme is further developed through a series of 1<sup>st</sup> person boasts recounting what he has accomplished through his aggressive military activities: removing the boundaries of peoples (13b $\alpha$ ), plundering treasures (13b $\beta$ ; 14a), bringing down inhabitants (13c), and gathering "all the earth" (14b), all without a chirp of resistance

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<sup>104</sup> See Clements, *Isaiah and the Deliverance of Jerusalem*, 28–51. See also Jer 21:2.

(14c). The chain of claims serves to illustrate the “greatness of mind” and “haughty pride” (12b) of the Assyrian king, who misapprehends the source of agency behind these successes.

As others have begun to document, the king’s speech is remarkably similar in both form and content to the rhetoric characteristic of the Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions, so much so that the prophet must have had some sort of direct contact with this kind of literature.<sup>105</sup> The stylistic similarity between the king’s chain of claims and the ubiquitous use of the 1<sup>st</sup> person in the royal rhetoric suggests that the king’s speech was modeled to mimic this literature.<sup>106</sup> Beyond the basic stylistic parallels, the particular claims of the monarch are also similar to the very kinds of claims found in the royal inscriptions.<sup>107</sup> The king is thus made to speak in a way that is characteristic of his self-presentation in Assyrian propaganda. Within the present context of the oracle, this

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<sup>105</sup> In recent years, comparative scholars have identified several plausible mechanisms of transmission for explaining how the 8<sup>th</sup> century prophets like Isaiah of Jerusalem could have come into contact with Assyrian royal ideology. The most comprehensive and compelling discussion to date is that of Aster, “Transmission of Neo-Assyrian Claims of Empire to Judah in the Late Eighth Century B.C.E.” Aster identifies no less than eight channels of exposure by various media in the Assyrian heartland, the Aramaean kingdoms between Assyria and Israel, and the land of Israel itself: (1) audiences in Assyrian palaces, especially for the delivery of annual tribute (e.g., Judah in 734 and 732 BCE), which would have included exposure to (2) Assyrian visual art and (3) rituals (so also Machinist, “Assyria and Its Image,” 730); (4) audiences with Assyrian personnel (see, e.g., 2 Kgs 16:10) and (5) exposure to Assyrian monuments (inscribed stele and non-textual statues) in Aramean territory during diplomatic journeys; (6) inscribed stelae in Israel (e.g., the stelae likely associated with Sargon II in Ashdod and Samaria and with Esarhaddon in Ben Shemen [Tel-Hadid]) and Qaqun (similarly, Machinist, “Assyria and Its Image,” 731; see also Hartenstein, *Das Archiv des verborgenen Gottes*, 86–90); (7) Assyrian administrative presence in Israel, including scribes and Assyrian administrators with facility in Akkadian and local languages (Aramaic); and (8) the oral conveyance of imperial claims, e.g., the kind of speech given by the Rabshakeh, which exposed besieged cities such as Samaria and Lachish to royal rhetoric (similarly Machinist, “Assyria and Its Image,” 731). See also Hays, *Death in the Iron Age II and in First Isaiah*, 21–33.

<sup>106</sup> So Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, 43. As Hayim Tadmor observes, the Assyrian royal inscriptions are “by their very nature official documents of self-praise,” that served to “indicate the way he aspired his image to be portrayed, in conformity with the norms of behavior befitting an Assyrian monarch” (“History and Ideology in the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions,” in *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: New Horizons in Literary, Ideological, and Historical Analysis; Papers of a Symposium Held in Cetona [Siena] June 26–28, 1980*, OAC 17 [Rome: Istituto per l’Oriente, Centro per le antichità e la storia dell’arte del vicino Oriente, 1981], 13).

<sup>107</sup> Gallagher, e.g., has collected parallels from the royal inscriptions that contain similar imagery to almost every clause in vv. 13–14 (*Sennacherib’s Campaign to Judah*, 78–82).

stereotypical speech serves to indict the king on the charge of his hubristic failure to recognize and acknowledge YHWH as the true agent behind his successes.<sup>108</sup>

### 2.3.6. A Concluding Reinforcement of the Hierarchy of Agency (10:15)

Following the king's self-aggrandizing speech, YHWH offers a set of rhetorical questions of his own, which serve as a fitting summary for the oracle's message as a whole. Returning to the imagery of the opening bicolon (v. 5), the closing lines reinforce the hierarchy of agency formulated in vv. 5–6 by developing the trope of THE KING AS MERE INSTRUMENT:

15     Shall the ax boast against the one who hews with it?  
           Or the saw magnify itself over the one who handles it?  
        As if a rod should lift the one who raises it,  
           As if the staff should lift the one who is not wood!

The king is again likened to a pair of hand tools and other implements that require one to wield them: he is but an ax or a saw, like a rod or a staff. As we know from v. 5, this agent is YHWH. The king's misapprehension of his subordinate place in the hierarchy of agency invites incredulity from the reader (v. 15b) and ultimately, punishment from YHWH (vv. 5, 12b).

### 2.3.7. Summary of Exegesis

To summarize briefly, the oracle of Isaiah 10:5–15 thematizes and works out a set of relations between YHWH and the figure of the Assyrian king. The two are configured into a hierarchy of agency (vv. 5–6, 15) in which YHWH is conceptualized as the one who wields the king for his own purposes in exercising wrath against nations that provoke it (v. 6). The king, however,

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<sup>108</sup> As Machinist observes: "In Isaiah 10, however, while much of this same language appears, its meaning is exactly the reverse. Now the Assyrian's first person proclamation ... unqualified as this is by any reference to a god—appears as *hubris* of the highest order, and specifically constitutes rejection of Yahweh. In short, the Assyrian becomes what the 'enemy' was in his own inscriptions, who 'trusted in his own strength' and 'did not fear the oath of the gods'" ("Assyria and Its Image," 734).

possesses a misaligned intentionality (vv. 7–11) that leads him to exceed his divine commission through imperial hubris and arrogantly fails to recognize the true agent behind his endeavors (vv. 13–14, 15). It is on these grounds that the oracle envisions YHWH’s punishment of the king (vv. 5, 12b, 15), though the temporal gloss in v. 12a attempts to integrate this work within YHWH’s plan for Zion.

#### 2.4. THE SYMBOLIC WORK OF ISAIAH 10:5–15 AND ITS HYBRID CHARACTER

In a foundational study on Neo-Assyrian ideology, Mario Liverani began to describe the negotiation of reality that takes place at the interface between imperial powers and those whom they subjugate:

At the moment of the impact there ... takes place a struggle between ideologies; each providing its own audience with the explanation of what is happening: as there is an ideological justification for victory and domination, similarly there can be an ideological justification for defeat and subjugation.<sup>109</sup>

What lies before us in Isa 10:5–15 is the product of just such a “moment of impact.” Formulated during the era of Assyria’s subjugation of Syria-Palestine, the oracle offers, from the perspective of the subordinate and threatened group, a model for understanding Assyria’s domination in the region. This model, as we have seen, is constructed by a series of counterclaims through which the activities of the Assyrian king are subsumed under the effective agency of YHWH. What follows marks an attempt to analyze the character of this model as an ideological response to Assyria’s imperial domination. I begin by (1) describing how the model represents an attempt to encompass the new political situation brought by Assyria within a Yahwistic framework. I then (2) consider the ways in which the “struggle between ideologies” has left its mark on the oracle’s

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<sup>109</sup> “The Ideology of the Assyrian Empire,” in *Power and Propaganda: A Symposium on Ancient Empires*, ed. Mogens Trolle Larsen, Mesopotamia: Copenhagen Studies in Assyriology 7 (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979), 300. See also his brief discussion of the ideology of defeat in Israel in Liverani, *The Ancient Near East*, 415.

construction of reality, especially in its presentation of YHWH. Finally, I conclude my analysis by (3) reflecting briefly on the symbolic nature of the work performed by the oracle.

#### **2.4.1. Mastering the Indomitable**

For Isaiah and his contemporaries, Assyria's rapid and overwhelming encroachment into the West was a reality that could not be denied. As observable phenomena, the claims made by the king in 10:5–15 were manifestly true: Calno was indeed like Carchemish, Samaria like Damascus, and so forth (v. 9); cities were despoiled and destroyed (vv. 6c, 13); the boundaries of the peoples were rewritten (v. 13); and it must have seemed, at least at times, that all this was done without so much as a “chirp” from the vanquished (v. 14). There is no attempt to deny or downplay the Assyria's dominance in First Isaiah—in fact, just the opposite. As Machinist observes, the presentation of Assyria here is “that of an overwhelming military machine, destroying all resistance in its path, devastating the lands of its enemies, hauling away huge numbers of spoils and captives to its capital or elsewhere in its realm, and rearranging by this devastation and deportation the political physiognomy of the entire region”—in fact, “the invincibility of the Assyrian army is taken for granted.”<sup>110</sup> The description of Assyria in Isa 5:26b–29 is illustrative:

Here they come, swiftly, speedily!  
None among them is weary, none stumbles  
    none slumbers or sleeps,  
not a loincloth is loose,  
    not a sandal-thong broken;  
their arrows are sharp,  
    all their bows bent,  
their horses' hoofs seem like flint,  
    and their wheels like a whirlwind.

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<sup>110</sup> Machinist, “Assyria and Its Image,” 722.

Their roaring is like a lion,  
                   like young lions they roar;  
 they growl and seize their prey,  
                   they carry it off, and no one can rescue. (NRSV)

The overwhelming threat of the Assyrian war machine and its manifest dominance were political facts that could not be denied. What could be contested, however, was the *meaning* of Assyria's activities in the region. And this, in my view, is precisely what the oracle in 10:5–15 sets out to do.

The oracle in 10:5–15 lifts up the new political realities brought by Assyria into the realm of the symbolic in order to work on them symbolically. The oracle thematizes the relationship between YHWH and the Assyrian king and configures these two into a hierarchy of effective agency. As we have seen, this configuration is constructed through a series of counterclaims by which the activities of the king are subsumed under the agency of YHWH. Contrary to the king's own perception of reality (vv. 8–11, 13–14), he is but an instrument in the hand of YHWH (vv. 5, 15), who wields the monarch for his own purposes: to go against nations that provoke his wrath (vv. 5–6) and to perform his “work” in Jerusalem (v. 12a).

The identification of the Assyrian king as an instrument in the hand of YHWH accomplishes much on the symbolic plane. Most importantly, it encompasses the activities of Assyria within a Yahwistic framework. Adverse experiences must be assimilated into existing ideological frameworks if they are to become meaningful. And if these realities cannot be rendered meaningful, then indigenous frameworks and the worldviews they hold together risk falling into oblivion.<sup>111</sup> To this end, assigning such events a purpose by claiming the agency

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<sup>111</sup> The need to make sense of the experience of evil is especially urgent in coping with traumatic experiences; see, e.g., Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered Assumptions: Towards a New Psychology of Trauma* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 134. For a helpful discussion of the meaning-making capacity of prophetic literature,

behind them is a useful ideological strategy. The oracle in 10:5–15 renders the aggressive activities of Assyria meaningful by assigning them to the agency of YHWH.<sup>112</sup> As was noted earlier, this rhetorical move comes with costs: YHWH becomes responsible for Assyria's actions. But the costs of this ideological solution could be worth it if it rescues the realities from meaninglessness. As Calvin's pastoral and theological sensitivities led him to recognize in his exegesis of this passage, it can be better to attribute such experiences to "the hand of God" than to "suppose that anything happens by chance."<sup>113</sup>

Assimilating the activities of Assyria within a Yahwistic framework also provides grounds for anticipating their end. Contrary to whatever the king might say (vv. 7–11), his imperial activities will not go on without end. The king's hubris, which proceeds from his false apprehension of his Yahwistic commission, invites YHWH's inevitable judgment (vv. 5–6,

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see Louis Stulman, "Prophetic Words and Acts as Survival Literature," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Prophets*, ed. Carolyn J. Sharp (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 324–6.

<sup>112</sup> A comparable strategy is found in the common ancient Near Eastern theology of defeat, which comes to expression in various forms of the so-called "divine abandonment motif" (see the discussion in Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, 9–41). Within this model, military defeat at the hands of one's enemies was understood as the result of the withdrawal or abandonment of the local deity, who was, for a number of possible reasons, displeased with the king or the inhabitants of the land. A concise articulation of this doctrine is found in Jdg 2:11–14. The most famous non-biblical example comes from the Mesha stele, in which Mesha, the king of Moab, attributes his defeat at the hands of the Israelite king to the anger of Kemosh. This ideological strategy similarly sought to render defeat by foreign armies explicable by claiming the agency behind it. In this case, vanquishment is framed as the result of one's own actions toward the deity. Taking the blame in such a way renders the defeat meaningful and provides a framework for envisioning a future in which one's actions could lead to a different outcome (see §3.5.1.3.2). See also Jacob L. Wright, "The Commemoration of Defeat and the Formation of a Nation in the Hebrew Bible," *Prooftexts* 29 (2009): 433–473.

<sup>113</sup> Calvin's full comment reads: "Whether ... we are attacked by tyrants or robbers ... or foreign nations rise up against us, let us always plainly see the hand of God amidst the greatest agitation and confusion, and let us not suppose that anything happens by chance" (*Commentary on Isaiah 10:1–34*); see also his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1.28.1 and Article 13 of the Belgic Confession. Not surprisingly, Calvin's commentary is quite sensitive to the configuration of agency in his discussion of the passage.



15).<sup>114</sup> As the glossator posits, the king is but an instrument in the hand of YHWH, and when YHWH completes his “work,” he will no longer have need of the instrument—in fact, the instrument itself will be punished for its failure to apprehend its role as such.

In short, the oracle works on the symbolic plane to construct a model that explains “what is happening” in Assyria’s dominance within a Yahwistic framework. By configuring YHWH and the Assyrian king into a hierarchy of effective agency, the model (1) renders Assyria’s aggression in the region meaningful and (2) provides the grounds for anticipating its end by YHWH’s judgment.

#### **2.4.2. A Hybrid Discourse**

The oracle in 10:5–15 offers not merely an “explanation of what is happening,” but a *counter*-explanation. As we have seen, the oracle constructs its model through a series of counterclaims. In contrast to what the Assyrian king says (vv. 7–11, 13–14), he is but an instrument in the hand of YHWH (vv. 5–6, 15), who wields him for his own purposes. The king misapprehends the nature of his commission (vv. 7–11) and source of his own agency (vv. 13–14, 15), which both stem from YHWH. More implicitly, the king’s aggressive activities are not undertaken at the behest of the imperial deity Aššur, but at the command of YHWH (vv. 5–6). Each of these counterclaims is executed by the subversion of the stereotypical claims found in Neo-Assyrian royal propaganda. In the course of contesting the claims of this discourse, however, the imperial values of the Neo-Assyrians become associated with YHWH. The “struggle between ideologies” has left its mark on the deity: he is now the supernatural agent who, like Aššur in Assyrian literature, commissions and dispatches the king to despoil and plunder nations of his wrath (vv.

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<sup>114</sup> For an attempt to describe this move as a nascent philosophy of history, see Wildeberger, *Isaiah 1–12*, 424–26.

5–6; see also 37:26–27). The attempt to resist Assyria’s construction of reality by contesting the agency behind their actions thus unsheathes a double-edged sword. By one edge, the meaning of Assyria’s activities is successfully assimilated into a Yahwistic framework. As I have just tried to show, this is a useful and even necessary ideological move. By the other edge, however, the counterclaims render YHWH responsible for the very destruction and trauma that elicited a response in the first place. The Assyrian king brought more than his troops into the land. The imperial ideology also encroached upon the prophetic imagination.

### **2.4.3. The Symbolic Action**

In the foregoing discussion I have attempted to describe what is accomplished by the symbolic work of the oracle in Isa 10:5–15 and to understand its character as an ideological response to Assyrian aggression. The passage accomplishes much on the symbolic plane: it counters Assyria’s ideology of dominance and assimilates the realities of their aggression into a Yahwistic framework, thus rendering them meaningful and providing grounds for anticipating their end. But a final question should also be posed: did this symbolic work accomplish anything more than to reframe the brutal realities of imperial domination? Or, as the Assyrian Rabshakeh asks: “Do you think that mere words are strategy and power for war?” (Isa 36:5 // 2 Kgs 18:20). Did the oracle make any difference? Unfortunately, we have little access to how this oracle and the model it constructed affected those for whom it was initially intended during the Period of Assyria’s rapid encroachment into the region. If its purpose was partly to discourage political resistance to Assyria in favor of a trust in YHWH, the oracle failed to persuade Hezekiah’s court. But these “mere words” eventually did have a powerful effect after Jerusalem was spared from destruction following Sennacherib’s invasion in 701 BCE. This miraculous event (Isa 37:36–38) seemed to confirm the belief that YHWH was indeed sovereign over the Assyrian king, having

both summoned and repelled him from Jerusalem. This contributed to the development of the belief, however nascent, of Zion's inviolability—a notion that Jeremiah would have to resist when the next imperial giant strode across the region. But that is the story of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 3

NEBUCHADNEZZAR OF BABYLON, MY SERVANT:  
GOD AND THE FOREIGN EMPEROR IN JEREMIAH

“Please, my lord, if YHWH is with us, why has all this befallen us?  
Where are all His wondrous deeds (נפלאותיו) about which our fathers told us?  
– *Gideon* (Judges 6:13)

It seems to me now we never looked up from the trouble we had just getting by to put the obvious question, that is, to ask what it was the Lord was trying to make us understand. The word “preacher” comes from an old French word, *prédicateur*, which means prophet. And what is the purpose of a prophet except to find meaning in trouble?  
– *Rev. John Ames*<sup>115</sup>

## 3.1. INTRODUCTION

The kingdom of Judah somehow managed to survive the existential threat posed by the Assyrians in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, and even the Neo-Assyrian empire itself. But the sudden downfall of that empire came at the hands of an ascendant Babylonian regime that would focus its new-found imperial energy on Syria-Palestine. Judah once again found itself having to negotiate the international ambitions of a Mesopotamian superpower. This time, Jerusalem would not evade catastrophe. Following a series of ill-judged political maneuvers by rebellious Judean rulers, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon would ultimately destroy the city of David, raze the temple of YHWH, and deport key sectors of the Judean populace throughout Babylonia.

This chapter marks an attempt to analyze the content and character of the models for making theological sense of these catastrophic events in the book of Jeremiah, especially as they came to expression in discourse about YHWH’s relationship to Nebuchadnezzar. The oracles in Jeremiah, I suggest, configure this relationship in three ways. First, several oracles identify

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<sup>115</sup> Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004), 233.

Nebuchadnezzar as an agent of YHWH's judgment upon his own people. This model, I argue, was ideologically useful, because it had the capacity to render the traumatic experiences meaningful by locating their cause within an exclusively Yahwistic framework in which the defeat is cast as a testimony to YHWH's own power and blame is assigned to the populace, which in turn creates space for the vanquished to assert their own agency. Second, in the absolutely crucial oracle of Jer 27:5–11, YHWH elects to delegate sovereignty over the world he created to Nebuchadnezzar. I argue that this model performs powerful symbolic work on the problem of Gentile imperialism by (1) locating the structure of empire itself within YHWH's own will and intentionality and (2) by establishing hierarchies of sovereignty and servitude in which the sovereignty of YHWH is (re-)affirmed. But because this model represents a Yahwistic appropriation of an ideological construct indigenous to the Mesopotamian empires, it also casts YHWH in the role of Nebuchadnezzar's patron deity and thus attests to the hybridity of the discourse emerging from the imperial encounter with Babylon. Finally, the oracle against Babylon in Jer 50–51 characterizes Nebuchadnezzar as an object of YHWH's retributive punishment. Despite the tension that obtains between this model and the other two worked out in the book, it, too, was ideologically powerful, giving voice to the enduring longing for justice following the disaster. Before analyzing the content and character of these models, however, it will first be necessary to survey the major political events in the decades straddling the turn of the 6<sup>th</sup> century that shaped the ideological challenges to which they respond.

### 3.2. THE FALL OF ASSYRIA AND THE RISE OF BABYLON

The Neo-Assyrian Empire collapsed as swiftly as it was constructed. In the mid-seventh century, Assyria was at its height. The Sargonid kings who reigned in Nineveh from 705–627 BCE ruled

a territory that “could not expand further”<sup>116</sup> and had eliminated virtually all standing opposition.<sup>117</sup> As late as the 630s BCE, when the long reign of Ashurbanipal (669–ca. 627 BCE) was nearing its end, the empire “seemed impregnable and solid” and “everything appeared to be as it had always been.”<sup>118</sup> Yet by 612 BCE, within a mere quarter-century, the major centers of the empire—Assur, Nimrud, and Nineveh—were “in ashes, destroyed by allied Babylonian and Median forces.”<sup>119</sup> Before the end of the century, “the greatest empire the world had known” had essentially vanished.<sup>120</sup>

The events and circumstances surrounding Assyria’s sudden collapse are difficult to reconstruct, largely due to a lack of evidential sources for the period.<sup>121</sup> But it appears that the seeds of Assyria’s demise were sewn into the empire’s very structure, which over time rendered it vulnerable to internal instability and external pressure.<sup>122</sup> In the final decades of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, a number of factors conspired to expose these vulnerabilities at more or less the same time.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Liverani, *The Ancient Near East*, 491.

<sup>117</sup> Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 266.

<sup>118</sup> Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 540.

<sup>119</sup> Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 540–41. See also J. Oates, “The Fall of Assyria (635–609 B.C.),” in *The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. 3, Part 2, Assyrian and Babylonian Empires and Other States of the Near East, from the Eighth to the Sixth Centuries B.C.*, ed. John Boardman, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 183; John W. Betlyon, “Neo-Babylonian Military Operations Other Than War in Judah and Jerusalem,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, ed. Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 263.

<sup>120</sup> Oates, “The Fall of Assyria,” 183.

<sup>121</sup> For an overview of the relevant evidential sources, see *ibid.*, 163–66. See also Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 266; Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 541; Rainer Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.*, trans. David Green, SBLStBL 3 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 46–47. No doubt the situation was more complex than we can appreciate from our vantage point; see Grayson, “The Reign of Ashurbanipal,” 161.

<sup>122</sup> Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 268.

<sup>123</sup> Assyriologists draw attention to a number of structural problems that continually plagued the empire. Internally, the investment of absolute power in the office of the king rendered the empire overly dependent upon the strength and competency of a single individual and vulnerable to instability during periods of succession (see *ibid.*,

The most significant factor for our present purposes was the rise of a native dynasty in Babylonia that was, at long last, sufficiently able and determined to cast off the Assyrian yoke.

Due to the special nature of relations between the two nations, maintaining control over Babylonia presented an intractable problem for the Assyrians.<sup>124</sup> “Unlike other subject nations,” as Grayson observes, “Babylonia could not be treated by the Assyrian imperialists simply as a territory to suppress and exploit. Historical, ethnic, and cultural ties were too strong to allow either the Babylonians to accept such subordinate status or the Assyrians themselves to handle their southern neighbor in this fashion.”<sup>125</sup> The diplomatic challenge was thus a delicate one, requiring the Assyrians to grant Babylonia an appropriate degree of latitude while also maintaining its subordinate position by whatever means possible. Throughout the 7<sup>th</sup> century,

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267–68; Grayson, “The Reign of Ashurbanipal,” 161). Perhaps most decisively, the Assyrian heartland became overly dependent upon the exploitation of resources from its provincial holdings. As Grayson observes, “as time went on, the nonproductive element of the population of the Assyrian heartland increased, and greater and greater demands were made on the outlying regions for supplies ... It is no exaggeration to say that the economies of the outlying regions of the Assyrian empire were gradually destroyed in order to prop up an artificial economy in central Assyria. This economic circumstance was no small factor in the weakening and eventual fall of the Assyrian empire” (“History and Culture of Assyria,” in *ABD*, vol. 4, 6 vols. [New York: Doubleday, 1992], 752); see also Oates, “The Fall of Assyria,” 180, 183. This economic exploitation did little to encourage loyalty from the subjected populations on whom the Assyrians depended for their defense; see Betlyon, “Neo-Babylonian Military Operations Other Than War in Judah and Jerusalem,” 183.

<sup>124</sup> For a helpful summary of the often conflictual relations between Babylonia and Assyria during the Late Assyrian Empire, see J. A. Brinkman, “Babylonia in the Shadow of Assyria (747–626 B.C.),” in *The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. 3, Part 2, Assyrian and Babylonian Empires and Other States of the Near East, from the Eighth to the Sixth Centuries B.C.*, ed. John Boardman, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 1–70, esp. 23–63. See also Grant Frame, “Babylon: Assyria’s Problem and Assyria’s Prize,” *Journal of the Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies* 3 (2008): 21–31. Concise accounts of Neo-Assyrian relations with Babylonia in various eras are also found in Grayson, “Tiglath-Pileser III to Sargon II,” 80–83; A. K. Grayson, “Assyria: Sennacherib and Esarhaddon (704–669 B.C.),” in *The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. 3, Part 2, Assyrian and Babylonian Empires and Other States of the Near East, from the Eighth to the Sixth Centuries B.C.*, ed. John Boardman, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 105–109; Grayson, “The Reign of Ashurbanipal,” 147–54.

<sup>125</sup> Grayson, “Assyrian Rule,” 965. See also the similar comments in Grayson, “The Reign of Ashurbanipal,” 161; Liverani, *The Ancient Near East*, 569.

striking such a balance became increasingly difficult. Eras of relative peace notwithstanding,<sup>126</sup> this period saw a series of rebellions in Babylonia that no strategy of control could ultimately stabilize.<sup>127</sup> From small-scale skirmishes to devastating conflicts in Babylonian urban centers, the century was punctuated by violent assertions of Assyrian hegemony.<sup>128</sup> Paradoxically, these assertions would eventually lead to a reversal of fortunes for the two nations.<sup>129</sup>

The protracted conflicts of the 7<sup>th</sup> century had a double effect that proved fatal for Assyria. Though they managed to curb Babylonian volatility for much of the century, the immense military efforts required to do so placed a strain on the empire from which it would never recover.<sup>130</sup> Particularly taxing was the Great Rebellion of 652–648 BCE, in which the Babylonian vassal-king Shamash-shuma-ukin led a coalition in a full-fledged revolt against his brother, Ashurbanipal. The depletion of Assyria's resources in dashing Babylonian resistance in this conflict was devastating; the Assyrian army never again managed to launch a significant international venture.<sup>131</sup> At the same time, the incessant enforcement of Assyrian domination over the century functioned as a catalyst for the strengthening of Babylonia.<sup>132</sup> Internally, the shared animus toward Assyria provided a common cause around which Babylonia's diverse

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<sup>126</sup> Relative stability appears to have obtained, e.g., during the tenure of Sennacherib's son, Ashur-nadin-shumi (699–694 BCE), from the time between the rebuilding of Babylon in 681 BCE until ca. 669 BCE (see Brinkman, "Babylonia in the Shadow of Assyria," 35, 47), and even during the late tenure of Kandalanu in Assyria's final years from ca. 635–627 BCE (Oates, "The Fall of Assyria," 171).

<sup>127</sup> See the brief discussion in Grayson, "Assyrian Rule," 965.

<sup>128</sup> See Brinkman, "Babylonia in the Shadow of Assyria," 23–63.

<sup>129</sup> See Brinkman, "Babylonia in the Shadow of Assyria," 1, 68–70; Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 49.

<sup>130</sup> Brinkman, "Babylonia in the Shadow of Assyria," 53.

<sup>131</sup> Brinkman, "Babylonia in the Shadow of Assyria," 53.

<sup>132</sup> Brinkman, "Babylonia in the Shadow of Assyria," 1, 68–70.



populations could unite politically.<sup>133</sup> Externally, the constant Assyrian threat stimulated the development of strong political and economic relations with neighboring states.<sup>134</sup> As the dust settled from the civil war, these developments allowed Babylonia to bounce back more efficiently than Assyria. The stage was set for a great reversal.

The time for rebellion arrived once again in 627 BCE, which saw the deaths of both Ashurbanipal and his long-reigning Babylonian vassal, Kandalanu (647–627 BCE).<sup>135</sup> In the usual confusion and instability brought by conflicts over the succession in Assyria, the Chaldean general Nabopolassar managed to claim the vacant throne in Babylon in 626 BCE. Unfortunately, the limited sources shed little light on these developments and those in Babylonia over the next decade, the period in which Nabopolassar was able to secure his office and to drive out Assyrian presence from the region.<sup>136</sup> What is clear, however, is that by 616, the Babylonian leader had consolidated enough power to launch an attack on the Assyrian heartland.<sup>137</sup> In this endeavor he found a crucial ally in the Medes, a people from the Zagros mountains in western Iran who had filled the power vacuum in that region after Ashurbanipal's eradication of Elam for its support of Shamash-shuma-ukin in the Great Rebellion.<sup>138</sup> Over the course of the next decade,

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<sup>133</sup> See *Ibid.*, 69 and Alberty, *Israel in Exile*, 49.

<sup>134</sup> Brinkman, "Babylonia in the Shadow of Assyria," 15.

<sup>135</sup> There is some uncertainty about whether Ashurbanipal died in 627 BCE or whether he had abdicated the throne some time earlier. Some have also suggested that Kandalanu was simply Ashurbanipal's throne name in Babylonia. Neither argument seems to maintain wide support, however, and I find the conclusion that these two figures died in relatively close succession in ca. 627 BCE persuasive; see Oates, "The Fall of Assyria," 167–71 and Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 588–89.

<sup>136</sup> Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 589.

<sup>137</sup> Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 267; Brinkman, "Babylonia in the Shadow of Assyria," 61; Alberty, *Israel in Exile*, 51.

<sup>138</sup> Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 267.

these joint powers would destroy the major centers of Assyria and, ultimately, inherit its imperial holdings.

Within the brief period of 614–609 BCE, the Medes and Babylonians vanquished the major imperial centers of the Assyrian heartland. The first major assault was launched by the Medes, who laid siege to the Assyrian capital of Nineveh in 614 BCE. This initial attack was unsuccessful, but after being repelled from the capital, they managed to capture the cities of Tarbisu and Assur. Nabopolassar's troops arrived only after the battle, but the two powers here ratified a treaty of mutual support.<sup>139</sup> Their most critical collaboration came in 612 BCE, when their joint forces laid siege to Nineveh and, after three months, managed to destroy it.<sup>140</sup> The defeat marked the end of the Assyrian empire in its heartland. But what survived of the Assyrian administration managed to draw one last breath. With the help of the Egyptians, who had in recent years become allies to the crumbling empire,<sup>141</sup> the Assyrians attempted to set up a state in the northwest Syrian site of Harran. It was here, in 609 BCE, that the Neo-Assyrian Empire took its last stand against the Medes and Babylonians.<sup>142</sup> The defeat was decisive. The Assyrian empire, which had so rapidly extended its grip over the Near East and maintained it within its clutches for more than a century, was no more.

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<sup>139</sup> Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 545.

<sup>140</sup> Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 545.

<sup>141</sup> See J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 450–51; Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 543.

<sup>142</sup> See the brief accounts in Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 267; Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 545.

### 3.3. BABYLON AND THE WEST

The implosion of the Neo-Assyrian Empire created a power vacuum throughout the Near East. Not surprisingly, it was those powers who dealt the death blows to Assyria that stepped into the void. The regions of the empire to the north and the east came under the control of the Medes, who ruled a coalition of states in the highlands of Iran and Anatolia.<sup>143</sup> The Babylonians, who were the natural heirs of Mesopotamia, aspired to gain control over Assyria's imperial holdings in the West as well.<sup>144</sup> The subjugation of the "Hatti-land" (Syria-Palestine), however, was complicated by the presence of the Egyptians, who had begun to establish themselves in the region as early as the 620s BCE.<sup>145</sup> The goal of securing control over Syria-Palestine thus required the eradication of Egyptian influence from the region.<sup>146</sup> This task fell largely to Nabopolassar's son, Nebuchadnezzar II, who, in a spate of military victories, began to make his grand appearance on the stage of history.

The pivotal clash came in 605 BCE at the Syrian site of Carchemish. Under the direction of Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian army defeated the Egyptian garrison in "one of the great

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<sup>143</sup> Liverani, *The Ancient Near East*, 539; Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 267; Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 540–41.

<sup>144</sup> Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 590; Grayson, "The Reign of Ashurbanipal," 161. See also Betlyon, "Neo-Babylonian Military Operations Other Than War in Judah and Jerusalem," 263–64. As Oded Lipschits observes, "[t]he major importance of Hatti-land at this time was a result of its function as a land bridge to Egypt. Nebuchadnezzar knew that Egypt was the only power that could threaten the existence of the young empire and that he could not establish his rule firmly in the region as long as there was a threat of Egyptian invasion" (*The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem: Judah under Babylonian Rule* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005], 36).

<sup>145</sup> According to Nadav Na'aman's reconstruction, the Assyrians may have formally relinquished their western holdings to the Egyptians in exchange for assistance in their increasing military struggles at this time ("The Kingdom of Judah under Josiah," *Tel Aviv* 18 [1991]: 39–40, 56). Na'aman's theory is supported, among others, by Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 543. See also the discussion in David Stephen Vanderhooft, *The Neo-Babylonian Empire and Babylon in the Latter Prophets*, HSM 59 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 69–81 and the concise reconstruction in Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 450–53.

<sup>146</sup> Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 53.

battles of antiquity.”<sup>147</sup> The Egyptian troops who survived fled to Hamath, but were there slaughtered, as a Babylonian Chronicle recalls, “so that not a single man returned home.”<sup>148</sup> The Babylonian advance into the West was stalled, however, when news of Nabopolassar’s death reached Nebuchadnezzar in the field. The crown prince was forced to rush back to Babylon to secure his accession to the throne. Harnessing the renown earned in his recent victory, his bid to succeed his father was successful.<sup>149</sup>

Nebuchadnezzar’s actions over the next decade make clear that establishing and maintaining control over Syria-Palestine was a top priority of his foreign policy.<sup>150</sup> Immediately after securing the throne, Nebuchadnezzar marched back to Syria to resume his campaign there for “another five months—right through the winter.”<sup>151</sup> Over the next ten years, eight of his nine military campaigns were conducted in Syria-Palestine.<sup>152</sup> The focused attention directed to the region demonstrates not only the importance that Nebuchadnezzar assigned to securing it, but

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<sup>147</sup> Oates, “The Fall of Assyria,” 182–83. That this battle was marked as a significant turning point in the Near East, and for Judah in particular, is evident in the heading of JerMT 25:1, which introduces a turning point in the book by dating it to the first year of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign; cf. the suggestion of John Betlyon, who states that “[t]his victory had an immediate ‘impact on sensitive opinion in the west.’ Jeremiah foresaw that Babylon would take control over the entire western region (25:1–14; 46:1–12)” (“Neo-Babylonian Military Operations Other Than War in Judah and Jerusalem,” 264).

<sup>148</sup> “(so that) a single (Egyptian) man [did not return] home” is the translation in A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 99. See Betlyon, “Neo-Babylonian Military Operations Other Than War in Judah and Jerusalem,” 264. The Chronicle that reports events during Nebuchadnezzar II’s early years is preserved on the obverse of a tablet from the British Museum, BM 21946 (96–4–9, 51); henceforth: the Babylonian Chronicle.

<sup>149</sup> Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 590.

<sup>150</sup> Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 590–91; Betlyon, “Neo-Babylonian Military Operations Other Than War in Judah and Jerusalem,” 264; Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 52–53.

<sup>151</sup> Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 590.

<sup>152</sup> Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 590.

also the necessity of maintaining a constant military presence there in order to stay Egyptian influence and to maintain control over the local rulers of its petty states.<sup>153</sup>

### 3.3.1. Judah between Egypt and Babylonia

In the clash between Egyptian and Babylonian interests in the southern Levant, the small kingdom of Judah found itself on the front lines. Like the other petty states of the region, Judah was forced into a position in which it had to negotiate the ever-shifting tides of power and political circumstance. The stakes were high. The survival of Judah rode on the right alignment of allegiances between the two superpowers. At a few critical junctures, Judah placed its bet against Babylonia. These misplayed hands would lead to utter catastrophe.

While Babylonia was attacking the Assyrian heartland, Egypt was already busy extending its hegemony over Judah. In 609 BCE, Pharaoh Neco II was in route to Syria to assist the Assyrians. According to the account in 2 Kings, King Josiah went to meet the Pharaoh at Megiddo, but when the two met, Neco put the Judean king to death (2 Kgs 23:29; cf. 2 Chr 35:20–24).<sup>154</sup> Josiah was then succeeded by his son, Jehoahaz, who was appointed by the “people of the land” (2 Kgs 23:30; 2 Chr 36:1) but reigned for a mere three months before he was deposed by Neco and replaced by his brother, Eliakim, who was given the throne name Jehoiakim (2 Kgs 23:30–34).<sup>155</sup> The king of Judah now owed his throne—and Judean tribute—to the Egyptian Pharaoh.

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<sup>153</sup> Betlyon, “Neo-Babylonian Military Operations Other Than War in Judah and Jerusalem,” 264–65.

<sup>154</sup> The tradition in Kings does not divulge further information regarding the circumstances of Josiah’s death; for a compelling reconstruction, see Na’aman, “The Kingdom of Judah under Josiah.”

<sup>155</sup> For brief discussions of “the people of the land” (עַם הָאָרֶץ) during this period, see Christopher R. Seitz, *Theology in Conflict: Reactions to the Exile in the Book of Jeremiah*, BZAW 176 (New York: de Gruyter, 1989), 42–51 and, more recently, Joseph Blenkinsopp, *David Remembered: Kingship and National Identity in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 12–13.

The political landscape soon shifted, however, with Nebuchadnezzar's defeat of the Egyptians at Carchemish in 605 BCE and his subsequent campaigns in Phoenicia the following years. The defeat of Ashkelon in 604–603 in particular signaled the towering ascendancy of Babylonia in the region. Like many of his neighbors, Jehoiakim willingly submitted to the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar after this campaign, becoming a vassal to Babylon (2 Kgs 24:1).<sup>156</sup> According to the biblical account, Jehoiakim conveyed his annual tribute for three years before he rebelled in ca. 600 BCE (2 Kgs 24:1). This was the first poorly judged wager against Nebuchadnezzar.

Jehoiakim's rebellion was likely inspired by events of the previous year. In 601 BCE, Nebuchadnezzar marched south and launched an attack on the King of Egypt in his own land. According to the Babylonian Chronicle, there were enormous losses on each side, with the two rulers "inflict[ing] a major defeat upon one another."<sup>157</sup> The protracted clash resulted in a stalemate (or, perhaps, a Babylonian defeat),<sup>158</sup> and Nebuchadnezzar was forced to withdraw from the region to "refit and regroup."<sup>159</sup> Apparently King Jehoiakim interpreted these events as a shift in the balance of power in the region in favor of Egypt, the state to which he owed his

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<sup>156</sup> See the discussion in D. J. Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon*, Schweich Lectures in Biblical Archaeology (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 22–23.

<sup>157</sup> *ABC*, 101.

<sup>158</sup> What is depicted as a stalemate in propagandistic royal literature in reality may have been a loss. As Daniel David Luckenbill observed so colorfully, had the prophet Samuel added to his description of "the manner of the king," (1 Sam 8:11–17) "that the ruler would keep at his side a number of obsequious scribes who would ... in balanced prose periods or in vague but ringing verse, transform a defeat which could not be passed over in silence, or a lucky escape from complete disaster in some foolish venture, into a dignified retreat before, say, the winter's bitter cold or the floods of springtime ... he would have given us not only the picture, but the gilded frame as well" (*The Annals of Sennacherib*, OIP 2 [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1924], 1). This was certainly the case for Babylonia's Mesopotamian neighbors and forerunners, the Assyrians; as Steven W. Holloway observes, "the Assyrians adopted a policy of complete blackout in the case of their own military defeats. The Assyrians never lost a battle, according to the royal inscriptions" (*Aššur Is King! Aššur Is King!: Religion in the Exercise of Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire*, CHANE 10 [Leiden: Brill, 2001], 92). See also Shawn Zelig Aster, "Transmission of Neo-Assyrian Claims of Empire to Judah in the Late Eighth Century B.C.E.," *HUCA* 78 (2007): 8 n. 23.

<sup>159</sup> Betlyon, "Neo-Babylonian Military Operations Other Than War in Judah and Jerusalem," 265.

throne.<sup>160</sup> Perhaps wishing to capitalize on the perceived shift, Jehoiakim revoked his vassalage to Babylon and defiantly withheld tribute.<sup>161</sup> The king's misapprehension proved fatal.

In the winter of 598–597 BCE Nebuchadnezzar returned to the region and launched his first attack on Judah with the assistance of vassal forces from Syria, Ammon, and Moab.<sup>162</sup> Before the attack commenced, however, Jehoiakim died suddenly and was succeeded by his son, Jehoiakin. The new monarch's brief three-month reign in 597 would end in defeat. According to the biblical account, Jehoiakin surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar during the siege (2 Kgs 24:12), which broke through on March 15/16 597. Nebuchadnezzar then took the king, together with his royal entourage of servants and officials, and thousands of the land's highly skilled "men of valor" into captivity in Babylon (2 Kgs 24:12–16). In the longstanding tradition of imperial plundering, he also deported many of the treasures of the Jerusalem temple and its sacred vessels to Babylon (2 Kgs 24:13; Jer 27:16–22; 28:1–9; Dan 1:1–2; 2 Chr 36:7, 10). Nebuchadnezzar then installed Jehoiakin's uncle, Mattaniah, in his place, giving him the throne name of Zedekiah (2 Kgs 24:17).<sup>163</sup>

Both the biblical texts and the Babylonian Chronicles provide little information about Zedekiah's reign. Besides the report of an anti-Babylonian conspiracy that assembled in

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<sup>160</sup> Betlyon, "Neo-Babylonian Military Operations Other Than War in Judah and Jerusalem," 265.

<sup>161</sup> See the reconstruction in Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 466–67.

<sup>162</sup> The Babylonian Chronicle dates the invasion and siege of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar's seventh year (598–597 BCE) during the month of Kislimu (Dec. 18, 598–Jan. 15 597); see *ABC*, 102.

<sup>163</sup> The biblical and Babylonian accounts accord with one another on the basic events. The Babylonian Chronicle reports simply: "He encamped against the city of Judah and on the second day of the month Adar he captured the city (and) seized (its) king. A king of his own choice he appointed in the city (and) taking the vast tribute he brought it into Babylon" (Ibid).

Jerusalem sometime early in his reign (Jer 27:1; 28:1),<sup>164</sup> it appears that Zedekiah was a dutiful vassal, fulfilling his obligations to Babylonia until ca. 590 BCE. The change in policy was almost certainly inspired by developments in Egypt. In 592 BCE, Neco II's successor, Psamtik II (595–589 BCE), conducted a successful military campaign against Nubia, “brilliantly demonstrat[ing] the military might of Egypt.”<sup>165</sup> The Rylands IX Papyrus reveals that, after his return to Egypt, Psamtik went on a victory tour through Palestine in 591 BCE.<sup>166</sup> The tour of triumph through Babylonia's vassal state was politically fraught. As Miller and Hayes observe, Psamtik's ceremonial visit “must have been seen as Egypt's reassertion ... of its claims over Syria-Palestine,” and it is possible that Psamtik formally engaged with Zedekiah in Jerusalem.<sup>167</sup> Whether Zedekiah began to confer with Psamtik at this point in time is unknown, but Ezekiel reports that Zedekiah sent ambassadors to Egypt around this period to request military assistance, thus breaking his oath to Nebuchadnezzar (Ezek 17:15). Fueled by anti-Babylonian animus and hope in Egyptian assistance, Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar in ca. 590 BCE (2 Kgs 24:20). This was the second—and final—poorly judged wager against Nebuchadnezzar.

The Babylonian king reacted boldly to the destabilization of his southwestern border, launching a second punitive campaign against Judah in 588/7 BCE.<sup>168</sup> After an eighteen-month

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<sup>164</sup> See the discussion in Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 469–72. The dating formulae in Jer 27:1 and 28:1 and the chronological placement of the conspiracy are problematic.

<sup>165</sup> Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 54.

<sup>166</sup> Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 473–74.

<sup>167</sup> Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 474.

<sup>168</sup> The dating of Nebuchadnezzar's second campaign against Jerusalem and the defeat of Jerusalem that followed (587/6 BCE) is notoriously thorny. Since there is little at stake in this debate for the current project, I have chosen simply to present both dates. For a concise survey of the relevant data and interpretive decisions that must be made to adjudicate the dating, see the discussion Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 76–81, who prefers the earlier dating.



siege, the Babylonian army breached the walls of the starving city (2 Kgs 25:3).<sup>169</sup> Hopes in Egyptian assistance had failed. The punitive actions taken against the king and the city were harsh. According to the biblical account, Zedekiah was captured fleeing the city with a contingent of his army and brought before Nebuchadnezzar, who was overseeing the siege from Riblah in Syria (2 Kgs 25:5–6; Jer 52:26–27). The Judean king’s fate was an extremely bitter one: he was forced to watch while his sons were slaughtered and, with that scene seared in his sight, he was blinded and taken in fetters to Babylon (2 Kgs 25:7; Jer 39:6–7; 52:10–11). A month later, the city, too, suffered a devastating fate (2 Kgs 25:8). Dashing the hopes of any anti-Babylonian parties that maintained belief in Zion’s inviolability to the bitter end, Nebuchadnezzar commissioned his servant Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, to destroy the temple in Jerusalem along with the great houses and walls of the city (2 Kgs 25:9–10; Jer 52:13–14).<sup>170</sup> He then “carried into exile the rest of the people who were left in the city,” leaving only “some of the poorest people of the land” (2 Kgs 25:11–12; Jer 39:9–10; 52:15–16).<sup>171</sup> Finally, he

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<sup>169</sup> For a detailed discussion of the siege, see Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon*, 36–37.

<sup>170</sup> As Albertz observes, “we must remember that the Babylonians were quite familiar with Judean partisan conflicts. It is reasonable to suppose that Nebuchadnezzar intended to strike at the theological foundation of the anti-Babylonian party, which even during the siege insisted that Yahweh’s presence in Zion would prevent the city from being taken, as it had defended the city against Sennacherib in 701” (*Israel in Exile*, 55). See also Albertz’s reconstruction of the anti-Babylonian faction and its interactions with Jeremiah and the Shapanides in his *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*, trans. John Bowden, vol. 1: From the Beginnings to the End of the Monarchy, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 236–41.

<sup>171</sup> The extent of demographic change in Judah following the destruction of Jerusalem in 587/6 BCE is a major debate among archaeologists; see, for an example, the essays in the selfsame volume by Hans M. Barstad, “After the ‘Myth of the Empty Land’: Major Challenges in the Study of Neo-Babylonian Judah,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, ed. Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 3–20 and B. Oded, “Where Is the ‘Myth of the Empty Land’ To Be Found? History versus Myth,” in *ibid.*, 55–74. The archaeological data supports the view that Jerusalem and other cities to the south and west of the city were decimated in the 580s BCE and remained unsettled during the 6<sup>th</sup> century (e.g., Lachish, Ramat Rachel, Beth-Shemesh), while rural areas in the Benjamin region and Mizpah to the north were less affected. Albertz’s level-headed analysis leads him to estimate that Judah’s population was cut roughly in half by the Babylonian deportations (*Israel in Exile*, 90). For a concise overview of the major developments and debates in the archaeology of the period and their significance for understanding biblical literature, see Megan Bishop Moore and Brad E.

deported what remained of the wealth of the temple to Babylon (2 Kgs 25:13–17; Jer 52:17–23).<sup>172</sup>

Following a pattern familiar from Neo-Assyrian imperial practice (see §2.2), Nebuchadnezzar then set up a new administration in Judah to the northwest in Mizpah under the Judean figure Gedaliah ben Ahikam (2 Kgs 25:22–26; Jer 40:5–41:3), leaving Jerusalem and its environs in waste.<sup>173</sup> Much about this new arrangement remains unclear, including the formal status of Gedaliah and Judah within the Babylonian imperial administration.<sup>174</sup> The biblical data inform us that Gedaliah was from a prominent, non-Davidide family in Jerusalem (see 2 Kgs 22:8; Jer 36:11–13; 29:3) and that he and certain members of his family advocated for a submissive stance toward Babylonian dominance (Jer 26:24; 40:9; see also 2 Kgs 25:24). Gedaliah's pedigree and political persuasion made him an advantageous figure from the

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Kelle, *Biblical History and Israel's Past: The Changing Study of the Bible and History* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 347–49, 367–88.

<sup>172</sup> On the depletion of Israel's wealth as a theme in biblical historiography, see Wright, "The Deportation of Jerusalem's Wealth and the Demise of Native Sovereignty in the Book of Kings."

<sup>173</sup> Some elements of this procedure departed from the typical practices of the Assyrians, who often restored such cities and repopulated them with foreigners from other parts of the empire. This procedure facilitated the ongoing economic exploitation of these regions; see Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 482. Drawing on a range of archaeological data, Vanderhooft argues that the Neo-Babylonians generally "did not pursue a policy of systematic, bureaucratic economic exploitation of conquered territories in the west," and that the "[a]rchaeological evidence from Judah ... provides a regional illustration of the minimal imperial economic bureaucracy" (Vanderhooft, *The Neo-Babylonian Empire and Babylon in the Latter Prophets*, 112; David Vanderhooft, "Babylonian Strategies of Imperial Control in the West: Royal Practice and Rhetoric," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, ed. Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 255; see also, Betlyon, "Neo-Babylonian Military Operations Other Than War in Judah and Jerusalem," 266. This perspective stands in contrast to the view articulated by Hans M Barstad, who sees a large measure of cultural continuity in Judah after the disaster of 587/6 BCE, that "[a]fter the fall of Jerusalem, Judah made up another cog in the great economic wheels of the Neo-Babylonian empire ..." (Barstad, "After the 'Myth of the Empty Land,'" 14).

<sup>174</sup> Whether Gedaliah was installed as "king" over Judah as a semi-independent vassal or merely a governor of a province ruled directly by Babylon is a matter of debate; see the survey in Moore and Kelle, *Biblical History and Israel's Past*, 356; Moore and Kelle note that "[t]he long-standing and still dominant consensus in most histories favors the governor view, but one also finds detailed arguments for identifying Gedaliah as king." See, e.g., the arguments in favor of the latter view in Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 483–84.

perspective of the Babylonians.<sup>175</sup> According to the biblical account, however, they also placed him in the cross-hairs of a nationalistic faction led by a member of the Davidic line named Ishmael ben Nethaniah, who murdered Gedaliah along with other Judeans and “Chaldeans” in Mizpah (2 Kgs 25:25; Jer 41:2–3). Historians are divided over whether this assassination occurred shortly after Gedaliah’s installation in 587/6, as the brief account in 2 Kings reports,<sup>176</sup> or several years later in ca. 582, as Jeremiah’s reference to a third Babylonian deportation in the twenty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 52:30) might indicate.<sup>177</sup> In any event, the assassination of Gedaliah marked the end of Judah’s tumultuous, four-hundred-year history as a state.

The fallout from Gedaliah’s assassination also marks the conclusion to the biblical account of Israel’s history prior to the end of Babylonian hegemony in 539 BCE (2 Kgs 25:22–26; Ezra 1–6; 2 Chr 35:21–22). The biblical texts do not provide a continuous account of the period between these two events—a yawning gap of over 40 years.<sup>178</sup> As far as the authors and editors of biblical tradition are concerned, the shadow cast by Nebuchadnezzar had fully eclipsed the land of Judah, and the “darkness of the exilic period fell over people and land.”<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> See Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 91.

<sup>176</sup> For an analysis in this direction, see Lipschits, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem: Judah under Babylonian Rule*, 98–102.

<sup>177</sup> This inference is sometimes supported by Josephus’s report of Babylonian activities in Syria-Palestine in 582 BCE (*Ant.* 10.181). For analyses in this direction, see Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 486; Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 90–96. Naturally, the later dating of Gedaliah’s assassination affords more time for him to have led a societal reform movement of some consequence; see *Ibid.*, 90–94.

<sup>178</sup> Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 3.

<sup>179</sup> Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*, 2 vols., *OTL* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 242.

### 3.4. GOD AND THE FOREIGN EMPEROR IN THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

Babylonia's total domination of the Judean state might have spelled end of Israel's history. The practical and ideological discontinuities presented by the systematic destruction of the capital city and its most important political and religious institutions, along with the forced displacement of its populations, could have proven insurmountable. And yet, in what Rainer Albertz has described as "one of the great miracles of human history," Israel's history continued.<sup>180</sup>

That Israel was not washed away with the tides of history is due in no small part to the ideological undercurrent that inspired the stewards of its traditions to find meaning in defeat even while in exile, identifying factors that could explain what had happened in the past and to forge a new path forward for life as a people without a state.<sup>181</sup> Near the source of this current stood already the prophet Jeremiah ben Hilkiyah, who, as biblical tradition reports, prophesied to and against the inhabitants of Judah and their leaders as they negotiated their precarious existence under the encroachment of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon (ca. 620–580 BCE).<sup>182</sup> The message of the prophet as it was articulated in his own ministry and given shape by his followers and sympathizers during the exilic and post-exilic periods provided vital models for interpreting the

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<sup>180</sup> Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 2.

<sup>181</sup> See the programmatic essay by Jacob L. Wright, "The Commemoration of Defeat and the Formation of a Nation in the Hebrew Bible," *Prooftexts* 29 (2009): 433–73; see also the insightful observations in Collin Cornell, "What Happened to Kemosh?" *ZAW* 128 (2016): 298.

<sup>182</sup> The editorial introduction to the book supplied in Jer 1:2 dates the beginning of the period in which YHWH's word came to Jeremiah in the thirteenth year of king Josiah (627 BCE). And yet no prophetic activity clearly datable to the reign of Josiah or his reform of 622 BCE is preserved in the book. One way to reconcile this disconnect has been to associate 627 BCE with the birth of Jeremiah rather than the beginning of his career; see William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1–25*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 1. I agree with Robert P. Carroll's suggestion that this editorial framework suggests that the book as a whole "may be read as a commentary on the events of the years c. 627–587" (*Jeremiah: A Commentary* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986], 65).

meaning and significance of the events leading up to and through the catastrophe of 587/6 BCE and the ideological challenges of life in diaspora after the demise of native sovereignty.

Among the most pressing ideological challenges presented by the Babylonian domination of Judah was how to interpret it *theologically*. The encroachment of Nebuchadnezzar and his manifest dominance over Judah's inhabitants and their most important cultural, political, and religious institutions raised theological questions that demanded answers if YHWH, the patron deity of Judah, was not to pass away with his city, temple, and state.<sup>183</sup> How, for instance, could YHWH allow the Babylonians to destroy inviolable Zion, the place that he had chosen for his own residence?<sup>184</sup> And what about the Davidic monarchy, to which YHWH had bound himself by an eternal covenant and for which he had vowed to fight?<sup>185</sup> How could YHWH allow its sovereignty to be removed and its very continuation threatened by Nebuchadnezzar (see Ps 89:49)? And those populations who were expelled from their ancestral territory and forced to inhabit far-flung regions of the Babylonian empire—"How could [they] sing YHWH's song in a strange land?"<sup>186</sup> Behind each of these questions stands a common theological problem: how could traditional beliefs about YHWH's sovereignty be reconciled with the manifest dominance exercised by the rival sovereignty of the Babylonians and their king, Nebuchadnezzar?

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<sup>183</sup> See also Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 669. As Joseph Blenkinsopp put the matter: "Sooner or later questions about why it happened and who was responsible would be raised, and sooner or later such questions would be directed at their ancestral deity who had pledged to protect his people, his city Jerusalem, and the house of David and had signally failed to do so . . . Such questioning is implicit in practically all the biblical texts from the exilic period" (*David Remembered: Kingship and National Identity in Ancient Israel*, 54).

<sup>184</sup> On the tradition of Zion's inviolability, see Pss 46:2–8 [1–7]; 48:4–8 [3–7]; 76:4–6 [3–5]; cf. 2 Kgs 18:20; Isa 14:32; 17:12–13; Mic 3:11. On Zion as YHWH's divine residence, see Deut 12:5, 11, 21; 14:23–24; 16:2, 6, 11; 26:2; 1 Kgs 8:16, 29; 9:3; 11:36; 14:21; 2 Kgs 21:4; 21:7; 23:27; Ps 9:12 [11]; 74:2; 76:3 [2]; 78:68; 87:1–2; 99:9; 132:13; see also Neh 1:9.

<sup>185</sup> See, e.g., Ps 89:20–38 [19–37]; 2 Sam 7:16.

<sup>186</sup> Ps 137:4.

Of the traditions preserved in the Hebrew Bible, those associated with Jeremiah engage most directly with the ideological challenges brought by Babylon and its king during the final decades of the Judean state.<sup>187</sup> The relationship between YHWH and the Babylonian king emerges at the surface of the discourse in several key texts throughout the collection. These passages establish sets of relations between YHWH and the figure of Nebuchadnezzar that provide models for interpreting the meaning and significance of Babylonian dominance within a Yahwistic framework. What follows marks an attempt to understand the content and character of these models as responses to the ideological challenges thrust upon Judeans in the era of Babylonian hegemony and its aftermath.

### 3.4.1. Complications in Studying the Perspectives on Babylonia in Jeremiah

The attempt to understand the models for making sense of Babylonian domination in Jeremiah, however, is beset by several steep interpretive challenges, the most daunting of which have to do with the book's exceedingly complex literary history.<sup>188</sup> The first is that the book bearing Jeremiah's name has come down to us in two variant editions represented by the Septuagint (JerLXX) and Masoretic (JerMT) versions.<sup>189</sup> As was recognized already in antiquity, these two

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<sup>187</sup> "Directly" is the operative term here, as it is difficult to overstate the formative impact of the exile on the formation of the texts of the Hebrew Bible. As Rannfrid I. Thelle observes, 169 of 306 mentions of Babylon (בבל) in the Hebrew Bible occur in Jeremiah, with the next highest concentration being in 2 Kings, which has 30; see "Babylon in the Book of Jeremiah (MT): Negotiating a Power Shift," in *Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah*, ed. Hans M. Barstad and Reinhard G. Kratz, BZAW 338 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 187.

<sup>188</sup> The complexity of the literary history may be why some studies on Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon in Jeremiah have chosen to focus on their portrayal in JerMT; see, e.g., John Hill, *Friend or Foe? The Figure of Babylon in The Book of Jeremiah MT*, BibInt 40 (Leiden: Brill, 1999); Thelle, "Babylon in the Book of Jeremiah." For a recent overview of the major theories on the composition of the book of Jeremiah as a whole, see Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 302–44.

<sup>189</sup> For overviews of the relevant textual data, see Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 286–94; idem, "The Literary History of the Book of Jeremiah in Light of Its Textual History," in *The Greek and Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint*, VTSup 72 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 363–384. For recent overviews of the secondary literature seeking to make sense of the data, see P.-M. Bogaert, "Le livre de Jérémie en perspective: les deux rédactions antiques selon les travaux en cours," *RB* 101

versions differ substantially from one another.<sup>190</sup> Prominent large-scale differences include their overall lengths, with JerLXX being roughly 1/7 shorter than JerMT, and the relative location of the compositional block comprising the Oracles Against the Nations (henceforth: OAN; JerMT 46–51; JerLXX 25:13–31:44).<sup>191</sup> Most of the variants that account for the difference in length occur on the micro-scale, with parallel passages in JerLXX and JerMT relating many differences in phraseology and vocabulary in which JerMT is usually less succinct.<sup>192</sup> These well-worn data points were accorded a new level of significance when manuscripts attesting to a Hebrew version of Jeremiah bearing similarities to the shorter text underlying JerLXX turned up among the Dead Sea Scrolls (4QJer<sup>b</sup>; 4QJer<sup>d</sup>).<sup>193</sup> These manuscripts provided important evidence that the shorter text of JerLXX is not due solely to scribal errors or a translator's penchant for abbreviation as was often supposed in prior periods.<sup>194</sup> Rather, it now appears that JerLXX represents a more or

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(1994): 363–406; Richard D. Weis, “The Textual Situation in the Book of Jeremiah,” in *Sôfer Mahîr: Essays in Honour of Adrian Schenker Offered by Editors of Biblica Hebraica Quinta*, ed. Yohanan A. P. Goldman, Arie van der Kooij, and Richard D. Weis, VTSup 110 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 269–93; and now Matthieu Richelle, “Jeremiah, Baruch,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Septuagint*, ed. A. Salveson and T. M. Law (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>190</sup> See, Bogaert, “Le livre de Jérémie en perspective,” 365–66.

<sup>191</sup> Tov, “The Literary History,” 363.

<sup>192</sup> A typological classification of the redactional activities evident in JerMT is provided in Tov, “The Literary History,” 366–83. JerMT also contains additional sections of some length, including Jer 33:14–26; 39:4–13.

<sup>193</sup> The first text-critical analysis of Jeremiah in light of the manuscripts discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls was conducted by J. Gerald Janzen, *Studies in the Text of Jeremiah*, HSM 6 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973). To his credit, many of Janzen's basic theses have been received favorably. With regard to manuscripts from the Dead Sea, it is important to note that some attesting to the proto-Masoretic version of the book were also found (2QJer, 4QJer<sup>a</sup> and 4QJer<sup>c</sup>).

<sup>194</sup> For a summary, see Tov, “The Literary History,” 364. See also Janzen, *Studies in the Text of Jeremiah*, 87–116. While this holds in general, it does not, of course, mean that there are no scribal errors that occurred during the translation that could account for some of the “minuses” in JerLXX.

less faithful rendering of its Hebrew *Vorlage*.<sup>195</sup> This in turn suggests that two different Hebrew versions of the book existed prior to the translation of JerLXX and eventually circulated alongside one another as late as the manuscripts from the Judean Desert.<sup>196</sup>

The majority opinion on the relationship between these two versions is that they represent two successive editions of the book, with JerLXX attesting to the earlier edition (Edition I).<sup>197</sup> In practice, this means that the plusses in JerMT (Edition II) are usually to be understood as expansions of a version similar to the short edition underlying JerLXX, though scholars disagree about whether these expansions accrued in many stages or by a small number of coordinated redactions.<sup>198</sup> In such cases, the versional evidence allows us to observe how certain passages developed over time. For this reason, it is methodologically imperative to consult both editions when analyzing passages in Jeremiah.<sup>199</sup> This holds for any non-synchronic study on the book,

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<sup>195</sup> See Richelle, “Jeremiah, Baruch”; Yohanan Goldman, “Juda et son roi au milieu des nations. La dernière rédaction du livre de Jérémie,” in *The Book of Jeremiah and its Reception*, ed. A. H. W. Curtis and T. Römer, BETL 128 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997), 153.

<sup>196</sup> Goldman, “Juda et son roi au milieu des nations,” 153; Tov, “The Literary History,” 364.

<sup>197</sup> See Richelle, “Jeremiah, Baruch”; Tov, “The Literary History,” 364. As Tov observes, the secondary nature of the additions does not preclude the possibility that some of the later editor had access to “authentic” Jeremiah materials (Ibid., 365, 383). William McKane’s concept of a “rolling corpus” renders such a theory plausible (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, vol. 1, 2 vols., ICC [London: T & T Clark, 2014], 1–lxxxiii).

<sup>198</sup> See the discussion in Weis, “The Textual Situation in the Book of Jeremiah,” 272. See also McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, 1–li; Thomas C. Römer, “How Did Jeremiah Become a Convert to Deuteronomistic Ideology?,” in *Those Elusive Deuteronomists: The Phenomenon of Pan-Deuteronomism*, ed. Linda S. Schearing and Steven L. McKenzie, JSOTSup 268 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 190; Mark Leuchter, “Jeremiah: Structure, Themes, and Contested Issues,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Prophets*, ed. Carolyn J. Sharp (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 174.

<sup>199</sup> As Anneli Aejmalaesus asserts: “no serious study of this book can be conducted without a consideration of the Septuagint” (“Jeremiah at the Turning-Point of History: The Function of Jer. XXV 1-14 in the Book of Jeremiah,” *VT* 52.4 [2002]: 461).



but especially so for the present study, because elaboration on Babylon and the figure of its king is a significant *Tendenz* of the expansional materials in JerMT.<sup>200</sup>

This task of evaluating the significance of variants between the two editions, however, is complicated by uncertainties surrounding their provenance. While there is general agreement on the relative chronology of the two editions, the same cannot be said about their absolute chronology.<sup>201</sup> Scholars diverge widely on the dating of Edition II (JerMT), with proposed dates ranging from the late 6<sup>th</sup> to the early 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BCE.<sup>202</sup> In my judgment, the disparity of opinion on the divergence of the two editions and the persistence of uncertainties regarding the redactional processes involved in their production should serve as a methodological caution against assigning particular variants and expansions to discrete periods with confidence. As unsatisfying as such a cautious procedure may be, the nature and significance of each variant must be taken on a case-by-case basis.

A second factor complicating this analysis is that the anthology of materials in Jeremiah does not preserve a single, unified perspective on Babylon or its king. In fact, the perspectives in

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<sup>200</sup> See Louis Stulman, *The Prose Sermons of the Book of Jeremiah: A Redescription of the Correspondences with the Deuteronomistic Literature in the Light of Recent Text-Critical Research*, SBLDS 83 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 143–44, 146; Tov, “The Literary History,” 374, 380; Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 11.

<sup>201</sup> Richelle, “Jeremiah, Baruch.”

<sup>202</sup> See the summaries in Weis, “The Textual Situation in the Book of Jeremiah,” 272; Beat Huwyler, *Jeremia und die Völker: Untersuchungen zu den Völkersprüchen in Jeremia 46–49*, FAT 20 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 63. As a way forward, some have endeavored in recent years to date the additional materials in JerMT on linguistic grounds. Based on an analysis of select passages in JerMT, Jan Joosten suggests that at least some of the additional material is relatively late, dating to the Hellenistic period (“L’excédent massorétique du livre de Jérémie et l’hébreu post-classique,” in *Conservatism and Innovation in the Hebrew Language of the Hellenistic Period: Proceedings of a Fourth International Symposium on the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls & Ben Sira*, ed. Jan Joosten and Jean-Sébastien Rey, STDJ 73 [Leiden: Brill, 2008], 107–8). Aaron D. Hornkohl recently conducted a comprehensive analysis of the linguistic profile of the book of Jeremiah as a whole and concludes that, while the supplementary stratum in JerMT is indeed relatively later than the rest of the book, it too dates to the transitional period between Classical Hebrew to Late Biblical Hebrew and “has the look and feel of a 6th-century composition” (*Ancient Hebrew Periodization and the Language of the Book of Jeremiah: The Case for a Sixth-Century Date of Composition*, *Studies in Semitic Languages and Linguistics* 74 [Leiden: Brill, 2014], 366–69, here 369).

the book are, at times, quite at odds with one another. On the one hand, for example, the prose sections of the book that take up the subject of Babylon explicitly (e.g., Jer 20–25, 27–29, 39–44) offer remarkably favorable assessments of Nebuchadnezzar’s actions as YHWH’s agent.<sup>203</sup> On the other hand, the oracle against Babylon (henceforth: OAB; JerMT 50–51; JerLXX 27–28) describes the Babylonian monarch as nothing short of a monster (51:34; see also 50:17–18) whom YHWH will punish on account of his treatment of Judah and its capital. However one might attempt to synthesize these different perspectives synchronically, the tensions that persists among them muddle the coherency of the book when taken as a whole.<sup>204</sup> It is therefore important to analyze the relevant passages on their own terms without synthesizing their perspectives too quickly.

The complexity of Jeremiah’s literary history evident in these points raises the problem of defining the rhetorical contexts in which its models for understanding Babylon and the activities of its king were shaped. As William McKane observed in his seminal commentary, with the book of Jeremiah, “[w]e are dealing with a complicated, untidy accumulation of material, extending over a very long period and to which many people have contributed.”<sup>205</sup> A “tidy” account of the book’s literary and compositional history or its relationship to the historical

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<sup>203</sup> Even these materials, it is important to note, may not preserve consistent ideological perspectives; see, e.g., the studies by Seitz, *Theology in Conflict*; Carolyn J. Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology in Jeremiah: Struggles for Authority in the Deutero-Jeremianic Prose*, OTS (New York: T & T Clark, 2003); and Mark Leuchter, *The Polemics of Exile in Jeremiah 26–45* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>204</sup> See Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 35; idem, “Surplus Meaning and the Conflict of Interpretations: A Decade of Jeremiah Studies (1984–95),” *CurBR* 4 (1996): 118; John Hill, “‘Your Exile Will Be Long’: The Book of Jeremiah and the Unended Exile,” in *Reading the Book of Jeremiah: A Search for Coherence*, ed. Martin Kessler (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 152–53.

<sup>205</sup> *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, 1:xlviii. More colorfully, Allen likens the book to “an old English country house, originally built and then added to in the Regency period, augmented with Victorian wings, and generally refurbished throughout the Edwardian years. It grew over a long period of time” (*Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 11).

figure of Jeremiah is beyond reach.<sup>206</sup> Fortunately for our present purposes, it is sufficient to recognize that the tradition represents a retrospective on the meaning and significance of the events leading up to and through the catastrophe of 587/6 BCE that took shape around the memory of Jeremiah's prophetic ministry during the exilic and early post-exilic periods.<sup>207</sup> The retrospective discourse of this tradition provides models for making sense of the ideological challenges brought by the political domination and hegemony exercised by Babylon and its king. Attending to the content and character of these models as they took shape in this Jeremianic discourse will allow us to observe and appreciate the ongoing attempts to render meaningful the historical catastrophe of 587/6 BCE and the more general problem of life in diaspora under imperial hegemony.

### 3.5. YHWH AND NEBUCHADNEZZAR IN JEREMIAH

The anthology of materials in Jeremiah preserves multiple models for configuring the relationship between YHWH and the Babylonian king. These models, I suggest, may be grouped into three categories: (1) Babylon and its king as agents of YHWH's judgment; (2) Nebuchadnezzar as YHWH's earthly representative; and (3) Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon as objects of YHWH's retributive judgment.

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<sup>206</sup> This point was made most forcefully by Robert Carroll, who summarized the matter famously by stating: "To the question 'what is the relation of the book of Jeremiah to the historical Jeremiah?' no answer can be given" (*Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 62).

<sup>207</sup> Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 7; Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 1.

### 3.5.1. Babylon and its King as Agents of YHWH's Judgment

Throughout much of the book of Jeremiah, Babylon and its king, Nebuchadnezzar,<sup>208</sup> are understood in various ways as agents of YHWH's judgment. Considering the content and character of the key passages in which this theme is foregrounded will help us to observe one of the key strategies for making sense of the ideological challenges brought by Babylonia and its king as it came to expression in Jeremiah.

#### 3.5.1.1. *The Enemy from the North and Jer 25:9–14*

A major theme of Jeremiah's preaching in the first half of the book (chs. 1–25) concerns an anonymous "Enemy from the North," whom YHWH will summon (1:13–16; 4:6; cf. 25:9) or stir up (6:22–23) to bring "great destruction" (4:6; cf. 6:1) or "to make the cities of Judah a desolation" (10:22).<sup>209</sup> Whether this anonymous designation always referred to the Babylonians in Jeremiah's preaching is disputed.<sup>210</sup> But the identification of the Enemy from the North with the Babylonians became inevitable as they began to dominate Judah and to pose an existential

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<sup>208</sup> With the exception of Jer 27–29, the orthographic representation of the Babylonian king's name (*Nabū-kudurru-ušur* in Babylonian) in the book of Jeremiah is always with a *resh* (נְבוּכַדְרֶאֱצַר) rather than with a *nun* (נְבוּכַדְנֶאֱצַר). Because the form with a *nun* is his more popular designation in English language reception, I will use this form unless quoting from a text in which the *resh* form is used.

<sup>209</sup> See also Jer 1:13–15; 4:5–8, 13–21, 29–31; 5:15–17; 6:1–5, 22–26; 8:14–16; 10:22. For a helpful overview of scholarship on this referent, see Vanderhooft, *The Neo-Babylonian Empire and Babylon in the Latter Prophets*, 136–49.

<sup>210</sup> Citing Herodotus's later account of events in the Levant during Josiah's reign, some have identified this enemy as the Scythians, a nomadic tribe from the Crimea who purportedly raided Syria-Palestine during that period (see, however, Na'aman, "The Kingdom of Judah under Josiah," 36–37). Given the highly conventional language employed in these references, others have maintained that the "Enemy from the North" is simply a metaphor for judgment proceeding from YHWH (see Hill, *Friend or Foe?*, 48–50); in favor of this option, the "North" also serves as a reference to the place from which those exiled will return (3:18; 16:15; 23:8; 31:8). Still others see these references as thinly veiled allusions to Babylon, the agent who did in fact bring destruction to Judah and its capital city during Jeremiah's career; see, e.g., Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 43.

threat to Jerusalem.<sup>211</sup> In the case of Jer 25:9, the versional evidence from JerMT allows us to observe a tradent making this identification explicit:<sup>212</sup>

**JerMT 25:9–10**

⁹ הנני שלח ולקחתי את־כל־משפחות צפון נא־יְהוָה ואל־נְבוּכַדְרֶאצַּר מֶלֶךְ־בָּבֶל עַבְדִּי וְהַבְּאִתִּים עַל־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת וְעַל־יֹשְׁבֵיהָ וְעַל־כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם הָאֵלֶּה סָבִיב וְהַחֲרַמְתִּים וְשַׁמְתִּים לְשִׁמָּה וְלִשְׂרָקָה וְלִחְרָבוֹת עוֹלָם:

¹⁰ וְהֵאֲבֹדְתִי מֵהֶם קוֹל שִׁשׁוֹן וְקוֹל שְׂמִחָה חֲתָן וְקוֹל כְּלָה קוֹל רַחִים וְאוֹר נֵר

⁹ I am going to send for all the peoples of the north, says YHWH, and for Nebuchadrezzar, the King of Babylon, my servant, and bring them against this land and its inhabitants, and against all those nations roundabout. I will exterminate them and make them an object of horror and of hissing, and an everlasting disgrace.

¹⁰ And I will banish from them the sound of mirth and the sound of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride,

**JerLXX 25:9–10**<sup>213</sup>

⁹ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω καὶ λήμψομαι τὴν πατριὰν ἀπὸ βορρᾶ καὶ ἄξω αὐτοὺς ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ταύτην καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς κατοικοῦντας αὐτὴν καὶ ἐπὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη τὰ κύκλῳ αὐτῆς καὶ ἐξερημώσω αὐτοὺς καὶ δώσω αὐτοὺς εἰς ἀφανισμόν καὶ εἰς συριγμόν καὶ εἰς ὄνειδισμόν αἰώνιον.

¹⁰ καὶ ἀπολωῶ ἀπ’ αὐτῶν φωνὴν χαρᾶς καὶ φωνὴν εὐφροσύνης, φωνὴν νυμφίου καὶ φωνὴν νύμφης, ὄσμην μύρου καὶ φῶς λύχνου.

⁹ behold, I am sending for and I will take a paternal family from the north, and I will bring them against this land and against its inhabitants and against all nations around it, and I will utterly devastate them and render them into an annihilation and into a hissing and into an everlasting disgrace.

¹⁰ And I will banish from them a sound of mirth and a sound of gladness, a voice of

<sup>211</sup> See R. E. Clements, *Jeremiah*, Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 21. It is important to note, however, as David L. Petersen observes, that the image of the enemy from the north is invoked in a judgment scene against Babylon itself in Jer 50:41–42. The enemy from the north could, therefore, serve a more general role as “a potent symbol, ever available to convey a new, or the latest, military threat in the ancient Near East” (*The Prophetic Literature: An Introduction* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002], 107).

<sup>212</sup> See Michael Fishbane, “Revelation and Tradition: Aspects of Inner-Biblical Exegesis,” *JBL* 99 (1980): 356.

<sup>213</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, English translations of JerLXX are from Albert Pietersma and Marc Saunders, “Jeremias,” in *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, ed. Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 876–924. Emphases in boldface are my own.

the sound of the millstones and the light of  
the lamp.

bridegroom and a voice of bride, a  
fragrance of perfume and light of a lamp.

The oracle of Jer 25:8–13,<sup>214</sup> in which this identification is made, comes at a major turning point in the book.<sup>215</sup> It is set during the fourth year of King Jehoiakim of Judah (v. 1), which JerMT also refers to as “the first year of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon,” that is, to 605 BCE, the date of Nebuchadnezzar’s defeat of the Egyptians at Carchemish and of his succession to the Babylonian throne.<sup>216</sup> This redactional supplement draws a close connection between the political sea change brought by Babylonia and the turning point of YHWH’s dealings with the people of Judah and its capital city (v. 2). Jeremiah’s speech (vv. 3–7), in typical deuteronomistic fashion, provides a summary of the message that he and other prophets preached to the inhabitants of Judah over the last twenty-three years and their obstinate refusal to heed the prophetic message, choosing instead to vex YHWH by continuing to follow other gods (see also 6:10, 17; 7:13, 25–26; 9:13–15; 13:15, 17; 16:12; 22:21; 34:17; 35:12–17; cf. 44:2–6; 2 Kgs 17) and thus to violate the terms of the covenant made with the fathers (Jer 11:1–4; cf. Judg 2:20).<sup>217</sup> Because they have

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<sup>214</sup> The textual history of Jer 25:1–14 is among the most complicated in the book of Jeremiah; as William McKane states, “[n]o passage in the book of Jeremiah is more of a patchwork than it is” (McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, 630).

<sup>215</sup> See, e.g., the comments in Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 65. and Aejmelaes, “Jeremiah at the Turning-Point of History,” 463–65.

<sup>216</sup> It should be noted that though JerMT alone dates this episode to the first year of Nebuchadnezzar, the dating of the oracle to the 4<sup>th</sup> year of King Jehoiakim, attested already in JerLXX, could serve a similar function for an alert reader sufficiently able to correlate the date of the battle of Carchemish and of Nebuchadnezzar’s succession with the regnal years of Jehoiakim.

<sup>217</sup> The relationship between the prose materials in Jeremiah and the deuteronomistic materials in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History has been a major theme in Jeremiah research; for concise surveys, see Römer, “How Did Jeremiah Become a Convert to Deuteronomistic Ideology?”; Leuchter, “Jeremiah: Structure, Themes, and Contested Issues,” 182–3. Because my research questions are focused on the content of the Jeremianic oracles, especially as they foreground the figure of Nebuchadnezzar (a foregrounding precluded by the literary context of Deuteronomy and much of the Deuteronomistic History), and not on the social and literary phenomenon of deuteronomism as it influenced various texts in the Hebrew Bible, the question of “deuteronomistic influence” on Jeremiah is not central to my inquiry.

refused to repent, Jeremiah announces that YHWH has resolved to send for the tribes of the north, “even for King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon, my servant,” (JerMT), to execute judgment upon “this land and its inhabitants, and against all these nations around it” (v. 9). YHWH’s previous threat to bring an Enemy from the North was now inevitable, and JerMT makes explicit who this enemy was: King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Making this identification explicit in v. 9—and later in v. 12—foregrounds the relationship between YHWH and the Babylonian king, and so the oracle becomes a locus for interpreting the meaning and significance of the dominance exercised by Nebuchadnezzar theologically.

The model for configuring the Babylonian king as an agent of YHWH’s judgment in JerMT 25:8–13 has two component parts. The first is articulated in vv. 9–10, in which the actions of YHWH and the tribes from the north, “even King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon, my servant” (JerMT), *are equated with one another*. The Enemy from the North is sent for to be an agent of YHWH’s judgment upon Judah and the surrounding nations (v. 9). Yet throughout the oracle, YHWH remains the subject of all the verbs of judgment, which are uttered in the first person (vv. 9–10). Though YHWH sends for Nebuchadnezzar (JerMT v. 9a) and the other nations to bring them against the land, YHWH is the one who will utterly destroy them and bring about their doom (vv. 9b–10).<sup>218</sup>

The second component part of the model is formulated in vv. 11–14 (JerLXX vv. 11–13), which relate Jeremiah’s prophecy of seventy years:

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<sup>218</sup> In his capacity as an agent of YHWH, Nebuchadnezzar functions in a way as YHWH’s “servant” (JerMT v. 9). See also the observation of Leslie C. Allen, who points out that, just as YHWH had sent for his servants the prophets to speak to the people, now he has sent for Nebuchadnezzar his servant to execute his judgment upon them (*Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 286). Most scholars believe that the designation “my servant” here is secondary, having been imported to the present passage from its first attestation in 27:6; see Aejmelaeus, “Jeremiah at the Turning-Point of History,” 471.

**JerMT 25:11–13**

<sup>11</sup> והיתה כל־הארץ הזאת לחרבה לשמה ועבדו  
הגוים האלה את־מלך בבל שבעים שנה

<sup>12</sup> והיה כמלאות שבעים שנה אפקד על־מלך־בבל  
ועל־הגוי ההוא נאם־יהוה את־עונם ועל־ארץ כשדים  
ושמתי אתו לשממות עולם

<sup>13</sup> והבאיתי על־הארץ ההיא את־כל־דברי אשר־  
דברתי עליה את כל־הכתוב בספר הזה אשר־נבא  
ירמיהו על־כל־הגוים

<sup>14</sup> כי עבדו־בם גמ־המה גוים רבים ומלכים גדולים  
ושלמתי להם כפעלם וכמעשה ידיהם

<sup>11</sup> And this whole land shall become a ruin  
and a waste, and these nations shall serve the  
king of Babylon seventy years.

<sup>12</sup> And after seventy years are completed, I  
will punish the king of Babylon and that  
nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their  
iniquity, says YHWH, and I will make it an  
everlasting waste

<sup>13</sup> And I will bring upon that land all the words  
that I have uttered against it, everything  
written in this book, which Jeremiah  
prophesied against all the nation.

<sup>14</sup> For many nations and great kings shall  
make slaves of them also and I will repay  
them according to their deeds and the work  
of their hands.

**JerLXX 25:11–13**

<sup>11</sup> και ἔσται πᾶσα ἡ γῆ εἰς ἀφανισμόν, και  
δουλεύσουσιν ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ἐβδομήκοντα  
ἔτη.

<sup>12</sup> και ἐν τῷ πληρωθῆναι τὰ ἐβδομήκοντα ἔτη  
ἐκδικήσω τὸ ἔθνος ἐκεῖνο, φησὶν κύριος, και  
θήσομαι αὐτοὺς εἰς ἀφανισμόν αἰώνιον·

<sup>13</sup> και ἐπάξω ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἐκείνην πάντας τοὺς  
λόγους μου, οὓς ἐλάλησα κατ' αὐτῆς, πάντα  
τὰ γεγραμμένα ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τούτῳ.

<sup>11</sup> And the whole land shall become an  
annihilation, and they shall be slaves  
amongst the nations seventy years.

<sup>12</sup> And when seventy years are completed, I  
will punish that nation (τὸ ἔθνος ἐκεῖνο), and  
I will make them an everlasting waste.

<sup>13</sup> And I will bring upon that land all my  
words that I have spoken against it,  
everything written in this book.

Here again JerMT makes explicit what is only implied in JerLXX. In JerLXX, the nations facing YHWH's judgment will serve as slaves "among the nations" (v. 11) for seventy years, after which YHWH will punish "that nation," which most likely refers to Babylonia (v. 12).<sup>219</sup> JerMT

<sup>219</sup> See the textual discussion in McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, 1:632; cf. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 496.



makes explicit and foregrounds the role of Nebuchadnezzar: the nations YHWH is judging will serve “the king of Babylon” for seventy years, after which YHWH will punish the Babylonian king and “the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity” (JerMT vv. 11–12, cf. v. 14). Jeremiah’s seventy-year prophecy contributes two closely related features to the model for understanding the relationship between YHWH and Nebuchadnezzar: (1) it sets their relationship within a limited temporal scope and (2) it envisions YHWH’s eventual punishment of Babylonia and its king (JerMT).

The period of servitude among the nations (JerLXX), or to the King of Babylon (JerMT), is set within the limited temporal scope of seventy years. Though interpreters both ancient and modern have tried to understand this temporal duration literally,<sup>220</sup> the span of seventy years is most likely a figurative or “impressionistic” one,<sup>221</sup> referring to a period of totality corresponding to a human life-span or to roughly three generations (27:7; cf. 29:10).<sup>222</sup> The figure is used elsewhere as the duration of a period in which a deity would leave a city desolate until it could return to the deity’s good favor, as we may observe in Isa 23:15–17 and the black stone of

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<sup>220</sup> See Zech 1:12; 7:5; 2 Chr 36:21. Contemporary scholars also have sought to identify temporal spans of roughly 70 years with which Jeremiah’s “prediction,” as a *vaticinia ex eventu*, would then corresponded, e.g., to the duration of Babylonian hegemony (605–539 BCE) or the period of the Jerusalem temple’s desolation (587/6–516 BCE); see the discussion in Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 493–94.

<sup>221</sup> Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 287.

<sup>222</sup> See, e.g., Ps 90:10; Job 42:10; Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 669. It is possible that the seventy-year prophecy here is dependent upon the reference in Jer 29:10 to seventy years as the duration of the time of exile in Babylon; see Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 496; Aejmelaeus, “Jeremiah at the Turning-Point of History,” 475. In any event, the fact that the seventy years is attested in both editions suggests that it is a relatively early concept. As with the three-generations prophecy of Jer 27:7, I see no reason why either of these predictions *must* be understood as *vaticinia ex eventu*, for what makes such prophecies compelling are their correspondence to reality—a correspondence that obtains clearly neither here nor in 27:7. Rather than seeing this number as a retrojection, I find the notion that this figure was a part of Jeremiah’s message regarding Babylon and that it later “gripped the attention of subsequent generations” most compelling (Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 287).

Esarhaddon.<sup>223</sup> The figure likely functions in the same way here, where it plays a double role. On the one hand, it is directed against Judah on account of their obstinate refusal to heed to the prophetic message, and in this capacity functions to “stress the fullness of that judgment.”<sup>224</sup> On the other hand, however, this fullness is set within a finite frame. The period of exilic punishment will by no means be brief, but neither will it go on without end. However harsh, the figure of seventy years delimits the period of Babylonian hegemony within a limited temporal scope.

What will occur at the end of this period is taken up in vv. 12–13, which shift the emphasis from YHWH’s punishment of Judah to the punishment he will exact upon Babylon and its king (JerMT; JerLXX: “that nation”).<sup>225</sup> The depiction of this punishment in JerLXX is less developed than that of JerMT in two important respects. First, the object of YHWH’s vengeance, “that nation,” remains (somewhat) ambiguous, while JerMT makes it explicit (v. 12). Second, JerLXX provides no grounds for why YHWH will exact this vengeance.<sup>226</sup> It simply states that YHWH will punish that nation, make it an everlasting waste (v. 12), and bring upon it everything YHWH (“I”) spoke against it—everything which is “written in this book” (v. 13b). The referent of “this book,” has been a matter of debate, but it most likely refers to the collection of OAN—or the oracle against Babylon found within it—that follows immediately after v. 13 in JerLXX

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<sup>223</sup> See “Esarhaddon,” trans. William W. Hallo (*COS* 2.120:306); Peter R. Ackroyd, “Two Old Testament Historical Problems of the Early Persian Period,” *JNES* 17 (1958): 24–25; Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 495; Clements, *Jeremiah*, 195; Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 669; Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 287. See also the discussion in Moshe Weinfeld, who points to nearly exact linguistic parallels between Esarhaddon’s Black Stone and Jer 25:11–13 and 29:10 (*Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomist School* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972], 144–45).

<sup>224</sup> Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 495.

<sup>225</sup> Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 287.

<sup>226</sup> Aejmelaeus, “Jeremiah at the Turning-Point of History,” 473.

(25:14–19; 26–32).<sup>227</sup> In JerMT, the block comprising the OAN was subsequently relocated to a position far later in the collection (JerMT 46–51 [chs. 50–51 against Babylon]), leaving v. 13 “isolated as a relic.”<sup>228</sup> A tradent behind JerMT then formulated v. 14 to serve “as a patch to repair the place where the oracles had been removed.”<sup>229</sup> Although the OAN are now separated from vv. 12–14 in JerMT, their impact is nevertheless evident in the supplemental comments JerMT provides on the *grounds* for YHWH’s judgment against Babylon and its king.

In v. 12, YHWH declares that he will exact vengeance upon the “king of Babylon” and “the land of the Chaldeans “for their iniquity” (אֶת־עֲוֹנָם). Probably drawing on the language and imagery in 27:7b,<sup>230</sup> the supplement in v. 14 states further that the Babylonians will in turn be enslaved by “many nations and great kings,” and that YHWH will “repay them according to their deeds and the work of their hands.” As we shall see, a similar notion of retributive justice is formulated in the OAB (JerMT 50:29, 41–42; JerLXX 27:29, 41–42). But in the present context, the concept of retributive justice against Nebuchadnezzar introduces a considerable tension into the model articulated in the oracle.<sup>231</sup> In JerMT 25:9–10, the Babylonian king is summoned by

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<sup>227</sup> The disagreement is usually over whether “this book” points back as a conclusion to a smaller or earlier collection of Jeremiah’s prophecies (see 36:1) or whether it points ahead as an introduction to OAN (including Babylon [see 51:60]), which follow immediately in JerLXX. See the discussions in McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, 631–32; Aejmelaesus, “Jeremiah at the Turning-Point of History,” 476–77; Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 288.

<sup>228</sup> Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 288. The textual problems in vv. 12–14 are further complicated by the probability that the location of the OAN in JerLXX is itself a secondary development; see McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, 632; Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 588.

<sup>229</sup> Aejmelaesus, “Jeremiah at the Turning-Point of History,” 478; Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 288. This, of course, would explain why no text corresponding to v. 14 is attested in JerLXX.

<sup>230</sup> “... then many nations and great kings shall make him their slave” (ועבדו בו גוים רבים ומלכים גדלים) (27:7).

<sup>231</sup> Aejmelaesus even suggests that the discord here might have been one of the chief reasons why the OAN were relocated to a point later in the book (“Jeremiah at the Turning-Point of History,” 478).

YHWH to utterly decimate Judah and the surrounding nations, and in this capacity as YHWH's agent of judgment. Nebuchadnezzar is even called YHWH's "servant" (v. 9). There is no hint here, as there is in Isa 10:7b, that the king has perversely exceeded his commission; in fact, the actions of Nebuchadnezzar and YHWH in Jer 25:9–10 are *equated with one another*. In other words, probably due to the influence of the OAN that once followed Jer 25:13, JerMT presents Nebuchadnezzar as incurring guilt for the very actions YHWH is said to enact through him.

### 3.5.1.2. *Nebuchadnezzar and YHWH in Jeremiah's Responses to Judah's Institutional Leaders*

The configuration of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon as an agent of YHWH's judgment is also found in three episodes that recount Jeremiah's interactions with representatives of Judah's religious and political institutions.<sup>232</sup>

#### 3.5.1.2.1. Jeremiah 20:1–6: A Chain of Agency

The brief narrative of Jer 20:1–6 tells of a conflict between Jeremiah and the chief officer of the temple, Pashhur ben Immer. The conflict arises when Pashhur overhears Jeremiah prophesying YHWH's imminent judgment against Jerusalem and its towns on account of their obstinate infidelity and unwillingness to repent (19:14–15). According to the narrative, Pashhur responds to Jeremiah's preaching by having the prophet flogged and locked up in the upper Benjamin Gate of the temple (20:2). Upon Jeremiah's release the next morning (JerMT), the prophet delivers a response of his own in the form of an oracle from YHWH (vv. 3b–6). He announces to Pashhur that YHWH has given him a new and ominous name<sup>233</sup> and declares YHWH's judgment

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<sup>232</sup> Generically similar episodes are found in Jer 34:1–7; 37:1–10; 38:14–23, but these are not concerned explicitly with the relationship between YHWH and Nebuchadnezzar; see Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 406.

<sup>233</sup> JerMT: מגור מסביב, "Terror-all-around"; JerLXX: Μέτοικον, "Deportee."

entailing deportation for him, all his friends, and all of Judah together with all its riches (vv. 3–6).

The oracle provides a brief description of the procedure by which YHWH will execute this judgment on Judah (vv. 4b–5). Here, for the first time in the book, the king of Babylon is referred to explicitly as an agent of YHWH’s judgment:<sup>234</sup>

**JerMT 20:4b–5**

<sup>4b</sup> And all of Judah **I will give** (אֶתֶּן) into the hand of the king of Babylon;  
 → **He** shall carry them captive (וְהִגְלֵם) to Babylon, and **he** shall kill them (וְהָרַגֵם) with a sword.

<sup>5</sup> And **I will give** (וְנָתַתִּי) all the wealth of this city, all its gains, all its prized belongings, and all the treasures of the kings of Judah into the hand of their enemies,  
 → and **they shall plunder** them, and **seize** them, and **carry** them to Babylon.

**JerLXX 20:4b–5**

<sup>4b</sup> And **I will give** you and all louda into the hands of the king of Babylon (εἰς χεῖρας βασιλέως βαβυλωνος),  
 → and **they**<sup>235</sup> shall deport (μετοικιοῦσιν) them and shall cut (κατακόψουσιν) them down with daggers.

<sup>5</sup> And **I will give** (δώσω) all the strength of this city and all its toils and all the treasures of the king of louda into the hands of his enemies,  
 → and **they shall bring** (ἄξουσιν) them into Babylon.

The procedure schematized here configures YHWH and the king of Babylon into what might be described as a *chain of agency*: YHWH and the Babylonian king remain independent agents, but their actions are inextricably interlinked. The execution of the judgment by the king of Babylon

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<sup>234</sup> As Leslie Allen observes, here “for the first time in the book the anonymity of Judah’s military foe is discarded and free mention is made of Babylon and its king. The threat of invasion and exile is brought disturbingly closer by the disclosure of a concrete power and person. From now on in the book Babylon would be explicitly used by God” (*Jeremiah*, 228). Though the figure of the Babylonian king remains anonymous, Nebuchadnezzar is the obvious, and indeed the only possible, referent.

<sup>235</sup> The king’s hands are the most immediate antecedent for the 3<sup>rd</sup> pers. plur. verbs, but it is also possible that the subject could be understood as the Babylonians more generally (cf. JerMT 20:6b, where the subject of the plur. verbs is “their enemies”).

and Judah's enemies is secondary to and dependent upon the primary action of YHWH *giving over* Judah and its treasures as objects for judgment and deportation (20:4b $\alpha$ ; 20:5a). YHWH hands over these objects for judgment, and the king of Babylon and Judah's enemies execute it. The two thus work in tandem.<sup>236</sup>

### 3.5.1.2.2. Jeremiah 21:1–10: YHWH (and Nebuchadnezzar) Fight against Jerusalem

A similar model of YHWH's relationship to the king of Babylon is articulated in the brief narrative of JerMT 21:1–10. This episode is set during the reign of King Zedekiah of Judah, when the city was besieged and surrounded by the Babylonians. According to the narrative, Zedekiah sent the priests Pashhur ben Machiah and Zephaniah ben Maaseiah to Jeremiah in the midst of the siege. The priests beseech Jeremiah to inquire after YHWH with hopes that the deity would perform one of his wonderful deeds (נפלאותיו) and make the King of Babylon (JerLXX), Nebuchadnezzar (JerMT), withdraw from the city (21:2; cf. Isa 37:29, 36–38; 2 Kgs 19:1–7). Jeremiah responds with an oracle from YHWH:

#### JerMT 21:4b–7

<sup>4b</sup> Thus says YHWH, the God of Israel:  
I am going to turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands and with which you are fighting against the king of Babylon and against the Chaldeans who are besieging you outside the walls;  
and I will bring them together into the center of this city.

#### JerLXX 21:4b–7

<sup>4b</sup> This is what the Lord says:  
Behold, I am turning back the weapons of war with which you are fighting with them, against the Chaldeans who have enclosed you outside the wall, into the midst of this city.

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<sup>236</sup> Similar language and imagery appears in other biblical texts that express the common ancient Near Eastern theology of defeat, whereby the local deities would abandon or give over their people into the hands of their enemies on account of their infidelity or cultic neglect (see, e.g., Judg 2:11–15; 3:7–8, 12–14; 4:1–2; 6:1–6, 13; 10:6–14; 13:1; 1 Sam 12:9 cf. Ps 31:9 [8]; 106:41–42 [40–41]; Lam 1:14; 2:7; the Mesha Stela). See the discussion in §2.4.1 and §3.5.1.3.1 below.

<sup>5</sup> And **I myself** will fight against you with outstretched hand and mighty arm, in anger, in fury, and in great wrath.

<sup>6</sup> And **I** will strike down the inhabitants of this city, both human beings and animals; they shall die of a great pestilence.

<sup>7</sup> Afterwards, says YHWH,

I will give King Zedekiah of Judah, and his servants, and all the people in this city—those who survive the pestilence, sword, and famine—into the hands of **King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon**, into the hands of those who seek their lives.

→ **He** shall strike them down (והכם) with the edge of the sword; **he** shall not pity (יחוס) them, or spare (יחמל) them, or have compassion (ירחם).

<sup>5</sup> And **I myself** will fight you with outstretched hand and mighty arm, in anger and great wrath.

<sup>6</sup> And **I** will strike all the inhabitants in this city, human beings and animals, with great death, and they shall die.

<sup>7</sup> Afterwards, say the Lord,

I will give Sedekias, king of Iouda, and his servants and the people left in this city from death and from famine and from the dagger into the hands of their enemies who are seeking their souls,

→ and **they** shall cut them into pieces (κατακόψουσιν αὐτούς) with a dagger's edge; → **I** will not be sparing (οὐ φείσομαι) toward them, and **I** will not have compassion (οὐ μὴ οἰκτιρήσω) on them.

The message that Jeremiah delivers is diametrically opposed to the hopes of Zedekiah. The Judean king and his delegation sought an oracle of salvation in which YHWH would serve as an agent of supernatural protection by repelling the enemy from the city. In a sharp reversal of traditional hopes and expectations rooted in Israel's tradition of holy war, however, Jeremiah proclaims that YHWH himself will fight against his own city, people, and king as an agent of supernatural destruction (vv. 4–6).<sup>237</sup> This reversal begins with YHWH declaring that he will *flip around* or *turn back* (פָּסַח) the weapons with which they were fighting with the Chaldeans—and King Nebuchadnezzar (JerMT)—to fight against them (v. 4).<sup>238</sup> With the weapons turned back into the city, YHWH then declares that he himself will fight against them with “outstretched

<sup>237</sup> Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 408–09.

<sup>238</sup> See the discussion in Helga Weippert, “Jahwekrieg und Bundesfluch in Jer 21 1–7,” *ZAW* 82 (1970): 396–409.

hand and mighty arm” (ביד נטויה ובזרוע חזקה). This exact locution is unique in the Hebrew Bible,<sup>239</sup> but it simply reverses the order of a common phrase that is associated almost exclusively with YHWH’s supernatural deliverance of Israel from their enemies, and especially their paradigmatic enemy, Egypt, by his “mighty hand and outstretched arm” (ביד חזקה ובזרוע נטויה; Deut 4:34; 5:15; 7:19; 26:8; 2 Kgs 17:36; Jer 32:21; Ps 136:12; cf. Exod 6:6).<sup>240</sup> The syntactical reversal corresponds to the larger reversal of Israel’s ideology of holy war: YHWH, who traditionally fights with and for his people and their king (see, e.g., Ps 89:23) now fights against them (vv. 5–6).<sup>241</sup>

Following the description of YHWH’s direct assault on Jerusalem, the oracle introduces the next stage in the sequence of YHWH’s judgment (v. 7), which is now oriented toward King Zedekiah and those who survive the initial act of judgment described in vv. 4–6. Here the variants between JerLXX and JerMT become significant. In JerLXX, YHWH declares that he will hand over King Zedekiah and the survivors in the city “into the hands of their enemies,”—that is, the Chaldeans who are besieging them (v. 4)—who will then cut them to pieces with their daggers (v. 7a). The linkage established between YHWH and the Chaldeans here is remarkably similar to the chain of agency configured in 20:1–6 (see esp. 20:4b–5; see also Jer 34:2): YHWH hands over, and the enemies execute the judgment. But the final declaration of the oracle

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<sup>239</sup> See Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 570.

<sup>240</sup> See also Deut 9:29 (בכחך הגדל ובזרעך הנטויה). The phrase is also used more generally as a description of YHWH’s greatness (Deut 11:2; 1 Kgs 8:42; 2 Chr 6:32) or ability (Ezek 20:33, 34). In Jer 27:5; 32:18, it is used in relation to YHWH as creator. For a source of the word order here, Weippert (followed by Allen) points to the Isaianic refrain using “outstretched hand” (Isa 5:25; 9:12 [11], 17 [16], 21 [20]); “Jahwekrieg und Bundesfluch in Jer 21 1–7,” 399 n. 20; Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 240–41.

<sup>241</sup> William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 26–52*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 58.



introduces a subtle variation on this theme. YHWH concludes the oracle by declaring: “*I will not be sparing toward them, and I will not have compassion on them*” (v. 7b). The resumption of the 1<sup>st</sup> person here blurs the distinction between the agency of the Chaldeans and that of YHWH. The deity frames the Chaldean execution of judgment and violence within his own resolution to show no mercy. By blurring the distinction between the actions of YHWH and the Chaldeans, the oracle presents the two as a sort of super-agent; like the model articulated in 25:9–10, the actions of the two agents are essentially equated with one another.

The redactional supplements preserved in JerMT modify this model by introducing the king of Babylon as a distinct agent and assigning him with a particular role in executing YHWH’s judgment. Already mentioned in v. 4 of JerMT (see JerLXX 21:2), the king of Babylon is now named as Nebuchadnezzar in v. 7. It is into his hands, along with those who seek their lives, that YHWH places Zedekiah and the survivors of pestilence in Jerusalem (v. 7a). The insertion of Nebuchadnezzar in v. 7a prepares the way for Nebuchadnezzar to be made the subject of the verbs in v. 7b. In JerMT, it is Nebuchadnezzar rather than YHWH who is the one who will show neither compassion nor mercy upon those whom he strikes down with the sword. The reassignment of these actions to Nebuchadnezzar maintains the chain of agency that binds YHWH and the Babylonian king together while also preserving their status as independent agents. Once again, the two work in tandem.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> As Thelle observes, “[i]t is not even a case of using Nebuchadrezzar as a tool; YHWH is doing the job for him! Nebuchadrezzar only gets to slaughter the survivors after YHWH is done ... YHWH positions himself entirely on the side of the enemy, and that enemy is Babylon” (“Babylon in the Book of Jeremiah,” 193).

The unavoidable doom announced in 21:4b–7 is then followed up by a second oracle (21:8–10).<sup>243</sup> Jeremiah is commissioned by YHWH to convey a stark choice to the inhabitants of the city if they are to survive the judgment:

**JerMT 21:8–10**

<sup>8</sup> And to this people you shall say: Thus says YHWH: See, I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death.

<sup>9</sup> Those who stay in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence; but those who go out and surrender to the Chaldeans who are besieging you shall live and shall have their lives as a prize of war.

<sup>10</sup> For I have set my face against this city for evil and not for good, says YHWH: it shall be given (תִּתֶּן) into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire.

**JerLXX 21:8–10**

<sup>8</sup> And to this people you shall say: This is what the Lord says: Behold, I have given before you the way of life and the way of death.

<sup>9</sup> He who sits still in this city shall die by dagger and by famine, but he who goes out to side with the Chaldeans who have closed you in shall live and his soul shall be as booty, and he shall live,

<sup>10</sup> For I have set my face against this city for evil and not for good. It shall be given over (παραδοθήσεται) into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire.

YHWH sets before “this people” two alternatives: “the way of life and the way of death.” The way of death consists of remaining in the city (v. 9a), while the way of life consists of surrendering to the Chaldeans (v. 9b; cf. 38:2; 40:9).<sup>244</sup> The conceptual grounding for these paths

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<sup>243</sup> Though the oracle in 21:8–10 may have been originally an independent oracle, as it stands now it is closely linked with the oracle in 21:4–7; the catchphrase “the Chaldeans who are besieging you” provides an important link between the oracles (21:4, 9) as does the catchword “pestilence” in JerMT (21:6, 9); see William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1–25*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 569; Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 241–42.

<sup>244</sup> This fate may be part of yet another rhetorical reversal. YHWH’s declaration that he has “set before” the people the way of “life and death,” is similar to the formulation in Deut 30:15–19 but is different in crucial respects. In Deuteronomy, YHWH offers “life and prosperity” *in the land* on the condition that Israel obeys YHWH’s commandments (30:16–20), while disobedience will lead to “death and adversity” in the form of expulsion from the land (30:17). In Jeremiah’s oracle, however, “the way of life” consists in abandoning YHWH’s chosen city and surrendering to the Chaldeans, while the “way of death” is to remain in the city; See Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 574. Cf. the episode in 38:14–27, where the handing over the city to the officials of the Babylonian king is conditional; if Zedekiah would surrender to the officials of king Nebuchadnezzar, the king would spare his life and the city would be not be set ablaze (vv. 17–18). Though the episode in Jer 34:8–22 does not foreground the role of the Babylonian king, it too configures the handing over of Zedekiah and his officials to the army of the Babylonians on conditional

is paved by YHWH's verdict of doom for the city: "For I have set my face against this city for evil and not for good" (v. 10a). The mechanism by which this doom will come is again described as a chain of agency between YHWH and the Babylonian king, though the passive verb makes this notion somewhat less explicit: "it shall be given into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire" (v. 10b). The chain of agency emerges here once again, only now it is given practical relevance for the inhabitants of Judah (not the king, whose fate is sealed), because it is tethered to the question of how one should respond to the fate YHWH has assigned the city through the actions of the Babylonian king.

### 3.5.1.2.3. Jeremiah 34:1–7: The Fate of Zedekiah in the Chain of Agency

The brief narrative of Jer 34:1–7 recounts an episode set in the reign of Zedekiah during the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem (vv. 1, 6–7). According to the narrative, Jeremiah was commissioned by YHWH to deliver an oracle to king Zedekiah regarding his fate. The oracle begins by establishing that the king of Babylon would overtake the city and the king (vv. 2b–3):

#### JerMT 34:2b–3

<sup>2b</sup> Thus says YHWH: I am giving (יָתַן) this city into the hand of the king of Babylon and **he** shall burn it with fire.

<sup>3</sup> And you will not escape from his hand, but you shall surely be captured and you shall be given over (יָתַן) into his hand; you shall see the king of Babylon eye to eye and speak with him face to face; and you shall go to Babylon.

#### JerLXX 41:2b–3

<sup>2b</sup> Thus did the Lord say: In surrender (παραδόσει) this city shall be surrendered (παραδοθήσεται) into the hands of the king of Babylon, and **he shall seize it** (συλλήμψεται) and burn it with fire.

<sup>3</sup> And even you shall not be saved from his hand, and with a seizing (συλλήμψει) you shall be seized (συλλημφθήσῃ) and given over into his hands (δοθήσῃ), and your eyes

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grounds: because the recently made covenant regarding the manumission of slavery was broken (vv. 16–18), YHWH resolves to hand them over to their enemies.

shall see his eyes, and you shall enter into  
Babylon.

Surprisingly, the oracle turns out to be a word of consolation to Zedekiah, who is told that he will ultimately die a peaceful death and be mourned like his ancestors (vv. 4–5). Nevertheless, in vv. 3–5, the fate of the king and the city are tied to the chain of agency between YHWH and Nebuchadnezzar: each will be given over into the hand(s) of Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>245</sup>

The variants among JerMT and JerLXX once again provide different nuances to the model. Similar to the notion expressed in Jer 21:10b, JerLXX states in the passive voice that the city will be given over into the hands of the king of Babylon, who will then set it ablaze (v. 2b). In JerMT, YHWH is the explicit subject (“I”) who will give the city over to the Babylonian king (cf. 21:7). In both cases, however, YHWH speaks from a perspective of omniscience, and so the activities of the king of Babylon could be understood within his active agency.

### *3.5.1.3. The Symbolic Work of the Model*

Apart from the few biblical reports that Jeremiah’s preaching incited conflicts with Judah’s nationalistic factions, prophets, and institutional leaders but won support from some high-ranking families like the Shapanides, we know very little about the reception of his message regarding Babylon and its king during his career. As the memory of Jeremiah’s ministry took shape among his followers and sympathizers in the exilic period, however, the notion that Nebuchadnezzar had acted as an agent of YHWH’s supernatural judgment against Judah and its inhabitants on account of their disobedience provided a powerful model for interpreting the

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<sup>245</sup> Notice that the same lexemes for giving over (JerMT), surrender (JerLXX), and seizure (JerLXX) are used with reference to both the city and the king in vv. 3b–4.

events leading up to and through the catastrophe of 587/6 BCE—a fact attested by the similar explanation of defeat worked out in the exilic redaction of the Deuteronomistic history (cf. 2 Kgs 21:8–15; 22:15–20; 23:26–25:30; Deut 28:47–68). The power of this model lay in its capacity to render the disaster meaningful by locating its causes and outcomes within an indigenous ideological framework.

In the key texts that identify Nebuchadnezzar as an agent of YHWH's judgment, the imperial ambitions of the Babylonians and the actual motives behind Nebuchadnezzar's retributive actions against Jerusalem—the rebellions of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah—never enter the discursive frame. Such factors, which emerge so obviously in any historical account of the events (§3.3.1), are muted in favor of an explanation framed exclusively within the relationship between YHWH and his people. The biblical texts surveyed above, each in their own way, configure YHWH as the sovereign agent acting with, through, and over the Babylonian king to punish the inhabitants of Judah and their leaders in Jerusalem on account of their disobedience and obstinate refusal to heed the prophetic message. What follows marks an attempt to describe some of the ways in which the employment of this strategy in Jeremianic discourse could perform powerful work on the symbolic level.

#### 3.5.1.3.1. Mastering the Indomitable, Once Again

First, and perhaps most importantly, the identification of Nebuchadnezzar as an agent of YHWH's judgment encompasses the king's manifest dominance within a Yahwistic framework by subsuming his activities under YHWH's active agency. This is a useful ideological strategy, because it has the potential to rescue the trauma of defeat from meaningless by assigning it a purpose within the active agency of one's own deity. In this regard, this Jeremianic discourse could function like the oracle in Isaiah 10:5–15, where the foreign king is instrumentalized

within the purposes of YHWH. In both instances, the aggressive activities of the foreign king are rendered meaningful by their assimilation into an indigenous ideological framework held together by the sovereign agency of YHWH. As far as Judah was concerned, however, the ideological challenges of Babylonian domination were far more acute than those posed during the Assyrian crisis. The threat to Jerusalem was no longer potential but had in fact been realized in a full-fledged catastrophe. The rival sovereignty expressed in Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of YHWH's city and YHWH's temple threatened to call YHWH's own sovereignty into question.<sup>246</sup> But by framing the defeat as the result of YHWH's own actions, the defeat itself could be understood as an expression of his sovereignty and a testimony to his power.<sup>247</sup>

The framing of Nebuchadnezzar's actions within YHWH's sovereign agency also provides grounds for anticipating the end of Babylonian hegemony. Jeremiah's seventy-year prophecy sets the period of servitude to Babylonia within a finite temporal span (25:11), after which YHWH would in turn punish the king of Babylon and the land of the Chaldeans (25:12) "for their iniquity" and "according to the work of their hands" (JerMT 25:12, 14; cf. JerMT 50–51). The belief that YHWH had sent for and used Nebuchadnezzar as an agent of judgment upon Judah could provide grounds for believing that YHWH could just as well summon another nation to exact vengeance on the Babylonians and restore the good fortunes of his own people.<sup>248</sup> When

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<sup>246</sup> In this regard, it is interesting to observe that some among the remnant in Egypt are said to have doubled-down on their devotion to the Queen of Heaven after the disaster (44:17–18).

<sup>247</sup> Wright, "The Commemoration of Defeat and the Formation of a Nation in the Hebrew Bible," 439. Albertz makes a similar point about the attempt to make sense of the disaster in the Deuteronomistic History around YHWH's righteous judgment: "in the downfall of his people, Yahweh had demonstrated not his impotence but his power and righteousness in the governance of history" (*Israel in Exile*, 282). See also Samuel E. Balentine, "Legislating Divine Trauma," in *Bible through the Lens of Trauma*, ed. Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette, SemeiaSt (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 170.

<sup>248</sup> So Jer 32:42: "For thus says YHWH: Just as I have brought all this great disaster upon this people, so I will bring upon them all the good fortune that I now promise them."

the Babylonian empire did indeed fall to the Persians, such a notion provided a useful model for interpreting the transfer of power among the nations (see §§4–6).

### 3.5.1.3.2. The Culpable Populace and the Vindication of YHWH

Second, this model distinguishes between the party responsible for the *execution* of this judgment (YHWH) and the party that is ultimately *to blame* for it (the populace). The model articulated in these passages lays the blame for the catastrophe squarely at the feet of the inhabitants of Judah and their leaders, who, despite the forewarnings issued by YHWH through his servants the prophets, brought the judgment upon themselves by their persistent disobedience, pagan worship, and refusal to repent (e.g., Jer 5:19; 9:12–16; 16:10–13; 22:8–9; 25:3–8).<sup>249</sup> This is a useful ideological strategy, for it grants the vanquished space to assert their own agency under imperial domination while at the same time absolving the deity “from the charge of injustice and caprice”<sup>250</sup>

The assignment of blame for the defeat to the vanquished Judeans could afford room for them to assert their own agency under the total domination of Babylon. The unequal power relations between the two nations meant that the Babylonians would eventually have their way with the Judeans. And they did. In retrospect, however, the notion that such domination would not have occurred if they had not disobeyed YHWH could grant the Judeans a measure of agency in the experience of this domination by locating its cause within their own actions rather than in the ambitions of the overwhelming foreign power. Such “behavioral self-blame” is a powerful

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<sup>249</sup> This explanation, of course, shares much with the model articulated in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History (1 Kgs 9:9; Deut 29:25–29), whose covenantal logic entails such a cursed outcome for covenantal infidelity (see, e.g., Deut 28:20–37).

<sup>250</sup> Blenkinsopp, *David Remembered: Kingship and National Identity in Ancient Israel*, 57.

adaptive strategy that allows survivors of trauma to gain a sense of control over the events in which they were victimized.<sup>251</sup> By assigning the collective blame for the experience of Babylonian domination to their own actions, the authors of Jeremiah establish a causal link between their actions and their experience, between what they did (or did not do) and what had happened to them. This allows for the catastrophe to be interpreted as having been contingent upon their own actions or omissions. The establishment of this contingency makes it possible to imagine how the catastrophe could have been averted by a different course of action and how a similar outcome might be avoided in the future.<sup>252</sup> The events of the past cannot be changed, but they can be rendered meaningful by acts of interpretation. Locating the *cause* of these events within their own actions offers a model for interpreting the experience of Babylonian dominance that could uphold their sense of agency.

While the attribution of collective self-blame carves out a space for the vanquished to affirm their own agency, this ideological territory comes at a steep theological price. The identification of Nebuchadnezzar's activities with YHWH's judgment on the culpable populace successfully locates the experience within the deity's relationship with his people—but what sort of relationship is this? The model constructed in these texts configures YHWH as the agent who has enacted extreme violence upon his people—death, famine, disgrace, pestilence, forced migration—because they “provoked [him] to anger with the work of [their] hands to [their] own harm” (25:7). By assigning the blame for this violence to the victims of this experience and

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<sup>251</sup> See the lucid discussion of this adaptive strategy in Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered Assumptions*, 123–34. This type of *behavioral* self-blame, which is associated with positive coping outcomes for survivors of various kinds of trauma, should be distinguished from “characterological self-blame,” which is related to issues of self-worth and is associated with negative coping outcomes (Ibid., 129).

<sup>252</sup> Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered Assumptions*, 126.



attributing its execution to YHWH, the model configures the deity and his people into what could be characterized as a relationship of abuse: YHWH enacted the extreme violence on his people, but they deserved it, because they had provoked him to anger.<sup>253</sup>

At the same time, however, there is a component of theodicy built into this configuration. Intrinsic to this model is the idea that YHWH had forewarned his people through his servants the prophets that such a disaster(ous judgment) would occur if they refused to repent (see, e.g., Jer 44:2–6). As Joseph Blenkinsopp observes, the notion that YHWH had repeatedly forewarned the disaster through his prophets “places the blame where it belongs, with the people and their rulers. It therefore at the same time absolves Yahweh from the charge of injustice and caprice.”<sup>254</sup> The understanding that YHWH’s judgment through the figure of Nebuchadnezzar was both conditional and forewarned provided grounds for vindicating YHWH’s actions as *righteous*.<sup>255</sup> The actions attributed to YHWH’s agency may have been devastating in the extreme, but they could also be interpreted as just. Passages in Lamentations provide an enduring testimony to the appropriation of this model in the wake of the catastrophe; as the poet reminds us:

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<sup>253</sup> For a theologically sensitive discussion of this dynamic as it comes to expression in Lamentations, see Kathleen M. O’Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 110–23.

<sup>254</sup> Blenkinsopp, *David Remembered: Kingship and National Identity in Ancient Israel*, 57. Similarly, Allen observes that the “why” questions posed in the prose sections of the book (5:19; 9:12–16; 16:10–13; 22:8–9), which “look back at the destruction wrought by the disaster of 587 and ... also at the ensuing exile. They patiently explain repeatedly to the reader the theological necessity for the covenant God to inflict the catastrophe that Jeremiah continually predicted. They are editorial summaries of Jeremiah’s oracles that frequently have their own indictments of pagan worship, and they provide a key for understanding much of the book as theodicy” (*Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 15).

<sup>255</sup> The concern to vindicate the righteousness of YHWH’s judgment on precisely these grounds is evident in other texts from the post-exilic period. See especially 2 Kgs 17:13–20, which may already have its roots following the disaster in Israel after 722 BCE. Blenkinsopp points also to what he identifies as an “interpretive scribal comment” in Amos 3:3–8 [v. 7]: “Surely the Lord YHWH does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets” (Blenkinsopp, *David Remembered: Kingship and National Identity in Ancient Israel*, 56–57). This does not mean, of course, that charges of injustice were not levied against YHWH during the exilic period (see, e.g., Ezek 18:25). The idea that life in the land was conditional and that the consequences of infidelity were forewarned by YHWH resonates with the emerging deuteronomic theology that eventually subsumed or eclipsed the theological categories of traditional Zion theology that had to be reworked in light of the disaster of 587/6 BCE.

YHWH is in the right,  
 For I have rebelled against his word;  
 (But) hear, all you peoples,  
 And behold my agony;  
 My maidens and my youths  
 Have gone into captivity!

... See, O YHWH, how distressed I am!  
 My stomach churns,  
 my heart is wrung within me,  
 because I have been very rebellious.  
 In the street the sword bereaves;  
 in the house it is like death! (Lam 1:18, 20)

#### 3.5.1.3.3. A Powerful, Yet Exploitable Model

The model formulated in these Jeremianic passages provides an indigenous framework for understanding Babylonian domination by locating its causes and outcomes exclusively within YHWH's relationship with his people. By encompassing the realities of the catastrophe within this framework, the model simultaneously fences out rival interpretations of the events. The exclusionary character of the explanation is evident in the fact that the imperial ambitions and motives behind Nebuchadnezzar's domination of Judah never enter the discursive frame. By subsuming the activities of Nebuchadnezzar under the active agency of YHWH and locating their cause within the culpability of the Judean populace, the model does not allow them to. In this way, the model's discourse represents a form of ideological resistance, for its exclusionary account of events also functions as an implicit refusal to interpret the reality of Babylonian dominance on Babylonian terms. When recourse to sword and shield had proven futile, it was at least possible to act upon the realities of imperial domination by containing them within an indigenous ideological framework.

As we saw in the previous chapter, however, the imperial powers could exploit the readiness of subject peoples to understand their subjugation within their own theological categories. It is easy to see why: the notion that the Babylonians were acting (or had acted) as YHWH's agents of judgment could legitimize their brutal dominance in the eyes of those whom they were dominating (or had dominated) and repress resistance to their imperial ambitions. The most pristine example of this dynamic, as we saw in the previous chapter, is the historically plausible speech of the Assyrian Rabshaqeh at the walls of Jerusalem in 701 BCE: "Is it without YHWH that I [Sennacherib] have come against this land to destroy it? YHWH said to me: 'Go up against this land, and destroy it!'" (Isa 36:10 // 2 Kgs 18:25). The book of Jeremiah relates no such real-time ideological encounter. But the words attributed to Nebuzaradan, the captain of the Babylonian guard who was responsible for the enacting the destruction of Jerusalem, reflect a similar dynamic, only here they represent a retrospective on what in fact had transpired:

The captain of the guard took Jeremiah and said to him, "YHWH your God threatened this place with this disaster; and now YHWH has brought it about, because you all sinned against YHWH and did not obey his voice. That is why this has happened to you." (Jer 40:2–3; cf. 50:7)

The historicity of this particular attribution is impossible to evaluate. The fact that Nebuzaradan's message articulates such a pristine summary of Jeremiah's preaching throughout much of the book raises the suspicion that it has been shaped by a Jeremianic tradent. But the notion that a Babylonian official would invoke YHWH's anger to explain the destruction is plausible, since the Babylonian vassal-treaties would bind vassal-states to subservience by oaths sworn to their own patron deities. Thus the Babylonians could frame violations of the treaty as rebellion against the local patron deity—in the case of Judah, YHWH—and thus harness local ideology in service of their own dominance. And indeed, Ezekiel interpreted the judgment of

Zedekiah precisely on these terms, identifying the king's rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar as a violation of the covenant he made with YHWH (Ezek 17:11–21; see also 2 Chr 36:13). The words attributed to Nebuzaradan epitomize this dynamic, illustrating how the Babylonians would accommodate their own discourse to the ideological framework of subordinate peoples as a strategy of control.

In short, the configuration of Nebuchadnezzar as an agent of YHWH's righteous judgment upon Judah provides a powerful interpretation of Babylonian dominance that achieves much on the symbolic plane. This model encompasses the realities of Babylonian domination exclusively within the relationship between YHWH and his people. In doing so, it provides a model for interpreting this domination within an indigenous ideological framework. At the same time, however, this model comes with potential costs: the relationship between YHWH and his people that emerges in the model entails difficult theological implications and, while the model could function as a means of resistance, it also provides an interpretation of events that the imperial power could be willing to exploit.

### **3.5.2. The Delegation of Sovereignty to Nebuchadnezzar, YHWH's Servant**

A different model for configuring the relationship between YHWH and Nebuchadnezzar is articulated in the oracle of Jer 27:5–11 (JerLXX 34:4–9). This oracle, more than any other in the collection, explicitly thematizes the relationship between these two figures. The oracle plays an important role within Jer 27–29, which is generally recognized as a coherent literary unit organized around the theme of true and false prophecy.<sup>256</sup> It is set sometime early in the reign of

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<sup>256</sup> See E. W. Nicholson, *Preaching to the Exiles: A Study of the Prose Tradition in the Book of Jeremiah* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 193; Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 114–15.

Zedekiah,<sup>257</sup> when envoys from the Transjordanian states of Edom, Moab, and Ammon and the Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon purportedly came to visit the king in Jerusalem (vv. 1, 3). Met by sympathetic factions in the capital encouraging resistance to Nebuchadnezzar (vv. 9–10, 14–18), the envoys assembled in the city to confer about forming an anti-Babylonian conspiracy. On this occasion, YHWH instructs Jeremiah to perform a symbolic act (v. 2) and to charge the envoys with a message to convey to their respective kings (v. 4). Jeremiah is told to construct a yoke with bars and straps and to place it upon his neck (v. 2). The meaning of the yoke symbolism is then clarified by the oracle from YHWH that Jeremiah relates to the envoys (JerMT 27:5–11; JerLXX 34:4–9):<sup>258</sup>

**JerMT 27:5–11**

<sup>5</sup> אנכי עשיתי את־הארץ את־האדם ואת־הבהמה  
אשר על־פני הארץ בכחי הגדול ובזרועי הנטויה  
ונתתיה לאשר ישר בעיני:  
<sup>6</sup> ועתה אנכי נתתי את־כל־הארצות האלה ביד  
נבוכדנאצר מלך־בבל עבדי וגם את־חית השדה נתתי  
לו לעבדו:  
<sup>7</sup> ועבדו אתו כל־הגוים ואת־בנינו ואת־בנותינו עד בא־  
עת ארצו גס־הוא ועבדו בו ביום רבים ומלכים גדלים:  
<sup>8</sup> והיה הגוי והממלכה אשר לא־יעבדו אתו את־  
נבוכדנאצר מלך־בבל ואת אשר לא־יתן את־צוארו  
בעל מלך בבל בחרב וברעב ובדבר אפקד על־הגוי  
ההוא נאס־יהוה עד־תמי אתם בידו:  
<sup>9</sup> ואתם אל־תשמעו אל־נביאיכם ואל־קסמיכם ואל  
חלמתיכם ואל־ענניכם ואל־כשפיכם אשר־הם אמרים  
אליכם לאמר לא תעבדו את־מלך בבל

**JerLXX 34:4–9**

<sup>4</sup> ὅτι ἐγὼ ἐποίησα τὴν γῆν ἐν τῇ ἰσχύι μου τῇ  
μεγάλῃ καὶ ἐν τῷ ἐπιχείρῳ μου τῷ ὑψηλῷ καὶ  
δώσω αὐτὴν ᾧ ἐὰν δόξῃ ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς μου.  
<sup>5</sup> ἔδωκα τὴν γῆν τῷ Ναβουχοδονοσορ βασιλεῖ  
Βαβυλῶνος δουλεύειν αὐτῷ, καὶ τὰ θηρία τοῦ  
ἀγροῦ ἐργάζεσθαι αὐτῷ.  
<sup>6</sup> καὶ τὸ ἔθνος καὶ ἡ βασιλεία, ὅσοι ἐὰν μὴ  
ἐμβάλωσιν τὸν τράχηλον αὐτῶν ὑπὸ τὸν ζυγὸν  
βασιλέως Βαβυλῶνος, ἐν μαχαίρα καὶ ἐν λιμῷ  
ἐπισκέψομαι αὐτούς, εἶπεν κύριος, ἕως  
ἐκλίπωσιν ἐν χειρὶ αὐτοῦ.  
<sup>7</sup> καὶ ὑμεῖς μὴ ἀκούετε τῶν ψευδοπροφητῶν  
ὑμῶν καὶ τῶν μαντευομένων ὑμῖν καὶ τῶν  
ἐνυπνιαζομένων ὑμῖν καὶ τῶν οἰωνισμάτων

<sup>257</sup> JerMT reads “beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim” (בראשית ממלכת יהויקים); LXX has no v. 1; the dating is usually modified by analogy to 28:1 and the general context of the conspiracy. See the discussion in William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, vol. 2 of ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 685–86.

<sup>258</sup> For ease of presentation, references to this passage will follow the versification of JerMT.

<sup>10</sup> כי שקר הם נבאים לכם למען הרחיק אתכם מעל  
 אדמתכם והדחתי אתכם ואבדתם  
<sup>11</sup> והגוי אשר יביא את־צוארו בעל מלך־בבל ועבדו  
 והנחתיו על־אדמתו נאם־יהוה ועבדה וישב בה

<sup>5</sup> It is I who by my great power and my  
 outstretched arm have made the earth, with  
the people and animals that are on the earth,  
 and I give it to whom it may seem good in my  
 eyes,

<sup>6</sup> And now<sup>259</sup> I have given all these lands into  
the hand of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon,  
my servant, and I have given to him even the  
 wild animals of the fields to serve him.

<sup>7</sup> All the nations shall serve him and his son  
and his grandson, until the time of his own  
land comes; then many nations and great  
kings shall make him their slave.

<sup>8</sup> But if any nation or kingdom which will not  
serve this king, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon,  
and which will not put its neck under the yoke  
 of the king of Babylon, then I will punish that  
 nation with the sword, with famine, and with  
pestilence, says YHWH, until I have completed  
 its destruction in/by his hand.

<sup>9</sup> You, therefore, must not listen to your  
 prophets, your diviners, your dreamers, your  
 soothsayers, or your sorcerers, who are saying  
 to you, 'You shall not serve the king of  
 Babylon.'

<sup>10</sup> For they are prophesying a lie to you, with  
 the result that you will be far removed from

ὕμῶν καὶ τῶν φαρμάκων ὑμῶν τῶν λεγόντων  
 Οὐ μὴ ἐργάσησθε τῷ βασιλεῖ Βαβυλῶνος·

<sup>8</sup> ὅτι ψευδῆ αὐτοὶ προφητεύουσιν ὑμῖν πρὸς τὸ  
 μακρῦναι ὑμᾶς ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς ὑμῶν.

<sup>9</sup> καὶ τὸ ἔθνος, ὃ ἐὰν εἰσαγάγῃ τὸν τράχηλον  
 αὐτοῦ ὑπὸ τὸν ζυγὸν βασιλέως Βαβυλῶνος καὶ  
 ἐργάσῃται αὐτῷ, καὶ καταλείψω αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τῆς  
 γῆς αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐργᾶται αὐτῷ καὶ ἐνοικήσει ἐν  
 αὐτῇ.

<sup>4</sup> (Because) it is I who by my great strength  
 and my lofty effort have made the earth, I  
 will also give it to whom it may seem good in  
 my eyes,

<sup>5</sup> I have given the earth to King  
 Nabouchodonosor of Babylon to be subject  
 to him, and the wild animals of the field to  
 work for him.

<sup>6</sup> And the nation and the kingdom, as many  
 as do not put their neck under the yoke of  
 the king of Babylon, I will visit them with  
 dagger and with famine, said the Lord, until  
 they fail in his hand.

<sup>7</sup> And you, do not keep heeding your pseudo-  
 prophets and your diviners and your  
 dreamers and your soothsayers and your  
 sorcerers, when they say 'You shall not work  
 for the king of Babylon,'

<sup>8</sup> because they are prophesying lies to you so  
 as to distance you far from your land.

<sup>259</sup> The JPS translation picks up on the temporal aspects of the delegation of sovereignty to  
 Nebuchadnezzar: "I herewith deliver ...".

your land; I will drive you out, and you will perish.

<sup>11</sup> But any nation that will bring its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, I will leave on its own land, says YHWH, to till it and live there

<sup>9</sup> And the nation that brings its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and works for him, I will also leave him on his own land, and it will work for him and will live in it.

The oracle presents the foreign envoys and Zedekiah (vv. 12–15) with a stark choice for how they should respond to Nebuchadnezzar’s sovereignty: Put on the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar and live or refuse to do so and die (vv. 8, 11; see also 21:8–10; 38:2; 40:9)!

This policy of willing submission to the Babylonian king, so vividly expressed in Jeremiah’s donning of the yoke himself, is usually understood as an exemplary expression of the realpolitik with which the prophet is associated. And rightly so. Despite whatever circumstances may have signaled Babylonian vulnerability and incited rebellion among the states of the Hattiland,<sup>260</sup> Jeremiah is presented throughout the book as having recognized more clearly than his nationalistic contemporaries that resistance to the new Mesopotamian superpower would prove futile and thus encouraged the practical course of compliance. When the dust settled from the disaster of 587/6 BCE, the perspective of Jeremiah had been vindicated, and for that reason discourse about true and false prophecy began to coalesce around his figure during the exilic period. It is important to recognize, however, that this oracle does not present the policy of willing submission to Nebuchadnezzar as a matter of mere political expediency. On the contrary,

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<sup>260</sup> Hope in Babylon’s vulnerability among the Levantine states was likely fanned by news of the breakout of a rebellion in Babylon in 595 BCE, which perhaps encouraged the formation of the conspiracy mentioned in the current episode; see Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 54; Lipschits, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem: Judah under Babylonian Rule*, 63–64.

it frames this policy within grand theological terms (vv. 5–6).<sup>261</sup> In the process, it constructs a model for understanding the sovereignty of foreign kings theologically that would transcend the initial incident with which it is associated (see §§ 4–6).

### 3.5.2.1. *Creation, the Divine Will, and Delegation (27:5–6)*

The opening lines of the oracle (vv. 5–6) frame the policy of submitting to the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar articulated in the rest of the episode (vv. 8–11, 12–13) within explicitly theological terms. These lines elevate the ideological challenges presented by Babylonian dominance into the realm of the symbolic by thematizing the relationship between the figures of YHWH and the foreign king, Nebuchadnezzar. In doing so, they establish a set of relations between YHWH, the Babylonian king, and the created order that is organized by YHWH's sovereign freedom over his own creation.

YHWH begins by establishing that it is he who has created the earth by his mighty efforts (5a) and therefore that he may give it to whomever he pleases (5b). He then announces that he has now chosen to give the entire created order—the earth (JerLXX; JerMT: “all these lands”) and even the wild animals of the field—to king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon to serve him (v. 6). The logic of YHWH's proclamation is clear: as the creator, he may delegate sovereignty as he sees fit, and he has chosen to delegate sovereignty over his creation to Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>262</sup>

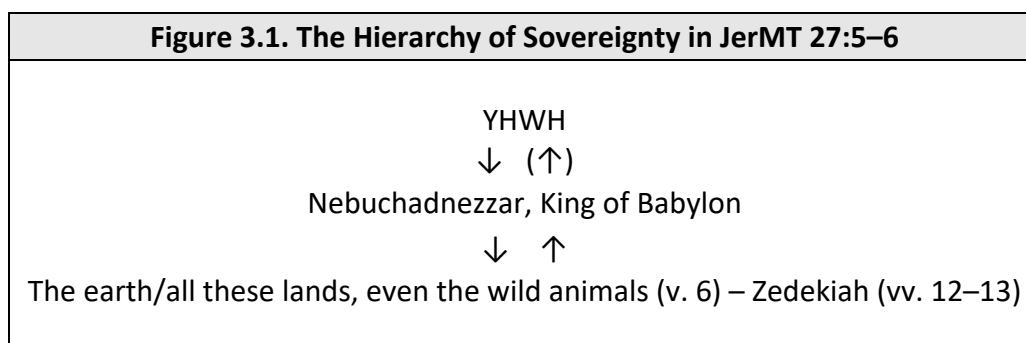
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<sup>261</sup> Such theological framing of political realities is characteristic of the book of Jeremiah; see Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, 2.

<sup>262</sup> Similarly, William McKane, “Jeremiah 27,5–8, especially ‘Nebuchadnezzar, my servant,’” in *Prophet und Prophetenbuch: Festschrift für Otto Kaiser zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Volkmar Fritz, Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann, and Hans-Christoph Schmitt, BZAW 185 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989), 106.



YHWH’s statements here construct what Carol Newsom has rightly described as a “three-tiered hierarchy of sovereignty”:<sup>263</sup>



The earth and all that is in it—including the figure of the Davidic king (vv. 12–13)—are placed by YHWH under the dominion of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar, in turn, remains subject only to YHWH, who is the sole source of his sovereignty.

This hierarchy of sovereignty entails a corresponding three-tiered hierarchy of servitude. The earth and all that is in it have been given to Nebuchadnezzar “to serve him” (v. 6). As the royal representative elected by YHWH, Nebuchadnezzar could be understood as YHWH’s “servant”—a concept made explicit by his epithet “my servant” in v. 6 of JerMT (see below). Conformity to this hierarchy of servitude provides the terms and conditions for continued life in the land set before the Levantine kingdoms by YHWH (vv. 8–11, 12–15). The opening lines of the oracle thus establish sets of relations between YHWH and Nebuchadnezzar that provide a model for understanding the source of Nebuchadnezzar’s earthly sovereignty and the

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<sup>263</sup> Newsom, “God’s Other: The Intractable Problem of the Gentile King in Judean and Early Jewish Literature,” 43. Newsom defines the contents of this hierarchy as “YHWH, Nebuchadnezzar, Zedekiah,” and points to Ezek 17:11–21, “where YHWH is represented as the guarantor of the vassal treaty sworn by Zedekiah to Nebuchadnezzar” as a comparative text (Ibid., 43 n. 24).

corresponding subordinate political stance that Judah and its neighbors should strike in relation to that sovereignty.

It is crucial to notice that the construction of this hierarchy of relations between YHWH, Nebuchadnezzar, and the created order is executed by decisions grounded exclusively within the divine will.<sup>264</sup> According to the oracle, YHWH, the sovereign creator of the earth, has chosen to delegate sovereignty to Nebuchadnezzar for no other reason than that it seemed “good in [his] eyes” (v. 5). This stands in contrast to models examined so far, in which the foreign king serves as an instrument of YHWH’s wrath (Isa 10:5–15) or an agent of YHWH’s righteous judgment (§§2.3; 3.5.1). In those models, YHWH is configured as the source of the foreign king’s *agency*, and YHWH employs the foreign king for the express purpose of executing his wrath or judgment on particular peoples. The discourse in Jer 27:5–11, however, is about the source of Nebuchadnezzar’s *sovereignty* or *dominion*. The claim in 27:5–6 is that YHWH has simply elected the foreign king, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, to be “his royal representative on the earth.”<sup>265</sup>

### 3.5.2.2. *Delegation and the Divine Will in Jer 27:5–6 and Near Eastern Royal Ideology*

As Newsom observes, this model for configuring the foreign king as YHWH’s elected representative over the created order “reflects a truly novel configuration” that finds no compelling parallel in ideological constructs indigenous to Judah.<sup>266</sup> Where, then, does this model

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<sup>264</sup> Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 306; A. Aejmelaeus, “‘Nebuchadnezzar, My Servant’: Redaction History and Textual Development in Jer 27,” in *Interpreting Translation: Studies on the LXX and Ezekiel in Honour of Johan Lust*, ed. F. García Martínez and M. Vervenne, BETL 192 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2005), 5–6.

<sup>265</sup> Newsom, “God’s Other: The Intractable Problem of the Gentile King in Judean and Early Jewish Literature,” 42.

<sup>266</sup> Newsom, “God’s Other: The Intractable Problem of the Gentile King in Judean and Early Jewish Literature,” 42. Newsom notes that “[t]he old tradition in Deuteronomy 32 that the Most High apportioned the nations

come from? Newsom suggests that “the book of Jeremiah is appropriating and adapting imperial ideological constructs ... known in Judah from the long period of Assyrian hegemony” and points to the opening lines of Sennacherib’s royal annals as an example:<sup>267</sup>

Sennacherib, the great king, the mighty king, king of the universe, king of Assyria, king of the four quarters (of the earth); the wise ruler, favorite of the great gods, guardian of the right ... The god Assur, the great mountain, an unrivaled kingship has entrusted to me, and above all those who dwell in palaces, has made powerful my weapons; from the upper sea of the setting sun to the lower sea of the rising sun all humankind he has brought in submission at my feet. (col. 1.1–4, 10–15)<sup>268</sup>

The notion that the emperor was the divinely elected king of the world is central to the ideological construct of the Neo-Assyrian empire and served to support and justify its aggressive expansionism.<sup>269</sup> This conception of the king as “king of the universe” (*šar kiššati*) or “king of the four corners” (*šar kibrāt erbetti*) is conspicuously downplayed in the royal literature of the Neo-Babylonian kings, who, for example, generally did not employ such epithets.<sup>270</sup> But such a notion is not entirely absent. A text set in the reign of Nabopolassar (626–605 BCE), for

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according to the number of the gods is not really parallel, though it does provide some analogy of Judah’s god making decisions about the governance of the nations” (ibid.).

<sup>267</sup> Newsom, “God’s Other: The Intractable Problem of the Gentile King in Judean and Early Jewish Literature,” 42.

<sup>268</sup> Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib*, 23.

<sup>269</sup> Vanderhooft, “Babylonian Strategies of Imperial Control in the West: Royal Practice and Rhetoric,” 249. As Shawn Zelig Aster summarizes: “Assur’s position as chief of the pantheon was used to justify the empire’s claim to universal dominion, because the chief of the pantheon has no geographical limits to his rule. Since Assur’s rule was identified with that of the city-cum-empire of Ashur and of its king, there was no land over which the empire should not be sovereign. The universal reach of the Assyrian empire, one of the more practical elements of Neo-Assyrian imperial ideology, is thus the direct result of the link between the god Assur, his representative (the king), and the empire” (Aster, “Transmission of Neo-Assyrian Claims of Empire to Judah in the Late Eighth Century B.C.E.,” 7).

<sup>270</sup> A notable exception is that of Nabonidus, the last Babylonian king, who did occasionally use such epithets; see Paul-Alain Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus, King of Babylon, 556–539 B.C.*, YNER 10 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 143, 214. David Vanderhooft hypothesizes “that the avoidance of these epithets in the royal inscriptions of Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar should be related to their effort to distance themselves from their Neo-Assyrian forebears who had based their militaristic and expansionist agenda, in part at least, on precisely these epithets” (“Babylonian Strategies of Imperial Control in the West: Royal Practice and Rhetoric,” 249).

example, provides an interesting parallel to Jer 27:5–11 (BM 55467).<sup>271</sup> The speaker in this text, Nabopolassar, begins by providing a list of grievances against Assyria related to the destruction of Babylon under Sennacherib in 689 BCE (or perhaps Ashurbanipal in 648 BCE; obv. lines 1–9a). These grievances provide the justification for the vengeance that he (rev. lines 3–8) and Marduk (rev. lines 9–12) will eventually exact upon the Assyrians as described in the final lines of the tablet.<sup>272</sup> Of particular interest for our present inquiry is the section in between in which the Babylonian king describes his divine investiture for just such a task:

I am the *reigning* man ... From the midst of the land of the lower sea Marduk, great lord, looked favorably upon me and [to] avenge Akkad, he inspected my omens, examined my loyal heart, he selected me for dominion [*bēlūtu*] over the lands, all of them, he placed in [my] hands. (obv. lines 9b–15)

The Babylonian king claims that Marduk looked favorably upon him and elected to give dominion “over the lands, all of them” into his hands. This claim provides the warrant for why the Assyrian king should submit (or should have submitted) to his dominion in order to avoid vengeance (obv. lines 16–19).<sup>273</sup> This construct bears some similarities to the model in Jer 27:5–11, where YHWH gives dominion over “all these lands” (JerMT) to the one “whom it is good in [his] eyes,” and where refusal to submit to this dominion entails divine punishment (vv. 8, 10, 13, 15). In any case, the model constructed in Jer 27:5–6 appears to have its roots in the native soil of Mesopotamia’s imperial powers and is most at home in Neo-Assyrian royal ideology.

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<sup>271</sup> Pamela Gerardi, “Declaring War in Mesopotamia,” *AfO* 38 (1986): 30–38.

<sup>272</sup> Gerardi, “Declaring War in Mesopotamia,” 37–38. There is some debate about whether this text looks prospectively to this violence as a sort of declaration of war, as Gerardi suggests (*Ibid.*, 32–34), or whether it represents a retrospective justification of Babylonian violence against Assyria, as Wright has proposed (“The Commemoration of Defeat and the Formation of a Nation in the Hebrew Bible,” 446).

<sup>273</sup> The text alludes to a former correspondence and Assyrian refusal to submit: “[No]w the mentioning of my name you did not fear, my command you did not obey. [ ] the tablet I sent to you and [you] did not [...] to Assyria [ ]” (Gerardi, “Declaring War in Mesopotamia,” 35).

As a result of the appropriation of this ideological construct in Jer 27:5–6, YHWH assumes the role of Nebuchadnezzar’s imperial deity as the one who elects the king for dominion over the world.<sup>274</sup> “For the first time,” as Newsom observes, “YHWH establishes an imperium.”<sup>275</sup> And his emperor is Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

**Figure 3.2. Hierarchies of Sovereignty in Jer 27:5–6, Neo-Assyrian Royal Ideology, and BM 55467**

<u>JerMT 27:5–6</u>	<u>Neo-Assyrian Royal Ideology</u>	<u>BM 55467</u>
YHWH	Aššur	Marduk
↓	↓	↓
Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon	Assyrian King	Nabopolassar
↓	↓	↓
The earth/all these lands – Zedekiah	The universe – lands – kings	All the lands

This radical departure from indigenous ideological constructs is developed even further in v. 6 of JerMT, where Nebuchadnezzar is given the epithet “my servant,” a title that occurs also at JerMT 25:9 and 43:10. Scholars generally agree that the epithet first occurred here in 27:6 and was only later imported into 25:9 and 43:10.<sup>276</sup> There is much less agreement, however, about whether its occurrence here should be understood as a secondary development<sup>277</sup> or whether its

<sup>274</sup> As A. K. Grayson observes regarding ideology of kingship among the Neo-Assyrians: “Of fundamental importance was the intimate link between the supernatural powers, the gods, and the Assyrian king, who was the earthly representative of the supreme god Ashur” (“Assyrian Civilization,” in *The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. 3, Part 2, Assyrian and Babylonian Empires and Other States of the Near East, from the Eighth to the Sixth Centuries B.C.*, ed. John Boardman, 2nd ed. [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991], 195).

<sup>275</sup> Newsom, “God’s Other: The Intractable Problem of the Gentile King in Judean and Early Jewish Literature,” 42.

<sup>276</sup> See, e.g., Emanuel Tov, “Exegetical Notes on the Hebrew Vorlage of the Septuagint of Jeremiah 27 (34),” in *The Greek and Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint*, VTSup 72 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 323–24; Aejmelaeus, “Nebuchadnezzar, My Servant,” 13. Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 286. Holladay describes the epithet as “the fruit of later theological speculation which exalted the station of Nebuchadnezzar” (*Jeremiah* 2, 121).

<sup>277</sup> So McKane, “Jeremiah 27,5–8,” 101; idem, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, 2:689.; Aejmelaeus, “Nebuchadnezzar, My Servant,” 13.”

absence in JerLXX is the result of some sort of scribal error<sup>278</sup> or purposeful omission.<sup>279</sup>

However one accounts for the variants between the versions, the epithet “my servant” recalls the designation characteristic of Judah’s royal ideology, “David my servant” (2 Sam 3:18; 7:5, 8; 1 Kgs 11:13, 32, 34, 36, 38; 14:8; 2 Kgs 19:34; Isa 37:35; Jer 33:21, 22, 26; Ezek 34:23, 24; 37:24, 25; Ps 89:3, 20; 1 Chr 17:4, 7).<sup>280</sup> As Newsom suggests, the use of this epithet “emphasizes the parallel between YHWH’s choice of Nebuchadnezzar and his choice of David.”<sup>281</sup> By divine election, Nebuchadnezzar has become YHWH’s royal representative to whom even the Davidic king, Zedekiah, must be subservient (Jer 27:12–15).

The radical departure from traditional Judean royal ideology in vv. 5–6 is tempered to some extent by the supplement in v. 7 of JerMT, which relates Jeremiah’s prediction that YHWH’s arrangement with the Babylonian king would continue for only three generations—

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<sup>278</sup> Emanuel Tov, e.g., suggests that the *Vorlage* to JerLXX (Ed. I) read עבדי but was corrupted to לעבדו by dittography of the preceding *lamed* in בבל and the confusion of the *yod* for a *waw* (Tov, “Exegetical Notes,” 324). Werner E. Lemke, however, suggests just the opposite: namely, that the reading in JerMT (עבדי) is the result of haplography of the *lamed* in בבל and the confusion of *waw* for *yod* (“Nebuchadnezzar, My Servant,” *CBQ* 28 [1966]: 48)! Lemke’s solution is also suggested by Janzen, *Studies in the Text of Jeremiah*, 55–57. A. van der kooij has defended the minority position that JerMT represents the older version not only of this verse but of the oracle as a whole (“Jeremiah 27:5–15: How Do MT and LXX Relate to Each Other?,” *JNSL* 20 [1994]: 59–78).

<sup>279</sup> See, e.g., John Bright, *Jeremiah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 21 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 200. Yohanan Goldman suggests that the translator, “qui raconte pour la première et dernière fois ce titre de Nabuchodonosor, résiste devant ce titre accordé au destructeur de la nation de Juda, de Jérusalem et du Temple, il aura lu עבדי/ו as un infinitif” (*Prophétie et royauté au retour de l’exil: Les origines littéraires de la forme massorétique du livre de Jérémie*, OBO 118 [Freiburg; Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992], 135). Ziony Zevit proposes that the phrase has a secular referent (“vassal”) was possibly misunderstood by the LXX translators and “purposely altered or omitted,” though he also maintains that it is possible that LXX is based on an earlier recension in which it was not present; in that case, however, he believes that “the second recension can only be a few years later than the first” (“The Use of עבד as a Diplomatic Term in Jeremiah,” *JBL* 88 [1969]: 77).

<sup>280</sup> Newsom, “God’s Other: The Intractable Problem of the Gentile King in Judean and Early Jewish Literature,” 43. See also Thelle, “Babylon in the Book of Jeremiah,” 198; Hill, “‘Your Exile Will Be Long’: The Book of Jeremiah and the Unended Exile,” 149–61.

<sup>281</sup> Newsom, “God’s Other: The Intractable Problem of the Gentile King in Judean and Early Jewish Literature,” 43. As Newsom observes, “this is not merely an instrumental but a personal relationship” (*Ibid.*, 43).

with him, his son, and his grandson—“until the time of his own land comes; then many nations and great kings shall make him their slave.”<sup>282</sup> This supplement sets a temporal limit on the potentially static situation established in vv. 5–6. In this way, the prophecy could serve a similar function to Jeremiah’s prediction elsewhere in the tradition that Babylonian hegemony would last 70 years (see esp. 25:11–14; 29:10). As it turned out, Nebuchadnezzar’s grandson, Labashi-Marduk (556 BCE), was not the last of the Babylonian rulers to occupy the throne.<sup>283</sup> The forecasts of 70 years or three generations thus represent either imprecise *vaticinia ex eventu* or genuine exilic projections.<sup>284</sup> In either case, the prediction here serves to confine the arrangement established in vv. 5–6 within a limited temporal scope.

In short, the oracle in Jer 27:5–11 establishes a set of relations between YHWH, Nebuchadnezzar, and the created order organized by YHWH’s sovereign freedom over his creation. YHWH’s declaration that he has elected to delegate sovereignty over the created order to Nebuchadnezzar, his “servant,” reflects a Mesopotamian ideological construct most at home in Assyria and forms a three-tiered hierarchy of sovereignty and servitude (vv. 5–6). Conformity to this hierarchy through submission to the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar, YHWH’s divinely elected royal representative, provides the terms and conditions for the Levantine states to remain on their own land (v. 11) or face YHWH’s punishment by Nebuchadnezzar’s hand (vv. 8, 10, 13, 15). The supplement in JerMT v. 7, which relates Jeremiah’s prophecy of three-generations, sets this arrangement within a finite temporal scope. Before attending to the character of this model as an

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<sup>282</sup> McKane, “Jeremiah 27,5–8,” 108–9; Newsom, “God’s Other: The Intractable Problem of the Gentile King in Judean and Early Jewish Literature,” 43.

<sup>283</sup> Nebuchadnezzar was succeeded by his son Evil-merodach (563–560 BCE), his son-in-law Neriglissar (560–556 BCE), and his grandson Labashi-Marduk (556 BCE) before the usurper Nabonidus (556–539) gained the throne, which fell to the Persians in 539 BCE under the watch of his son, Belshazzar; see (§4.2).

<sup>284</sup> See the concise summary of interpretive arguments presented by McKane, “Jeremiah 27,5–8,” 102–3.

ideological response to Babylonian domination, it will be helpful to observe how some of themes developed in 27:5–11 are taken up elsewhere in Jeremiah (42:12–13; 43:10–13).

### 3.5.2.3. *YHWH and Nebuchadnezzar in Jer 42:12–13 and 43:10–13*

Some of the themes developed in the discourse of Jer 27:5–11 reemerge in a few passages that narrate the events following the assassination of Gedeliah, the Babylonian appointed ruler, by Ishmael ben Nethaniah. According to the biblical account, a group of Judeans led by Johanan ben Kareah escaped from the clutches of Ishmael and intended to evade Babylonian retribution by fleeing to Egypt (Jer 41:17–18). Before they departed, however, representatives from this Judean remnant approached Jeremiah with the request that he consult with YHWH about “where [they] should go and what [they] should do” (42:2–3). After ten days Jeremiah receives an oracle from YHWH and conveys it to the entire remnant community (vv. 7–8). YHWH’s response to the inquiry is structured by two conditional clauses, one positive (v. 10–12) and one negative (vv. 13–17).<sup>285</sup> Positively, YHWH announces to the remnant that if they would only remain in the land, then he would build them up and not pull them down, plant them and not pluck them up, and would change his mind regarding the harm that he would otherwise bring upon them (v. 10).<sup>286</sup> YHWH then addresses their desire to escape Nebuchadnezzar’s retribution (41:17–18) by taking up the subject of the king explicitly (vv. 11–12):

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<sup>285</sup> Walter Brueggemann, “At the Mercy of Babylon: A Subversive Rereading of the Empire,” *JBL* 110 (1991): 5–6; Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 436.

<sup>286</sup> I find Holladay’s suggestion that the verbs in the last phrase of this verse (כי נחמתי אליהרעה אשר עשיתי) (לכם) should be rendered as future perfects persuasive (*Jeremiah* 2, 274, 300); so Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 424, 428.



**JerMT 42:11–12**

<sup>11</sup> Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon, whom you fear; do not be afraid of him—declares YHWH—for I am with you, to save you and to rescue you from his hands.

<sup>12</sup> I will grant you mercy (ואתן לכם רחמים) (so) that **he** will have mercy (ורחם) on you and **he** will allow you to stay (והשיב)<sup>287</sup> on your native soil.

**JerLXX 49:11–12**

<sup>11</sup> Do not be afraid before the king of Babylon, whom you fear before him. Do not be afraid, quoth the Lord, because I am with you, to rescue you and to save you from his hand.

<sup>12</sup> And I will grant you mercy (δώσω ὑμῖν ἔλεος), and I will have mercy (ἐλεήσω) on you and I will return (ἐπιστρέψω) you to your land.

On the condition that they remain in the land, YHWH admonishes the remnant not to fear the king of Babylon on that grounds that he is with them and will rescue them from his hands—the very hands into which he had resolved to deliver Jerusalem and its inhabitants elsewhere in the book (e.g., 20:4–5; 21:7, 10; cf. 38:18, 23). YHWH then offers merciful treatment (12a), which would entail their remaining in their own land (12b–c). The variants between JerMT and JerLXX in v. 12b–c differ significantly in their presentation of how this mercy would be extended to the remnant.<sup>288</sup> In JerLXX, YHWH remains the subject of the verbs, which are each in the 1<sup>st</sup> pers. singular. All that is said about the king of Babylon is that he is not to be feared due to YHWH’s presence and power to save. In JerMT, however, the verbs in 12b–c are in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person so that the “king of Babylon,” (v. 11) is their subject. The king of Babylon—Nebuchadnezzar—is thus

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<sup>287</sup> JerLXX follows the pointing in MT (והשיב) in reading this form as from  $\sqrt{\text{שוב}}$ , “cause to return.” Many commentators, however, prefer to point the verb as from  $\sqrt{\text{ישב}}$  (והשיב), “to cause to remain, settle,” which makes better sense contextually given the location of the remnant in the land in 41:17; 42:10, 13; see McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, 1034–35; Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 428. It is also important to observe that the root  $\sqrt{\text{ישב}}$  occurs a few times in this passage in relation to choice set before the remnant (42:10 [x2 if one understands  $\sqrt{\text{שוב}}$  as a form of  $\sqrt{\text{ישב}}$ ]; 42:13).

<sup>288</sup> For a thorough textual discussion, see McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, 1034–35.

configured as a potential agent of YHWH's mercy. The actions of YHWH and the king of Babylon are linked by a mere conjunctive *waw*, which by its semantic flexibility leaves the relationship between their actions somewhat ambiguous.<sup>289</sup> The syntactical switch from the imperfect verb (וַאֲתָן) to the *waw*-consecutive perfect (וַהֲשִׁיב; וַרְחַם), however, suggests some sort of causal relationship between YHWH's granting of mercy and the king of Babylon's showing of it. On the condition that they choose to stay in the land, YHWH vows that he will extend mercy to the Judean remnant through the Babylonian king's merciful policy of allowing them to stay on their soil—the same opportunity extended to the Levantine states in 27:11 on the condition that they don the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar. Both passages envision the possibility of life in the land under the dominion of the Babylonian king.

The negative condition entails an oracle of doom. If the remnant chooses not to stay in the land but instead to disobey YHWH by emigrating to Egypt (v. 13–15), YHWH declares that “the sword that you fear [i.e., Nebuchadnezzar's retribution] shall overtake you there, in the land of Egypt” (v. 16a) and everyone who sojourns there will die by sword, famine, and pestilence (v. 17, 22)—the same fate that the inhabitants of Jerusalem previously suffered under YHWH's wrath (v. 18; see 14:12; 21:6–7, 9; 24:10; 27:8, 13, 17–18; 32:24, 36; 34:17; 38:2). The global horizon of Nebuchadnezzar's sovereignty under YHWH (27:5–6) reemerges at this point in the discourse: YHWH claims that he is able to punish the remnant by the sword of Nebuchadnezzar even in Egypt if they should choose to emigrate there.

According to the biblical account, the course of action formulated in the oracle conveyed by Jeremiah once again fell upon unwilling ears. Azariah ben Hoshaiiah, Johanan ben Kareah,

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<sup>289</sup> Or, as Brueggemann states: “The connection between ‘I’ and ‘he’ (the king of Babylon) is elusive, bridged only by a *waw* consecutive” (“At the Mercy of Babylon,” 6).

and “all the other insolent men” among the remnant accuse Jeremiah of prophesying falsely under the influence of Baruch ben Neraiah (43:2–3). So Johanan and other leaders of the remnant fled to Egypt, bringing Jeremiah with them (v. 6). The biblical text reports that Jeremiah received an oracle from YHWH upon their arrival at Tahpanhes in Egypt (vv. 7–8). Jeremiah is told to gather and bury large stones in the clay before Pharaoh’s palace as a sign-act in the sight of the Judeans (v. 9). The meaning of this act is then explained by an oracle of doom (vv. 10–13):

<sup>10</sup> I am going to send and take my servant, King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon, and he will set his throne above these stones that I [JerLXX: “you”] have buried, and he will spread his royal canopy over them [JerLXX: “raise his weapons against them”].

<sup>11</sup> He shall come and ravage [JerLXX: “enter and strike”] the land of Egypt, giving those who are destined for pestilence, to pestilence, and those who are destined for captivity, to captivity, and those who are destined for the sword, to the sword

<sup>12</sup> He shall kindle a fire in the temples of the gods of Egypt; and he shall burn them and carry them away captive; and he shall pick clean the land of Egypt, as a shepherd picks his cloak clean of vermin; and he shall depart from there safely.

<sup>13</sup> He shall break the obelisks of Heliopolis, which is in the land of Egypt [JerLXX: “those in On”] and the temples of the gods of Egypt he shall burn with fire.

The connection between this oracle of doom for Egypt and the actions of the Judean remnant in fleeing there is tenuous. But as Leslie Allen observes, “[s]uch oracles, even those that address foreign nations, are really aimed at a Judean constituency. The implication here is that those who wanted to evade Babylonian military action (42:14) had walked into a situation ripe for its resurgence.”<sup>290</sup> In its depiction of how YHWH would bring this doom to Egypt, the oracle bears conceptual continuity with the models of Nebuchadnezzar as YHWH’s agent of judgment and

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<sup>290</sup> Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 440.

YHWH's royal representative over the earth. Like the passages surveyed above, the oracle constructs a chain of agency between YHWH and the Babylonian king. In v. 10a, YHWH says that he will send and take Nebuchadnezzar, his "servant," (25:9; 27:6), who will then bring upon the land of Egypt the very same destruction he brought upon Judah and Jerusalem by YHWH's command: to put them to the sword and bring pestilence (v. 11; see esp. 15:2; 21:6–7, 9; 24:10; 27:8, 13, 17–18; 32:24, 36; 34:17; 38:2), to set the temples ablaze (v. 12a, 13b; see 21:10; 32:29; 34:2, 22; 37:8; 38:18), and to carry them away captive (v. 12b; see 20:4; 39:9; 52:15). Thematic continuity with 27:5–6 is again evident in the international context of Nebuchadnezzar's actions and dominion under YHWH (v. 10b–c). The chain of agency between YHWH and Nebuchadnezzar is not confined to YHWH's dealings with his own people in the land of Judah, but extends even to Egypt.<sup>291</sup> As a manifestation of the sovereignty delegated to him by YHWH, Nebuchadnezzar will set his throne over the stones buried before the palace at Tahpanhes (v. 10b) and spread his royal canopy over them (JerMT v.10c). Because YHWH has delegated sovereignty over all the lands to Nebuchadnezzar, one cannot escape the dominion of the Babylonian king. Some of the key themes developed in Jer 27:5–11—the international scope of Nebuchadnezzar's dominion under YHWH and the subservient stance that the Judeans were to strike in relation to that dominion in order to avoid YHWH's retribution—are thus assumed and taken up in the discourse in Jer 42:12–13 and 43:10–13.

#### 3.5.2.4. *The Symbolic Work of the Model: Radical Assimilation and Life in Diaspora*

The model for understanding the sovereignty of Nebuchadnezzar that is constructed in Jer 27:5–11 and assumed in 42:12–13 and 43:10–13 performs powerful work on the symbolic level. The

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<sup>291</sup> See also YHWH's sending of Nebuchadnezzar against Egypt in the editorial comments found in the oracle against Egypt at Jer 46:13, 25–26.

power of this model rests in its capacity to assimilate the rival sovereignty of the Babylonian king into a Yahwistic framework by subsuming it under the still greater sovereignty of YHWH and by locating its origin and purpose within YHWH's will. In its immediate literary context, the assimilation of Nebuchadnezzar's sovereignty into a Yahwistic framework functions to discourage Judah and its neighbors from forming an anti-Babylonian conspiracy. YHWH's declarations in the oracle construct a three-tiered hierarchy of sovereignty and a corresponding three-tiered hierarchy of servitude, which together provide the theological rationale for submitting to the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar: it is YHWH's will for all the earth to serve king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (v. 6).

And yet the capacity of this model to assimilate the realities of Babylonian political domination within a Yahwistic framework meant that its usefulness could exceed the needs of the episode with which it is initially associated. For those populations who were exiled to various regions of the Babylonian empire, the hierarchies established in Jer 27:5–6 together offered a useful model for making sense of what had happened in 587/6 BCE and continued life in diaspora under imperial hegemony (see esp. §5).<sup>292</sup>

In retrospect, the refusal of Zedekiah to submit to the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar could be understood as a violation of YHWH's will, a violation that resulted in the forewarned catastrophe of 587/6 BCE (27:8, 10, 13, 15). In this way, the model could function like the first model surveyed above (§3.5.1.3.2): it assigns blame for the political disaster to Judah's royal leadership, who refused to heed the message of YHWH as it had been delivered by his prophetic

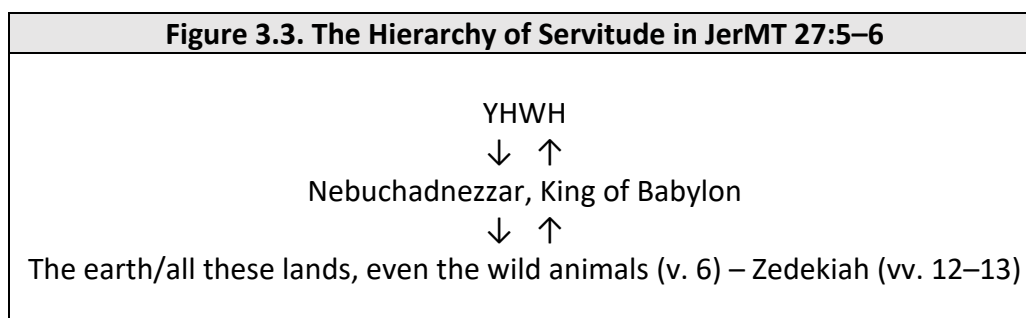
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<sup>292</sup> That the episode of Jer 27 circulated already during the exilic period is demonstrated by its interpretation in Second Isaiah (Isa 45:12–13), which dates to the very end of the exilic period ca. 538 BCE; see Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40–66*, *Contraversions: Jews and Other Differences* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 60–61. See also Leuchter, *The Polemics of Exile*, 3.

servant, Jeremiah; it frames the disastrous events as contingent upon Judah's own decisions; and it vindicates YHWH's forewarned actions in executing this judgment as just.

But the ideological challenges of life in diaspora entailed more than the steep task of explaining what had happened in the past theologically. One also needed a theological framework for moving forward with life in diaspora. The oracle in 27:5–11 provides just such a framework, and it does so by assimilating the very structure of the imperial order within YHWH's will. The oracle in Jer 27:5–6 appropriates an ideological construct that was developed among the Mesopotamian imperial powers and modifies it by configuring YHWH as the imperial deity: YHWH has elected the Babylonian king for dominion over all the earth and vows to punish those who do not put on his yoke and serve him (27:8, 10, 13, 15; cf. 42:12–13; 43:10–13). This is a useful ideological strategy, for it acknowledges the undeniable reality of the empire's vast political dominion while at the same time containing it within a framework held together by YHWH's own will.

By framing Babylonia's imperial dominion within YHWH's will, the model provides a framework for understanding the practical concerns of life in diaspora. Because YHWH had chosen to delegate sovereignty to the Babylonian king, it was possible to understand service to the king as service to YHWH. In fact, the conceptual hierarchies constructed in 27:5–6 align service to Nebuchadnezzar with service to YHWH (Figure. 3.3).



The notion that such servitude to Nebuchadnezzar was God's will could grant those in diaspora with space to assert their own agency in serving Babylon and its king and could authorize the politically expedient decisions that many would have to make to survive in a foreign land. In this way, the admonitions in Jeremiah's letter to the first wave of exiles in Jer 29:4–7 could function not only to emphasize the duration of the exile, but also to provide a divine authorization for moving forward with life in diaspora under Babylonian hegemony:

Build houses and live in them, plant gardens and eat their fruit. Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters. Multiply there, do not decrease. *And seek the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you and pray to YHWH on its behalf; for in its prosperity you shall prosper.* (vv. 5–7, italics mine; JPS)

The most vivid access that we have to the reception of this notion is found in the court tales of Daniel 1–6. This collection of tales will be the subject of §5, but it is important to note in the present context that these stories take up the model articulated in 27:5–11 and work out the ideological implications of its alignment of service to YHWH and the figure of the foreign king, including Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2–4). The tales consistently confirm that it is YHWH who has delegated sovereignty to the Babylonian king (see especially Dan 2:21, 37–38; 4:17[14], 25[22], 32[29]; 5:21) and, on this assumption, they have no scruples about depicting Daniel and his compatriots as loyal servants of the foreign king, at least when such service did not preclude fidelity to YHWH. The tales in Daniel 1–6 are a testament to the reception of the ideological construct developed in 27:5–11, which, in assimilating the imperial order within a Yahwistic framework, could create the ideological space necessary for negotiating life in diaspora under “the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar.”

### 3.5.2.5. *Reframing the Empire: A Hybrid Discourse*

In the foregoing discussion, I have attempted to show how the oracle in Jer 27:5–11 assimilates the rival sovereignty of the Babylon king into a Yahwistic framework by subsuming it under the still greater sovereignty of YHWH and by locating its origin and purpose within YHWH's will. The oracle does so by assimilating the very structure of the imperial order within a Yahwistic framework: YHWH is configured as Nebuchadnezzar's patron deity. This assimilation of the imperial order could perform powerful work on the symbolic level in allowing for the maintenance of a Yahwistic framework for interpreting the undeniable political realities of Babylonian dominion and making sense of life in diaspora under imperial hegemony. But there are three additional aspects to this ideological move that require further discussion.

First, by assimilating the imperial order within YHWH's will, the oracle authorizes the *very imperial political structure* that elicited a response in the first place. The appropriation of imperial discourse in 27:5–11 subsumes the reality of Babylonian imperial domination under YHWH's still greater sovereignty, but it also entails YHWH's willful election of the very king and empire that had brutally dominated YHWH's people: *YHWH* is the imperial deity—and so YHWH is the *imperial* deity. The oracle in 27:5–11 thus provides us with one side of the hybrid discourse that emerged during the negotiation of reality that took place during the ideological encounter with Babylonian imperialism: in the process of responding to empire, a novel configuration of YHWH and the foreign king emerged in which YHWH was presented as the deity who elects the foreign emperor for dominion over the earth. The realities of Nebuchadnezzar's political dominion could not be denied. But through an act of interpretation, these realities could be assimilated within a Yahwistic framework. The result of this assimilation



is a novel presentation of the deity that reaffirms and authorizes the structure of the very empire to which the oracle is a response.

Second, while the hierarchies of sovereignty and servitude provide a Yahwistic framework making sense of life under imperial hegemony, it is easy to see how these hierarchies could serve the interests of the empire by encouraging compliance among its Judean subjects. The oracle identifies service to Nebuchadnezzar with YHWH's will (v. 6) and resistance to Nebuchadnezzar as resistance to YHWH's will (vv. 8, 10, 13, 15).<sup>293</sup> This notion could grant those in diaspora with space to assert their own agency under imperial domination. But it also authorizes the oppressive structure of servitude to the foreign emperor as divinely willed. The formulation of the model may have been motivated by prudent political calculations that recognized the futility of resistance and sought to limit further political domination, but this formulation at the same time serves the interest of the empire in limiting resistance to its ambitions.<sup>294</sup>

Finally, it is important to recognize the extension and modification of the symbolic work performed by the oracle that is made by the supplement in JerMT v.7, which relates Jeremiah's prediction that YHWH's arrangement with the Babylonian king would last for only three generations after which it would in turn be dominated by another nation under YHWH's sovereignty (cf. 25:11–14; 29:10). Within its immediate literary context, this prophecy sets the arrangement within a finite temporal scope and thus tempers the radical assimilation of the

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<sup>293</sup> Similarly: Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 121.

<sup>294</sup> In this regard, it is interesting to note that the Babylonian-appointed figure of Gedaliah preached the same message as Jeremiah: "Do not be afraid to serve the Chaldeans. Stay in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it shall go well with you" (Jer 40:9). Though the message attributed to Gedaliah was politically prudent, it also served the interests of the empire who appointed him to his position. See the similar observation drawn in Thelle, "Babylon in the Book of Jeremiah," 209.

imperial construct elsewhere in the oracle. But when the Babylonian empire did indeed fall to the Persians (see Isa 41:25; Jer 50:3), the combination of this prediction with the appropriation of the imperial construct in vv. 5–6 and 8–11 prepared the way for Second Isaiah to transfer this arrangement to king Cyrus of Persia, his “anointed” (§4.3.2.2; see also §5). The supplement in JerMT v.7 and its fulfillment with the rise of Cyrus thus prepared the way for the development of the notion that YHWH’s sponsorship of the foreign emperor was transferrable to the next imperial power who happened to have dominion over Judah and its populations in diaspora (see §§4–6).

### 3.5.3. Nebuchadnezzar as an Object of YHWH’s Retributive Justice (JerMT 50–51)

The final model for configuring the relationship between YHWH and Nebuchadnezzar comes to expression in the lengthy oracle against Babylon (OAB), which in JerMT is in the final position of the collection of Oracles against the Nations (cf. JerLXX 27:1–28:64).<sup>295</sup> The discourse concerning the Babylonian king emerges as part of the larger message about the vengeance (√נקם; 50:15, 28, 51:6, 36), punishment (50:18, 27, 31, 44, 47, 52), or repayment (√שלם, Piel; 50:29; 51:6, 24, 56; cf. JerMT 25:14) that YHWH is about to exact upon Babylon on account of “all the wrong [רעתם] they have done in Zion” (51:24), including the violence wrought against the inhabitants of Jerusalem (51:35–36, 49), the destruction of YHWH’s temple (50:28; 51:11), and the direct affront to YHWH himself (√חטא, √גרה, √זיד; 50:14, 24, 29). Indeed, the central

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<sup>295</sup> Although the particular order of OAN in JerLXX appears to lack a clear purpose, the order in JerMT, which is most likely secondary, suggests an intentional design on at least two accounts. First, the OAN in JerMT begin with the oracle against Egypt, which is fitting, because the OAN are located immediately after Jeremiah’s condemnation of the remnant in Egypt in Jer 44. Second, the location of the OAB in the final position, together with the colophon about Seraiah ben Neriah in 51:59–64, which ends with the notice “Thus far the words of Jeremiah,” suggests that it was placed in the climactic location, perhaps by the Babylonian-based tradents responsible for JerMT. For a concise and lucid discussion of the structural significance of the two collections, see Leuchter, “Jeremiah: Structure, Themes, and Contested Issues,” 173–74.

trope developed throughout the OAB is YHWH's *proportional* retribution: "Repay her according to her deeds; just as she has done, do to her ..." (50:29)!

Significantly, the proportional retribution announced and commanded by YHWH means that Babylon (and its king) will become the object of the destructive activities for which it is elsewhere in Jeremiah is the divinely ordained subject: the one who was to plunder Jerusalem (20:5) will now be plundered (50:10, 37); the one who was to make the environs of Jerusalem an object of horror (שמם) and hissing (שרק) (25:9, 18) will now become an object of horror (שמם; 50:23) at which all who pass by will hiss (שרק; 50:13); the one who was to burn Jerusalem with fire (34:2b) will itself be set aflame (50:32).

The reversal of fortunes is perhaps most dramatic in the recurrence of the "Enemy from the North" motif (§3.5.1.1), which in the earlier part of Jeremiah's preaching frequently refers to the agent that YHWH would summon or stir up to enact judgment upon Judah. In Jer MT 25:9–10, a tradent made the identification of this enemy with Nebuchadnezzar explicit. Now, YHWH declares that he is going to do the very same *against Babylon*: "For behold, I am rousing (מעיר; cf. 51:1) and bringing up (מעלה) against Babylon a company of great nations from the land of the north!" (50:9). Rhetorically, the reversal is executed most self-consciously in Jer 50:41–43, which recasts the oracle against "daughter Zion" in 6:22b–26 nearly verbatim:

#### Jer 6:22b–24

22b הנה עם בא מארץ צפון וגוי גדול יעור מירכת־  
ארץ  
23 קשת וכידון יחזיקו אכזרי הַנָּא ולא ירחמו קולם  
כים יהמה ועל־סוסים ירכבו ערוך כאיש למלחמה  
עליך בת־ציון  
24 שמענו את־שמעו רפו ידינו צרה החזיקתנו חיל  
כילדה

#### JerMT 50:41–43

41 הנה עם בא מצפון וגוי גדול ומלכים רבים יערן  
מירכת־ארץ  
42 קשת וכידון יחזיקו אכזרי הַמָּה ולא ירחמו קולם כים  
יהמה ועל־סוסים ירכבו ערוך כאיש למלחמה עליך  
בת־בבל  
43 שמע מלך־בבל את־שמעם ורפו ידיו צרה  
החזיקתנו חיל כילדה

<sup>22b</sup> Behold, a people is coming from the land of the north, and a great nation is stirring from the farthest parts of the earth

<sup>23</sup> Bow and javelin they grasp, it is cruel and they will not have mercy, their sound is like the sea roaring, and they ride on horses, equipped like a man for the war, against you, **O daughter Zion!**

<sup>24</sup> We have heard the report of them, our hands fall helpless; anguish has taken hold of us, agony like a woman in labor

<sup>41</sup> Behold, a people is coming from the north and great kings are stirring from the farthest parts of the earth

<sup>42</sup> Bow and javelin they grasp, they are cruel and they will not have mercy, their sound is like the sea roaring, and they ride on horses, equipped like a man for the war, against you, **O daughter Babylon!**

<sup>43</sup> The king of Babylon heard news of them, and his hands fall helpless, anguish has taken hold of him, agony like a woman in labor

A key to understanding the context in which this message was formulated is provided in 51:11, where the Enemy from the North is identified most explicitly: “YHWH has stirred up (העיר) the spirit of the king of the Medes, because his purpose concerning Babylon is to destroy it, for that is the vengeance of YHWH, vengeance for his temple!” (see also Isa 13:7). Two aspects of this identification are telling. The first is that it was not, in fact, the king of the Medes who marched upon Babylon, but the Persian conqueror, Cyrus the Great.<sup>296</sup> The second is that when Cyrus did march upon Babylon, his takeover of the city was remarkably peaceful (§4.2). There was no battle for Babylon—no siege, no fire, no destruction of its temples. At least according to pro-Persian sources produced in Babylon following the Persian eclipse of city, Cyrus was welcomed by its inhabitants as a liberator and took steps to refortify its walls and to contribute to its cults (cf. 51:44, 47; §4.2.4). The OAB’s inexactitude on these fronts suggests that it was articulated in the period prior to the decisive events in Babylon in 539–538 BCE,

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<sup>296</sup> Although there is some indication that the Medes and the Persians were not clearly distinguished in the early Persian period (see, e.g., David F. Graf’s study of “the Medes” in Hellenistic literature from this period, (“Medism: The Origin and Significance of the Term,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 104 [1984]: 15–30), the fact that the oracle also veers from historicity in the manner of Babylon’s subordination to the Persians suggests that this oracle is anticipatory.

when the memories of events earlier in the century still stoked the fiery longings for retribution against Babylon and its king, Nebuchadnezzar.

Although the Babylonian king is implicated in all of the judgment against “Babylon” in the oracle, he emerges at the surface of the discourse at two points in which he, too, is the object of YHWH’s retributive action (50:17–18; 51:34–37; see also 50:53). In both cases, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon is likened to a beast who has consumed YHWH’s people:

Israel is a hunted sheep driven away by lions. First the king of Assyria devoured it, and now at the end King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon has gnawed its bones. Therefore, thus says YHWH of hosts, the God of Israel: I am going to punish the king of Babylon and his land, as I punished the king of Assyria. (50:17–18; cf. 51:38; NRSV)

Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has devoured me, he has crushed me; he has made me an empty vessel, he has swallowed me like a dragon (תנין), he has filled his belly with my delicacies, and then he rinsed me out! (51:34; cf. 51:44; NRSV)

What is remarkable about this model for understanding Nebuchadnezzar is that it so obviously stands in contrast against the depiction of the king elsewhere in Jeremiah, where he acts as the agent who works in tandem with YHWH to punish Jerusalem and its environs for their sins (20:1–6; 21:1–10; 25:9–14; 34:1–7).<sup>297</sup> In Jer 25:9–10, the destructive actions of YHWH and Nebuchadnezzar, his “servant” (JerMT), are essentially *equated* with one another. But here, in the OAB, these very actions render the Babylonian king culpable. The tension between these models persists, because there is no hint in the OAB that Nebuchadnezzar’s activities were in any way authorized by YHWH or that he somehow exceeded the bounds of a legitimate commission. This tension is resolved only later by Second Isaiah, who states explicitly that “Chaldea” transgressed the bounds of its commission: “I put them into your hands, but you

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<sup>297</sup> See the references in n. 204 above.

showed them no mercy!” (Isa 47:6b; cf. JerMT 25:12). In the OAB, however, no such distinction is found. Here Nebuchadnezzar is exclusively the object of YHWH’s retributive justice.

The book Jeremiah therefore provides at least two models for coping with Nebuchadnezzar’s activities in Judah in 587/6 BCE, both of which met needs of the survivors of that trauma. The first model surveyed above (§3.5.1) explained the disaster as an expression of YHWH’s own power and as a result of the infidelity of the Judeans and their political leadership, which provided a powerful explanation of what had happened on exclusively Yahwistic terms. The OAB, however, approaches the problem from a completely different angle. It leaves aside any discourse about YHWH’s ultimate agency or superior sovereignty, and for that reason does not provide a Yahwistic explanation for understanding the meaning of what had happened. But it does provide a way of coping with it by holding out the promise that YHWH would act to restore divine justice by punishing Nebuchadnezzar for his actions. The oracle promises that the trauma inflicted by Nebuchadnezzar would not go unanswered; vengeance would be had.

For a community that could not act to restore justice on its own behalf, offloading desires for retributive justice upon YHWH, who did possess the power to act against Babylon, could provide a powerful model for coping with trauma discursively. At the same time, however, by expressing this longing for retributive justice in terms of a proportional reversal of fortunes for Babylon, the oracle’s vision of justice participates in the very cycle of imperial violence against which it protests. The vision longs for the Babylonians—all of their inhabitants (51:1, 24, 35–36)—to experience the same trauma of imperial aggression that YHWH’s people had experienced, including the siege (50:8–9, 14, 25, 28; 51:30–33, 41–43, 58), plundering (50:10), and the displacement of refugees (50:28; 51:34–37; cf. 51:6). This theological response to Gentile empire is thus shaped by, and therefore participates discursively in, the practices of

empire to which it responds in the first place—a trend that runs throughout each of the responses I have analyzed so far in this study. For many of the inhabitants of Babylon, it was fortunate, as we shall see in the next chapter, that this prophetic vision ultimately did not play itself out in history.

## CHAPTER 4

CYRUS, YHWH'S ANOINTED ONE:  
GOD AND THE FOREIGN EMPEROR AT THE DAWN OF THE PERSIAN PERIOD

## 4.1. INTRODUCTION

By the late 540's BCE, when it had become clear that King Cyrus of Persia would march upon Babylon after conquering the Median empire, the wealthy states of western Anatolia, and large swathes of central Asia in less than a decade, the Judean deportees to Babylonia had carried out their lives in that "strange land" of diaspora for an entire generation. As the years since the deportations had passed by, the displaced communities had managed to find ways of survival, taking up Jeremiah's advice of setting roots in exile—building houses, planting gardens, producing children and even grandchildren (cf. Jer 29). But as the displaced people of YHWH took pragmatic steps forward, they were also faced with the ongoing challenge of making sense of what had happened earlier in the century as well as their future prospects under the enduring reality of Gentile imperial hegemony. Internal debates naturally arose among the diaspora.

Among the most vital matters of dispute was the fate of the Davidic monarchy. Even as Jerusalem and its temple lay in ruin as monuments to the discontinuity of defeat, hopes for national restoration could live on in the royal descendants of David, especially King Jehoiachin and his sons in exile. Biblical texts stemming from the exilic period attest to fervent beliefs that YHWH would somehow make good on his covenantal promises to David by restoring the monarchy. The prophecies of Ezekiel proclaimed that YHWH would once again set his servant David as shepherd over his flock in the land of Jacob (Ezek 34:23–24; 37:24–25; cf. Jer 23:1–4; 33:25–26). Taking up the metaphor of the monarchy as a tree (cf. §5.3.4), oracles like Isaiah 11:1–3 and Jer 23:5–6 envisioned that a new "shoot" or "righteous branch" of David would



come forth once again (see also Amos 9:11). As long as the line of David lived on, so could hopes for the restoration of the monarchy.

But whether such national restoration could be possible under Babylonian hegemony was anything but clear. From time to time, the shifting circumstances that came with regime change in Babylon stoked hopes for the restoration of Judah as a vassal kingdom under Babylonian patronage.<sup>298</sup> When Jehoiachin was finally released from prison and returned to the royal court in Babylon following the death of Nebuchadnezzar in 562 BCE, many likely hoped that King Amel-Marduk (562–560 BCE) would reinstate him as a vassal, as the composition of the final appendix to the Deuteronomistic History perhaps attests (2 Kgs 25:27–30 // Jer 52:31–34; cf. Jer 22:24–28). Although the assassination of Amel-Marduk by Neriglissar in 560 BCE might have derailed such hopes for a time, the usurpation of the Babylonian throne in 556 BCE by Nabonidus, who appears to have repatriated kings of Phoenician cities in exchange for military assistance,<sup>299</sup> may have put them back on track.<sup>300</sup>

Other voices preserved in biblical tradition, however, ruled out the possibility that the Babylonians could be the agents of restoration by envisioning Babylon and its king as the object of YHWH's retributive punishment (Jer 25:11–13; 27:7; 50–51; Isa 13; see §3.5.3).

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<sup>298</sup> See, e.g., the insightful discussion in Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 109–11.

<sup>299</sup> According to H. Jacob Katzenstein's reconstruction of events, the Tyrian king Baal-ezer, and later his successors Maharbaal and Hiram, who had been kept captive in Babylon, may have been repatriated to his throne by Nabonidus in exchange for assistance in defending Harran from a Median campaign early in his reign (*The History of Tyre: From the Beginning of the Second Millennium B.C.E. until the Fall of the Neo-Babylonian Empire in 538 B.C.E.* [Jerusalem: Schocken Institute for Jewish Research, 1973], 342–45). Katzenstein further observes that there are grounds for thinking that the repatriation of Phoenician rulers under Nabonidus was more widespread than the case of Tyre: "We may even go further and take it for granted that about this time all the other royal Phoenician families returned to their home towns on the Phoenician coast. For in the early Persian period we find kings in all the Phoenician towns, in contrast to Judah or Samaria, where there were only governors" (*The History of Tyre*, 342–43).

<sup>300</sup> As Albertz observes, [t]he reappointment of Baalezer as king of Tyre and the return of two of his successors who had been held hostage (Maharbaal, Hiram) a few years later show that such hopes were not entirely baseless" (*Israel in Exile*, 110).

Significantly, the agent of this punishment was often identified as a third political party. The developing Jeremianic discourse envisioned that YHWH would summon yet another Gentile kingdom—identified explicitly as “the Medes” (51:11; Isa 13:17–22)—to destroy Babylon and its king (Jer 50:17–18, 53; 51:34–37; 27:7; §3.5.3). The longing for retribution was understandably widespread and deep-seated. But the fall of Babylon could also jeopardize the chances for national restoration, since there was no guarantee that a new regime powerful enough to destroy that great state would opt for a policy of repatriation.

The debates about the future prospects of the Babylonian diaspora and the Davidic monarchy entered a new stage when the rapidly ascendant Persian regime prepared to make its inevitable march towards Babylon. For with the unprecedented rise of Cyrus the Great, the fall of Babylon became a very real prospect indeed. As news of Cyrus’s remarkable achievements went before him and became the talk of Babylon,<sup>301</sup> hopes for national restoration among the diaspora could find a new object. Although the Judean diaspora largely lacked the capacity to influence the outcome of the impending clash of imperial giants, it is easy to imagine that opinions about how to navigate the shifting tides of the political sea change became divided. Backing Nabonidus’s threatened regime, which was already supporting the Judean royal family in Babylon, could pay political dividends in the future. But so could a willingness to cooperate with the Persians, whose astounding rise was sure to have an impact on Judean communities in all the places they lived.

Into this thorny political situation stepped the remarkable prophet known to us as Second Isaiah, who, in a burst of poetical and theological creativity, offered a radical vision of the role that Cyrus the Great would play in YHWH’s plan for his people. This chapter marks an attempt to understand the content and character of that vision, especially as it came to expression in

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<sup>301</sup> See Blenkinsopp, *David Remembered: Kingship and National Identity in Ancient Israel*, 65.

discourse about YHWH's relationship with Cyrus. My analysis proceeds in three steps. I begin by tracing the major historical events that unfolded in the years leading up to and through the Persian eclipse of Babylon, paying special attention to the internal political conditions in Babylon and the Persian policy toward conquered peoples, which together conspired to make this eclipse occur so quickly. Attending to these developments is crucial for my analysis, for they provide the context for understanding how the biblical discourse about Cyrus took shape in response to the political and ideological conditions in Babylon at the dawn of the Persian period.

Second, in light of this historical background, I analyze the discourse about YHWH's relationship to Cyrus in Second Isaiah. Here I argue on exegetical grounds that the so-called Cyrus Songs configure YHWH and Cyrus into hierarchies of agency and relative sovereignty. Establishing the hierarchy of agency functioned to frame the rise of Persia and the ensuing judgment of Babylon entirely within YHWH's predetermined plan, demonstrating the deity's freedom and power as the exclusive lord over world history. By configuring YHWH and Cyrus into a hierarchy of relative sovereignty, the oracles also assimilate the political sovereignty possessed by Cyrus within an exclusively Yahwistic framework and do so by identifying YHWH as Cyrus's patron deity. Backed by claims about YHWH's sovereign freedom as lord of history and creator of all things, this radical assimilation entailed a major modification to the traditional Judean royal theology: the prophet identified Cyrus as YHWH's new Davidic ruler while transferring the promises to the Davidic monarchy to the people as a whole.

Finally, I conclude by considering the theological consequences and hybrid character of this discourse. Building on a solid foundation of previous research, here I seek to advance two important themes in the study of Second Isaiah. The first is that the soaring and polemical rhetoric about YHWH's freedom in electing Cyrus played an important role in the formation of Second Isaiah's exclusively monotheistic discourse. Attending to this development will advance

the thesis running throughout this study that the assimilation of the political sovereignty possessed and expressed by Gentile kings into an exclusively Yahwistic framework contributed to the development of monotheistic discourse in the Hebrew Bible. The second concerns the hybrid character of the biblical discourse about YHWH's relationship to Cyrus. In light of my historical and exegetical analyses, it is possible to observe how the discursive depictions of reality stemming from both sides of the imperial encounter between the Persians and the Judean diaspora appear to have been shaped, at least in part, by the other. Observing the cultural hybridity that obtains in this encounter allows us to recognize how the responsive nature of the biblical discourse about Cyrus had an impact on the depiction of YHWH—yet another observation that recurs in each chapter of this study.

#### 4.2. THE PERSIAN ECLIPSE OF BABYLON AND THE FATE OF THE EXILES

In the autumn of 562 BCE, as King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon prepared to breath his last, the Neo-Babylonian empire was at the pinnacle of its political power and prestige.<sup>302</sup> By the end of the monarch's energetic, forty-three-year reign, the empire had established and secured control over its vast territorial holdings,<sup>303</sup> Babylon had been rebuilt and enhanced into the splendidous "city of legend,"<sup>304</sup> and the institutional bulwarks of the empire had become sturdy enough to weather the storm of problematic successions that was to come.<sup>305</sup> And yet, within a quarter

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<sup>302</sup> D. J. Wiseman, "Babylonia 605–539 B.C.," in *The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. 3, Part 2, Assyrian and Babylonian Empires and Other States of the Near East, from the Eighth to the Sixth Centuries B.C.*, ed. John Boardman, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 240.

<sup>303</sup> Wiseman, "Babylonia 605–539 B.C.," 240.

<sup>304</sup> For concise descriptions of Nebuchadnezzar's building and restoration projects, see Amélie Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East c. 3000–330 BC*, 2 vols., *Routledge History of the Ancient World* (London: Routledge, 1995), 593; Mario Liverani, *The Ancient Near East: History, Society and Economy*, trans. Soraia Tabatabai (New York: Routledge, 2014), 541. In his discussion of Nebuchadnezzar's building efforts in Babylon and elsewhere in the empire ("Babylonia 605–539 B.C.," 236–39), Wiseman illustrates the massive extent of the undertaking by pointing to the roughly "164 million bricks made for the outer northern defence wall alone" (239)!

<sup>305</sup> As Van De Mieroop notes, Nebuchadnezzar's succession was "extremely problematic; three kings ruled for a total of six years only, and two of them were assassinated" (*A History of the Ancient Near East ca. 3000–323*

century of his death, Babylon itself was a mere province of a kingdom that was virtually unknown during his reign. In October of 539 BCE, Cyrus II of Persia (559–530 BCE) entered Babylon without a battle, was heralded as a liberator by the city’s Marduk priesthood, and, as the new “King of Babylon,” absorbed the empire’s immense holdings into his rapidly expanding realm of sovereignty.

The Persian eclipse of Babylon, so rapid as it appears in our sources, marked the culmination of at least two political developments: (1) the almost inexplicable rise of the Persian empire under Cyrus II and (2) the disaffection of the Babylonian elite by the empire’s last native king, Nabonidus (556–539 BCE). Considering how these developments unfolded in the mid-sixth century BCE will allow us to observe the ideological challenges and prospects faced by the Babylonian exiles as Cyrus ascended on the international scene and turned his sights toward Babylon—challenges and prospects about which the oracles of Second Isaiah had much to say.

#### **4.2.1. The Rise of Persia**

The meteoric rise of Persia under Cyrus II “can only be described as spectacular.”<sup>306</sup> In a mere two decades, Cyrus managed to transform his small kingdom in southwest Iran into what soon became “the largest empire the world had seen.”<sup>307</sup> For historians, this “sudden outburst into history by a people and a state hitherto practically unknown” is difficult to explain, not least due to a lack of reliable sources pertaining to the era prior to Cyrus’s defeat of the Medes in 550

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*BC*, 2nd ed., Blackwell History of the Ancient World [Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004], 277). Nebuchadnezzar was initially succeeded by his son, Amel-Marduk, who reigned for a mere two years before being assassinated by his brother-in-law, Neriglissar in 560 BCE (see Jer 39:13); Neriglissar reigned from 560–556 BCE before he was succeeded by his son Labashi-Marduk, who reigned less than a year before he, too, was murdered in the conspiracy that brought Nabonidus to power. It is a testament to Nebuchadnezzar’s achievements that these problematic successions did not in themselves bring down the empire (Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 587).

<sup>306</sup> Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 661.

<sup>307</sup> Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 647.

BCE.<sup>308</sup> Despite the dearth of documentary evidence for this period, however, it is possible to reconstruct some of the key events and circumstances leading up to the Persian eclipse of Babylon.

In the early 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, a local dynasty tracing its ancestry to a figure by the name of Achaemenes emerged in southwestern Iran in the region of contemporary Fars.<sup>309</sup> Identifying as “Kings of Anshan,” these Persian rulers staged themselves as successors to the earlier Elamite kings of the area.<sup>310</sup> Unfortunately, little else is known about this emerging Achaemenid dynasty prior to Cyrus’s accession in 559 BCE.<sup>311</sup> The story begins to become intelligible in the final years of the 550s, when Cyrus appears to have rebelled against his Median overlord, Astyages (585–550 BCE), whose kingdom had held hegemony over a broad coalition of states in the highlands of Iran and Anatolia since the beginning of the century.<sup>312</sup> The conflict came to a climax in 550 BCE, when Astyages sought to end Cyrus’s rebellion by marching against the Persian king in the south. Somehow, Cyrus managed a decisive victory against the venerable

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<sup>308</sup> Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire*, trans. Peter T. Daniels (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 13. For concise discussions of the relevant sources, see *Ibid.*, 16–18; Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 648–52; and T. Cuyler Young Jr., “The Early History of the Medes and the Persians and the Achaemenid Empire to the Death of Cambyses,” in *The Cambridge Ancient History: Vol. IV, Persia, Greece and the Western Mediterranean, c. 525 to 479 B.C.*, ed. John Boardman et al., 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 6–7.

<sup>309</sup> Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 287.

<sup>310</sup> Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 653; see Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 17. To this point, Briant also notes that Cyrus I used an Elamite type seal (*Ibid.*, 20).

<sup>311</sup> For the most part, it is only possible to observe the list of kings, together with their emerging titulature, in the inscriptions of later Persian rulers like Cyrus and Darius. The sources on the early life of Cyrus and his relationship to the Medes, related so colorfully in classical sources like Herodotus and Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia*, are less than reliable for the historical reconstruction of these events; see, e.g., Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 14–15. For a presentation of these events that attempts to synthesize the disparate classical sources, see Reza Zarghamee, *Discovering Cyrus: The Persian Conqueror Astride the Ancient World* (Washington, DC: Mage, 2013), 43–94.

<sup>312</sup> See Liverani, *The Ancient Near East*, 561. Some details of the events leading up to the battle—fantastic as they are—are provided by Herodotus, *The Persian Wars* 1.123–30.

Mede.<sup>313</sup> In the aftermath of his triumph, Cyrus marched to the Median capital of Ecbatana, an economic powerhouse strategically located on the Khorasan road, sent its treasures back to Persia, and assumed his role as heir to Median hegemony.<sup>314</sup>

Cyrus's victory over Astyages sent a shockwave throughout the Near East, destabilizing the geopolitical arrangements that had taken hold after the decline of Assyria over a half-century earlier.<sup>315</sup> Most immediately for Cyrus, the defeat of Astyages disturbed Median relations with the legendarily wealthy kingdom of Lydia in western Anatolia. For some 35 years, the Lydian and Median kingdoms had respected the Halys River as a border between their respective domains.<sup>316</sup> Wishing to capitalize on the shift in power in Ecbatana, the king of Lydia, Croesus (560–546 BCE), launched an offensive against Cyrus.<sup>317</sup> In 547 BCE, the two rulers clashed in battle along the Halys in Cappadocia. The conflict resulted in a stalemate, and Croesus withdrew and prepared to regroup over the winter. But in a feat of daring and unexpected aggression, Cyrus pursued Croesus into the dead of the cold, catching the Lydian king and his troops by surprise.<sup>318</sup> The risk paid off. Cyrus's victory over Croesus marked the beginning of Persian dominance over Lydia, and with its fall, "the whole of western Anatolia lay open to the Persian conqueror."<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>313</sup> The Nabonidus Chronicle suggests that the Median army betrayed their king, handing him over to Cyrus, but provides no explanation for why such a betrayal occurred (*ABC 7 ii 1–4*).

<sup>314</sup> Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 654; Liverani, *The Ancient Near East*, 562.

<sup>315</sup> See Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 34; Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 658. The event is mentioned, e.g., in the Nabonidus Chronicle (*ABC 7 ii 1–4*).

<sup>316</sup> This arrangement had been established by a treaty ratified in 585 BCE; see Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 34.

<sup>317</sup> Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 34–35.

<sup>318</sup> Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 34–35.

<sup>319</sup> Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 658. See also *ABC 7 ii 15–18*. The Persian subjugation of Lydia and the other cities of Anatolia was no simple affair; for example, it took Cyrus's generals some four years to put down rebellions and finally secure control over Lydia; see Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 38.

Following Cyrus's subjugation of Lydia, the sources break off for the years of 546–540 BCE, the period in which Cyrus managed to secure his control over Anatolia and to extend his hegemony over large swathes of central Asia.<sup>320</sup> The sources pick up the story in earnest in October of 539 BCE, when the Persian king marched toward Babylon itself, his most “formidable adversary land rival in the Near East.”<sup>321</sup> There is some indication of a buildup to this inevitable clash.<sup>322</sup> The Babylonian king, Nabonidus, for instance, had by this point brought several deities from important temples throughout Babylonia to the capital in order to prevent their capture by the Persians and to shore up loyalty from the cities of their patronage.<sup>323</sup> Despite whatever preparations Nabonidus had made for the looming conflict, however, the Persian takeover appears to have been remarkably swift indeed.<sup>324</sup>

The first and only major military clash took place in mid-October, when Cyrus's troops battled against the “army of Akkad” on the eastern banks of the Tigris at Opis, a strategically important site located roughly fifty miles to the northeast of Babylon (*ABC 7 iii 12–14*). Under the direction of Ugbaru, a governor of the former Babylonian province of Gutium that had already shifted allegiance to Cyrus, the Persians won the battle, “carried off the plunder, (and) slaughtered the people” (*ABC 7 iii 14*).<sup>325</sup> The victory secured a point of passage across the Tigris

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<sup>320</sup> See Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 40.

<sup>321</sup> Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 40.

<sup>322</sup> As Briant observes, “it may have been the case that the events of 540–539 were merely the end result of a much longer and more complex history of hostilities between Cyrus and the Babylonians,” but our sources provide only shadowy clues to this background (*Ibid.*, 42–43); see also Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 569.

<sup>323</sup> Paul-Alain Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus, King of Babylon, 556–539 B.C.*, YNER 10 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 222–23; D. J. Wiseman, “Babylonia 605–539 B.C.,” in *The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. 3, Part 2, Assyrian and Babylonian Empires and Other States of the Near East, from the Eighth to the Sixth Centuries B.C.*, ed. John Boardman, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 248.

<sup>324</sup> Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus*, 226, 230; Wiseman, “Babylonia 605–539 B.C.,” 249. Cf. Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 42–43.

<sup>325</sup> See Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 42.



north of Babylon. A few days later, on October 10, the Persian army took over the city of Sippar without a battle (*ABC 7 iii 14*) and Nabonidus was forced to flee to the capital city.<sup>326</sup>

Heavily fortified and well-stocked with provisions, Babylon itself was prepared to endure a lengthy siege.<sup>327</sup> And yet—remarkably—within a few days of the taking of Sippar, it too was under Persian control. On October 12, a small contingent of troops led by Ugbaru entered the city “without a battle” (*ABC 7 iii 15–16; Cyrus Cylinder 17, 22b*).<sup>328</sup> According to Herodotus (*Hist.* 1.191), the infiltration was made possible by a secret diversion of the Euphrates north of the city, which weakened the water-defenses and provided a point of entry through a dried-up canal.<sup>329</sup> Upon their entrance, Ugbaru’s troops surrounded and secured Marduk’s temple, the Esagila, where a major religious festival was underway (*ABC iii 17–18*),<sup>330</sup> and likely killed Belshazzar, the crown prince who had ruled the capital during his father’s long absence in Arabia.<sup>331</sup> Soon afterward, Nabonidus himself surrendered.<sup>332</sup> The events of the next two weeks

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<sup>326</sup> Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus*, 230; See Wiseman, “Babylonia 605–539 B.C.,” 248–49.

<sup>327</sup> Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 42. Herodotus (*Hist.* 1.190) makes the point that Babylon had provisions for “very many years.”

<sup>328</sup> Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus*, 230. See also Wiseman, “Babylonia 605–539 B.C.,” 249.

<sup>329</sup> See Wiseman, “Babylonia 605–539 B.C.,” 249; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 42.

<sup>330</sup> Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 42; Wiseman, “Babylonia 605–539 B.C.,” 249. See also Herodotus 1:191; Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* VII:5; Daniel 5. See also Beaulieu’s observation that as “Babylon was captured on the eve of the seventh [of *Tašrītu*], the festivities mentioned by Herodotus and the book of Daniel may have been those of the Ḫarran *akītu* festival, as celebrated in the capital by the supporters of Nabonidus” (*The Reign of Nabonidus*, 226).

<sup>331</sup> Wiseman makes the reasonable assumption that Belshazzar was killed (“Babylonia 605–539 B.C.,” 249). As Newsom notes, however, “there is no confirmation in cuneiform sources that he died during the transition to Persian rule” (Carol A. Newsom, “Why Nabonidus? Excavating Traditions from Qumran, the Hebrew Bible, and Neo-Babylonian Sources,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Transmission of Traditions and Production of Texts*, ed. Sarianna Metso, Hindy Najman, and Eileen Schuller, STDJ 92 [Leiden: Brill, 2010], 66). Beaulieu suggests that Xenophon’s reference to the king slain by Gobryas upon the Persian entrance into the city (*Cyropaedia* VII, v, 29–30) could refer to the killing of Belshazzar (*The Reign of Nabonidus*, 231).

<sup>332</sup> Regarding the fate of Nabonidus following the Persian takeover, Beaulieu points out that “the Dynastic Prophecy confirms Berossus’ statement that Nabonidus was not killed, but exiled to a remote province in the Persian empire” (Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus*, 231). Berossus states that Cyrus gave Nabonidus Carmania in southern Iran (see Amélie Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire: A Corpus of Sources from the Achaemenid Period* [London: Routledge, 2007], 81–82). See also Newsom, “Why Nabonidus?” 63.

remain obscure, but by their end, Babylon was secure enough for the Persian king to make his formal entrance into the city. On October 30, Cyrus proceeded into the capital and was welcomed and acclaimed by its inhabitants as a liberator.<sup>333</sup> Babylon had a new king.<sup>334</sup> And with his assumption to the throne, Cyrus added the extensive territorial holdings of the empire—including the regions of Syria-Palestine—to his already expansive realm of sovereignty.

#### 4.2.2. Babylonian Hostility toward Nabonidus

The stunningly swift and conspicuously peaceful takeover of Babylon the Great was most likely made possible by a faction of Babylonian elites who were willing to collaborate with Cyrus's regime in order to depose Nabonidus.<sup>335</sup> By the final years of his reign, Nabonidus had estranged influential sectors of the Babylonian population, most significantly the capital's Marduk priesthood, to an extent that would ultimately prove fatal.<sup>336</sup> The hostility was generated largely

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<sup>333</sup> As Wiseman notes, "though whether as befits a conqueror or as a deliverer from oppression, as Cyrus claimed, it is hard to tell" (249); Liverani, *The Ancient Near East*, 543.

<sup>334</sup> For an example of the royal titulary assumed by Cyrus in Babylon, including "King of Babylon," see lines 20–22a of the *Cyrus Cylinder*.

<sup>335</sup> See Wiseman, "Babylonia 605–539 B.C.," 249; Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 287; Paul-Alain Beaulieu, "Nabonidus the Mad King: A Reconsideration of His Steles from Harran and Babylon," in *Representations of Political Power: Case Histories from Times of Change and Dissolving Order in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Marlies Heinz and Marian H. Feldman (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 163; see also Liverani, *The Ancient Near East*, 542; cf. Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 659; Josef Wiesehöfer, *Ancient Persia: From 550 BC to 650 AD*, trans. Azizeh Azodi (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1996), 2; Roland de Vaux, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, trans. Damian McHugh (New York: Doubleday, 1971), 66.

<sup>336</sup> Amélie Kuhrt has suggested that the evidence for popular opposition to Nabonidus during his reign is unclear and has perhaps been over-emphasized in reconstructions of the Persian takeover ("Nabonidus and the Babylonian Priesthood," in *Pagan Priests: Religion and Power in the Ancient World*, ed. Mary Beard and John North (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 119–55; idem, "The Cyrus Cylinder and Achaemenid Imperial Policy," *JSOT* 25 (1983): 90–93; idem, *The Ancient Near East*, 600–1, 648; See, however, the refutation of this suggestion in Peter Machinist and Hayim Tadmor, "Heavenly Wisdom," in *The Tablet and the Scroll: Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William W. Hallo*, ed. Mark E. Cohen, Daniel C. Snell, and David B. Weisberg (Bethesda, MD: CLD Press, 1993), 146–51; see also Newsom, "Why Nabonidus?," 63; idem, "Now You See Him, Now You Don't: Nabonidus in Jewish Memory," in *Remembering Biblical Figures in the Late Persian and Early Hellenistic Periods: Social Memory and Imagination*, ed. Diana V. Edelman and Ehud Ben Zvi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 274. Nabonidus's own inscribed stele from Harran shows, as Beaulieu observes, that "the opposition to Nabonidus [was] vocal and acting during his reign," and not simply a product of later Persian propaganda like the *Verse Account of Nabonidus* ("Nabonidus the Mad King: A Reconsideration of His Steles from Harran and Babylon," 160); see also idem, *The Reign of Nabonidus*, 62, 184–85; Wiseman, "Babylonia 605–539 B.C.," 246; and already C. J. Gadd, "The Harran Inscriptions of Nabonidus," *AnSt* 8 (1958): 68. As we shall see in the next chapter, the

by Nabonidus's religious pretensions, which came to expression in his imposition of major cultic reforms centered on the exaltation of the moon-god Sîn to the head of the Babylonian pantheon.<sup>337</sup> Perhaps envisioned from the outset of his reign,<sup>338</sup> these reforms were implemented with full force after his return to the capital in October of 543 BCE following a decade-long sojourn at Teima in Arabia.<sup>339</sup> From this point onward, Nabonidus's building projects across the empire were dedicated almost exclusively to shrines of Sîn, including the extensive restoration of the Eḫulḫul temple in Harran where his mother is often thought to have been priestess.<sup>340</sup> Most acute, however, were Nabonidus's reforms within the capital itself, where his brazen attempt to promote Sîn to the head of the pantheon came at the expense of Marduk, "the undisputed

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hostility expressed toward Nabonidus by certain sectors of the Babylonian population does not mean that it was universal; see Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus*, 232; Beaulieu, "Nabonidus the Mad King: A Reconsideration of His Steles from Harran and Babylon," 138.

<sup>337</sup> See Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus*, 43–65; idem, "Nabonidus the Mad King: A Reconsideration of His Steles from Harran and Babylon"; Machinist and Tadmor, "Heavenly Wisdom"; Liverani, *The Ancient Near East*, 542.

<sup>338</sup> See Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus*, 65.

<sup>339</sup> See Ibid., 61, 165. Nabonidus's sojourn to Arabia was probably motivated by imperial ambitions of the political and economic variety; see Ibid., 180–81; Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 600; Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 281; Liverani, *The Ancient Near East*, 544. For a concise overview of theories behind Nabonidus's motives here, see Wiseman, "Babylonia 605–539 B.C.," 247. As Beaulieu observes, while the desire to annex Arabian territories and resources into the empire provides the most compelling reason for Nabonidus's campaigns in Arabia, it does not explain the lengthy duration of his stay there (Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus*, 184). Citing evidence of opposition to Nabonidus's unorthodox beliefs in his own stele from Harran, Beaulieu suggests that the stay was driven by political conflicts with the crown prince, Belshazzar, and his party, who encouraged the king to remain away due to the risk of religiously-motivated dissent among the Babylonian oligarchy—a dissent that did in fact materialize upon his return (Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus*, 184–85). Nabonidus's time apart from the capital may have already generated disaffection from the priesthood, not least because it entailed the suspension of the annual Akītu festival in Marduk's temple, the Esagila, as the Babylonian Chronicle notes repeatedly (*ABC 7* ii 5–8, 10–12, 19–22, 23–25, iii 8; cf. col. ii of the *Verse Account of Nabonidus*); see Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 280; Liverani, *The Ancient Near East*, 544; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 40; cf. Julye Bidmead, *The Akītu Festival: Religious Continuity and Royal Legitimation in Mesopotamia*, Gorgias Dissertations: Near Eastern Studies 2 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2002), who argues that the Akītu must have been celebrated by the crown prince (Belshazzar) during Nabonidus's absence (135–37). See also Beaulieu, "Nabonidus the Mad King: A Reconsideration of His Steles from Harran and Babylon," 138.

<sup>340</sup> Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus*, 55. Nabonidus's other construction projects in this final period of his reign included the restoration of the ziggurat of Ur (another shrine of Sîn) and the Eulmaš of Sippar-Anunītum (a shrine of Anunītum, the daughter of Sîn). As Schaudig points out, the oft-expressed assumption that Nabonidus's mother, Adad-guppi, was a priestess of Sîn at Harran lacks clear supporting documentation (Hanspeter Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids von Babylon und Kyros' des Großen samt den in ihrem Umfeld entstandenen Tendenzschriften: Textausgabe und Grammatik*, AOAT 256 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2001), 14.

supreme god of Babylon for the past six centuries.”<sup>341</sup> Nabonidus’s late inscriptions indicate that he promoted a syncretism between Sîn and other Babylonian deities, including the reassignment of divine prerogatives traditionally associated with Marduk to Sîn’s godhead.<sup>342</sup> In a move that provoked both contempt and ridicule from the Marduk priesthood, Nabonidus even began to identify Marduk’s temple, the Esagila, as a sanctuary of Sîn, (purportedly) justifying the innovation by his identification of crescent imagery in the temple.<sup>343</sup>

Beyond his own personal convictions, Nabonidus’s religious designs were likely part of a broader strategy to unite his extensive and culturally diverse empire with a common theology orbiting around the moon-deity.<sup>344</sup> But whatever gains these designs made toward uniting the empire came at a cost to Babylon itself. As Beaulieu observes, Nabonidus’s efforts to promote Sîn throughout the empire entailed “a decentering of Babylon as cosmological and political capital, a notion that pervaded the intellectual and religious culture of late Babylonia.”<sup>345</sup> This policy of decentralization began to infringe upon the political, social, and religious capital of Babylon’s elite populations and their social institutions, especially that of the capital’s cultural powerhouse, the Marduk priesthood. With the ascendancy of Cyrus and his conflict with

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<sup>341</sup> Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus*, 62. See also idem, “Nabonidus the Mad King: A Reconsideration of His Steles from Harran and Babylon,” 148; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 43.

<sup>342</sup> See Beaulieu, “Nabonidus the Mad King: A Reconsideration of His Steles from Harran and Babylon”; Newsom, “Why Nabonidus?,” 62.

<sup>343</sup> See the mocking report in the *Verse Account* V 18–22; see Beaulieu, “Nabonidus the Mad King: A Reconsideration of His Steles from Harran and Babylon,” 139, 163; Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus*, 61; Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 280; Newsom, “Why Nabonidus?,” 59. See also Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion*, 69. As the admittedly biased account in the *Cyrus Cylinder* summarizes, Nabonidus, “by his own plan, [he] did away with the worship of Marduk, the king of the gods; he continually did evil against his (Marduk’s) city” (lines 3–8).

<sup>344</sup> See Beaulieu, “Nabonidus the Mad King: A Reconsideration of His Steles from Harran and Babylon,” 163. See also the suggestion along these lines made already by Julius Lewy, “The Late Assyro-Babylonian Cult of the Moon and Its Culmination at the Time of Nabonidus,” *HUCA* 19 (1948): 486–87. See also Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 94.

<sup>345</sup> Beaulieu, “Nabonidus the Mad King: A Reconsideration of His Steles from Harran and Babylon,” 163; see also Kuhrt, “The Cyrus Cylinder and Achaemenid Imperial Policy,” 90.

Babylon looming, collaboration with the Persian king in exchange for the restoration of Babylonian prerogatives became an attractive option. Happy to exploit the discontent generated by Nabonidus, Cyrus appears to have struck just such a deal.<sup>346</sup>

#### 4.2.3. Pro-Persian Propaganda and Persian Policy toward Conquered Peoples

The perspective of the “Pro-Persian” party in Babylon that was willing to collaborate with Cyrus’s regime is preserved in the literature produced by Babylonian scribes following the Persian takeover. The most pristine examples are those of the famous *Cyrus Cylinder* and the so-called *Verse Account of Nabonidus*.<sup>347</sup> Works of blatant propaganda, these compositions were likely written by the Marduk priesthood to legitimate and justify Cyrus’s rule over Babylon.<sup>348</sup> Both texts depict Cyrus as the royal agent elected by Marduk to restore “the divine and earthly order that was set awry by the actions of Nabonidus,”<sup>349</sup> by liberating Babylon’s citizens from the oppressive corvée,<sup>350</sup> repatriating deities to their former abodes throughout the land,<sup>351</sup> increasing the cultic offerings across the capital,<sup>352</sup> and continuing Nebuchadnezzar’s legacy by refortifying the capital city.<sup>353</sup> So welcome was Cyrus’s benevolent takeover that, according to the *Cylinder*, “[a]ll the people of Babylon, all the land of Sumer and Akkad, princes and governors, bowed to

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<sup>346</sup> See Kuhrt, “The Cyrus Cylinder and Achaemenid Imperial Policy,” 90.

<sup>347</sup> For the most recent and authoritative edition of these texts, see Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids von Babylon und Kyros’ des Großen*, 550–56, 563–78.

<sup>348</sup> Kuhrt, “The Cyrus Cylinder and Achaemenid Imperial Policy,” 88–89; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 43; Reinhard Achenbach, “Das Kyros-Orakel in Jesaja 44,24–45,7 im Lichte altorientalischer Parallelen,” *ZABR* 11 (2005): 171.

<sup>349</sup> Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 43.

<sup>350</sup> *Cylinder* lines 8, 25–26; *Verse Account* iii 1.

<sup>351</sup> *Cylinder* lines 32–34; *Verse Account* vi 3. See also *ABC* 7 iii 21–22.

<sup>352</sup> *Cylinder* lines 37–38a; *Verse Account* vi 1.

<sup>353</sup> *Cylinder* lines 38b–42f.; *Verse Account* vi 2. See Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 281; Wiseman, “Babylonia 605–539 B.C.,” 250.

him and kissed his feet. They rejoiced at his kingship and their faces shown ... they greeted him with gladness and praised his name."<sup>354</sup>

The rosy representation of Cyrus as benevolent conqueror and consummate liberator in the Pro-Persian propaganda has colored the perception of his career from antiquity to the present.<sup>355</sup> As historians are quick to point out, however, the notion that Cyrus's rule was welcomed by those he conquered is rather one-sided.<sup>356</sup> The bloody battle at Opis, which the Pro-Persian propaganda conspicuously fails to mention, is but one example of the resistance put up against Cyrus's imperial march.<sup>357</sup> Another is the fact that, as late as 522–521 BCE, during the rocky period following Darius I's accession, a series of aspiring usurpers in Babylon could garner support for their efforts by claiming to be sons of Nabonidus (Nidintu-Bēl and Arakha).<sup>358</sup> But if the propaganda provides us with a distorted image of the facts on the ground, it nevertheless allows us to see clearly how Cyrus wished to depict his own rule and to observe Persian strategies of control over conquered peoples.<sup>359</sup> It is here that the novel aspects of the Persian imperial program begin to emerge.

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<sup>354</sup> Lines 18–19; translation from "Cyrus Cylinder," trans. Mordechai Cogan (*COS* 2.124:315). See also the *Verse Account* vi 6.

<sup>355</sup> See R. J. van der Spek, "Did Cyrus the Great Introduce a New Policy toward Subdued Nations? Cyrus in Assyrian Perspective," *Persica* 10 (1982): 78–79, 82; Kuhrt, "The Cyrus Cylinder and Achaemenid Imperial Policy," especially 83–84.

<sup>356</sup> Kuhrt, "The Cyrus Cylinder and Achaemenid Imperial Policy." As Briant points out, the traditional interpretation of Cyrus "evokes suspicion to the extent that it agrees with the image that Persian propaganda itself would have portrayed" (*From Cyrus to Alexander*, 41).

<sup>357</sup> As Newsom observes in relation to the selective memory of the Persian propaganda, "it is noteworthy that the Cyrus Cylinder, by omitting mention of the battle at Opis, elides the memory of Babylonian support for Nabonidus" (Newsom, "Nabonidus in Jewish Memory," 274 n. 20).

<sup>358</sup> See Darius's Behistun inscription, col. IV §52; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 120; Newsom and Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 129.

<sup>359</sup> Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 43; See also Sidney Smith, *Isaiah Chapters XL–LV: Literary Criticism and History*, The Schweich Lectures of the British Academy 1940 (London: Oxford University Press, 1944), 31.

Cyrus and his successors implemented a strategy of control that sought to exploit the partial agency of those under their hegemony. Rather than decimating rival centers of power and the cultural institutions that upheld them, the Persians preferred to integrate these structures into their system of rule and to enlist them toward their own ends.<sup>360</sup> This integration was achieved through a variety of strategies of accommodation. Perhaps most distinctively, the Persian conquerors sought to attract and harness local support for their rule by assimilating themselves into the indigenous political and ideological structures of subdued peoples.<sup>361</sup> Such assimilation was largely a matter of political staging by the Persian rulers, who would present themselves as rightful heirs to local dynasties, rule in the name of local patron deities, and comport themselves according to local royal customs.<sup>362</sup> Beyond mere rhetorical staging, these rulers would even allocate resources for restoring and promoting the cults of the vanquished.<sup>363</sup> As we have seen in the case of Babylon, Cyrus was careful to frame his rule within the structures of Babylonian royal ideology: he claimed to rule by Marduk's election and in Marduk's name and acted according to the conventional ideals of Babylonian kingship by restoring local cultic centers and practices, acting to liberate his Babylonian subjects from the *corvée*, and investing in the refortification the capital city.<sup>364</sup> Cyrus's strategic manipulation of Babylonian ideology allowed

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<sup>360</sup> Liverani, *The Ancient Near East*, 569; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 79; Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 295; Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 697, 699. See also Wiesehöfer, *Ancient Persia*, 49.

<sup>361</sup> Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 79. See also Vaux, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 65.

<sup>362</sup> Liverani, *The Ancient Near East*, 569–70; Kuhrt, “The Cyrus Cylinder and Achaemenid Imperial Policy,” 89–90.

<sup>363</sup> Liverani, *The Ancient Near East*, 569–70; Kuhrt, “The Cyrus Cylinder and Achaemenid Imperial Policy,” 89.

<sup>364</sup> Cyrus's accommodation to Babylonian religious traditions and beliefs went beyond his appeal to Marduk and its priesthood. The flexibility of his policy is attested, for example, in a few inscriptions discovered at the cite of Ur. An inscription from one brick found near the temple of Sin in Ur reads in part: “Cyrus, king of all, king of Anshan ... the great gods have delivered all the lands into my hand ...” (C. J. Gadd and Leon Legrain, *Ur Excavations. Texts, I: Royal Inscriptions* [London: Harrison & Sons, 1928], 58 [no. 194]). Similarly, in an inscription found on a foundation cylinder near the Ziggurat, which is often attributed to Cyrus, the speaker claims that “Sin the Nannar ... of heaven and earth, with his favourable omen delivered into my hands the four quarters of the world. I returned the gods to their shrines” (Gadd and Legrain, *Ur Excavations*, 96 [no. 307]). See Vaux, *The*

him to stage the Persian takeover as a restorative event in Babylonian history even as he inaugurated an utterly novel political situation—Babylon was now ruled by a foreigner!<sup>365</sup> And yet, despite the cultural discontinuity brought by his regime, Cyrus’s political and ideological accommodation to Babylonian ideals and conventions allowed him to attract a significant measure of support from Babylon’s cultural elite. And this strategy was by no means limited to Persian dealings with Babylon.

Contemporary sources show that Cyrus’s son and heir, Cambyses (530–522 BCE), pursued a similar policy after conquering Egypt in 525 BCE. The clearest evidence is found in the autobiographical statue of Udjahorresnet, a high-ranking Egyptian military official who was made a key advisor to Cambyses following the Persian takeover.<sup>366</sup> In his statue, Udjahorresnet boasts of assisting Cambyses as he assumed Egyptian royal titulary and proudly relates that he encouraged Cambyses to restore the temple of “Neith the great, the mother who bore Re,” in the dynastic center of Sais. Udjahorresnet reports that Cambyses took the title of “King of Upper and Lower Egypt Mesuti-re [Offspring of Re]” and purified the temple of Neith, whom he worshipped along with the other great deities of Egypt “as every excellent king has done.” In addition to Udjahorresnet’s statue, we also have clear evidence that Cambyses acted according to Egyptian royal conventions by participating in the ceremonial burial of a sacred Apis bull in 524 BCE.<sup>367</sup> As Kuhrt suggests, the testimony of this Egyptian evidence allows us to observe the

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*Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 69–70; Williamson, H.G.M., *Ezra, Nehemiah*, WBC 16 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 12; Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 121; cf. Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids von Babylon und Kyros’ des Großen*, 480–1, who assigns this inscription to Nabonidus rather than Cyrus.

<sup>365</sup> See Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus*, 233; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 44.

<sup>366</sup> For a translation and discussion of the relevant section, see Alan B. Lloyd, “The Inscription of Udjahorresnet: A Callaborator’s Testament,” *JEA* 68 (1982): 166–80 and Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 663. For a translation of all the inscriptional materials on the statue, see Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), III: The Late Period:36–41.

<sup>367</sup> Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 663–64; Lisbeth S. Fried, “Cyrus the Messiah? The Historical Background to Isaiah 45:1,” *HTR* 95 (2002): 387–88.



steps taken by Cambyses to “cast himself as much as possible in the mould of a legitimate Egyptian Pharaoh.”<sup>368</sup> Similar to his father’s actions in Babylon, such staging by Cambyses allowed him to frame the Persian takeover of Egypt as a restorative event in continuity with Pharaonic rule.<sup>369</sup>

The Persian policy of cultural accommodation was a shrewd strategy of control that offered to preserve or restore a measure of continuity among conquered populations in exchange for cooperation and compliance.<sup>370</sup> It was not, therefore, entirely benevolent. For one thing, it required subordinate cultures to assimilate the foreign king into their indigenous political and ideological structures.<sup>371</sup> And such compliance was hardly an option; even if it was constructed in the local fashion, subordinate cultures were still required to don the yoke of Persian hegemony.<sup>372</sup> But compliance with the Persians in exchange for the preservation or even promotion of local institutions was a price that subordinate cultures were often willing to pay. Ultimately, it was this policy, and the compliance it encouraged among subordinate cultures, that allowed the Persians

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<sup>368</sup> Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 664, see also 646; Vaux, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 71; Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 295; Fried, “Cyrus the Messiah? The Historical Background to Isaiah 45:1,” 384, 387–88; Lloyd, “The Inscription of Udjahorresnet,” 170.

<sup>369</sup> See Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 513–14. See also Joseph Blenkinsopp, “The Mission of Udjahorresnet and Those of Ezra and Nehemiah,” *JBL* 106 (1987): 413–14; idem, *David Remembered: Kingship and National Identity in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 70. This is not to say that the Persian takeover of Egypt did not entail a degree of cultural discontinuity with regard to political and religious administration in Egypt; see, e.g., Damien Agut-Labordère, “Beyond the Persian Tolerance Policy: Great Kings and Egyptian Gods during the Achaemenid Period,” in *Religion in the Achaemenid Persian Empire: Emerging Judaisms and Trends*, *Orientalische Religionen in Der Antike* 17 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 319–28.

<sup>370</sup> See Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 659–60; Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East*, 295; Vaux, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 65. The principle of cooperation and reward is epitomized in a line from the tomb inscriptions of Darius I (Dnb) and Xerxes (XPI): “The man who cooperates, him do I reward according to his cooperation. He who does harm, him I punish according to the damage” (§2c); Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 504.

<sup>371</sup> See Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 79.

<sup>372</sup> The Persians did not hesitate to quash rebellion; see, e.g., Herodotus’s account of the Persian destruction of the sanctuaries of Apollo at Didyma (6.19) and of Athena in Athens (8.53); see Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 699. See also Vaux, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 65; Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 508.

to extend and maintain their hegemony over an empire that was much larger—even five to ten times larger—than those of their Mesopotamian predecessors.<sup>373</sup>

#### 4.2.4. Persian Policy and the Babylonian Diaspora

The political and ideological give-and-take intrinsic to Persian imperial policy toward subordinate peoples may be observed in the biblical account of Cyrus's dealings with the Judean populace in Babylon following the Persian takeover. Though the historical veracity of some of its source materials remains a matter of debate, the account in the book of Ezra remains our best resource for reconstructing events in the early Persian period of Judean history.<sup>374</sup> At two important junctures in the book, Ezra relates edicts that were purportedly issued by Cyrus soon after he assumed control of Babylon and its territories (Ezra 1:2–4; 6:2b–5). The extent to which these edicts preserve statements actually issued by Cyrus has been a major point of debate in scholarship on Ezra.<sup>375</sup> In my judgment, (1) the similarities obtaining between these edicts and the language and policy of cultural accommodation reflected in the primary sources composed by the Persians themselves and (2) the historical fact that the Judean community in Babylon was authorized by the Persian administration to return to Jerusalem support the view that these

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<sup>373</sup> Liverani, *The Ancient Near East*, 563.

<sup>374</sup> See Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 46. For a helpful survey of the challenges and prospects that have and continue to face historians of the Persian Period, see Moore and Kelle, *Biblical History and Israel's Past*, 396–462.

<sup>375</sup> For studies in favor of the historical veracity—or at least the historical plausibility—of the decrees attributed to Cyrus, see Elias J. Bickerman, “The Edict of Cyrus in Ezra 1,” *JBL* 65 (1946): 249–75; Vaux, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 63–96; Williamson, H.G.M., *Ezra, Nehemiah*, xxiii–xxiv, 8–16, 80–81; Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 509. For a more skeptical approach, see the comments in Lester L. Grabbe, “Reconstructing History from the Book of Ezra,” in *Second Temple Studies: 1. Persian Period*, ed. Philip R. Davies, JSOTSup 117 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 98–106. See also the popular position that the Aramaic source of 6:2–5 is more historically reliable than decree in 1:2–4, which is taken, for example, in Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 121. At the very least, the edicts are plausible literary constructions that nevertheless reflect the actual actions taken by Cyrus. If they are complete Judean compositions, they would represent an appropriation of the model of how the Persians interacted with the major nations of Babylonia and Egypt and therefore how the Judean authors wished the Persians had communicated.

decrees do preserve actual Persian communication, even if they have undergone editing to fit their present contexts.<sup>376</sup> They thus provide us with important, though limited, textual data for observing how the Persian administration engaged discursively with the Judean diaspora.

The first edict comes at the beginning of the book:

Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: YHWH, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem in Judah. Any of those among you who are of his people—may their God be with them!—are now permitted to go up to Jerusalem in Judah, and rebuild the house of YHWH, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem; and let all survivors, in whatever place they reside, be assisted by the people of their place with silver and gold, with goods and with animals, besides freewill offerings for the house of God in Jerusalem. (Ezra 1:2–4; see also 5:11–17; 2 Chr 36:22–23)

Another decree of Cyrus is recorded in Ezra 6:2b–5 in the context of an inquiry that that was made by Tattenai, the Persian governor of the province “Beyond the River,” about the source of authorization for the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem that was taking place under the direction of Zerubbabel ben Shealtiel and Joshua ben Jozadak in the first years of the reign of Darius I (522–486 BCE; 5:3–17). According to Ezra’s account, Tattenai sent a dispatch to Darius in which he asked the king to commission a search for a copy of Cyrus’s decree in the royal archives in Babylon. In his reply to Tattenai (6:2–12), Darius reports that a memorandum of Cyrus’s orders regarding the rebuilding of temple in Jerusalem and the return of its sacred

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<sup>376</sup> See especially the analysis in H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 10–14. In my judgment, the only reasonable ground for doubting the historicity of the decree in Ezra 1:2–4 // 2 Chr 36:22–23 is the suspicion that Cyrus would not have produced such a theologically orthodox statement. But Williams’s point that the decree “is a response to a petition by the Jews” and therefore reflects Jewish language, provides a compelling answer to this suggestion, since this certainly happened “in other similar circumstances,” such as the authorization to rebuild and maintain the Jewish temple in Egypt in *AramP* 32 (in response to *AramP* 30; see B. Porten, “The Archive of Jedaniah Son of Gemariah of Elephantine—The Structure and Style of the Letters (I) [ ארכיון ידניה בן גמריה מיב: א (מבנה האיגרות וסגנון)],” *Eretz-Israel: Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies* H. L. Ginsberg Volume (1978): 165–77) and the Persian Satrap’s Aramaic reply to the request in Greek and Lycian for the construction and maintenance of a new temple (see Javier Teixidor, “The Aramaic Text in the Trilingual Stele from Xanthus,” *JNES* 37 (1978): 181–85); see Williamson, H.G.M., *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 11.

appurtenances was found in the fortress in Ecbatana (6:2). Darius's letter relates a copy of it in

Aramaic:

A memorandum. In the first year of his reign, King Cyrus issued a decree: Concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, let the house be rebuilt, the place where sacrifices are offered and burnt offerings are brought; its height shall be sixty cubits and its width sixty cubits, with three courses of hewn stones and one course of timber; let the cost be paid from the royal treasury. Moreover, let the gold and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be restored and brought back to the temple in Jerusalem, each to its place; you shall put them in the house of God. (6:2b–5)

As the account of events provided in the book of Ezra itself makes clear, the measures taken by Cyrus to restore the temple in Jerusalem were not fulfilled until the reign of Darius.<sup>377</sup> But the authorization of the rebuilding of the temple (1:2–4; 5:13 6:3–4; 2 cf. Chr 36:2), the return of the temple vessels that had been deported by Nebuchadnezzar (Ezra 1:7–11; 5:14–15; 6:5), and the repatriation of Judeans to Jerusalem (1:3) accord well with the continuity strategy pursued already by Cyrus in his dealings with the Babylonians.<sup>378</sup> Exactly why he would implement a similar strategy of accommodation with the Judean population in Babylon is not difficult to discern.

The restorative measures taken by Cyrus—and later reauthorized by Darius (6:6–11)—were likely motivated by the desire to secure a pocket of loyalty on the southwestern flank of the empire.<sup>379</sup> Set between the Egyptian frontier and the Arabian tribes whom former empires had

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<sup>377</sup> Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 512.

<sup>378</sup> See Vaux, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 70, 79, 94. As Briant summarizes: “while the measures ascribed to Cyrus appear legitimate as a whole, contradictions and uncertainties regarding certain details of the royal decrees and their exact chronology still remain” (*From Cyrus to Alexander*, 47).

<sup>379</sup> See Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East*, 660; Kuhrt, “The Cyrus Cylinder and Achaemenid Imperial Policy,” 94; John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34–66*, WBC 25 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), xxv; Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 510; Vaux, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 78. Although Rainer Albertz finds it likely that Cyrus did indeed allow for the repatriation of the temple vessels as part of his restorative program after taking Babylon, he does not think that Judah became an important site for the Persians until after Cambyses's Egyptian campaign in 525 BCE (Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 123, 403).

struggled to keep in check,<sup>380</sup> the territory of Judah was a strategically important region for Cyrus, especially as he sought to shore up his control over the Levant and to prepare for the inevitable campaign against Egypt.<sup>381</sup> Accommodating to those Judeans who wished to return to their former capital and to restore its temple was an astute way to establish a center of allegiance in the southern Levant. That, at least, was the likely political calculation. In light of the glowing depiction of Cyrus in Second Isaiah (see below), which is later reflected in Ezra (see also 2 Chr 36:22–23), the Persian king was correct to expect the willingness of certain Judeans to comply with Persian rule in exchange for a return to Jerusalem and the restoration of its temple.<sup>382</sup>

As much as Second Isaiah predicted that Cyrus would act on behalf of YHWH's people and do so "not for a price or a reward" (Isa 45:13), Persian patronage did, in fact, come with strings attached. Most crucially, the arrangement required continued compliance and political subordination from the Judeans. So far as we can tell, it was not until the early years of the reign of Darius, when the construction of the new temple in Jerusalem began in earnest (ca. 520 BCE), that this bilateral arrangement came under strain.<sup>383</sup> In the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Darius's reign (Hag 1:1, 15; 2:20; cf. Ezra 5:1; Zech 1:7), as the stones of the temple were being put into place, nationalistic hopes began to flare up wildly around the Davidic figure Zerubbabel. The prophet Haggai, who drummed up popular support for the building effort among the people of Judah (Hag 1:1-15a; Ezra 5:1), played no small part in fanning the flames. Haggai eventually went so far as to proclaim that YHWH would soon overthrow and destroy the kingdoms of the nations and make Zerubbabel, his chosen servant, "like a signet ring" (Hag 2:21–23). The prophet Zechariah, for

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<sup>380</sup> Kuhrt, "The Cyrus Cylinder and Achaemenid Imperial Policy," 94.

<sup>381</sup> See Isa 45:14–17; Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 124; Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 40–66*, FOTL 19 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 150–51.

<sup>382</sup> See Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 509.

<sup>383</sup> For a helpful summary of these events and circumstances, see Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 127–29.

his part, articulated a vision in which Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest would share in YHWH's universal rule as his anointed ones (Zech 4:14; cf. 6:9–14). When the Persians became aware of the nationalistic hopes percolating in Jerusalem, they were naturally concerned that such hopes might boil over into an open rebellion. This, perhaps, is what occasioned Tattenai to inquire after the authorization behind Zerubbabel's activities in Jerusalem (Ezra 5). In any event, at least two outcomes obtained following Tattenai's intervention: the first is that the biblical texts become conspicuously silent about the figure of Zerubbabel; and second, by 515 BCE, the construction of the temple was completed under Persian patronage. What likely happened was that Zerubbabel was "gotten rid of" and a non-Davidic figure was placed in charge of Jerusalem in order to quash any hopes for the restoration of the former monarchy. And in exchange for compliance under these new conditions, the Persians reauthorized and sponsored the rebuilding of the temple.<sup>384</sup>

The rapid rise of Persia under Cyrus and the Persian policy toward conquered populations thus played a decisive role for the history of Judah. The advent of Cyrus brought with it the end of Babylonian hegemony and a new opportunity for exiled Judeans to return to their former capital and rebuild its temple. But—importantly—it also entailed the discontinuation of the Davidic monarchy. About these political prospects and ideological challenges the prophet now known as Second Isaiah had much to say.

#### 4.3. GOD AND THE FOREIGN KING IN SECOND ISAIAH

Of the traditions preserved in the Hebrew Bible, the oracles in Isaiah 40–55 engage most directly with the figure of Cyrus and the significance of his rise to power during the final decade of the Neo-Babylonian empire (550–539 BCE). At several places throughout this collection, and in

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<sup>384</sup> Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 129.

chapters 40–48 in particular, Cyrus’s relationship to YHWH and his role within YHWH’s purposes emerge at the foreground of the discourse (41:1–4, 25, 26; 44:24–28; 45:1–7 (8), 9–13; 46:8/9–11; 48:14–16a). These key passages, sometimes called the “Cyrus Songs,” establish a set of relations between YHWH and the Persian king that provides a model for understanding the meaning and significance of Cyrus within a Yahwistic framework. What follows marks an attempt to understand the content, character, and rhetorical construction of this model as a response to the ideological challenges and prospects that came with the ascendancy of Cyrus. My analysis will proceed in two steps. After clarifying my understanding of the primary rhetorical context of Second Isaiah, I begin by establishing the basic claims of these texts as they thematize the relationship between YHWH and Cyrus. In the course of attributing Cyrus with a central role within YHWH’s plans for his people, these oracles configure YHWH and Cyrus into hierarchies of agency and sovereignty. In this regard, certain facets of Second Isaiah’s model for making sense of the relationship between YHWH and the foreign king reflect similarities with the earlier models constructed in First Isaiah and Jeremiah. But the oracles of Second Isaiah go much further in assimilating the figure of Cyrus into a traditional Judean ideological framework and do so by identifying him as a legitimate occupant of the Davidic throne—a move that was sure to be met with resistance. Second, after establishing the content of this model and observing how it is constructed rhetorically, I then offer an analysis of its character as a response to the new political circumstances brought by Cyrus. Building on observations that scholars have made since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, here I attempt to show how the discourse of the Cyrus Songs may be characterized by what post-colonial critics have referred to as “hybridity.” The depiction of Cyrus in Second Isaiah is remarkably like that of Cyrus’s own self-depiction in the Pro-Persian propaganda. The striking parallels between these two depictions, which stem from different sides of the imperial encounter, reveal how the ideology of each accommodated to the other as they negotiated their

unequal power-relations. Attending to the content and character of the Cyrus Songs in Second Isaiah will thus allow us to understand and appreciate at least one of the major responses to the ideological prospects and challenges faced by the Judeans at the dawn of the Persian period.

#### 4.3.1. The Rhetorical Context of the Cyrus Songs in Second Isaiah

Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a majority of scholars have maintained that the remarkable collection of poetic materials in Isa 40–55 stem from an anonymous prophet, usually referred to as Second or Deutero-Isaiah, among the Babylonian diaspora in the years leading up to the Persian eclipse of Babylon (ca. 550–539 BCE).<sup>385</sup> In recent decades, this consensus view on the basic unity and singular provenance of Isa 40–55 has become a matter of dispute, especially among literary-historical and redaction-critical scholars working in continental Europe.<sup>386</sup> Without denying the likelihood that this collection had a complex literary history, I find that the line of argumentation

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<sup>385</sup> See, e.g., Joachim Begrich, *Studien zu Deuterjesaja*, ed. Walther Zimmerli, TB 20 (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1963), 114; Christopher R. North, *The Second Isaiah: Introduction, Translation and Commentary to Chapters XL–LV* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), 1–2, 17; Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66: A Commentary*, trans. David M. G. Stalker, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 3, 8, 28; R. N. Whybray, *Isaiah 40–66*, NCB (London: Oliphants, 1975), 20–23; John L. McKenzie, *Second Isaiah: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), xvii–xviii, xviii; Shalom M. Paul, “Deutero-Isaiah and Cuneiform Royal Inscriptions,” in *Divrei Shalom: Collected Studies of Shalom M. Paul on the Bible and the Ancient Near East 1967–2005*, CHANE 23 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 11; North, *The Second Isaiah*, 1–2, 17; John Goldingay and David Payne, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40–55*, vol. 1: Introduction and Commentary on Isaiah 40.1–44.23 of ICC (New York: T&T Clark International, 2006), 28–29; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 93; Blenkinsopp, *David Remembered: Kingship and National Identity in Ancient Israel*, 62; Sweeney, *Isaiah 40–66*, 33.

<sup>386</sup> See, e.g., the studies by Jean M. Vincent, *Studien zur literarischen Eigenart und zur geistigen Heimat von Jesaja, Kap. 40–55*, BBET 5 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1977); Klaus Kiesow, *Exodustexte im Jesajabuch: literarkritische und motivgeschichtliche Analysen*, OBO 24 (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires, 1979); Rosario Pius Merendino, *Der Erste und der Letzte: Eine Untersuchung von Jes 40–48*, VTSup 31 (Leiden: Brill, 1981); Reinhard Gregor Kratz, *Kyros im Deuterjesaja-Buch: Redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Entstehung und Theologie von Jes 40–55*, FAT 1 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991); Odil Hannes Steck, *Gottesknecht und Zion: Gesammelte Aufsätze zu Deuterjesaja*, FAT 4 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1992), 173–207; Jürgen van Oorschot, *Von Babel zum Zion: Eine literarkritische und redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung*, BZAW 206 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993); Ulrich Berges, *Das Buch Jesaja: Komposition und Gestalt*, Herders biblische Studien 16 (Freiburg: Herders, 1998), 322–413; Jürgen Werlitz, *Redaktion und Komposition: Zur Rückfrage hinter die Endgestalt von Jesaja 40–55*, BBB 122 (Berlin: Philo, 1999); Alberty, *Israel in Exile*, 390–403. See also the brief discussion in Klaus Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 40–55*, trans. Margaret Kohl, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 30–32 and the reappraisal of key aspects of the consensus offered by Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, *For the Comfort of Zion: The Geographical and Theological Location of Isaiah 40–55*, VTSup 139 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 13–51.



supporting the consensus view remains persuasive, not least in locating the composition of the Cyrus texts in Babylon in the final years of the Neo-Babylonian empire (ca. 550–539 BCE). The arguments for this provenance are generally three-fold. First, two of the passages in this collection refer to Cyrus directly by name (Isa 44:28; 45:1) and therefore must post-date his rise on the international scene after the defeat of Astyages in 550 BCE.<sup>387</sup> This much is clear. Second, much of the relevant discourse about Cyrus is formulated and best explained as predictive, anticipating future actions to be taken by Cyrus.<sup>388</sup> In some cases, the predictions about Cyrus's actions never came to pass. Most tellingly, a few of the relevant passages have YHWH announcing that Cyrus would act as his agent of destructive judgment against Babylon (48:14; 45:1–3; see also 43:14–17; cf. 13:17; Jer 50:41–46). As we have seen, when Cyrus finally did march upon Babylon, this vision did not play out in reality; in fact, the Persian takeover was remarkably peaceful and indeed welcomed by influential sectors of the Babylonian population. It is also telling that the taking of Babylon is nowhere recounted, or even assumed to have taken place, anywhere in this collection.<sup>389</sup> For these reasons, scholars generally date the composition of these texts to the period prior to the Persian takeover of Babylon.<sup>390</sup> Finally, citing the prophet's intimate awareness of Babylonian religious and intellectual culture<sup>391</sup> and the fact that

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<sup>387</sup> Even if the name itself is a secondary insertion (see the literature cited in Achenbach, “Das Kyros-Orakel in Jesaja 44,24–45,7 im Lichte altorientalischer Parallelen,” 156 n. 5), Cyrus is the only explicable referent in these passages; see Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 248; Milton Eng, “What’s in a Name? Cyrus and the Dating of Deutero-Isaiah,” in *Inspired Speech: Prophecy in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of Herbert B. Huffmon*, ed. John Kaltner and Louis Stulman, JSOTSup 378 (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 218.

<sup>388</sup> See Eng, “Cyrus and the Dating of Deutero-Isaiah,” 218–19; Childs, *Isaiah*, 290.

<sup>389</sup> Nor, for that matter, did the promised conquest of Ethiopia or Egypt happen during Cyrus's career; see Morton Smith, “II Isaiah and the Persians,” *JAOS* 83 (1963): 417.

<sup>390</sup> Smith, *Isaiah Chapters XL–LV*, 1; McKenzie, *Second Isaiah*, xviii; North, *The Second Isaiah*, 4; Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 239; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 93, 249.

<sup>391</sup> Blenkinsopp provides a concise list of the “religious and intellectual traditions and practices” known by the prophet, “including the names of deities (46:1–2), ceremonies and processions (46:7), omens (44:25), magic (47:1, 12), and astrology (47:13)” (*Isaiah 40–55*, 103).

his oracles at times anticipate an Exodus-like return from Babylon to Judah,<sup>392</sup> scholars generally conclude that the collection (or chs. 40–48 as a part of the collection) was most likely composed in the Babylonian diaspora.<sup>393</sup> I find that these judgments regarding the primary rhetorical context of the Cyrus Songs provide the most compelling account of the data while raising the fewest interpretive problems. For that reason, the following analysis assumes the basic validity of the consensus position regarding the provenance of the Cyrus Songs in Second Isaiah.

Although not every aspect of my analysis hangs or falls on these judgments, this understanding of the collection's provenance does have important consequences for reconstructing the primary rhetorical situation in which the Cyrus Songs took shape. Locating the composition of the Cyrus Songs in Babylon in the years leading right up to the Persian takeover allows us to understand Second Isaiah's proclamations about the Persian king as largely anticipatory: the oracles are shaped rhetorically in order to persuade fellow Judeans of the significance of Cyrus within the plans and purposes of YHWH that are about to unfold in their midst. Beyond "fellow Judeans," it is difficult to identify the implied audience with more precision. Often designated as "Jacob-Israel," throughout chs. 40–48,<sup>394</sup> those addressed by the prophet could include his contemporaries in the Babylonian diaspora as well as those who remained in the land ("Jerusalem-Zion").<sup>395</sup> Further precision is largely precluded by our lack of

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<sup>392</sup> Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 104. See 40:3–5; 42:16; 43:19; 49:11 and 48:20; 55:12.

<sup>393</sup> For recent discussions of the relevant evidence adjudicating between a Babylonian or Palestinian provenance, see *Ibid.*, 102–4; Goldingay and Payne, *Isaiah 40–55*, 1: Introduction and Commentary on Isaiah 40.1–44.23: 30–37; Tiemeyer, *For the Comfort of Zion*. See also Michael Goulder, "Deutero-Isaiah of Jerusalem," *JOT* 28 (2004): 351–62.

<sup>394</sup> These designations are often in parallel lines of the poetry; see 40:27; 41:8, 14; 42:24; 43:1, 22, 28; 44:1, 5, 23; 45:4; 46:3; 48:1, 12; 49:5; see also 44:21; 45:17–19; 48:20–49:3.

<sup>395</sup> For an insightful discussion of the identity of Second Isaiah's audience, see Goldingay and Payne, *Isaiah 40–55*, 1: Introduction and Commentary on Isaiah 40.1–44.23: 37–44.

sufficient evidence. In what follows, therefore, I understand the prophet's primary audience simply as his "fellow Judeans," broadly understood.

#### 4.3.2. YHWH and Cyrus in Second Isaiah: Hierarchies of Agency and Sovereignty

The figure of Cyrus and his role within YHWH's purposes are central to the message of Second Isaiah. Indeed, discourse about Cyrus pervades chapters 40–48, and even when the prophet speaks of other topics in this section, these topics are inextricably linked to the new saving event that YHWH was about to enact in history through the Persian king.<sup>396</sup> In the texts where the relationship between YHWH and Cyrus emerges at the foreground of the discourse, two central themes predominate: (1) YHWH's claim to the agency behind Cyrus's endeavors; and (2) YHWH's special relationship with Cyrus, "his anointed." Attending to the content of these themes will allow us to observe the model that the discourse of the Cyrus Songs constructs for understanding the relationship between YHWH and Cyrus.

##### 3.2.1. *A Hierarchy of Agency*

One of the central tropes that recurs throughout the Cyrus Songs is YHWH's claim to the effective agency behind Cyrus's actions. From his spectacular successes in the past to those anticipated in the future, all of Cyrus's activities are framed and subsumed within YHWH's agency throughout this discourse. At several junctures, YHWH identifies explicitly as the agent who has initiated Cyrus's endeavors by "rousing," "calling," or "bringing" him into action:<sup>397</sup>

Who has roused [העיר] a (victor) from the east,  
called him (Cyrus) [יקראהו] to his service? (41:2)

I roused [העירותי] one from the north,

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<sup>396</sup> See Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 244; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 92.

<sup>397</sup> See Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 248. See also 2 Chr 36:22.

and he (Cyrus) has come,  
 from the rising of the sun he shall call my name/was summoned by  
 name.<sup>398</sup> (41:25; cf. Jer 50:41)

I have roused him [העירתי] (Cyrus) in righteousness,  
 and I will make all his paths straight. (45:13a)

“My purpose shall stand, and I will fulfill my intention,”  
 calling [קרא] a bird of prey from the east,  
 a man (Cyrus) for my purpose [עצתי] from a far country. (46:10b–11a)

I, even I, have spoken and called him [אני דברתי אף קראתי] (Cyrus),  
 I have brought him [הביאתי],  
 and he will prosper in his way. (48:15; see also 45:4b).

YHWH also claims the agency behind Cyrus’s imperial activities in the past. YHWH’s self-identification as the agent who has granted success to Cyrus in his imperial march is expressed most explicitly in the first Cyrus Song near the beginning of the collection:

<sup>2</sup> Who has roused a victor from the east,  
 summoned him to his service?  
 He delivers up nations to him,  
 and tramples kings under foot;  
 he makes them like the dust with his sword,  
 like driven stubble with his bow.  
<sup>3</sup> He pursues them and passes on safely,  
 scarcely touching the path with his feet.  
<sup>4</sup> Who has performed and done this (פעל ועשה),  
 Calling the generations from the beginning?  
 I, YHWH, am first,  
 and will be the last. (41:2–4; see also 41:25b; 45:1–3; 46:10)

The rhetorical questions bookending this oracle (vv. 2, 4) invite the reader to draw the same conclusion as the prophet: namely, that YHWH is the agent behind Cyrus’s spectacularly successful conquests. The intimate link between the agency of YHWH and Cyrus is established

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<sup>398</sup> The text of the final phrase (יקרא בשמי) has several variants in the versional evidence; cf. e.g., 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>, which reads: ויקרא בשמו. For a recent discussion, see Goldingay and Payne, *Isaiah 40–55*, 1: Introduction and Commentary on Isaiah 40.1–44.23: 201.

in this oracle by the ambiguous use of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular throughout vv. 2b–3: though it is clear that YHWH is the one who delivers nations and sovereigns to Cyrus (v. 2b), exactly who makes the kings like dust and stubble by sword and bow (v. 2c) and who marches along unimpeded (v. 3) remains obscured by the 3<sup>rd</sup> person discourse. Such a blurring of the distinction between the king and his patron deity is characteristic of ancient Near Eastern royal ideology, in which the deity is often depicted as the supernatural agent who goes before the king in battle and who grants the king victory over his enemies (see §3).

Establishing YHWH's claims to the agency behind Cyrus's activities in the past ultimately serves to provide the grounds for expecting that YHWH will continue to work through Cyrus in the near future. Here two closely related aspects of Second Isaiah's message emerge. The first is that YHWH will continue to grant Cyrus military success, especially as he performs YHWH's purposes in executing judgment against Babylon. The most explicit statement comes in the final Cyrus Song of the collection:

YHWH loves him (Cyrus);  
 he shall perform his purpose [הפצו] on Babylon,  
 and his arm shall be against the Chaldeans.  
 I, even I, have spoken and called him [אני אגיד ואת קראתי],  
 I have brought him, and he will prosper in his way. (48:14b–15)

YHWH's actions against Babylon through Cyrus are also the likely subject of 45:1–3 (see also 43:14–17), in which YHWH shares his plan with Cyrus:<sup>399</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Thus says YHWH to his anointed, to Cyrus,  
 whose right hand I have grasped  
 to subdue nations before him  
 and strip kings of their robes,  
 to open doors before him—  
 and the gates shall not be closed

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<sup>399</sup> See Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 225.

<sup>2</sup> I will go before you  
 and level the mountains,  
 I will break in pieces the doors of bronze  
 and cut through the bars of iron,  
<sup>3</sup> I will give you the treasures of darkness  
 and riches hidden in secret places,  
 so that you may know that it is I, YHWH, the God of Israel, who call you by your name.

YHWH's declaration that he will use Cyrus as an agent of punishment against Babylon is part of a larger pattern of rhetorical reversal in Second Isaiah by which the prophet turns Babylon's former role as YHWH's agent of judgment against it. Just a half-century before, YHWH had used the Babylonian king as his agent of judgment against his own people (§3.5.1). But, according to the prophet, once YHWH handed over his people to him, the Babylonians had transgressed their limited commission, treating the Judeans with excessive severity and conducting themselves as if they had divine impunity (see 47:5–8; see also 49:26; 51:18–23; cf. Isa 10:7–11). YHWH, therefore, was now going to use a new royal agent to punish the Babylonians according to the work of their own hands. And that royal agent was Cyrus.

The analogous, yet inverse relationship between Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus is also developed through an allusion to earlier prophetic discourse in the opening utterances of the Cyrus oracle in 41:25–29:

<sup>25</sup> I roused one (Cyrus) from the north [מצפון],  
 and he has come [ויבא],  
 from the rising of the sun [ממזרח-שמש]  
 he was summoned by name.  
 He shall trample on rulers as on mortar,  
 As the potter treads clay.  
<sup>26</sup> Who declared it from the beginning,  
 so that we might know,  
 and beforehand,  
 so that we might say, "He is right"?

Interpreters have struggled at times to make sense of this oracle's affirmation that Cyrus was roused from the north and yet was summoned from the east. Both directions have a plausible explanation in terms of the geography and logistics involved in Cyrus's westward march.<sup>400</sup> But the declaration that YHWH has roused a royal agent from the north recalls the motif of the "Enemy from the North," that was so central to Jeremiah's preaching about Nebuchadnezzar (see §3.5.1.1).<sup>401</sup> This reversal of fortunes for Babylon, YHWH's former agent of judgment, was envisioned already in the oracles against Babylon in Jeremiah (see §3.5.3):

Look, a people is coming from the north [בא מצפון];  
 a might nation and many kings  
 are stirring [יערו] from the farthest parts of the earth (JerMT 50:41).

Using similar imagery and terminology (בוא, עור, מצפון),<sup>402</sup> Second Isaiah picks up on the reversal envisioned in the Jeremianic oracle: YHWH has roused a new ruler from the north (Cyrus), and he has come to perform YHWH's purpose in judging Babylon (see also 2 Chr 36:22).

The second theme to emerge is that Cyrus will serve as YHWH's agent of restoration by carrying out YHWH's purposes in rebuilding Jerusalem and its temple and by allowing the Judean exiles to re-inhabit their former capital. The link between YHWH's purposes with Cyrus and the restoration of Jerusalem and the Judean populace is made by association in 44:26–28 (see also 49:19):

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<sup>400</sup> That is, Cyrus would have marched first westward and then south to Babylon, as it appears he did; see McKenzie, *Second Isaiah*, 35. Cf. the brief discussion by Baltzer, who outlines the interpretive challenges here and argues that the oracle envisions YHWH *speaking from* the (mythological) north (Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 121).

<sup>401</sup> See Jer 1:13–15; 4:5–8, 13–21, 29–31; 5:15–17; 6:1–5, 22–26; 8:14–16; 10:22; 25:9; 50:9; see also 51:1, 11; Ezek 26:7; cf. Isa 13:17; 14:31. See Goldingay and Payne, *Isaiah 40–55*, 1: Introduction and Commentary on Isaiah 40.1–44.23: 200.

<sup>402</sup> See Shalom M. Paul, "Literary and Ideological Echoes of Jeremiah in Deutero-Isaiah," in *Divrei Shalom: Collected Studies of Shalom M. Paul on the Bible and the Ancient Near East 1967–2005*, CHANE 23 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 407; Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 235 n. 96.

<sup>24b</sup> I am YHWH ...  
<sup>26b</sup> ... who says of Jerusalem, “it shall be inhabited,”  
 and of the cities of Judah, “They shall be rebuilt, and I will raise up their ruins”;  
<sup>27</sup> who says to the deep, “be dry—  
 I will dry up your rivers”;  
<sup>28</sup> who says of Cyrus, “He is my shepherd,  
 and he shall carry out all my purpose [חפצי]”;  
 and who says of Jerusalem, “it shall be rebuilt,”  
 and of the temple, “Your foundation shall be laid.”

The same connection is drawn explicitly later in the same oracle (45:13):

I have roused him (Cyrus) in righteousness,  
 and I will make all his paths straight;  
 he shall build my city  
 and set my exiles free,  
 not for price or reward,  
 says YHWH of hosts.

YHWH’s announcements regarding Cyrus’s role in the restoration of Jerusalem establish a chain of effective agency between these two figures: YHWH identifies as the agent who initiates Cyrus’s restorative activities and guarantees their success (45:13a) while Cyrus is the agent who will fulfill these purposes of YHWH (44:26, 28; 45:13b; cf. §3.5.1).

The ubiquitous discourse about agency in the Cyrus Songs thus configures YHWH and Cyrus into a hierarchy of effective agency. Through his utterances, YHWH identifies as the agent who has initiated Cyrus’s activities, who has granted Cyrus success in his previous imperial conquests, and who will continue to work through Cyrus in order (1) to execute judgment against Babylon and (2) to restore Jerusalem, its temple, and its exiled populace. There are two closely related aspects of this discourse on agency that warrant further discussion.

#### 4.3.2.1.1. An Exclusively Yahwistic Framework

First, by subsuming the activities of Cyrus under YHWH’s effective agency, the discourse of the Cyrus Songs locates their meaning and purpose within an exclusively Yahwistic and Judeo-



centric framework.<sup>403</sup> Whatever the Persian regime might have said about the motivations, sources of authorization, and causes of success behind Cyrus's imperial march, such considerations never enter the discursive frame in Second Isaiah (cf. Isa 10:13–14); they are not allowed to, because the prophet's exclusively Yahwistic interpretation of events fences out alternative explanations. According to the prophet, YHWH—and no other (cf. 45:5)—is the agent who is responsible for all of Cyrus's activities. And all of these activities, moreover, are framed within YHWH's designs and purposes for his own people. As the deity declares to Cyrus: “For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name ...” (45:4; see also 43:14).<sup>404</sup> The discourse about agency in Second Isaiah thus frames Cyrus's activities within an exclusively Yahwistic framework.

By locating the activities of the foreign king within a Yahwistic framework, the claims about Cyrus in Second Isaiah resemble the discourse about the Assyrian king in First Isaiah (see §2) and about Nebuchadnezzar throughout much of Jeremiah (see §3). The oracle of Isaiah 10:5–15 subsumed the activities of the Assyrian king under YHWH's agency and purposes: the king was but a tool used by YHWH to exercise his wrath against nations that provoked it. The prophet in that case even went so far as to contest the Assyrian king's claims about the source of his own agency (Isa 10:13–15; §2.3). Several oracles in Jeremiah likewise framed Nebuchadnezzar's imperial activities within YHWH's purposes in exercising judgment against Judah and the Judeans (§3.5.1). In each of these former cases, the relegation of the foreign king's activities under YHWH's agency located their meaning and purpose within an exclusively Yahwistic framework while simultaneously muting rival interpretations of events.

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<sup>403</sup> See also Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 244; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 92.

<sup>404</sup> See Begrich, *Studien zu Deuterocesaja*, 69; Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 244.

Figure 4.1. Hierarchies of Agency in Judean Prophetic Discourse			
<u>Isaiah 10:5–15</u>	<u>Jeremiah</u>	<u>Isaiah 40–48</u>	
YHWH	YHWH	YHWH	
↓	↓	↓	
King of Assyria	Nebuchadnezzar	Cyrus	
↓	↓	↙	↘
Vs. Nations of Wrath	Vs. Judah	Vs. Babylon	For Judeans

Claiming the agency behind the foreign king’s activities—whether for weal or for woe (cf. Isa 45:7)—thus appears to have been a useful strategy for interpreting the meaning and purpose of foreign imperialism within an indigenous ideological framework. When the Judeans lacked the resources to shape conditions on the ground and were at the mercy of foreign super-powers, they could at least negotiate the *meaning* of these conditions through acts of interpretation by which their origin and purpose were located within YHWH’s agency. Though more will have to be said about this in a later chapter (§7), the *cumulative* effect of these highly contextual and responsive claims about YHWH’s agency is that the deity is depicted, again and again, as the sole agent in charge of international events. Interpreting the imperial activities of foreign kings within an exclusively Yahwistic framework thus played no small part in the development of functionally monotheistic discourse about YHWH, who is portrayed as the sole orchestrator of geopolitical events in each chapter of Judah’s history (see §2.3.2).<sup>405</sup> Such monotheistic discourse, as we shall see, becomes explicit in Second Isaiah.

<sup>405</sup> See again Levine, “Assyrian Ideology and Israelite Monotheism,” 416.

## 4.3.2.1.2. Cyrus's Dual Role as the Antitype of Nebuchadnezzar

Second, although Second Isaiah's claim about YHWH's agency over the foreign king resembles the claims made by his prophetic predecessors, it also differs from the earlier discourse in important ways. Perhaps most distinctively, Cyrus's role as YHWH's agent is no longer singular. Unlike the Assyrian king in Isaiah 10:5–15, Nebuchadnezzar throughout much of Jeremiah, and the expected enemy from the north in the Jeremianic Oracle against Babylon, Cyrus is not merely an agent of destructive judgment; he also serves as the agent who will fulfill and enact YHWH's restorative purposes.<sup>406</sup> This difference was recognized and elaborated by the prophet himself, who, through a sophisticated allusion to Jer 27:5–6,<sup>407</sup> made a typological association between Cyrus and Nebuchadnezzar:<sup>408</sup>

**JerMT 27:5–6**

(Plusses of MT in italics)

<sup>5</sup> אֲנִי עָשִׂיתִי אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֶת־הָאָדָם וְאֶת־הַבְּהֵמָה  
אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי הָאָרֶץ בְּכַחַי הַגָּדוֹל וּבְזִרְעוֹי הַנְּטוּיָה  
וְנִתְתִּיָה לְאִשֶׁר יִשָּׂר בְּעֵינָי:  
<sup>6</sup> וְעַתָּה אֲנִי נֹתֵתִי אֶת־כָּל־הָאָרֶץ אֶל־כַּיִד  
נְבוּכַדְנֶאֶצַּר מֶלֶךְ־בָּבֶל עַבְדִּי וְגַם אֶת־חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה  
נֹתֵתִי לוֹ לְעַבְדּוֹ:

**Isa 45:12–13**

<sup>12</sup> אֲנִי עָשִׂיתִי אֶרֶץ וָאָדָם עָלֶיהָ בְּרַאֲתִי אֲנִי יְדֵי נְטוּ  
שָׁמַיִם וְכָל צְבָאִם צְוִיתִי  
<sup>13</sup> אֲנִי הֵעִירְתִּהוּ בְצַדֶּק וְכָל דַּרְכָיו אִשֶׁר הוּא־יִבְנֶה  
עִירֵי וּגְלוֹתֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא בְמַחִיר וְלֹא בְשַׁחַד אָמַר יְהוָה  
צְבָאוֹת

<sup>5</sup> It is I who have made the earth with the human(s) and animal(s) that are on the earth by my great power and my outstretched arm

<sup>12</sup> It is I who made earth, and the human(s) upon it I created; my own hands stretched out the heavens, and I command all its hosts.

<sup>406</sup> Similarly, Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 16.

<sup>407</sup> On Second Isaiah's use of Jeremiah, see Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 32–107; and idem, "New Light on the Composition of Jeremiah," *CBQ* 61 (1999): 646–66.

<sup>408</sup> Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 60–61. See also Paul, "Literary and Ideological Echoes of Jeremiah in Deutero-Isaiah," 407–8 (originally published as idem, "Literary and Ideological Echoes of Jeremiah in Deutero-Isaiah," *Proc. Fifth World Congr. Jew. Stud.* [1969]: 1:102–20):

The Lord declares that he created the universe and directs the course of history by controlling the destiny of all, including, in particular, His appointed one, Cyrus. The same thought sequence, coupled with a partially identical phraseology, first appears in Jer 27:5–6, where the king referred to is Nebuchadnezzar ... The creator of the universe is the controller of history, and both Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus are accorded leading roles in the execution of the divine plan.

and I give it to whom it may seem good in my eyes,

<sup>6</sup> *And now I have given all these lands into the hand of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, my servant, and I have given to him even the wild animals of the fields to serve him.*

<sup>13</sup> *I myself raised him [Cyrus] up in victory, and all his roads I made straight. He will build my city and let my exiles go.*

As Benjamin Sommer suggests, the several lexical and phraseological parallels between these passages establish a typological link between Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus by which the latter figure can be understood in light of the former: while both Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus have been elected by YHWH, the creator of the universe, to be his royal agents, they each “have opposite tasks: Nebuchadnezzar destroys and deports, Cyrus restores and rebuilds.”<sup>409</sup> The prophet thus makes the point that YHWH is capable of using the foreign king as both an instrument of judgment against his people as well as an instrument of salvific restoration for his people.

#### 4.3.2.1.3. Minding the Foreign King

Finally, another important aspect of the discourse on agency in Second Isaiah is that the prophet begins to reflect explicitly on whether Cyrus *knows* that YHWH is the source of his agency or that his activities are an outworking of YHWH’s purposes. This theme emerges in the oracle of Isa 45:1–7, in which YHWH, addressing Cyrus directly, twice states explicitly that Cyrus does not know (√עד) him:

<sup>1</sup>Thus says YHWH to his anointed, to Cyrus,  
 whose right hand I have grasped  
 to subdue nations before him  
 and strip kings of their robes,  
 to open doors before him—and the gates shall not be closed:

<sup>2</sup>I will go before you  
 and level the mountains  
 I will break in pieces the doors of bronze  
 and cut through the bars of iron,

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<sup>409</sup> Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 61.

- <sup>3</sup> I will give you the treasures of darkness  
and the riches hidden in secret places,  
so that you may know [למען תדע] that it is I, YHWH, the God of Israel,  
who call you by your name.
- <sup>4</sup> For the sake of my servant Jacob,  
and Israel my chosen.  
I call you by your name [ואקרא לך בשמך],  
I betitle you [אכנה], though you do not know me [ולא ידעתני].
- <sup>5</sup> I am YHWH and there is no other.  
Besides me there is no god.
- <sup>6</sup> I arm you, though you do not know me [ולא ידעתני],  
so that they may know [למען ידעו],  
from the rising of the sun and from the west,  
that there is no one besides me ... (45:1–6a)

Within its immediate context, Cyrus's ignorance of YHWH's ultimate agency serves as the starting point for YHWH's revelatory purposes, which are two-fold: first, that through YHWH's actions, Cyrus would somehow come to know that YHWH is the one who calls him by name and grants him success (45:3c); and second, that by acting for and through Cyrus, the whole world would come to know that YHWH alone is God (45:5–6).<sup>410</sup>

Cyrus's movement from ignorance to knowledge of YHWH for revelatory purposes in 45:1–7 is strikingly similar to the discourse about the knowledge of foreign kings elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, especially in Exodus 5–15 and the court tales of Daniel (see §5). In the Exodus narrative, YHWH acts, again and again, to answer the first words Pharaoh speaks to Moses and Aaron: "Who is YHWH, that I should heed him and let Israel go? I do not know YHWH [לא ידעתי], and I will not let Israel go!" (Ex 5:2). Throughout the rest of the narrative, YHWH then reveals his power in the plagues, continuing in the process to harden Pharaoh's heart (7:3, 13–14, 22; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; see also 4:21; 8:15, 19; 8:32; 9:7, 34–35), *so that* Pharaoh would come to know (למען תדע) exactly who YHWH is (Ex 8:10, 22; 9:14, 29; 10:2;

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<sup>410</sup> See John Goldingay and David Payne, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40–55*, vol. 2: *Commentary on Isaiah 44.24–55.13 of ICC* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2006), 26.

11:7). Significantly, after Pharaoh finally lets the Israelites go, YHWH again hardens his heart for wider revelatory purposes:

I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, so that I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh (בפרעה) and over all his army; and the Egyptians shall know (וידעו) that I am YHWH. And they did so ... Then I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them [into the divided sea]; and so I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army, his chariots, and his chariot drivers (14:4, 17).

As I argue in the next chapter (§5), the sequence of bringing the foreign king from ignorance to knowledge resulting in YHWH's glorification is also developed in the court tales of Daniel 1–6. Over the course of the Nebuchadnezzar cycle in Dan 1–4, the Babylonian king moves from ignorance of YHWH to explicit knowledge of YHWH's status as the sole source of his political sovereignty. This movement comes to a crescendo in Nebuchadnezzar's realization that the Most High God of the Jews “has sovereignty over the kingdom of mortals and gives it to whom he will” (4:17[14], 25[22], 32[29]; see also 2:21, 37–38)—knowledge that Nebuchadnezzar broadcasts throughout his entire realm (4:1[3:31]). From Second Isaiah's perspective, Cyrus has not yet come to the knowledge of YHWH that Pharaoh or Nebuchadnezzar would come to through these narratives. Nor would he come to this knowledge through judgment. But the prophet envisions a comparable outcome in actual history: that the world would come to know YHWH's exclusive power.

The ignorance of Cyrus also bears an important similarity with the false consciousness attributed to the king of Assyria in Isaiah 10:5–15. In both cases, the prophets configure the Gentile king and YHWH into hierarchies of agency in which the king is unaware of his subordinate position. There is, of course, an obvious difference: whereas the Assyrian king incurred guilt for his misapprehension, Cyrus's ignorance is acknowledged and viewed as unproblematic. But in both cases the king's *perception of reality* is foregrounded as a discursive theme. Discourse about the thoughts or perceptions of actors rarely emerges in biblical literature

(see further §7). Why, then, might it recur in discourse about the Gentile king? The answer, I suspect, is that the “mind” of the king—his thoughts and perceptions—provided a useful locus for performing symbolic work on the ideological problems presented by the power he manifestly possessed and expressed. When the events and circumstances brought about by the Gentile kings were impossible to change through action in the “real world,” it was at least possible to work on the fundamental question of “what is happening” through acts of interpretation.<sup>411</sup> Positing a gap between reality and the king’s perception of it creates the interpretive space necessary for performing this kind of symbolic work.

#### 4.3.2.2. *A Hierarchy of Sovereignty*

In the course of identifying Cyrus as YHWH’s royal agent, the discourse of Second Isaiah also configures YHWH and Cyrus into a corresponding hierarchy of sovereignty. This configuration is constructed largely by the royal designations that are assigned to Cyrus and by the particular actions that YHWH is said to have taken with him throughout the oracles. As Shalom Paul has demonstrated most thoroughly, this discourse about YHWH’s relationship to Cyrus is densely populated with conventional imagery found in royal texts from the cuneiform tradition.<sup>412</sup> Such imagery includes:

- The deity calling the king by name (41:25; 45:3, 4; cf. 43:1), sometimes with the adverb “justly” (בצדק) // Akk. *kīnu/kīniš*; see 45:13; see also 41:2; cf. 42:6)<sup>413</sup>

<sup>411</sup> See Liverani, “The Ideology of the Assyrian Empire,” 300.

<sup>412</sup> See Paul, “Deutero-Isaiah and Cuneiform Royal Inscriptions,” 12–14. See also Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 33.

<sup>413</sup> The Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian inscriptions frequently refer to kings being named (gen. nabû) to kingship; see, e.g., M.-J. Seux, *Épithètes royales akkadiennes et sumériennes* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1967), 176–79, who also points out earlier attestations. In several cases, this naming is for the royal task of “shepherding,” (see note below) or having “lordship of x.” Several of Nabonidus’s inscriptions refer to him being called to kinship by Nabû or Sîn (e.g., Harran-stele I 10–11; Adad-guppi-Stele I 1 41; *Eḫulḫul Cylinder* III 46; Larsa-Stele III 1–3; *Ebabbar Cylinder* I 21–23); perhaps the best reference to being called by name, however, is from his Adad-guppi Stele II 1: “Du hast ihn zum Königtum berufen und seinen Namen genannt” (*at-ta a-na LUGAL-u-ti tam-bi-šu-ma taz-ku-ru zi-kir-šû*); translation from Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids von Babylon und Kyros’ des Großen*, 511; see also his building inscription for the temple of E’ulmaš in Sippar-Anunītu (III 26). Importantly, this image also occurs in the *Cyrus Cylinder*, where the claim is made that Marduk called “called out his name: Cyrus, king of

- The deity taking the king by his hand (45:1)<sup>414</sup>
- The king as object of the deity’s special love (48:14; cf. 44:28)<sup>415</sup>
- The deity granting the king military success (41:2–4, 25; 45:1–3)
- The king as “shepherd,” often designated as such by the deity (44:28; cf. 48:14)<sup>416</sup>

The occurrence of these motifs throughout Second Isaiah suggests that the prophet drew from the common well of royal imagery in the ancient Near East to establish and describe the special relationship between YHWH and Cyrus. By appealing to such conventional tropes, the prophet begins to configure YHWH and Cyrus into a hierarchy of sovereignty in which YHWH is identified as Cyrus’s patron deity.

#### 4.3.2.2.1. Cyrus, “My Shepherd,” and “YHWH’s Anointed”

The prophet, however, employs more than conventional royal imagery to describe the relationship between YHWH and Cyrus. In at least two instances, Second Isaiah uses designations for Cyrus that were closely associated with the Davidic monarch in Judean royal ideology. Both instances occur in the two-part oracle running from 44:24–45:7, in which YHWH

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Anshan; he pronounced his name to be king over all” (lines 12–13); similarly, see the *Verse Account of Nabonidus* I 24.

<sup>414</sup> See especially the *Cyrus Cylinder* line 12, where Marduk is said to have searched for someone whose hand he could grasp (ša ittamaḥ qātišu). As Paul notes, “[t]he grasping of an individual’s hand by a deity is a scene often depicted on cylinder seals” (Paul, “Deutero-Isaiah and Cuneiform Royal Inscriptions,” 13 n. 19).

<sup>415</sup> The self-identification of king as the beloved or favorite of the god(s) (narām DN; migir DN) is very common in the royal titulary of the Neo-Assyrian kings, pervading the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III, Sennacherib, and Esarhaddon. Nabonidus, in his *Ebabbar Cylinder*, claims to be the one who satisfies the deity’s heart (I 10). See also Cyrus’s self-identification in the *Cyrus Cylinder* as the heir to an eternal line of kingship, whose rule Bel (Marduk) and Nabu love, whose kingship they desire for their hearts’ pleasure” (line 22a).

<sup>416</sup> The image of the king as a shepherd elected by the gods is common in the Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions. In the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III, see his Iran Stele I 27 (SIPA *ba-’u-la-a’ tim*), II 17’ (*a-bur-riš ar-te-né ’u-ú-ši-na-a-ti*). In the inscriptions of Sennacherib, see the Chicago/Taylor prism VI 73b–75: “In the future, one of the kings, my descendants, whom the god Aššur and the goddess Ištar name for shepherding (RE.É.UM, /rē’ût/) the land and people ...” (paralleled 15x in other inscriptions), and his common epithets “pious shepherd” (RE.É.UM *mut-nen-nu-ú* [/rē’ût metnennû/; 6x) and “capable shepherd” (RE.É.UM *it-pe-šu* [/rē’ût itpēšu/; 5x). In the inscriptions of Esarhaddon, see the Aššur A Prism I 1’–2’: “they (the gods) [named] me [for shepherd]ing the land and people ([*a-na re-’u*]-*ut* KUR ù UN.MEŠ [*ib-bu*]-*ú zik-ri*)” and many other similar references; see also his characteristic epithet as “true shepherd” (rē’ûm kēnu; 10x). See also the reference to Cyrus as shepherding in the *Cyrus Cylinder* 13–14.



elects and commissions Cyrus to fulfill his purposes.<sup>417</sup> In the context of describing his intention to rebuild Jerusalem and its temple, YHWH says of Cyrus: “He is my shepherd (רֹעֵי), and he shall carry out my purpose” (44:28). As just indicated above, “shepherd” is a common descriptor for kings in Mesopotamian royal texts. But in the traditions preserved in the Hebrew Bible, this descriptor is closely associated with the figure of David, both as an historical figure (2 Sam 5:2 // 1 Chr 11:2; see also Ps 70:71–72) and as the eponymous representative of the Judean monarchy (Ezek 34:23; 37:24; cf. Zech 10:2–3; 11:3–9, 16–17). YHWH’s description of Cyrus as his “shepherd” who, like David’s son, Solomon, will (re)build the temple in Jerusalem, begins to associate the Persian king with the office of the Davidic monarchy.

This association is made even more closely—and indeed scandalously so—by the identification of Cyrus as YHWH’s anointed in 45:1:

Thus says YHWH to his anointed, to Cyrus [לְמַשִּׁיחוֹ לְכוֹרֶשׁ],  
whose right hand I have grasped ...

Throughout the Hebrew Bible, various figures are “anointed” (מִשָּׁח) for a variety purposes, tasks, or offices—including priests (Lev 4:3, 5, 16; 6:13), prophets (1 Kgs 19:5–6), and kings. But the designation *YHWH’s anointed* is applied in the Hebrew Bible “only to the one selected by YHWH to be the legitimate ruler of the Judean people.”<sup>418</sup> It is thus used of unnamed kings of

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<sup>417</sup> Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 245.

<sup>418</sup> Fried, “Cyrus the Messiah? The Historical Background to Isaiah 45:1,” 379–80, 391–92; McKenzie, *Second Isaiah*, 76; Sigmund Mowinckel, *He That Cometh: The Messiah Concept in the Old Testament and Later Judaism*, trans. G. W. Anderson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 5, 7. See also Smith, *Isaiah Chapters XL–LV*, 74; Whybray, *Isaiah 40–66*, 104–5; Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 161; Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 225; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 249.

Israel and Judah,<sup>419</sup> of Saul,<sup>420</sup> and especially of David, the “prototype of the anointed one” and eponymous representative of the Judean monarchy.<sup>421</sup>

<b>Figure 4.2. Hierarchies of Sovereignty in Judean Royal Ideology and Isa 45:1</b>	
<b><u>Judean Royal Ideology</u></b>	<b><u>Isaiah 45:1</u></b>
YHWH	YHWH
↓	↓
“David,” YHWH’s anointed	“Cyrus,” YHWH’s anointed
↓	↓
Judah and the Judeans	Judah and the Judeans

By referring to Cyrus as “YHWH’s anointed,” Second Isaiah thus gives the foreign king a designation traditionally reserved exclusively for the figure of the Judahite monarch.

But what exactly did the prophet intend to communicate by this identification, and how close of an association did he intend to make between Cyrus and the Davidic throne? Some have suggested that Second Isaiah merely meant to describe Cyrus as the next foreign king elected to serve a special role within YHWH’s particular and limited purposes—even if this description was executed in a rhetorically startling fashion. In this case, the reference to Cyrus as YHWH’s anointed would mean little more than the designation of Nebuchadnezzar as YHWH’s “servant” in JerMT 25:9, 27:6, and 43:10.<sup>422</sup> There are good reasons, however, to think that the

<sup>419</sup> 1 Sam 2:10, 35; see also Lam 4:20.

<sup>420</sup> 1 Sam 12:3, 5; 24:7 [6] (x2), 11 [10]; 26:9, 11, 16, 23; 2 Sam 1:14, 16.

<sup>421</sup> 2 Sam 19:22 [21]; Pss 18:51 [50]; 20:7 [6]; 28:8; 89:39 [38]; see also 2 Sam 2:4; 5:3; Pss 2:2; 28:8; 84:10 [9]; See Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 225.

<sup>422</sup> See North, *The Second Isaiah*, 150; Whybray, *Isaiah 40–66*, 104–5; see also Watts, *Isaiah 34–66*, 156.

identification of Cyrus as YHWH's anointed was meant to convey more than the election of the Persian king for YHWH's limited purposes.

The significance of Second Isaiah's identification of Cyrus as YHWH's anointed can be appreciated fully only in light of how the prophet deals with the figure of David and the covenantal promises made to him elsewhere in the collection. Remarkably, David is mentioned only once in Isaiah 40–55 (and not at all in chs. 56–66). This singular occurrence comes in the final oracle of the collection:

<sup>3</sup> Incline your ear, and come to me;  
 Listen, so that you may live.  
 I will make with you an everlasting covenant [וְאָכַרְתָּה לָכֶם בְּרִית עוֹלָם]  
 The sure and gracious promises made to David [חֲסָדֵי דָוִד הַנְּאֻמִּים].  
<sup>4</sup> See, I made him a witness to the peoples [אֻמִּים],  
 A ruler [נְגִיד] and commander [מְצַוֶּה] for the peoples [אֻמִּים].  
<sup>5</sup> See, you shall call a nation [גּוֹי] that you do not know,  
 And a nation [גּוֹי] that that did not know you shall run to you,  
 Because of YHWH your God, the Holy One of Israel,  
 For he has glorified you. (55:3–5)

This brief oracle takes up the themes of the traditional promises to David, encapsulated by the phrase חֲסָדֵי דָוִד (cf. 2 Chr 6:42),<sup>423</sup> and radically reworks them. The prophet has YHWH announcing that these traditional promises were now being made with those addressed by the oracle: YHWH's people as a whole (v. 3). The prophet thus “democratizes” the promises to David (חֲסָדֵי דָוִד), identifying YHWH's people as the party on the other end of YHWH's eternal covenant (בְּרִית עוֹלָם; see 2 Sam 23:5).<sup>424</sup> It is the people—and not the figure of the Davidic

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<sup>423</sup> Understanding this phrase as an objective genitive; so H. G. M. Williamson, “‘The Sure Mercies of David’: Subjective or Objective Genitive?,” *JSS* 23 (1978): 31–49; Whybray, *Isaiah 40–66*, 191; Childs, *Isaiah*, 434–5; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 270–71; Blenkinsopp, *David Remembered: Kingship and National Identity in Ancient Israel*, 60 n. 9; Goldingay and Payne, *Isaiah 40–55*, 372.

<sup>424</sup> Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 240; Blenkinsopp, *David Remembered: Kingship and National Identity in Ancient Israel*, 60–62; Goldingay and Payne, *Isaiah 40–55*, 2: Commentary on Isaiah 44.24–55.13: 40, 372–74; Sweeney, *Isaiah 40–66*, 34.

king—who are now assigned the royal role as witness and commander of peoples (vv. 4–5).<sup>425</sup>

This democratization of the דודי דוד represents a major modification of traditional Judean ideology. As von Rad memorably puts it, “[i]n thus ‘democratising’ the tradition Deutero-Isaiah actually robbed it of its specific content.”<sup>426</sup> The oracle “takes over the language of everlasting covenant, commitment, and faithfulness,” as Goldingay and Payne observe, “but omits the key motif of the promise that one of David’s sons would sit on David’s throne in favor of relating [Psalm 89’s] promises to the people as a whole.”<sup>427</sup> Crucially, this omission creates ideological space for Cyrus, YHWH’s anointed, to occupy the role of the one who sits on the Davidic throne.

The prophet’s handling of the traditional royal ideology of Judah thus had two closely related components: (1) it reworked the eternal covenant made to David, “democratizing” it to the people as a whole, while also (2) identifying Cyrus, YHWH’s anointed, as the legitimate occupant of the Davidic throne. This ideological move allowed the prophet to assimilate Cyrus into the indigenous ideological framework of Judah while preserving a measure of continuity in the royal covenant between YHWH and his people.<sup>428</sup> But it also quashed any hopes for the restoration of the Davidic monarchy, which, accordingly, play no part in the prophet’s thought.<sup>429</sup>

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<sup>425</sup> See Richard J. Clifford, “The Unity of the Book of Isaiah and Its Cosmogonic Language,” *CBQ* 55 (1993): 15.

<sup>426</sup> *Old Testament Theology*, 240.

<sup>427</sup> Goldingay and Payne, *Isaiah 40–55*, 372. See also Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 442.

<sup>428</sup> See Newsom, “God’s Other: The Intractable Problem of the Gentile King in Judean and Early Jewish Literature,” 44.

<sup>429</sup> Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 240; Blenkinsopp, *David Remembered: Kingship and National Identity in Ancient Israel*, 61–62; Sweeney, *Isaiah 40–66*, 34.

### 4.3.2.3. *Second Isaiah on Cyrus: Resistance and Rhetoric*

The prophet's identification of a Cyrus as YHWH's anointed and his radical innovation of traditional Judean royal ideology must have come as a shock to the prophet's contemporaries.<sup>430</sup>

"How could the prophet imply that God had handed over to a foreigner a theology which belonged to the Davidic king?"<sup>431</sup> As Sidney Smith observed regarding the likely affront of these claims to the prophet's contemporaries: "The [inevitable] consequence ... of this proclamation of Cyrus must have been that the prophet would seem to some of his own people a traitor, worthy of death."<sup>432</sup> Though the rhetorical flair of Smith's suggestion is itself quite bold, there are good reasons to suspect that the prophet's message was met with resistance from at least some of his contemporaries.

The first is that this message about Cyrus went directly against the hopes of his fellow exiles who longed for and expected a restoration of the Davidic monarchy. The promises made to the Davidic king were traditionally articulated and understood as perpetually binding (see Ps 89:27–37; 2 Sam 7:8–17; 23:1–7). It is therefore not surprising that hopes and expectations for a descendant of David to sit on the Judean throne once again persisted throughout the exile. Second Isaiah's immediate forerunner, Ezekiel, for example, had envisioned such a restoration for the Davidic monarchy:

I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, YHWH, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, YHWH, have spoken. (34:23–24)

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<sup>430</sup> Scholars often suggest that the use of the designation must have been "shocking" to the prophet's contemporaries; see, e.g., North, *The Second Isaiah*, 150; Whybray, *Isaiah 40–66*, 105; Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 159; Watts, *Isaiah 34–66*, 156; Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 224; Blenkinsopp, *David Remembered: Kingship and National Identity in Ancient Israel*, 66; idem, *Isaiah 40–55*, 248–49; Fried, "Cyrus the Messiah? The Historical Background to Isaiah 45:1," 392.

<sup>431</sup> Fried, "Cyrus the Messiah? The Historical Background to Isaiah 45:1," 392; see also Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 225: "Cyrus is the new David! The dignity of the 'anointed one' is transferred to a foreign ruler."

<sup>432</sup> Smith, *Isaiah Chapters XL–LV*, 74.

My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall follow my ordinances and be careful to observe my statutes. They shall live in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, in which your ancestors lived; they and their children and their children's children shall live there forever; and my servant David shall be their prince forever. (37:24–25)

As we began to see earlier, the nationalistic hopes placed upon the Davidic figure of Zerubbabel by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah attest to the continued persistence of such hopes after the exile (see, e.g. Hag 2:20–23; Zech 4:1–14). Thus Second Isaiah's identification of Cyrus as YHWH's anointed, the legitimate occupant of Davidic throne, must have been met by resistance from those fellow Judeans who held out hope for a future restoration of the Davidic monarchy.

Another source of resistance may have come from those who maintained a measure of loyalty to Nabonidus. At least while the outcome of Cyrus's inevitable conflict with Babylon remained unclear, no group had more at stake in keeping in the good graces of Nabonidus than did "the Judahite royal family and its retainers," as Newsom observes, "since their basic financial support and their hope of reestablishment as a loyal dependent kingdom would have rested in his hands."<sup>433</sup> The prophet's message certainly posed a risk to these relations, for, as Albertz suggests, "[t]o the ears of the Babylonian royal house, such a message was high treason."<sup>434</sup>

But others, too, had a stake in Nabonidus's regime. Pockets of loyalty to Nabonidus were likely found among the exiled artisans (2 Kgs 24:14, 16; 25:11) and their descendants who found employment in Nabonidus's building activities and among the deportees who were conscripted for service in Nabonidus's army. Citing the fact that the very sites named in Nabonidus's Harran inscription (Teima, Dadanu, Padakku, Hibra, Yahidu, Yatribu) are identified as Jewish settlements in Medieval sources, it is sometimes suggested that the Judean exiles were "strongly

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<sup>433</sup> Newsom, "Nabonidus in Jewish Memory," 274. See also the discussion of hopes for repatriation under the sponsorship of the Babylonian rulers in Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 109–11.

<sup>434</sup> Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 111.

represented among these soldiers and settlers in Arabia.”<sup>435</sup> If the argument that YHWH had now elected Cyrus as his anointed had reached such soldiers and settlers, it is by no means clear that they would have preferred a regime change.

#### 4.3.3.1.1. YHWH’s Freedom and the Election of Cyrus

That his message regarding Cyrus would prove shocking—if not dangerous—to his contemporaries was not lost upon the prophet. The rhetorically supercharged argumentation of chs. 40–48 responds to, or at least anticipates, resistance from fellow Judeans.<sup>436</sup> The prophet frequently disputes the objections (real or anticipated) of his audience, appeals to the validity of prophetic authority and his own divine inspiration (41:22–23, 25–29; 44:7–8, 26–28; 48:3–5, 16b), and expresses his exasperation at those who do not (or will not) believe his message (42:18–25; 43:22–28; 45:9–13; 46:8–13; 48:1–11). For our present purposes, what is important to notice is how the prophet frames YHWH’s election of Cyrus rhetorically in order to substantiate his claims and to persuade his audience of their theological legitimacy.

Second Isaiah frames his controversial message about YHWH’s election of Cyrus by establishing YHWH’s freedom as the sovereign creator of the cosmos.<sup>437</sup> The relationship between YHWH’s election of Cyrus and YHWH’s status as creator is made most closely in the oracle of 44:24–45:7. This oracle begins with a long list of self-predications (44:24–28). At the

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<sup>435</sup> Gadd, “The Harran Inscriptions of Nabonidus,” 86–88 (quotation 86); Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 110–11; Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus*, 174; Newsom, “Nabonidus in Jewish Memory,” 273.

<sup>436</sup> See Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 252.

<sup>437</sup> Discourse about YHWH as creator and cosmic deity pervades Isa 40–48; see, e.g., the studies by Clifford, “The Unity of the Book of Isaiah and Its Cosmogonic Language”; Richard J. Clifford, “The Hebrew Scriptures and the Theology of Creation,” *TS* 46 (1985): 517–20; Theodore M. Ludwig, “The Traditions of the Establishing of the Earth in Deutero-Isaiah,” *JBL* 92 (1973): 345–57; Carroll Stuhlmueller, “‘First and Last’ and ‘Yahweh—Creator’ in Deutero-Isaiah,” *CBQ* 29 (1967): 189–205; C. L. Crouch, “Adapting the Cosmological Tradition in Isaiah 40–45,” *SJOT* 2 (2011): 260–75.

head of this list, YHWH identifies as the one who formed the addressees (24a) and as the sole creator of the cosmos (24b):

44:24 Thus says YHWH, your Redeemer,  
 Who formed you [יצרך] in the womb:  
 It is I, YHWH, who made (makes) everything [עשה כל]  
 Who alone stretched (stretches) out the heavens [נטה שמים לבדין]  
 And who by myself spread(s) out the earth [רקע הארץ מאתי] ...

The motifs of YHWH's stretching out the heavens (see also 40:12, 22; 42:5; 45:12, 18; Job 9:8 [cf. 26:7–9]; Pss 18:9; 104:2; 144:5) and spreading out the earth recall the deity's primal acts by which he created an orderly cosmos.<sup>438</sup> Although these phrases invoke traditional cosmological conceptions, they are here put to a novel use: namely, to emphasize YHWH's singular status as the one who “makes everything” (24a). This point is driven home in the final lines of the oracle, which relate the most explicitly monotheistic discourse in the entire Hebrew Bible (Isa 45:5–7):<sup>439</sup>

... 45:5 I am YHWH, and there is no other;<sup>440</sup>  
 besides me there is no god.  
 I arm you (Cyrus), though you do not know me,  
 6 so that they may know, from the rising of the sun  
 and from the west,  
 that there is no one besides me;  
 I am YHWH, and there is no other.  
 7 I form light and create darkness [יוצר אור ובורא חשך],  
 I make weal and create woe [עשה שלום ובורא רע];<sup>441</sup><sup>442</sup>

<sup>438</sup> See the insightful study by Norman C. Habel, “He Who Stretches Out the Heavens,” *CBQ* 34 (1972): 417–30.

<sup>439</sup> See, e.g., Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 191–92.

<sup>440</sup> Cf. 1 Kgs 8:60.

<sup>441</sup> Cf. 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> (XXXVIII 13), which reads תוב instead of שלום.

<sup>442</sup> Citing the dualistic imagery of “light” and “darkness” in 45:7 and the connection between cosmology and kingship, some scholars have sought to find a Persian source for this thought, especially in the teachings of Zoroaster as preserved in Yasna 44:4–5 of the Avesta; see, e.g., Smith, “II Isaiah and the Persians,” 419–20;



I, YHWH, do all these things.

YHWH's identification and commissioning of Cyrus (44:28–45:6) is thus bookended by self-predications in which the deity identifies as the sole creator of everything.

Establishing YHWH's singular status as the sole creator of all that exists serves to establish the deity's absolute freedom over his creation and his people.<sup>443</sup> YHWH's status as the creator of the cosmos and the one who forms his people (see also 43:15) entails a creator-creature distinction that renders YHWH's will indisputable. The prophet leverages this point in the ensuing oracle (45:9–13), which takes up the themes of 44:24–45:7 and casts them into a polemic against those who would dispute YHWH's election of Cyrus:

<sup>9</sup> Woe to the one who strives [רָבַ] with its Maker [יָצַר],  
earthen vessels with the potter!

Does the clay say to the one who fashions it [יָצַר],  
“What are you making?”  
or “Your work has no handles”?

<sup>10</sup> Woe to anyone who says to a father  
“What are you begetting?”  
or to a woman “With what are you in labor?”

<sup>11</sup> Thus says YHWH, the Holy one of Israel, and its Maker [יָצַר]:  
Will you question me about my children,  
or command me concerning the work of my hands?

<sup>12</sup> It is I who made the earth,  
and the human(s) upon it I created.  
my own hands stretched out the heavens,  
and I command all its hosts

<sup>13</sup> I raised him (Cyrus) up in victory,  
and all his roads I made straight.  
He will build my city and let my exiles go.

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Achenbach, “Das Kyros-Orakel in Jesaja 44,24–45,7 im Lichte altorientalischer Parallelen,” 173–83. Although these parallels are no doubt fascinating, there are a few difficulties that beset this position: first, it is not clear that the teachings of Zoroaster were important for the Persians at this point; second, the source of this imagery can be found in traditional sources indigenous to Judah (e.g., Gen 1:3–5); and third, it is hard to grasp why the prophet would appeal to or attempt to subvert these Persian ideas in an attempt to persuade his fellow Judeans of the significance of Cyrus. See also the mediating position of Smith, who suggests that this imagery has its source in Jewish thought but that it was here shaped for Cyrus himself to understand (*Isaiah Chapters XL–LV*, 58–59).

<sup>443</sup> See Fried, “Cyrus the Messiah? The Historical Background to Isaiah 45:1,” 376; Blenkinsopp, *David Remembered: Kingship and National Identity in Ancient Israel*, 66.

The logic of the prophet's argument and the link that it establishes between YHWH's freedom as creator and the election of the foreign king finds a precedent in the oracle of Jer 27:5–6.<sup>444</sup> As we have already seen, Second Isaiah takes up and reworks this oracle at the conclusion of the polemic just cited (49:12–13):

**JerMT 27:5–6**

(Plusses of MT in italics)

*<sup>5</sup> אֲנִי עָשִׂיתִי אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֶת־הָאָדָם וְאֶת־הַבְּהֵמָה  
אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי הָאָרֶץ בְּכַח הַגְּדוֹל וּבְזִרְעוֹנֵי הַנְּטוּיָה  
וְנָתַתִּיהָ לְאִשְׁרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֵינָי:  
<sup>6</sup> וְעַתָּה אֲנִי נָתַתִּי אֶת־כָּל־הָאָרְצוֹת הָאֵלֶּה בְּיַד  
נְבוּכַדְנֶאֶצַּר מֶלֶךְ־בָּבֶל עַבְדִּי וְגַם אֶת־חַיֵּי הַשָּׂדֶה  
נָתַתִּי לוֹ לְעַבְדּוֹ:*

<sup>5</sup> It is I who have made the earth *with the human(s) and animal(s) that are on the earth* by my great power and my outstretched arm and I give it to whom it may seem good in my eyes,

<sup>6</sup> *And now* I have given *all* these lands into the hand of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, my servant, and I have given to him even the wild animals of the fields to serve him.

**Isa 45:12–13**

<sup>12</sup> אֲנִי עָשִׂיתִי אֶרֶץ וָאָדָם עָלֶיהָ בְּרַאֲתִי אֲנִי יְדֵי נְטוּ  
שָׁמַיִם וְכָל צְבָאָם צִוִּיתִי  
<sup>13</sup> אֲנִי הֵעִירְתֵהוּ בְצַדֵּק וְכָל דַּרְכָיו אִישָׁר הוּא־יִבְנֶה  
עִירֵי וּגְלוֹתֵי יִשְׁלַח לֹא בַמַּחִיר וְלֹא בַשְּׂחָד אָמַר יְהוָה  
צְבָאוֹת

<sup>12</sup> It is I who made earth, and the human(s) upon it I created; my own hands stretched out the heavens, and I command all its hosts.

<sup>13</sup> I myself raised him [Cyrus] up in victory, and all his roads I made straight. He will build my city and let my exiles go.

In his response to the particular political challenges brought by Nebuchadnezzar, Jeremiah grounded the election of the foreign king within the will of YHWH, who, as the creator of the earth, was free to do as he pleases.<sup>445</sup> In doing so, he created a model for assimilating the foreign king into a Yahwhistic framework that was contextually transferrable (see also §5 [Dan 1–6]).

<sup>444</sup> So Paul, “Literary and Ideological Echoes of Jeremiah in Deutero-Isaiah,” 407–8; Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 60–61.

<sup>445</sup> The link between YHWH's status as the creator of the cosmos and his freedom to act is also developed in the Psalmic tradition from the exilic era. In Ps 89, cosmic creation imagery is employed both to fund the Davidic royal ideology (89:9–13 [10–12], 37–38 [36–37]), and by the inclusion of the exilic redaction, to protest God's apparent failure to ensure success of the monarchy. Similarly, the cosmic creation imagery in Ps 74:12–17 is used to ground an appeal for an historical intervention for God's cause against God's enemies (vv. 18–23). YHWH's cosmic power thus became an important locus for grounding claims about YHWH's power in relation to political events in the exilic period; the closest parallel to the language and rhetorical logic of Isa 45, however, remains Jer 27:5–6.

Just as political conditions could change, so could YHWH's will. Jeremiah proclaimed that YHWH, in his sovereign freedom as creator, had chosen to delegate sovereignty to his servant Nebuchadnezzar, whom the Judeans were to be subservient if they wished to live (Jer 27:11–12). Now, according to Second Isaiah, YHWH had elected Cyrus as his royal “anointed one” to enact his judgment on Babylon and to restore the fortunes of his people. It was to this message, and all it entailed for the Judean monarchy, that the Judeans were to incline their ears so that they might live (Isa 55:3).

#### 4.3.3.1.2. Summary

To summarize briefly, the discourse of the Cyrus Songs in Second Isaiah configures YHWH and Cyrus into hierarchies of (1) agency and (2) sovereignty. This configuration subsumes the activities of Cyrus within an exclusively Yahwistic framework and establishes the special relationship between the deity and the king. Through the kinds of actions that YHWH is said to have taken with Cyrus and especially by the royal designations that applied to him, Cyrus is identified as YHWH's elected royal figure and the legitimate occupant of the Davidic throne. Second Isaiah created the ideological space for Cyrus to occupy this role by democratizing the traditional covenantal promises made to David, transferring them to the people as a whole. Anticipating (or responding to) resistance to this message, the prophet anchored his arguments within the divine will by establishing YHWH's absolute, sovereign freedom as the creator of all that exists.

#### 4.3.3.3. The Message of Second Isaiah and Persian Propaganda: A Hybrid Discourse?

Since the discovery of the publication of *Cyrus Cylinder* nearly a century and a half ago, scholars have recognized that there are many parallels between the message of Second Isaiah and the presentation of Cyrus in the Persian propaganda. These parallels are of two closely related

kinds.<sup>446</sup> The first and most obvious is comprised of the remarkable number of phrases and images that are found in both the *Cylinder* and the Cyrus Songs in Isa 40–48 (see §4.3.2.2 above). The second set comprises what Morton Smith described as “remote parallels,” which “show variant forms of one theological structure.”<sup>447</sup> In each text, the respective deity summons Cyrus, the foreign king, to punish Babylon’s ruler (Nabonidus) and elects Cyrus for kingship, an office he proceeds to occupy righteously by liberating the people and taking steps to restore the capital city and its cult.<sup>448</sup>

The parallels to the *Cyrus Cylinder* are so dense within Isa 40–48 that scholars have had to reckon with whether or not they are to be explained by some kind of direct dependence between the two compositions. Recognizing that (1) the *Cylinder* was almost certainly not dependent upon Second Isaiah’s oracles and (2) that these oracles most likely predate the composition of the *Cylinder* (and so could not be dependent upon it),<sup>449</sup> scholars have advocated for essentially two plausible explanations. One possible channel of transmission for explaining the parallels was first sketched by Smith, who proposed that Cyrus’s agents must have circulated pro-Persian propaganda of the type found in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person section of the *Cylinder* among the exiled Judeans in Babylon in the years leading up to the Persian eclipse of the city.<sup>450</sup> As Blenkinsopp suggests, it is quite plausible that pro-Persian propaganda was circulating throughout the Near East and that it could have been peddled out by the priests of Marduk in the

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<sup>446</sup> See Smith, “II Isaiah and the Persians,” 415.

<sup>447</sup> Smith, “II Isaiah and the Persians,” 415.

<sup>448</sup> For a clear and concise comparative table of these parallels, see Thomas C. Römer, “Yhwh, the Goddess and Evil: Is ‘Monotheism’ an Adequate Concept to Describe the Hebrew Bible’s Discourses about the God of Israel,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 34 (2013): 3.

<sup>449</sup> See Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 158; Whybray, *Isaiah 40–66*, 105.

<sup>450</sup> Smith, “II Isaiah and the Persians,” 417–20.

years leading up to Cyrus's march on Babylon.<sup>451</sup> This theory provides a plausible mechanism for contact between Second Isaiah and the pro-Persian propaganda that would account for the many parallels in terms of literary dependence. This argument is difficult to evaluate, however, because all of the parallel images and phrases shared between these texts are *also* found in other royal texts in the cuneiform tradition. For that reason, many scholars follow the influential suggestion by R. Kittel that the similarities should be explained by a common familiarity with Babylonian court-style (*Hofstil*) that influenced each text independently.<sup>452</sup>

Even if one does not posit a direct dependence between these discourses, the striking similarities between them nevertheless attest to the extent to which the discourse of Second Isaiah was shaped by the attempt to assimilate Cyrus, and the events he set in motion, into a Judean ideological framework. The rise of Cyrus brought with it real prospects for the restoration of Jerusalem, its temple, and its populace. But these prospects would come at the cost of continued compliance to Persian hegemony. The discourse of Second Isaiah attests to the willingness of at least one influential voice among the exiled Judeans to pay this cost by adapting traditional Judean royal ideology.

Second Isaiah was not alone in his willingness to assimilate the Persian king into his indigenous ideological framework. As Lisbeth Fried observes, the *Cyrus Cylinder* and Udjahorresnet's statue attest to the same ideological move.<sup>453</sup> The priests of Marduk were willing

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<sup>451</sup> On the plausibility of the circulation of pro-Persian propaganda in Babylon leading up to the takeover, see Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 249; Blenkinsopp, *David Remembered: Kingship and National Identity in Ancient Israel*, 65.

<sup>452</sup> R. Kittel, "Cyrus und Deuterocesaja," *ZAW* 18 (1898): 149–62. See also the influential analysis of Second Isaiah's *Hofstil* in Hugo Gressmann, *Der Messias*, FRLANT 26 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1929), 59–63.

<sup>453</sup> Fried, "Cyrus the Messiah? The Historical Background to Isaiah 45:1," 386–93.

to identify Cyrus as Marduk's chosen King of Babylon, while Udjahorresnet was willing to assist Cambyses in assuming the title and office of Egyptian Pharaoh.

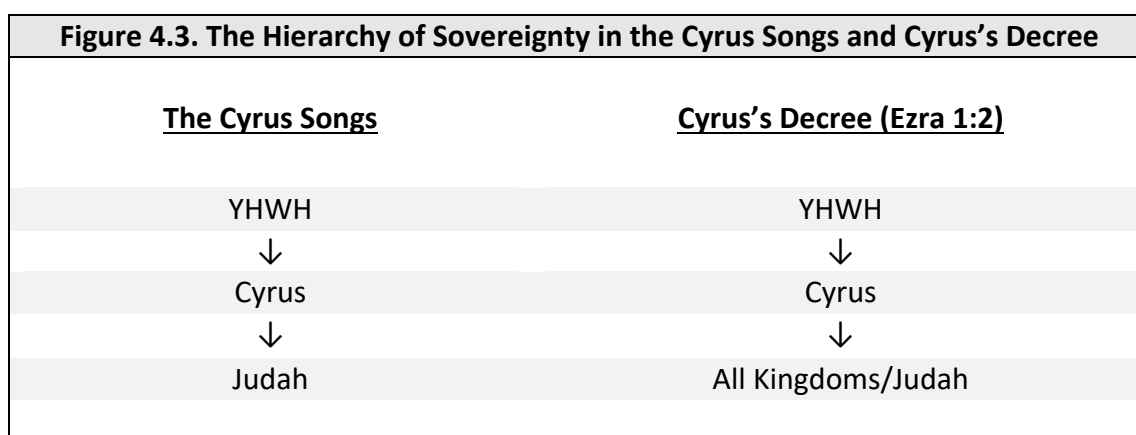
<b>Figure 4.3. Hierarchies of Sovereignty in the Cyrus Cylinder, Udjahorresnet's Statue, and the Cyrus Songs</b>		
<b><u>Cyrus Cylinder</u></b>	<b><u>Udjahorresnet's Statue</u></b>	<b><u>The Cyrus Songs</u></b>
Marduk et al.	Neith et al.	YHWH
↓	↓	↓
Cyrus	Cambyses	Cyrus
↓	↓	↓
Babylon	Egypt	Judah

In each of these cases, representatives of the subordinate culture modified traditional royal ideology in order to create space for the Persian king to occupy the local throne. And, in each case, this compliance was rewarded by the restoration, preservation, or promotion of local institutions. These representatives were thus collaborators. Although such collaboration came with benefits, it also left an indelible mark on the discourse and royal ideology of the subordinate cultures, which, in their restricted agency, had limited choices in adapting to the new political conditions wrought by Cyrus.

At the same time, Second Isaiah's ideological accommodation to Cyrus was not a one-sided affair. As the Pro-Persian propaganda from Babylon and Egypt (and perhaps from Ur as well) illustrates, the Persian kings were also willing to assimilate themselves into the ideological frameworks of subordinate populations. Unfortunately, we do not have the same kind of *in situ* primary sources relating to the Persian interactions with the Judeans as we do with the larger nations. But the decrees attributed to Cyrus in Ezra, especially that in Ezra 1:2 // 2 Chr 36:23, reflect the same policy of accommodation:

“Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: YHWH, the God of Heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.”

The declaration attributed to Cyrus assigns the source of his sovereignty to YHWH (see Jer 27:5–6), much like he attributed his kingship over Babylon to Marduk in the *Cylinder*.<sup>454</sup>



Such accommodation by the foreign king represents an implicit acknowledgement of the limits of his own power. The terrible fact underlying all imperialism is that it requires the active participation of subordinate cultures to sustain the hegemonic conditions. This was especially true for the Persians, who could not have extended and maintained their hegemony over so large an empire without accommodating to select cultures in ways that encouraged compliance—a fact that they knew well. They thus sought to exploit the limited agency of subordinate cultures to bolster their own hegemony. One important way that they did so was by accommodating their discourse to local ideological structures.

What emerges at the interface between these cultures on opposite sides of the imperial encounter is a hybrid discourse. In negotiating their unequal power-relations, the discourses of

<sup>454</sup> See also the phraseology of the inscription on the foundation cylinder of the temple of Sîn in Ur, whose speaker is perhaps Cyrus: “Sîn, the Nannar [illuminator?] of heaven and earth, with his favourable omen delivered into my hands the four quarters of the world. I returned the gods to their shrines” (Gadd and Legrain, *Ur Excavations*, 96).

these dominant and subordinate cultures interacted with and mutually influenced one another in ways that were inescapable. For Second Isaiah, YHWH's new saving activities through Cyrus entailed a necessary adaptation of traditional Judean royal ideology. The same was true for the discourses of the Marduk priesthood in Babylon and of Udjahorresnet in Egypt. As for the Persians, their discourse, too, was influenced by encounters with various subordinate cultures, whose cultural symbols, values, and traditions shaped their discourse and influenced their allocation of resources. In the case of the Judean diaspora, the Persians were willing to accommodate their discourse to the theology of those who wished to return to Judah (Ezra 1:2–4; 6:2b–5) and to sponsor the restoration of YHWH's temple in Jerusalem—all in exchange for continued subordination.



## CHAPTER 5

IN THE COURT OF THE KING:  
GOD AND THE GENTILE EMPEROR IN DANIEL 1–6

## 5.1. INTRODUCTION

So far in this study I have analyzed the discourse about YHWH's relationship with foreign kings at several critical junctures in the history of Israel and Judah. Emerging at the foreground in key passages across the prophetic corpus, this discourse took shape in the form of highly contextual responses to the immediate political and ideological challenges brought by foreign empires. The rapid encroachment of the Neo-Assyrian Empire across Syria-Palestine in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE triggered a response from First Isaiah, who subsumed these novel realities within a Yahwistic framework in the course of contesting the characteristic claims of Assyrian royal ideology (§2). In the early 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, the oracles of Jeremiah provided models for understanding the meaning and significance of Nebuchadnezzar's devastating destruction of Jerusalem and the forced migration of Judean populations to Babylonia (§3). And Second Isaiah, in the period leading up to the Persian eclipse of Babylon, offered a radical interpretation of the meteoric rise of Cyrus the Great and its import for the future of the Judean populace (§4). At each of these critical junctures, the rise and fall of Gentile empires elicited responses from the prophets (and the stewards of their messages) that provided interpretive models for making sense of the new political conditions and ideological challenges within a Yahwistic framework.

But as Persian hegemony stretched on into the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, a different set of ideological challenges—less immediate, but no less vital—began to present themselves to Jewish communities throughout the empire. Although the fall of the Neo-Babylonians to the Persians meant that some among the Eastern Diaspora eventually returned to their former capital and

rebuilt YHWH's temple, the Persian period (539–333 BCE) did not see the reestablishment of an independent kingdom in Judah. Jewish communities throughout this period were thus faced with the challenge of making sense of the *persistence*—and possible *permanence*—of life without political autonomy within the structures of empire that were held together by the sovereignty of Gentile kings. Ideologically, this challenge had to be met on at least two closely related fronts. First, it was necessary to address the situation “from above” by working out a *theological* model for understanding the manifest political sovereignty possessed and exercised by Gentile kings. What was needed was a model that could help make sense of the very structure of empire itself while maintaining a commitment to the ultimate supremacy of YHWH. And second, it was necessary to think about the problem “from below” by negotiating the challenges and prospects of actually living within these political structures: it was one thing to posit a theological model for explaining Gentile imperialism in principle; it was another to know what to do when the demands made by YHWH and the Gentile emperor came into conflict with one another.

My aim in this chapter is to examine the responses to such challenges as they came to expression in the court tales of the Book of Daniel (chapters 1–6). More than any other discursive tradition preserved in the Hebrew Bible, the Danielic court tales explore the relationship between divine and imperial sovereignty and the corresponding implications for Jewish life within the structures of Gentile empire. Attending to the content and character of this discourse will allow us to trace the most direct and imaginatively powerful engagement with the ideological challenges of imperial rule that developed among Jewish communities in the Persian and Hellenistic periods as they began to forge a way forward as a people without a state.

Toward this end, the story I wish to tell here will proceed in two parts. In the first part, I aim to describe exactly how the court tales tackle the ideological challenges of Gentile

imperialism through discourse about YHWH's relationship with the foreign king. I begin by providing a brief discussion of the complex literary history of the collection as it came together in the Masoretic version (MT) of Daniel. This discussion will allow us to observe how the literary formation of the collection can inform our understanding of its rhetorical shape and function. I then examine the theological politics of the collection as it addresses the challenges presented by the Gentile emperor from "above" and "below." Here I suggest that the court tales take their cue from Jeremiah 27:5–6 by assuming a model of divine delegation of sovereignty to the foreign king and work out its implications through a creative appropriation of the court tale genre. The narrative structure of the court tale and its capacity to posit and resolve conflicts about power relations imaginatively made this form of discourse especially useful for performing symbolic work on the intractable ideological challenges of life under imperial hegemony—not least that of making sense of the political sovereignty of Gentile kings. But the intrinsically comedic structure of the court tale and its "ideological commitment to the *legitimacy* of the court" meant that while these narratives had the capacity to contain the ideological challenges of imperial hegemony within a symbolic framework, this containment also entailed and established an ideologically static view of the political structure of Gentile empire itself.<sup>455</sup> The discourse of the Danielic court tales, in other words, underwrote the very structures of empire to which they responded in the first place. I thus seek to advance the strand of analysis that has recognized the complex ways in which the court tales present an ambivalent view of Gentile empire through

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<sup>455</sup> Newsom, "Resistance Is Futile!," 170. The argument that court tale genre is intrinsically committed to the legitimacy of the court as the realm in which justice to expression was first made in the perceptive study of Lawrence M. Wills, *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King: Ancient Jewish Court Legends*, HDR 26 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 21. See also W. Lee Humphreys, "A Life-Style for Diaspora: A Study of the Tales of Esther and Daniel," *JBL* 92 (1972): 217.

discourse about the Gentile king.<sup>456</sup> The second part of this chapter attempts to show how the eschatological schema developed in the dream-vision of Daniel 2 sought to shatter this stasis. Likely inspired by the cultural trauma that followed the defeat of the Persian empire in Babylon, the dream-interpretation sequence in chapter 2 set the structures of empire itself within a finite temporal framework and posited a future in which the universal imperium previously possessed by Gentile kings would be superseded by an eternal kingdom established by God Most High. This innovation would prove to have enormous consequences for the development of early Jewish eschatology and the future of Danielic discourse on empire—the subject of my next chapter.

## 5.2. THE COURT TALES OF DANIEL

### 5.2.1. The Literary History of the Danielic Court Tales and the Masoretic Tradition

The court tales of Daniel have an extremely complex literary history.<sup>457</sup> For our present purposes, it is necessary to touch upon two aspects of this history that allow us to make important observations about how the literary formation of the collection can inform our understanding of its discourse about the figure of the Gentile king.

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<sup>456</sup> See Anthea E. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 226; Danna Nolan Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty: A Story of Stories in Daniel 1–6*, JSOTSup 72 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1988), 161–62; Newsom, “Resistance Is Futile!”; Newsom and Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 15–17; Frisch, *The Danielic Discourse on Empire*, 104–6.

<sup>457</sup> For concise overviews of the history of scholarship on the literary history of Daniel, see H. H. Rowley, *The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the Old Testament* (London: Lutterworth, 1952), 237–68; Klaus Koch, *Das Buch Daniel*, ed. Till Niewisch and Jürgen Tubach, EdF 144 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980), 55–77; John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 24–38.

### 5.2.1.1. Tradition-History: From Nabonidus to Nebuchadnezzar

The first is that at least some of the individual narratives comprising the collection have long tradition-histories. Although the collection in its present form dates to the Hellenistic Era (ca. late 3<sup>rd</sup> to early 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE) and received its decisive formation during the *pax Persica*, several of the tales appear to have their tradition-historical roots in the Neo-Babylonian period. In the course of this lengthy tradition-history, the tales underwent important transformations that are relevant for understanding their discourse on the Gentile king. Perhaps most significantly, comparative evidence from cuneiform inscriptions pertaining to the reign of Nabonidus (556–539 BCE) suggests that as many as four of the narratives in the collection were originally about Nabonidus (chapters 2–4/5) and were only later transferred to the more (in)famous figure of Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>458</sup> The clearest and most widely acknowledged case for this transferal is found in the story of the “Nebuchadnezzar’s madness” in Daniel 4.<sup>459</sup> Due to the close parallels between

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<sup>458</sup> A number of parallels (some more compelling than others) were drawn between the Nebuchadnezzar stories in Daniel and the inscriptions pertaining to Nabonidus (especially the *Verse Account*) already by Sidney Smith (*Babylonian Historical Texts Relating to the Capture and Downfall of Babylon* [London: Methuen, 1924], 27–97). Building on Smith’s initial observations, a more focused discussion of the transferal of these stories from Nabonidus to Nebuchadnezzar was offered by Wolfram von Soden, “Eine babylonische Volksüberlieferung von Nabonid in den Danielerzählungen,” *ZAW* 53 (1935): 81–89, who drew attention to: (1) Nabonidus’s unparalleled concern for dreams (cf. Dan 2, 4); (2) the parallel between Nebuchadnezzar’s construction of the gold statue (Dan 3) and the report that Nabonidus produced and introduced a hideous statue of Šin in the Esagila (*Verse Account* I 15–8); (3) a likely link between Nebuchadnezzar’s exile to the wilderness in Dan 4 and Nabonidus’s lengthy sojourn in Tema; (4) a similarity between Nabonidus’s neglect of the Marduk temple and Belshazzar’s defiling of the temple vessels from Jerusalem. See also Martin McNamara, “Nabonidus and the Book of Daniel,” *ITQ* 37 (1970): 131–49; Reinhard Gregor Kratz, “Nabonid und Kyros,” in *Das Judentum im Zeitalter des Zweiten Tempels*, FAT 42 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 53. For recent overviews of the evidence in this direction, see Carol A. Newsom, “Why Nabonidus? Excavating Traditions from Qumran, the Hebrew Bible, and Neo-Babylonian Sources,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Transmission of Traditions and Production of Texts*, ed. Sarianna Metso, Hindy Najman, and Eileen Schuller, STDJ 92 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 57–79; idem, “Now You See Him, Now You Don’t: Nabonidus in Jewish Memory,” in *Remembering Biblical Figures in the Late Persian and Early Hellenistic Periods: Social Memory and Imagination*, ed. Diana V. Edelman and Ehud Ben Zvi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 270–82.

<sup>459</sup> For a judicious summary, see Matthias Henze, *The Madness of King Nebuchadnezzar: The Ancient Near Eastern Origins and Early History of Interpretation of Daniel 4*, JSJSup 61 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 51–99, esp. 63–73. See also P. R. Davies, *Daniel*, Old Testament Guides (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 41–42. Collins, *Daniel*, 216–21.

this story and Nabonidus's Harran B inscription, scholars have long suspected that the story in Daniel 4 reflects traditions originally about Nabonidus.<sup>460</sup> This suspicion was essentially confirmed by the discovery among the Dead Sea Scrolls of 4Q242 Prayer of Nabonidus, which yielded additional tradition-historical parallels suggesting that the story in its earliest stages was indeed about the last Babylonian king.<sup>461</sup> But a case can be made that other stories in the collection were also originally rooted in memories of Nabonidus. The narrative of Daniel 3, which depicts Nebuchadnezzar constructing a statue and demanding that his subjects worship it, likely first emerged as a parody of Nabonidus's well-known and publicly ridiculed<sup>462</sup> construction of a cult statue of the moon-god Sîn at the Eḫulḫul temple in Harran and his notorious championing of that deity in Babylon itself.<sup>463</sup> Even Daniel 2, which in its current form

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<sup>460</sup> As Henze points out, tradition-historical connections between Nabonidus and Daniel 4 were drawn already by P. Riessler, *Das Buch Daniel*, KKHSAT 3/3/2 (Stuttgart/Wien: Roth, 1899), 43 and F. Hommel, "Die Abfassungszeit des Buches Daniel und der Wahnsinn Nabonids," *Theologisches Literaturblatt* 23 (1902): 145–50—connections corroborated much later by the discovery of 4Q242 Prayer of Nabonidus among the Dead Sea Scrolls. See the recent comparison between Daniel 4 MT and the Harran B inscription by Carol Newsom as well as her comment that "[t]he striking similarities in structure, sequence, and detail between [the two] strongly suggest that the author of the *Vorlage* of Dan 4 MT was aware of this Harran inscription and shaped his own composition in light of it" (*Daniel: A Commentary*, 130–32, quotation from 130). See also Klaus Koch, "Gottes Herrschaft über das Reich des Menschen: Daniel 4 im Licht neuer Funde," in *The Book of Daniel in the Light of New Findings*, ed. A. S. van der Woude, BETL 106 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993), 77–119.

<sup>461</sup> The parallels between 4Q242 and Daniel 4 do not suggest that the traditions are dependent on each other; rather, the similarities between them suggest that they represent independent traditions that both reflect on the events and circumstances of Nabonidus's reign, and especially his enigmatic sojourn to Teima; see the judicious summary in Henze, *The Madness of King Nebuchadnezzar*, 64–73. For the *editio princeps*, see John J. Collins, "4Q242," in *Qumran Cave 4.XVII: Parabiblical Texts, Part 3*, ed. George Brooke et al., DJD 22 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 83–93; see also John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2nd ed., BRS (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 88.

<sup>462</sup> See the so-called *Verse Account of Nabonidus* I 21–II 3 (Hanspeter Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids von Babylon und Kyros' des Großen samt den in ihrem Umfeld entstandenen Tendenzschriften: Textausgabe und Grammatik*, AOAT 256 [Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2001], 566–67, 573–74).

<sup>463</sup> See especially the recent study of Paul-Alain Beaulieu, "The Babylonian Background of the Motif of the Fiery Furnace in Daniel 3," *JBL* 128 (2009): 273–90, especially 275–77, 285–90. This idea was suggested already by Smith, *Babylonian Historical Texts*, 51. See also Soden, "Eine babylonische Volksüberlieferung," 85–86; McNamara, "Nabonidus and the Book of Daniel," 144–48; Newsom, "Why Nabonidus?," 58–59; similarly, see Collins, *Daniel*, 194. Cf. W. Baumgartner, "Neues keilschriftliches Material zum Buche Daniel?," *ZAW* 44 (1926): 47.

dates no earlier than the Seleucid period (see below), may have originally been about Nabonidus. There are at least two closely related reasons for thinking so: first, Nabonidus was the *only* Neo-Babylonian king who was publicly interested in dreams and set them down in his inscriptions<sup>464</sup>—an interest prominent enough to incite derision from his religious opponents (see also Dan 4);<sup>465</sup> and second, with the setting of the story in the second year of the king’s reign (Dan 2:1; cf. Dan 1:1),<sup>466</sup> it is “quite likely that the king’s distress at the ominous dream is intended to suggest anxiety as to the security of his reign,” which would accord well with Nabonidus’s status as a usurper.<sup>467</sup> Significantly, these two concerns appear together in one of Nabonidus’s own inscriptions (his *Babylon Stele*), which was likely composed during his first

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<sup>464</sup> Primary evidence for Nabonidus’s concern with dreams is found in his *Ehulhul Cylinder* I 15–26, Harran Inscription I 11; III 1–2; *Babylon Stele* VI–VII (see below); and an inscribed bead (Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids von Babylon und Kyros’ des Großen*, 416–17, 436; 488, 496, 498; 519–20, 525–26; 545). For analyses of this conspicuous interest in dreams, see A. Leo Oppenheim, “The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East. With a Translation of an Assyrian Dream-Book,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 46 (1956): 202–6; Paul-Alain Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus, King of Babylon, 556–539 B.C.*, YNER 10 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 108–13, 218. See also Collins, *Daniel*, 155.

<sup>465</sup> For derisive comments about Nabonidus’s obsession with dreams and their meaning, see the *Verse Account* V 10–11; see Soden, “Eine babylonische Volksüberlieferung,” 85; Beaulieu, “Nabonidus the Mad King: A Reconsideration of His Steles from Harran and Babylon,” 161–62; Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids von Babylon und Kyros’ des Großen*, 22.

<sup>466</sup> Precisely because the dating of the story to the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the king presents chronological problems within the larger framework of the book, it might reflect the original setting of the story early in the king’s reign, when concerns over the legitimacy of his reign would have been most acute. Cf. the (most likely secondary) dating of ch. 2 to the 12<sup>th</sup> year of Nebuchadnezzar in the OG version preserved in Papyrus 967 (from the Chester Beatty Papyri; 2–3 century CE).

<sup>467</sup> Sir Isaac Newton, *Observations upon the Prophecies of Daniel, and the Apocalypse of St. John: In Two Parts* (London: J. Darby and T. Browne, 1733), 10. See also F. H. Polak, “The Daniel Tales in Their Aramaic Literary Milieu,” in *The Book of Daniel in Light of New Findings*, ed. A. S. van der Woude, BETL 106 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993), 261–62, who argues that the dream was originally about the end of the Babylonian empire; and Ida Frölich, “Daniel 2 and Duetero-Isaiah,” in *The Book of Daniel in the Light of New Findings*, BETL 106 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993), 267, who points out the accurate knowledge about Babylonian dream interpreters in the narrative.

regnal year.<sup>468</sup> In this inscription, Nabonidus recounts a dream in which he receives assurance from an unnamed young man and, later, his predecessor Nebuchadnezzar, that the astronomical phenomena he observed in the dream-state do not portend evil for him or the security of his kingship. In light of these unique parallels, Newsom has made the reasonable suggestion that “[i]f there is a historical source behind the story of Dan[iel] 2, it is presumably this public inscription of Nabonidus.”<sup>469</sup> And Daniel 5, for its part, is indisputably related to the reign of Nabonidus, since its royal protagonist, Belshazzar, was Nabonidus’s son and crown prince (see §4.2.1)—a fact that is obscured by the erroneous identification of Belshazzar as the son of Nebuchadnezzar (5:2, 11, 12 [OG], 13, 18 [MT/LXX]). As Paul-Alain Beaulieu suggests, in terms of the historical facts on the ground, this simple misidentification “constitutes the strongest argument for tracing the Danielic narratives about Nebuchadnezzar to a cluster of historical memories of Nabonidus.”<sup>470</sup>

The tradition-historical insight that several of the court tales were originally about Nabonidus and were secondarily transferred to Nebuchadnezzar allows us to make some important observations about the rhetorical shaping and character of the collection. To begin with, it enables us to recognize that several of the stories comprising the collection once represented much more immediate responses to the events and circumstances of the historical

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<sup>468</sup> For a brief discussion of the date of this inscription, as well as some helpful commentary, see Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus*, 22, 110–11); see also Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids von Babylon und Kyros’ des Großen*, 514–29.

<sup>469</sup> Newsom and Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 67.

<sup>470</sup> Beaulieu, “The Babylonian Background,” 275.



kingship of Nabonidus during the Neo-Babylonian period than they do in their current form.<sup>471</sup>

As Newsom has argued most persuasively, since “Nabonidus was not a king whose memory had much cultural resonance for Jews except during the time of his actual reign,” these stories were likely composed by Jewish exiles in the Eastern diaspora during the reign of Nabonidus or shortly thereafter.<sup>472</sup> This observation, in turn, allows us to recognize how the tradition has actively dislocated the stories from their original historical contexts and recast them around the more culturally relevant and paradigmatic figure of Nebuchadnezzar. This process of recasting would prove to have important consequences for the character of the collection. Perhaps most fundamentally, it prepared the way for the formation of a *cycle* of stories about Nebuchadnezzar, which together could tell a larger story about that king’s dealings with the Most High God of the Jews. Crucially, this larger story could then represent a continuation of the wider Judean discourse about YHWH’s relationship to Nebuchadnezzar, especially the discourse about Nebuchadnezzar’s sovereignty that took shape in Jeremiah. As I argue below, the Danielic court tales take up the model of divine delegation of sovereignty to Nebuchadnezzar that was articulated in Jer 27:5–6 (§3.5.2) and work out its implications imaginatively through narrative. The transfer of these stories to Nebuchadnezzar thus made possible the formation of a narrative cycle that facilitated continued reflection on the enduring ideological challenges of life under the world-wide political sovereignty that YHWH had delegated to the Gentile king.

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<sup>471</sup> In light of this observation, one could, with due caution, attempt to study how these stories could have functioned at such an early stage, as Carol Newsom has ventured in a few recent studies; see Newsom, “Why Nabonidus?”; and “Nabonidus in Jewish Memory.”

<sup>472</sup> Newsom and Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 9; Newsom, “Why Nabonidus?,” 60. See also the observations made by Stephanie Dalley that similar literature written in Aramaic from the Late Assyrian Empire was composed soon after the contemporary events they describe (“Assyrian Court Narratives in Aramaic and Egyptian Historical Fiction,” in *Historiography in the Cuneiform World: Proceedings of the XLV<sup>e</sup> Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale. Part 1: Harvard University*, ed. Tzvi Abusch et al. [Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2001], 150–60).

### 5.2.1.2. *The Versional Evidence: Toward an Appreciation of Daniel MT*

A second literary-historical factor that both complicates and facilitates the study of the Danielic court tales is presented by the complex versional evidence. Especially complicated (and intriguing) is the relationship between the Masoretic tradition and the Greek versions.<sup>473</sup> In some cases, especially for chapters 4–6, it appears that the Old Greek (OG) version preserves older, or at least less developed, versions of the tales than their counterparts in Daniel MT.<sup>474</sup> But what really complicates the matter is that the variants between these versions are not easily explained in terms of unidirectional development.<sup>475</sup> Rather, because the sizable variants between the two cannot be traced to a common source, it appears that the MT and OG versions developed with a degree of independence from one another and therefore represent something like “variant” or “parallel” editions of the same stories.<sup>476</sup>

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<sup>473</sup> For a recent summary of scholarship, see Amanda M. Davis Bledsoe, “The Relationship of the Different Editions of Daniel: A History of Scholarship,” *CBR* 13 (2015): 175–90. See also Alexander A. Di Lella, “The Textual History of Septuagint-Daniel and Theodotion-Daniel,” in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, ed. John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint, vol. 2 of *VTSup* 83 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 586–607.

<sup>474</sup> See Wills, *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King*, 144; Rainer Albertz, *Der Gott des Daniel: Untersuchungen zu Daniel 4–6 in der Septuagintafassung sowie zu Komposition und Theologie des aramäischen Danielbuches*, SBS 131 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1988), 76.

<sup>475</sup> Collins, *Daniel*, 219–21; Newsom and Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 2, 5.

<sup>476</sup> See already August von Bludau, *Die Alexandrinische Übersetzung des Buches Daniel und ihr Verhältniss zum Massorethischen Text*, BibS(F) 2/2/3 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1897), 31–33. That these versions represent “parallel” or “variant” editions of the same stories has been proposed, with a variety of nuances, in recent studies for each of these chapters: for Daniel 4, see, e.g., Collins, *Daniel*, 221; Henze, *The Madness of King Nebuchadnezzar*, 40; Newsom and Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 128; for Daniel 5, Eugene Ulrich, “The Parallel Editions of the Old Greek and Masoretic Text of Daniel 5,” in *A Teacher for All Generations: Essays in Honor of James C. VanderKam*, ed. Eric F. Mason et al., JSJSup 153 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 201–17; Justin L. Pannkuk, “The Preface to Old Greek Daniel 5: A Formal Approach,” *VT* 67 (2017): 222–25; Ian Young, “The Original Problem: The Old Greek and the Masoretic Text of Daniel 5,” in *Empirical Models Challenging Biblical Criticism*, ed. Raymond F. Person Jr. and Robert Rezetko, *Ancient Israel and Its Literature* 25 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 271–302; see also Segal, Michael, “Daniel 5 in Aramaic and Greek and the Textual History of Daniel 4–6,” in *Congress Volume Stellenbosch 2016*, ed. Louis C. Jonker, Gideon R. Kotzé, and Christl M. Maier, *VTSup* 177 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 251–84; for Daniel 6, see Michael Segal, “The Old Greek Version and Masoretic Text of Daniel 6,” in *Die Septuaginta – Orte und Intentionen: 5. Internationale Fachtagung veranstaltet von Septuaginta Deutsch (LXX.D), Wuppertal 24.–27. Juli 2014*, ed. Siegfried Kreuzer, Martin Meiser, and Marcus Sigismund, WUNT 361 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 404–28. While there appears to be a budding consensus along these lines, it should be noted that the view is not universally held; see, e.g., Albertz (*Der Gott des Daniel*, 76) and Wills (*The Jew in the Court of*

The recognition that the OG and Masoretic versions preserve parallel editions of chapters 4–6 has important consequences for analyzing the discourse of the court tales.<sup>477</sup> For our present purposes, there are two that are most important. The first is that this comparative evidence supplied by the OG tradition helps us to see how the tales that arose and circulated independently in diverse forms were redacted in stages to form the collection now before us in Daniel MT.<sup>478</sup> Though it is difficult to reconstruct the exact stages of this redaction-history, the substantial differences between chapters 4–6 in the OG and the MT, together with the fact that they are framed by similar (and perhaps editorial) doxologies placed on the lips of Nebuchadnezzar (3:31–33; 6:26–28/9), suggest that these stories once represented a distinct unit and likely circulated as a sort of booklet at an early stage in the development of the collection.<sup>479</sup> This

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*the Foreign King*, 87–121), who generally argue for the priority of the OG for Daniel 4, while Pierre Grelot, e.g., argued for the priority of the MT (“La Septante de Daniel IV et Son Substrat Semitique,” *RB* 81 [1974]: 22).

<sup>477</sup> Perhaps most fundamentally, this evidence helps us to see that the choice which version to focus one’s study on is anything but straightforward; see Eugene Ulrich, “Double Literary Editions of Biblical Narratives and Reflections on Determining the Form to Be Translated,” in *Perspectives on the Hebrew Bible: Essays in Honor of Walter J. Harrelson*, ed. James L. Crenshaw (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988), 107–8.

<sup>478</sup> The theory of the collection’s growth out of fragmentary units has a long history in the research reaching back to Sir Isaac Newton’s *Observations upon the Prophecies of Daniel, and the Apocalypse of St. John: In Two Parts* (London: J. Darby and T. Browne, 1733), 10. The understanding of the gradual formation of Daniel in key stages taken up here is similar to what Klaus Koch has termed the “Aufstockungshypothese,” (*Das Buch Daniel*, 63–65), in which the individual tales in Daniel 1–6 are believed to have come together in Aramaic before the extension of that collection by ch. 7, and later the composition of chs. 8–12 (and the translation of Dan 1:1–2:4a into Hebrew); see §6.2.2.1. This model for understanding the gradual development of the book was worked out in its basic form in two key studies by Johannes Meinhold, including *Die Composition des Buches Daniel* (Greifswald: Julius Abel, 1884); *Beiträge zur Erklärung des Buches Daniel. Heft 1, Dan. 2–6* (Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1888), and quickly found a favorable reception in German scholarship; in Anglophone contexts, see the influential study of Charles C. Torrey, “Notes on the Aramaic Part of Daniel,” *Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences* 15 (1909): 239. More recently, see Reinhard Gregor Kratz, *Translatio imperii: Untersuchungen zu den aramäischen Danielerzählungen und ihrem theologiegeschichtlichen Umfeld*, WMANT 63 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1991), esp. 4–6; Collins, *Daniel*, 29, 33–38; Newsom and Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 9.

<sup>479</sup> See Wills, *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King*, 144. For discussions of the doxological statements as a sign of redactional activity in the formation of chs. 4–6 as a unit, see Koch, *Das Buch Daniel*, 75; Ernst Haag, *Die Errettung Daniels aus der Löwengrube: Untersuchungen zum Ursprung der biblischen Danieltradition*, SBS 110 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1983), 13–15; Collins, *Daniel*, 37–38. Newsom has summarized the reasoning here quite clearly (Newsom and Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 5 [see also 10]):

booklet was later joined with chapters \*2–3, with chapter 1 most likely being composed or edited by the redactor of the collection as an introduction to the cycle of tales as a whole.<sup>480</sup> As a result of this gradual redactional process, the court tales came to comprise a cycle of stories about Nebuchadnezzar (chs. 1–4), his “son” Belshazzar (ch. 5), and Darius “the Mede” (ch. 6).<sup>481</sup> Crucially, the formation of this cycle resulted in the creation of a larger narrative for analysis: namely, the story of Nebuchadnezzar as it unfolds over the course of the once discrete tales in chapters 1–4 and that now casts its shadow over the narratives in chapters 5–6. The creation of this story is significant for our present purposes, because the tales have been arranged in such a way that it is possible to track the *development* of Nebuchadnezzar’s character over chapters 1–4 of Daniel MT—a development that is important for understanding the symbolic work that the collection performs on the problem of the Gentile king.

Second, the comparative evidence supplied by chapters 4–6 in the OG tradition allows us to see how the redactors of Daniel MT produced a more self-consciously streamlined and theologically focused version of this cycle. This is most evident in the close connection that the

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It may be that the version of chs. 4–6 now present in the OG is actually older than that translation as a whole and originally circulated independently as a booklet. When the complete MT was translated into what we now know as the OG, that translator apparently preferred the older and more familiar version of chs. 4–6 to *Vorlage* present in MT and so incorporated the existing Greek translation of these chapters into the OG version rather than preparing a new translation from the MT.

<sup>480</sup> Regarding the composition of Dan 1 as an introduction to the larger cycle of tales, Collins provides a concise summary: “This introduction was supplied, in Aramaic, by the editor or collector of the tales. Besides establishing the identify of Daniel, it prepares for chap. 5 by mentioning the temple vessels, for chap. 3 by introducing Daniel’s three companions, and for chaps. 2 and 4 by noting Daniel’s insight into the visions and dreams” (*Daniel*, 35). See already Gustav Hölscher, “Die Entstehung des Buches Daniel,” *TSK* 92 (1919): 117; Walter Baumgartner, *Das Buch Daniel*, *Aus der Welt der Religion AT/1* (Gießen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1926), 8; and, more recently, Klaus Koch, *Daniel 1, 1–21*, *BKAT* 22 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1986), 16–18; Kratz, *Translatio imperii*, 148–49, 154–56. To cite just one additional piece of evidence, the fact that Daniel is presented as unknown to the king in Dan 2, having just been trained in the king’s court by the end of Dan 1, shows that these two stories were once independent; see P. R. Davies, “Daniel Chapter Two,” *JTS* 27 (1976): 393.

<sup>481</sup> This is in contrast to the order preserved in the OG, which places chs. 7–8 before chs. 5 and 6, likely in order to resolve the chronological issues of the book; see Davis Bledsoe, “The Relationship of the Different Editions of Daniel,” 178.

MT draws between the stories in chapters 4 and 5.<sup>482</sup> Though a brief allusion to Daniel's actions during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar is found in the OG version of Daniel 5 (vv. 10–12), the MT version explicitly links these two stories through an extended retelling of the story in Daniel 4 at Daniel MT 5:18–21.<sup>483</sup> This retelling draws the court tales into a more coherent developmental narrative, leading the reader to draw a comparison between the experiences of Nebuchadnezzar with that of his successor, Belshazzar.<sup>484</sup> More generally, the presence of the lengthy “Additions” to the Danielic court tales in the Greek versions, including the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men (3:24–45, 51–90) and Susanna (before 1:1 in the LXX), makes these versions less tightly-focused on the figure of the Gentile king and the social setting of the Gentile royal court.<sup>485</sup> Because the Masoretic version of the cycle is more streamlined and thematically focused on the figure of the Gentile and his relationship to the God of the Jews as it is worked out in the royal court, my analysis will focus primarily on this version.

### 5.2.2. The Theological Appropriation of the Court Tale

If the authors of the Danielic court tales aimed to reflect theologically on the problems presented by the Gentile emperor and life within the structures of empire more generally, the genre they chose to appropriate provided a useful form of discourse to do so.<sup>486</sup> Though the precise origins

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<sup>482</sup> Albertz, *Der Gott des Daniel*, 91–94.

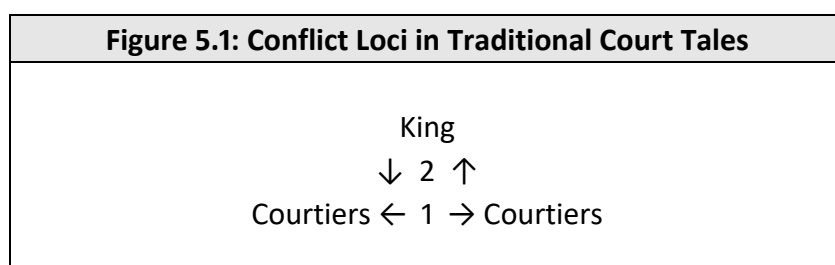
<sup>483</sup> See Wills, *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King*, 145.

<sup>484</sup> Similarly, the presence of the lengthy “Additions” to the Danielic court tales in the Greek versions, including the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men (3:24–45, 51–90) and Susanna (before 1:1 in the LXX), makes these versions less tightly-focused on the figure of the Gentile king. Or, put conversely, the absence of these traditions in the Masoretic version of the court tales keeps the discourse centered on the fundamental ideological problems associated with the sovereignty of the Gentile king.

<sup>485</sup> See Wills, *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King*, 145.

<sup>486</sup> The literature on the genre(s) of Daniel 1–6 is immense. Thorough surveys are offered by Wills, *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King*, 1–38; Collins, *Daniel*, 38–47; and, more recently, Tawny L. Holm, *Of*

of the court tale are difficult to trace, the genre may have first developed in the royal courts of Mesopotamian rulers to “explore and narratively resolve tensions between the king and his courtiers on the one hand and between rival courtiers on the other.”<sup>487</sup> The various sub-genres of the court tale, with their typical cast of characters and stock plotlines, thus came preloaded with the capacity to explore the dangerous and often volatile power of the king and the disputes that could emerge among rivals within his court (see Figure 5.1).<sup>488</sup>



The vertical tensions between the king and his courtiers (Fig. 5.1, locus “2”) as well as the horizontal tensions between various members of the court (Fig. 5.1, locus “1”) play a significant role in shaping the plot structures of the individual tales in Daniel, which, as Lee Humphreys recognized clearly, are generally of two types.<sup>489</sup> The first type is the tale of *contest*,

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*Courtiers and Kings: The Biblical Daniel Narratives and Ancient Story-Collections*, EANEC 1 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 192–201.

<sup>487</sup> Newsom and Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 12–13. See also Collins, *Daniel*, 45–47. Dalley, “Assyrian Court Narratives,” 153–55. On the origin of the court legend in the Ancient Near East, see also Wills, *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King*, 39–55, who notes that the genre flourished across the Near East during the Persian period and had its greatest currency in Asia Minor and Persia. As Karel van der Toorn points out, the contentious intrigues explored in the Daniel court tales closely resemble the volatile, high-stakes relations between (1) fellow court advisors and scholars within the royal court (2) as well as their relations with the figure of the king attested in Babylonian texts (“Scholars at the Oriental Court: The Figure of Daniel against Its Mesopotamian Background,” in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, ed. John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint, vol. 1 of *VTSup* 83 [Leiden: Brill, 2002], 37–54, esp. 39–41).

<sup>488</sup> Similarly, Newsom and Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 14; Newsom, “Resistance Is Futile!,” 171.

<sup>489</sup> Humphreys, “A Life-Style for Diaspora.” See also Collins, *Daniel*, 45–47. Humphreys’s categories are useful for recognizing the basic plot-structure of the Danielic tales. As folklorists have long observed, however, it is possible to identify a range of story-types within these wider categories based on their common morphological ordering (or structure) of narrative motifs, which have been identified and organized in A. Aarne and S. Thompson,

in which the hero manages to outdo rival courtiers in a particularly difficult, if not impossible, task and thereby (re)gains the king's favor, as in Dan 2, 4, and 5.<sup>490</sup> The second is the tale of *conflict*, in which the hero is endangered, usually by conspiring rivals, and must somehow escape a sentence issued by the king or some other authority, as in Dan 3 and 6.<sup>491</sup> The kinds of conflicts that the tales posit and resolve narratively arise along the conflict loci intrinsic to these sub-genres.

It is important to notice, however, that the Danielic court tales appropriated the genre(s) in ways that were distinctively *theological*.<sup>492</sup> Most crucially, the vertical dimension of the power-conflict is extended in each case to include the “Most High God” of the Jews above the figure of the king (see Figure 5.2). Within the discursive world of the tales, it is the God of the Jews who is assumed and asserted to be the sole source of the Gentile king's political sovereignty, and this assumption provides the theological starting point for exploring the nature

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eds., *The Types of the Folktale*, Folklore Fellows Communications 184 (Helsinki: Suomalainen tiedeakatemia, 1964). In an important 1977 study, e.g., Susan Niditch and Robert Doran pointed out that the narratives of Dan 2, Gen 41, and Aḥiqar 5–7 each share the morphosyntax of story type 922 (“The Success Story of the Wise Courtier: A Formal Approach,” *JBL* 96 [1977]: 179–93; elsewhere I have argued that Dan 5 is also of that particular story type in Pannkuk, “The Preface to Old Greek Daniel 5”).

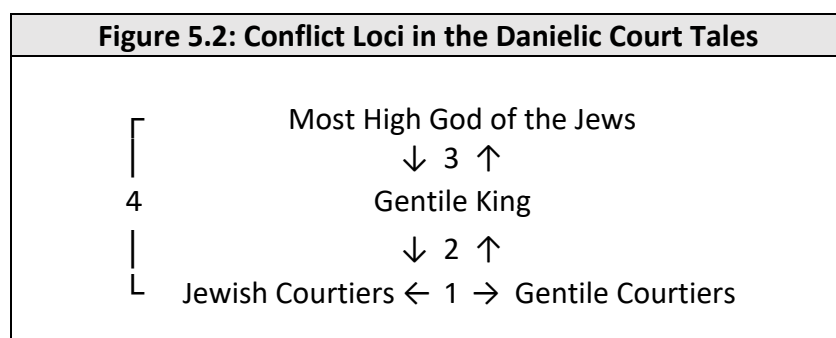
<sup>490</sup> Cf., e.g., Genesis 41 and Aḥiqar (the task of building a castle between heaven and earth).

<sup>491</sup> Cf., e.g., Esther; Aḥiqar (the conflict with Nadan); Bel and the Dragon; the story of Croesus and Cambyses in Herodotus, *Hist.* 3.35–36 (where Croesus is endangered not by rivals but by the figure of the volatile king).

<sup>492</sup> Lawrence Wills has made the important observation that the figures of God or the gods are often absent in court tales, even biblical ones, which may be a result of their predominating focus on the court itself as the realm of ultimate justice (Wills, *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King*, 22–23). The theological emphasis of the Danielic court tales becomes clear through a comparison with other Jewish stories set in the court of the Gentile king that tackle the challenges of living under imperial hegemony by strategies that are not explicitly theological. For example, in Esther, where the figure of God is conspicuously absent (at least in MT), the resolution of the conflict involves the imaginative devolution of essential royal functions to the Jewish characters Esther and Mordecai. Bel and the Dragon, for its part, also tackles questions of religious fidelity and idolatry in the court of the Gentile king, but the story does not foreground questions about the source of the king's sovereignty. In the story centered on Bel, the resolution of the conflict depends not on God's power (to reveal or to save) but on the cleverness of Daniel (14–19, 27). The resolution of the conflict centered on the Dragon and the lions' den with the intercession of the angel of the Lord, which leads to the confession of Cyrus, does, however, resemble Daniel 6.

of this sovereignty.<sup>493</sup> At several places throughout the collection, and especially in chapter 4, Daniel is made to identify explicitly the God of the Jews as the one who delegates sovereignty to kings as he wills (2:37–38; 4:17[14], 25[22], 32[29]; 5:18, 21; see also 2:21). The closest antecedent to this conception in Judean thought is found in the oracle of Jeremiah 27:5–6 (see §3.2.2), and indeed, the close phraseological parallels between this oracle and several of the Daniel passages suggest that the Danielic tradition drew directly upon this earlier oracle as it introduced the God of the Jews as an integral figure into the world of the court tale.

This theologizing of the genre in Daniel 1–6 added a third tier to the court tale’s presumed hierarchy of sovereignty.



The addition of this third tier of sovereignty introduced at least two further loci for potential conflict-resolution within the narrative structure of the tales. The first is the relationship between the Gentile king and the source of his sovereignty, the Most High God (Fig. 5.2, locus “3”). As we shall see in the following sections, the nature of this relationship is a central concern in the Danielic tales, which perform symbolic work on the relationship “from above.” The second is the

<sup>493</sup> As a result of this theological starting point, the stories—especially those of the conflict type—are distinctive in that, as Collins observes, “the problems the heroes encounter *are specifically religious in nature* and the heroes attain deliverance not by their own wits or by the connivance of others *but by divine intervention*. The traditional tale type, then, is being adapted in Daniel for specifically religious ends” (*Daniel*, 46; emphasis mine).



relationship between the Jewish courtiers and their God (Fig. 5.2, locus “4”).<sup>494</sup> What threatens to bring conflict to this relationship is the sovereignty exercised by the Gentile king, who occupies the medial position in the hierarchy. Because both God and the Gentile king are sovereign over the Jewish courtiers, the demands made by each have the capacity to place conflicting claims upon the Jewish courtiers that they must negotiate “from below.” The theologized version of the court tale thus established a set of relationships that made it possible to explore imaginatively (1) the relationship between YHWH and the Gentile king and (2) the relationship between the Jews and their God when the sovereignty of Gentile kings could put that relationship to the test. And that, I want to suggest, was exactly what the authors of Daniel 1–6 intended to do.

### 5.2.3. A Lesson in Sovereignty: King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in Daniel 1–4

As a result of the tradition- and redaction-history sketched above, the individual tales in Daniel 1–4 now comprise a cycle of stories about the figure of Nebuchadnezzar. Although originally discrete narrative units with self-sufficient plot-structures, these tales *together* tell a larger story about the infamous Babylonian king and his gradual development as a character. As Carol Newsom has recognized most clearly in her recent commentary, this gradual development takes place along the lines of Nebuchadnezzar’s *knowledge* and *perceptions* about the nature of his sovereignty. Chapters 1–4, she suggests, represent a kind of *Bildungsroman* for King Nebuchadnezzar, narrating his education as he gradually learns about the true nature of his

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<sup>494</sup> The addition of this third tier of sovereignty, of course, also means that the Gentile courtiers could come into conflict with the Most High God, but the court tales are mostly mute about this relationship; the Gentile courtiers function much more as catalysts for introducing the religious conflict that drives the plot in the tales of conflict (chs. 3, 6) and for demonstrating the superiority of Daniel’s (divinely granted) interpretive ability in the tales of contest (chs. 2, 4, 5).

sovereignty through dramatic confrontations with the power of the God of the Jews.<sup>495</sup> In what follows, I aim to advance Newsom's thesis in two ways. First, by arguing that the tales together educate Nebuchadnezzar (and the implied audience) into a particularly Jeremianic understanding of his sovereignty. The conflicts and contests that emerge in the king's court create the imaginative space that makes it possible to teach Nebuchadnezzar about his rightful place within the hierarchies of sovereignty and servitude constructed by the oracle in Jer 27:5–6. And second, I offer an analysis of the character of this discourse as a response to the challenges presented by the Gentile king. Here I argue that the discourse about Nebuchadnezzar's knowledge performs symbolic work on the problem of Gentile political sovereignty "from above" and "below" by containing the ideological challenges presented by the figure of the Gentile king within an exclusively Yahwistic framework. At the same time, however, this theological containment, which was endemic to the Jeremianic model of divine delegation and to the genre of the court tale itself, also served to underwrite theologically the structures of Gentile imperialism to which the tales in Daniel 1–6 responded in the first place.

#### 5.2.3.1. *Daniel 1: Historical Agency and the Theme of Knowledge*

Daniel 1 was mostly likely composed as an introduction to the prior collection of tales in chapters \*2–6.<sup>496</sup> The story sets the stage for the subsequent cycle by establishing the relevant historical circumstances (1:1–2) and introducing the cast of Jewish protagonists (1:3–7). But the story does more than merely set up props for subsequent action. More subtly, the narrative

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<sup>495</sup> Newsom and Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 10, 33–35, 39, 127.

<sup>496</sup> Wills, *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King*, 78–79; George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah: A Literary and Historical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 17–18; Davies, *Daniel*, 43; Collins, *Daniel*, 130; Newsom and Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 8, 38.

provides a sophisticated introduction to one of the central themes developed throughout the Nebuchadnezzar cycle: namely, the king's *knowledge* of the ultimate sovereignty of the God of the Jews that lies behind his own. This theme is introduced by the construction of a “knowledge gap” between what the audience knows about God's sovereign agency in history, on the one hand, and what Nebuchadnezzar knows about that sovereignty, on the other.<sup>497</sup> Significantly, this knowledge gap is not closed until the climax of the Nebuchadnezzar cycle in chapter 4, when the audience and Nebuchadnezzar come to share the same knowledge about the Most High, who “has sovereignty over the kingdom of mortals and gives (נתן) it to whom he will” (4:17[14], 25[22], 32[29]; see also 2:21, 37–38).

The knowledge gap is constructed in the tale's opening historiographical section, which briefly narrates the historical circumstances at the dawn of the Babylonian exile:

In the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon came [בא] to Jerusalem and besieged it.<sup>498</sup> And the Lord gave [ויתן] Jehoiakim, King of Judah into his hand [בידו], with some of the vessels from the house of God. And he brought them [ויביאם] to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god. Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring [להביא] some of the people of Israel ... (1:1–3)

This historiographical account uses language that conforms closely to the predications attributed to Jeremiah (see §3.5.1). In several of the narrative accounts of Jeremiah's prophetic disputes, the prophet's oracles construct a chain of effective agency between YHWH and Nebuchadnezzar: YHWH will give (נתן) various objects— including all of Judah (Jer 20:4; 21:7), the treasures and wealth of the city (20:5), royal figures and their servants (21:7), and

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<sup>497</sup> Newsom and Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 41.

<sup>498</sup> For a discussion of the chronological problems presented by the historiography of Dan 1:1–2, see Collins, *Daniel*, 155.

Jerusalem itself (34:2b)—into the hand (ביד) of Nebuchadnezzar,<sup>499</sup> who will then act upon them by carrying them off to Babylon (√גלה; √בוא; 20:4–5; see also 34:2b). From the exilic perspective of Daniel, the events entailed in this chain of agency need no longer be cast as predictive but may be narrated as having actually taken place. In continuity with the Jeremianic tradition, the reader of Daniel 1:1–3 is thus informed that YHWH did, in fact, serve as the effective agent who gave (√נתן) Judah, its treasures, and its populace into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, who then brought them (√בוא) to Babylon. It is important to notice, however, that it remains entirely unclear in the narrative whether Nebuchadnezzar is aware that YHWH was the effective agent behind his imperial activities in Judah. The silence of the tale on this matter is important, because it introduces the knowledge gap between the reader and figure of Nebuchadnezzar, who will proceed to learn about the true nature of his sovereignty over the course of chapters 2–4.<sup>500</sup> Daniel 1:1–3 thus plays a major role in initiating one of the key strategies for addressing the problem of the Gentile emperor “from above.”

Nebuchadnezzar’s lack of knowledge also plays a key role in the central narrative of Daniel 1 itself. Crucially, the refusal of Daniel and his compatriots to defile themselves with the royal rations is executed without the king’s knowledge. Exploiting the willingness of members of the imperial bureaucracy to proceed in willful ignorance of their conduct or to facilitate it with discretion (vv. 8–14), the Jewish courtiers show that it is possible to assert their own agency within a world held together by the king’s sovereignty to the extent that the king remains in ignorance. “The king’s lack of knowledge,” as Newsom observes, “creates a space where

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<sup>499</sup> Cf. JerLXX 34:2b (§3.5.1.2.3), where the verb is in the passive voice (παραδοθήσεται).

<sup>500</sup> Similarly, Newsom and Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 41.

individuals can exercise their own power.”<sup>501</sup> The danger of such self-assertion in defying the king’s commands emerges as a central theme in other tales in the collection, where rival courtiers attempt to close the gap between the conduct of the Jews and the king’s knowledge by alerting the king to their behavior (3:12) or attempting to entrap them by it (6:4–8, 11–13). But by showing that pockets of ignorance within the king’s domain can provide a space for self-assertion and resistance, the narrative of Daniel 1 illustrates a useful strategy for negotiating the conflicting claims of YHWH and the Gentile king “from below.”

When read against the oracle of Jer 27:5–6, the promotion of this strategy “from below” introduces a fundamental principle for living within the hierarchy of servitude established by YHWH: when the demands on Jewish conduct made by the Gentile king conflict with the demands made by YHWH, allegiance must remain aligned with YHWH. Because the oracles ultimately affirm the theological legitimacy of the Gentile king’s delegated sovereignty, this principle nuances the Jeremianic model by distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate *expressions* of that sovereignty.<sup>502</sup> This distinction is worked out most clearly in the conflict tales in Dan 3 and 6, where the Jewish protagonists refuse to obey royal decrees that would require religious idolatry. In both cases, the Jewish protagonists are ultimately rescued from the king’s power by God, but the legitimacy of the king’s office is not called into question.

#### 5.2.3.2. *Daniel 2: Nebuchadnezzar and the God who Reveals Mysteries*

In its current literary context, the narrative of Daniel 2 makes a key contribution to the gradual education of King Nebuchadnezzar. Apart from the content of the king’s dream and its

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<sup>501</sup> *Daniel: A Commentary*, 49.

<sup>502</sup> This distinction would emerge as a crucial theological principle in Christian Reformed theology; see, e.g., the final section of Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (4.20.32).

interpretation, which will be analyzed further below, the basic plot of the narrative functions to demonstrate to Nebuchadnezzar that the God of Daniel is able to reveal mysteries (2:28, 47; cf. 2:11). What drives the conflict in this narrative is the king's demand that his court sages provide him with both the content of his dream as well as its interpretation upon pain of death (2:5–6, 9, 26).<sup>503</sup> As the sages protest, the king's refusal to disclose the content of his dream renders the task of interpretation impossible, for it demands abilities that are categorically beyond human capacity: "The thing that the king is asking is too difficult, and no one can reveal it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with mortals!" (2:11; see also 2:27–28). The court sages thus render the problem of interpreting the king's dream a theological one. Because it is the God of Daniel who is able and apparently willing to disclose both the content and interpretation of the dream to Daniel, and through him, to the king (2:28), Nebuchadnezzar learns something about the nature of this God: "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery!" (2:47).

Within Daniel 2 as a stand-alone unit, Nebuchadnezzar's confession represents a satisfying conclusion to the tale. The plot is resolved when Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel, and the implied audience all come to share the same knowledge about the content and significance of the ominous dream, which ultimately reveals that Daniel's God is "Lord of kings." But in its present literary context, the story is followed by two additional, and once independent, stories in which Nebuchadnezzar acts as if he has never come to this knowledge.<sup>504</sup> As a result, the story-cycle

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<sup>503</sup> The refusal of Nebuchadnezzar to disclose the content of his dream is likely an indication of his paranoia about the security of his reign, suggesting that he was worried that the court sages might take advantage of its portentous content; as was suggested above, this insight might serve as an additional indication that the story was originally about Nabonidus.

<sup>504</sup> With respect to the literary formation of the Danielic court tales, the fact that Nebuchadnezzar has no knowledge of who the God of the Jews is in the following story of Dan 3 supports the view that they were once independent tales, as the Fragmentary hypothesis suggests; see Koch, *Das Buch Daniel*, 57.

presents Nebuchadnezzar as repeatedly relapsing into a state of ignorance about his relationship to YHWH, and especially YHWH's position of ultimate supremacy.<sup>505</sup> Nebuchadnezzar's lesson in sovereignty thus becomes painstakingly gradual, coming to a completion only after his seven-year-long humiliation, when he finally comes to fully apprehend his relationship to the Most High. In the meantime, Nebuchadnezzar's megalomaniacal conduct in Dan 3 makes clear that he has not fully understood the contents of this own declaration that YHWH is "lord of lords."<sup>506</sup>

### 5.2.3.3. *Daniel 3: And Who is the God who Will Save You from My Hands?*

The story of Daniel 3 narrates the first and only explicit conflict between Nebuchadnezzar and his Jewish courtiers (Fig. 5.2, locus "2"). The catalyst for the conflict is the king's decree that all of his subjects—peoples, nations, and languages—must bow down on cue and worship the statue that he set up or face the punishment of being thrown into a fiery furnace (3:2–6). Upon learning from his Chaldean courtiers (Fig. 5.2, locus "1") that certain Jews in his administration—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—do not comply with this order (3:8–12; Fig. 5.2, locus "4"), Nebuchadnezzar summons them to his presence to confront them about the matter, reiterating his command and its accompanying threat. Although the king intends this confrontation to be an occasion for him to reassert his power in dealing with the three Jews, he does not foresee that this confrontation will also provide an opportunity for his subjects to defy his demands openly and thereby to expose the relative limits of his power (Fig. 5.2, locus "3") "from above" and "below."

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<sup>505</sup> This relapse is analogous to Pharaoh's stubbornness of heart/mind following the plagues in Exodus 5–12, though here (1) the relapse is the result of a gradual redactional process and (2) there is no parallel to YHWH's agency in causing the relapse (i.e., there is nothing like a divine hardening of Nebuchadnezzar's heart/mind).

<sup>506</sup> Similarly, Newsom and Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 84–85.

Nebuchadnezzar's command is a pristine example of how political hegemony comes to expression in the bodily domination of subordinate subjects.<sup>507</sup> The order itself requires bodily obedience: all the subjects of the empire must bow down and worship on Nebuchadnezzar's cue, and the threat that seeks to ensure such obedience entails nothing less than the annihilation of those bodies that would refuse to comply.<sup>508</sup> As Nebuchadnezzar reminds his Jewish courtiers:

Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre ... to fall down and worship the statue that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire, and who is the god that will deliver you from my hands (יְיָ)? (3:15)

But just as the body provides the locus of domination, it also provides the locus for resistance.

The Jews answer the king, in part:

If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand (יְיָ), O king, let him deliver us. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up. (3:17–18)

This response incites the total rage of the king (3:19), who takes extreme measures to exert his bodily domination over the Jews by having them bound and thrown into the furnace by his

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<sup>507</sup> See Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism*, 23: “Through these directly political and physically coercive forms of rule the empire acts on the bodies of its subjects, claiming a sovereign power over their bodies not only in matters of life and death but also in the structured and structuring practices of daily life.”

<sup>508</sup> Behind the fictional imagination of this story, with its lengthy (and subversively humorous) lists of imperial bureaucrats, instruments, and designations for subordinate peoples (“all peoples, nations, and languages”), there is an echo of the pageantry that Near Eastern empires actually carried out as public orchestrations of imperial ideology. The clearest evidence for this is in the Persian iconographic record, which demonstrates how the Persian rulers (broad)cast their ideology of rule in images and inscriptions, in which the subordinate peoples of the empire are depicted and described, as Briant observes, in order to “impose the idea of the unbounded nature of their authority over territories and populations. These documents eloquently attest to the royal desire to depict every country and every people of the Empire united in harmonious cooperation organized by and surrounding the king” (Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 177–78). A pristine example of this iconography is Darius's Behistun Inscription. See also Margaret Cool Root, *The King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art: Essays on the Creation of an Iconography of Empire*, *Acta Iranica* 19; *Textes et Mémoires* 9 (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 152–3, 160.



strongest guards (3:20–21).<sup>509</sup> As Newsom observes, the king’s rage is provoked not only by the resolve of the Jews to defy his will, but—more fundamentally—by how this refusal lays bare the limits of his power over his subjects:

Their refusal to comply with the king’s order, despite the threat of the worst that he can inflict, exposes the limits of dictatorial power. Nebuchadnezzar literally has no power to enforce his command, to make the Jews behave like all the rest of his officials. He can kill the three Jews; but he cannot make them worship his god. Even if they should not be saved, in this matter they have more power than the mighty king of Babylon.<sup>510</sup>

The effective enforcement of Nebuchadnezzar’s royal power depends on the fear that he is able to cast over his subjects by the terrible power that he does, in fact, possess over their bodies. But the response of the Jews reveals that he lacks the power to cause them to fear (cf. Ps 56:12[13]). Their wills are beyond the reach of his hand. The defiance of the Jews thus exposes the relative limits of Nebuchadnezzar’s totalizing power “from below.”

On account of their willful resistance, the Jews are thrown into the fiery furnace. King Nebuchadnezzar does, after all, possess power over their bodies. But it is precisely here that the narrative begins to address the relative limits of the king’s power theologically, or “from above.” Nebuchadnezzar himself raised the question in his final word to the three Jews, echoing the boastful challenge of Sennacherib issued at the walls of Jerusalem: “And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands (מִן יָדִי)?” (3:15; cf. 2 Kgs 18:29–30, 34–35 // Isa 36:15, 18–20). The Jewish courtiers reply, as we have seen, with an unflinchingly brave and sobering response: “*If* our God whom we serve is able ... let him ... but *if not* ... we will not serve your gods and

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<sup>509</sup> On the trope of the king’s rage in the Jewish court tales, see Michael J. Chan, “Ira Regis: Comedic Inflections of Royal Rage in Jewish Court Tales,” *JQR* 103 (2013): 1–25.

<sup>510</sup> Newsom and Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 110.

we will not worship the statue that you have set up” (Dan 3:18).<sup>511</sup> At this point in the cycle, the reader—and perhaps also the cohort of young Jews—knows something that Nebuchadnezzar does not: namely, that it was the God whom the Jews worship who gave them *into* King Nebuchadnezzar’s hands (וַיִּתֶּן אֱדֻנִי בְיָדוֹ; 1:1–3) and who is therefore also able to deliver them *out* of his hands. As the story proceeds, it is told from the perspective of Nebuchadnezzar, who recounts the events as they unfold and supplies their meaning. The reader is thus invited to view the events through the eyes of Nebuchadnezzar as his perceptions about his own power in relation to the God of the Jews are transformed.

The transformation begins to occur when Nebuchadnezzar sees a mysterious event in the fiery furnace. He reports to his counsellors that he sees “four men unbound, walking in the middle of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the fourth has the appearance of a god” (3:25). In the Masoretic version of the story, nothing more is said about the identity of the fourth figure or anything else that transpired in the furnace (cf. 3:24–91 in the OG and LXX). The reticence of the Masoretic version keeps the focus on Nebuchadnezzar, who, as Newsom has so colorfully put it, has, like “a Peeping Tom ... seen an event in which he is not a participant, taking a glimpse into a different reality and forms of power that nullify his own.”<sup>512</sup>

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<sup>511</sup> A careful analysis of the contextually ambiguous syntax of the conditional phrases in Dan 3:17–18 is offered by Roy L. Heller, who ultimately argues that the protases in 17a and 18a refer to whether or not Nebuchadnezzar’s decree would be carried out; “‘But If Not ...’ What? The Speech of the Youths in Daniel 3 and a (Theo)Logical Problem,” in *Thus Says the Lord: Essays on the Former and Latter Prophets in Honor of Robert R. Wilson*, ed. John J. Ahn and Stephen L. Cook, LHBOTS 502 (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 244–55. Although such a reading is contextually possible, in my judgment, the fact that the OG and LXX versions of Dan 3:16–18 appear to be uncomfortable with the contingency of the MT around God’s ability to save and attribute the young Jews with the affirmation that their God was not only able to deliver them from the fire but that he would do so, suggests that the earliest readers understood the theological logic of the protases in terms of YHWH’s willingness and ability. In both cases, the bold replies of the young Jews stands in contrast with the silence that followed the boasting of the Assyrian king against YHWH in 2 Kgs 18:36 // Isa 36:21.

<sup>512</sup> Newsom and Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 112.

And here the bodies of the young Jews reemerge as a central theme. Nebuchadnezzar summons the Jews out of the furnace, and as they come forth, the various members of the king's court gather and see "that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men" (3:27). Nebuchadnezzar himself then provides the meaning of what had just happened in the form of a doxology: "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him. They disobeyed the king's command and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God." (3:28). By the bodily deliverance of the Jews who were subjected to his ultimate form of bodily domination, Nebuchadnezzar learns that *this* god has the power to deliver them from his hands (see 3:15).

Ironically, the king's apprehension of this lesson comes to expression in the form of yet another decree in which he threatens to destroy the bodies of those that might blaspheme the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abenego, "for there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way" (3:29). This public confession of YHWH's power by Nebuchadnezzar brings the narrative to a satisfying conclusion.<sup>513</sup> By the end of the tale, Nebuchadnezzar's power has been addressed "from above": the king's own rhetorical question has been answered, for he now knows that YHWH has the power to deliver from his hands. And "from below," the fidelity of the young Jews in resisting Nebuchadnezzar's demands has been vindicated by YHWH's power to save. When set alongside Dan 4, however, the lesson learned by Nebuchadnezzar represents only a penultimate stage in his education.

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<sup>513</sup> Although Nebuchadnezzar's new decree could satisfy the longings for the respect of YHWH across the empire, the fact that the king frames himself as the one with the power to safeguard this respect through royal tyranny does raise the question of whether Nebuchadnezzar has fully grasped just how wide the chasm is between his power and God's.

#### 5.2.3.4. *Daniel 4: The Most High has Sovereignty over the Kingdom of Mortals*

The narrative of Daniel 4, as Newsom observes, “plays a climactic role in the sequence of stories in Dan 1–6.”<sup>514</sup> On its own terms, the story represents the most sustained reflection on the relationship between divine and imperial sovereignty within the collection. And at the same time, it also serves as a fitting conclusion to the carefully redacted Nebuchadnezzar cycle, bringing to culmination a central theme anticipated and developed throughout the preceding stories: namely, Nebuchadnezzar’s *knowledge* about the nature of his sovereignty in relation to that of the Most High God of the Jews. Through its sequence of dream-interpretation-fulfillment, the narrative educates Nebuchadnezzar—and through him, the reader—into the full knowledge that his truly remarkable political sovereignty has been delegated to him by the Most High God of the Jews. Thus, by the end of the Nebuchadnezzar cycle, the king’s knowledge and perceptions about the source of his own sovereignty have been aligned with the model articulated in Jer 27:5–6.

The lesson begins to come to Nebuchadnezzar in the form of a two-part dream-vision (and thus at the initiative of the deity), whose meaning is ultimately supplied by Daniel (“Belteshazzar”). The first part focuses on the king’s vision of a tree, which he describes at length:

- <sup>10</sup> There was a tree at the center of the earth,  
and its height was great.  
<sup>11</sup> The tree grew great and strong,  
its top reached to heaven,  
and it was visible to the ends of the whole earth.  
<sup>12</sup> Its foliage was beautiful,  
Its fruit abundant,  
And it provided food for all.  
The animals of the field found shade under it,  
The birds of the air nested in its branches,

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<sup>514</sup> Newsom and Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 127.

And from it all living beings were fed. (4:10–12[7–9])

With its symbolically significant location (v. 10a[7a]), cosmic dimensions (vv. 10b–11[7b–8]), and function as provider of shelter and sustenance for life (v. 12[9]), the tree described by Nebuchadnezzar is congruent with iconographic depictions of what is usually described as the TREE OF LIFE or the WORLD TREE.<sup>515</sup> Both of these designations are appropriate, for in its long history of use across the ancient Near East, the TREE was often depicted as part of a constellation of motifs representing (1) the values of fertility and the flourishing of life as well as (2) the interconnectedness of the entire cosmos.<sup>516</sup> Like the tree described by Nebuchadnezzar in 4:12[9] (see also Ezek 17:23; 31:6), the TREE is frequently represented with birds nested in its branches or with animals taking shelter beneath it.<sup>517</sup> Similar to what is described in Dan 4:10b–11[7b–8], the TREE often has cosmic dimensions, representing the created order and its interconnected spheres.<sup>518</sup> It is sometimes located on the cosmic mountain or with roots in the mythic

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<sup>515</sup> For a survey of the distribution of the iconographic image of the TREE as it is available to us in the iconographic record across the ancient Near East as well as in biblical literature, see Martin Metzger, “Der Weltenbaum in vorderorientalischer Bildtradition,” in *Unsere Welt – Gottes Schöpfung: Eberhard Wölfel zum 65. Geburtstag am 16. April 1992*, ed. Wilfried Härle, Manfred Marquardt, and Wolfgang Nethöfel, Marburger theologische Studien 32 (Marburg: Elwert, 1992), 1–34. See also Simo Parpola, “The Assyrian Tree of Life: Tracing the Origins of Jewish Monotheism and Greek Philosophy,” *JNES* 52 (1993): 161–68; Klaus Koch, *Die Reiche der Welt und der kommende Menschensohn: Studien zum Danielbuch*, ed. Martin Rösel (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1995), 105–17.

<sup>516</sup> The image of the TREE has an ancient pedigree in the ancient Near East stretching back to the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE; see Metzger, “Der Weltenbaum in vorderorientalischer Bildtradition,”; Parpola, “The Assyrian Tree of Life,” 161. For discussions of the tree and fertility, see Barbara Nevling Porter, “Sacred Trees, Date Palms, and the Royal Persona of Ashurnasirpal II,” *JNES* 52 (1993): 133–38; on the cosmic dimensions of the TREE, see Metzger, “Der Weltenbaum in vorderorientalischer Bildtradition,” 6.

<sup>517</sup> See Metzger, “Der Weltenbaum in vorderorientalischer Bildtradition,” 8–9, and his figs. 11, 13, 37, 41, 43, 70, 76.

<sup>518</sup> Metzger, “Der Weltenbaum in vorderorientalischer Bildtradition,” 6.

subterranean waters and reaches up to heaven itself, symbolized by the winged sun-disk that regularly often hovers above it (see also Ezek 31:4).<sup>519</sup>

Given its ancient pedigree and widespread distribution across the Near East, the iconographic image of the TREE likely had a broad and flexible semantic range. But it is possible to trace at least one important trend in the appropriation of this motif for a particular communicative purpose: namely, its employment as a symbol for royal power. As early as the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE, depictions of the motif begin to make a close association between the image of the TREE and the figure of the king, who appears in symmetrical form on both sides of the of the TREE and often wields an object used for pollination.<sup>520</sup> As a number of scholars have suggested, these motifs together most likely served to represent the divinely ordered world and the crucial role of the king in maintaining that world.<sup>521</sup>

This connection between the king and the TREE became a major theme in the royal iconography of the Neo-Assyrian empire.<sup>522</sup> Most famously, the TREE served as the central motif in Ashurnasirpal II's Northwest Palace at Calah (ca. 965–959 BCE), where it recurs in various

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<sup>519</sup> Metzger, "Der Weltenbaum in vorderorientalischer Bildtradition," 6–8.

<sup>520</sup> Metzger provides examples of a number of stamp seals and ivory works from the Syria-Palestine region in which the king flanks symmetrically both sides of the tree; Metzger, "Der Weltenbaum in vorderorientalischer Bildtradition," 10.

<sup>521</sup> See Metzger, "Der Weltenbaum in vorderorientalischer Bildtradition," 10; Irene J. Winter, "Royal Rhetoric and the Development of Historical Narrative in Neo-Assyrian Relief," *Studies in Visual Communication* 7 (1981): 10–11; Parpola, "The Assyrian Tree of Life," 167; Simo Parpola, "Neo-Assyrian Concepts of Kingship and Their Heritage in Mediterranean Antiquity," in *Concepts of Kingship in Antiquity: Proceedings of the European Science Foundation Exploratory Workshop Held in Padova, November 28th–December 1st, 2007*, ed. Giovanni B. Lanfranchi and Robert Rollinger, HANE/M 11 (Padova: S.A.R.G.O.N. Editrice e Libreria, 2010), 38.

<sup>522</sup> Parpola provides a concise summary of how a recognizable form this motif-cluster obtains in the Neo-Assyrian period on a wide variety of media, including "royal garments and jewelry, official seals, and the wall paintings and sculptures of royal palaces"; see Parpola, "The Assyrian Tree of Life," 163–4.

forms to make a highly sophisticated claim about the office of the king.<sup>523</sup> In several instances, the king appears between attendant *apkallu* genies and the TREE, which are both located beneath the winged sun-disk representing the imperial deity Ashur.



**Figure 5.3. The King flanking the TREE between Attendant *apkallu* Genies<sup>524</sup>**

Importantly, however, the motif occurs in additional variations in which the figure of the king and the image of the TREE are *interchangeable*.<sup>525</sup>

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<sup>523</sup> For a sophisticated discussion of the function of the TREE in Ashurnasirpal's palace, see Porter, "Sacred Trees, Date Palms, and the Royal Persona of Ashurnasirpal II." See also John Malcolm Russell, "The Program of the Palace of Assurnasirpal II at Nimrud: Issues in the Research and Presentation of Assyrian Art," *AJA* 102 (1998): 687–96.

<sup>524</sup> After Winfried Orthmann, *Der Alte Orient*, Propyläen Kunstgeschichte 18 (Berlin: Propyläen, 1985), Plate 198.

<sup>525</sup> See Metzger, "Der Weltenbaum in vorderorientalischer Bildtradition," 11, who also points out the interchangeability of the king and the tree in seal images from Syria-Palestine; Parpola, "The Assyrian Tree of Life," 167.



**Figure 5.4. The Interchangeability of the King and the TREE<sup>526</sup>**

The interchangeability of the king and the TREE makes an important ideological claim about the identity and role of the monarch within Neo-Assyrian ideology. As Simo Parpola has reasoned, “if the Tree symbolized the divine world order, then the king himself represented the realization of that order in man.”<sup>527</sup> Thus the TREE “not only provided legitimation for Assyria’s rule over the world, but it also justified the king’s position as absolute ruler of the empire.”<sup>528</sup> Crucially, in what follows, the content of the dream and its interpretation by Daniel make the same ideological identification: the TREE *is* Nebuchadnezzar, whose sovereignty reaches up to heaven and to the ends of the earth (Dan 4:22[19]). In this way the dream-interpretation sequence affirms the universalizing ideology of rule that was characteristic of the Neo-Assyrians and their imperial successors. But it also assimilates this ideology of rule within a Yahwistic framework.

As Nebuchadnezzar recounts the second part of his dream-vision, he relates the command of a heavenly watcher, who issues a directive to an unspecified subject in two parts. The first part

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<sup>526</sup> After Janusz Meuszyński, *Die Rekonstruktion der Relieffdarstellungen und ihrer Anordnung im Nordwestpalast von Kalḫu (Nimrūd)*, trans. O. Hanczakowska, *Baghdader Forschungen* 2 (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1981), Plate 6.

<sup>527</sup> Parpola, “The Assyrian Tree of Life,” 167–68.

<sup>528</sup> Parpola, “The Assyrian Tree of Life,” 168. See also Metzger, “Der Weltenbaum in vorderorientalischer Bildtradition,” 10–11.



is a command to cut and strip down the tree but to leave its stump (4:14–15a[11–12a]).

Addressing the stump as a human person, the second part of the directive begins to identify it with the figure of the king: “Let him be bathed with the dew of heaven. And let his lot be with the animals of the field in the grass of the earth. Let his mind be changed from that of a human and let the mind of an animal be given to him. And let seven times pass over him” (4:15b–16[12b–13]). The watcher concludes the decree by explicitly identifying its revelatory purpose: “... in order that all who live may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdom of mortals and sets over it the lowliest of human beings ( שליט עליא במלכות אנושא ולמן־די יצבא ) (יתננה ושפל אנשים יקים עליה” (4:17b[14b]). The judgment of the TREE-KING will thus serve a revelatory purpose for the entire world, just as YHWH’s self-revelation through Cyrus (Isa 45:1–7) and against Pharaoh (Exod 5–15) would elsewhere in the biblical tradition (§4.3.2.1.3).

Daniel’s interpretation of the dream is rather straightforward (4:20–26[17–23]). Echoing the interpretive move made already in the imperial iconography, Daniel identifies the tree with Nebuchadnezzar, whose remarkable greatness reaches to heaven and whose sovereignty spans “to the ends of the earth” (4:22[19]). The words of the watcher, he clarifies, are a decree of the Most High that will come upon the king. Like the watcher, Daniel then makes explicit the revelatory purpose of this decree against the king, but now it is for the king specifically (not “all who live”) that the judgment will serve an instructive purpose: “seven times shall pass over you, until you have learned that the Most High has sovereignty over the kingdom of mortals, and gives it to whom he will (עד די־תנדע די־שליט עליא במלכות אנושא ולמן־די יצבא יתננה)” (4:25[22]). Nebuchadnezzar’s experience will thus lead him into the knowledge of what YHWH had already declared through the prophet Jeremiah: namely, that YHWH may give the earth and its inhabitants to whomever he pleases and had, in fact, chosen to give them to Nebuchadnezzar (Jer

27:5–6; §3.5.2). Nebuchadnezzar’s knowledge of this arrangement did not emerge in Jeremiah’s discourse. But it is the central and explicit concern of Daniel 4. It is only once this lesson has been learned that the stump will be restored, as Daniel reveals to Nebuchadnezzar: “your kingdom shall be reestablished for you from the time that you learn that Heaven in sovereign (שלטן שמיא)” (4:26[23]). After laying out the dream’s interpretation, Daniel concludes his interpretive service to the king by encouraging him to take measures that might prolong his prosperity. But as a decree of the Most High, the words of the watcher were inexorable.

Significantly, the judgment that comes to pass a year later is triggered by an act of royal hubris from Nebuchadnezzar, which demonstrates that the king does not yet understand the nature of his delegated sovereignty.<sup>529</sup> In a moment of self-aggrandizing reflection while strolling along the roof of his royal palace in Babylon, the king marvels at his building efforts, which he attributes to his own power through a series of 1<sup>st</sup> person statements: “Is this not great Babylon, which I have built as a royal capital by my vast power and for my glorious majesty!” (4:30[27]). This prideful musing triggers the judgment: immediately a voice from heaven interrupts the king and announces that “the kingdom has departed” from him and that his judgment will now commence and last “until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of morals ( מלכות אנושא) and gives it to whom he will” (4:25[22]).

After a brief notice of the decree’s fulfillment in the humiliating transformation of the king (4:33[30]), the narrative immediately shifts back into first-person narration from the perspective of Nebuchadnezzar, who shares a doxology that he issued to the Most High at the end of the period of his judgment (4:34–35[31–32]). Echoing the statement issued in his

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<sup>529</sup> Cf. the OG, which identifies the grounds for the judgment as Nebuchadnezzar’s destructive activities in Jerusalem (4:20–21).

encyclical at the beginning of the story (4:3[3:33]), Nebuchadnezzar shares something of what he has learned about the Most High: namely, that “his sovereignty is an everlasting sovereignty, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation” (4:34[31]).<sup>530</sup> As remarkable as his sovereignty in the human realm may be, Nebuchadnezzar learns that it is nevertheless fundamentally subordinate to the sovereignty of the Most High, which is eternal and therefore transcends any particular instantiation sovereignty in the human realm. With this lesson *in mind*, Nebuchadnezzar then draws the story to a close with a report of his full restoration by which he regained his kingdom and former glory, and even that “still more greatness was added” to him (4:36[33]).

By the end of his ordeal, Nebuchadnezzar had been taught a number of lessons about the nature of his political sovereignty: first, that the Most High God of the Jews (or “Heaven”) is sovereign over the kingdom of mortals; second, that the Most High places whomever he wishes in charge of the kingdom of mortals, even the “lowliest of human beings” (4:17[14]); and third, that the sovereignty of the Most High is eternal and therefore transcends the finite sovereignty of any particular king or kingdom. This imaginative instruction of the king through his judgment and rehabilitation performs powerful symbolic work on the Gentile king from “above” and “below.”

Working theologically “from above,” the story teaches Nebuchadnezzar, the paradigmatic Gentile emperor, a lesson about his rightful place in the hierarchy of sovereignty established in Jer 27:5–6. The king comes to learn that his truly remarkable sovereignty, which

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<sup>530</sup> The phraseology in these statements is nearly identical: “an everlasting kingdom (מלכות עלם), and his sovereignty/dominion (שלטן) is from generation to generation” (4:3[3:32]) // “for his dominion/sovereignty is an eternal dominion/sovereignty (שלטן עלם) and his kingdom (מלכותה) is from generation to generation” (4:34b[31:b]).

spans the entire created order, is (1) inferior to the eternal sovereignty of the Most High and (2) contingent upon the (good) will of the Most High, who gives this sovereignty to whomever he wishes.

By imaginatively acting out the judgment and education of the king around this conviction, the narrative posits a related theological principle about the terms and conditions for YHWH's authorization of Gentile empire: if the Gentile king does not acknowledge his proper place in the hierarchy of sovereignty and the theological contingency of his office, he will be subject to the Most High's judgment and have his sovereignty removed from him.<sup>531</sup> This theological principle, as we shall see, is worked out in the following narrative in Daniel 5.

The story's work "from below" is much more complicated. To begin with, the imaginative humiliation of the notorious Nebuchadnezzar was undoubtedly culturally satisfying for Jewish audiences, addressing the cultural wounds of defeat that had lingered since 587/6 BCE. Within the discursive world of the story, the king is brought down, at least for a time, from his superior place in the hierarchy of sovereignty. The dehumanization of king by his transformation into a state of animalistic madness positions him even *below* his former subjects—again, at least for a time.

But the story of Nebuchadnezzar's madness is not ultimately subversive to the king nor to the structure of empire held together by the sovereignty of his office. On the contrary, the dream-interpretation-fulfillment sequence provides a theological legitimation of the structure of universal kingship on the earth. Like the royal iconography prominent in Neo-Assyrian and Persian ideology, Nebuchadnezzar's dream-vision and its interpretation affirm an ideology of

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<sup>531</sup> See Koch, "Gottes Herrschaft über das Reich des Menschen: Daniel 4 im Licht neuer Funde," 113.

reign in which the king has political sovereignty over the entire created order. The notion that the empire was the single, legitimate expression of universal political sovereignty sanctioned by the imperial deity was a characteristic feature of the ideologies of reign promulgated by the Neo-Assyrians and, in a more programmatic way, their eventual successors, the Persians.<sup>532</sup> This emphasis is explicit in the ideologies expressed in traditional royal titulary employed by Neo-Assyrian and Persian kings. Consider, for example:

Sennacherib, the great king, the mighty king, king of the universe, king of Assyria, king of the four quarters (of the earth); the wise ruler, favorite of the great gods, guardian of the right ... The god Assur, the great mountain, an unrivaled kingship has entrusted to me, and above all those who dwell in palaces, has made powerful my weapons ...<sup>533</sup>

A great god (is) Auramazda, who created this earth, who created yonder heaven ... who made Xerxes king, one king of many, one lord of many ... I (am) Xerxes, the great king, king of kings, king of countries containing many peoples, king of this great earth far and wide, son of Darius, the king, an Achaemenid ...<sup>534</sup>

Daniel 4 ultimately affirms this ideological structure. As in Jer 27:5–6, Nebuchadnezzar is identified as the royal figure elected by YHWH to have kingship over the entire earth (Figure 5.5).

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<sup>532</sup> For a comparative overview of the universalizing of the Neo-Assyrian and Persian royal ideologies, see Barjamovic, "Propaganda and Practice in Assyrian and Persian Imperial Culture."

<sup>533</sup> Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib*, 23.

<sup>534</sup> From the inscriptions of Xerxes found at Persepolis, cited in Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 244. Similar concepts are expressed earlier in Darius I's Behistun inscription I 1, 5 and later in the inscriptions of Artaxerxes I, Darius II, and Artaxerxes II; see Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 141, 316, 334–35, 364.

<b>Figure 5.5: Hierarchies of Sovereignty in JerMT 27:5–6/Dan 4 and Neo-Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian, and Achaemenid Royal Ideology</b>			
<u>JerMT 27:5–6/Dan 4</u>	<u>Neo-Assyrian Royal Ideology</u>	<u>BM 55467</u>	<u>Achaemenid Royal Ideology</u>
YHWH	Aššur	Marduk	Ahura Mazda
↓	↓	↓	↓
Nebuchadnezzar	Assyrian King	Nabopolassar	Achaemenid King
↓	↓	↓	↓
The earth/all these lands	The universe – lands – kings	All the lands	All lands – king on earth – the earth far and wide

In this way, the narrative both contests and reaffirms the imperial ideology. It contests the theological foundations of Gentile empire by asserting the counterclaim that it is the Most High God of the Jews who is at the top of the hierarchy of sovereignty: *YHWH* is the imperial deity who delegates sovereignty to the king. But at the same time, by assimilating the notion of a single, world-wide empire within a Yahwistic framework, *YHWH* is also the *imperial* deity (cf. §3.5.2.5). The narrative of Daniel 4 thus affirms the theological legitimacy of the structure of Gentile empire to which it responds in the first place. According to the narrative, all that the Most High requires of the king is that he acknowledge and operate within his proper place in the hierarchy of sovereignty.<sup>535</sup> The next narrative in the cycle, Daniel 5, demonstrates what happens when the Gentile king knowingly fails to do so.

<sup>535</sup> Similarly, see Davies, *Daniel*, 94. In this respect, it is interesting to recall that in the decree attributed to Cyrus in Ezra 1:2–4, Cyrus does just this: “Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: YHWH, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem in Judah” (1:2). Whether this attribution reflects Cyrus’s own formulation or—more likely—reflects either the wording of a petition formulated by a Jewish diplomat or a free invention of a Jewish scribe (see §4.2.4), this decree portrays Cyrus acting in the full and correct knowledge of his place in the hierarchy of sovereignty established by Jer 27:5–6 and later worked out in Daniel 1–4. Since Cyrus does not attribute his sovereignty to YHWH in his own inscriptions, he did not, in fact, operate under this understanding but was merely willing to accommodate his rhetoric to his Jewish audience. Given the acclamation of Cyrus in biblical literature, his willingness to do so might have set a precedent for judging kings within the understanding of Gentile empire within the model of divine delegation—a precedent that Daniel 1–6 works out imaginatively through narrative.

#### 5.2.4. In Nebuchadnezzar's Shadow: Daniel 5–6

##### 5.2.4.1. Daniel 5: "Though You Knew All This!" The Judgment of Belshazzar

The narrative of Daniel 4 represents the climax not only of the Nebuchadnezzar cycle (chs. 1–4) but of the entire cycle of court tales as a whole. The judgment and rehabilitation of Nebuchadnezzar around the acknowledgement of the Most High and the role that this acknowledgement plays as a necessary condition for Gentile imperium looms over the following story in Daniel 5 and provides a backdrop against which to understand the divine judgment it enacts imaginatively against Belshazzar. The connection between these two narratives is made explicit in the Masoretic version of Daniel 5, which features a lengthy redactional supplement in which Daniel looks back upon and retells the previous story of Daniel 4 (5:18–21; see also vv. 11–12) and harnesses its moral in explaining the finality of the Most High's judgment against Belshazzar.<sup>536</sup> The redactors of Daniel 5 MT thus sought to draw an explicit comparison between the cases of Nebuchadnezzar and that of his feckless successor, Belshazzar.

The issue that provides the point of contrast between the two kings is—significantly—the status of their knowledge.<sup>537</sup> Unlike Nebuchadnezzar, who moves from a state of ignorance to knowledge and is thus redeemed through his humiliating judgment, Belshazzar directly affronts the Most High *knowing full well* the lesson learned by his father and thus incurs the deity's immediate, inexorable, and total judgment (5:22). In the Masoretic version of the story, Belshazzar's sins against the Most High at his drunken feast are threefold: (1) he summons the

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<sup>536</sup> As Newsom has recognized, Daniel 5 "uses the redeemed Nebuchadnezzar as a foil over against his weak and arrogant son, Belshazzar" (*Daniel: A Commentary*, 127).

<sup>537</sup> Collins frames the comparison between the two king as "one who learns to repent and one who does not" (*Daniel*, 47). But the grounds for the comparison really lie under the issue of *knowledge*. Belshazzar is not given a chance to repent, because he acted in full knowledge of the Nebuchadnezzar episode.

temple vessels from Jerusalem—symbols of YHWH’s presence in Judah’s aniconic culture—and he and his royal entourage them drink from them;<sup>538</sup> (2) he praises hand-crafted idols, and in doing so, as Daniel later points out, (3) he fails to glorify the God “in whose power is your very breath, and to whom belong all your ways” (5:3–4, 23).<sup>539</sup> In his indictment of Belshazzar, which emerges from his interpretation of the mysterious inscription that appears immediately after these actions, Daniel draws an explicit contrast between Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar around the theme of knowledge (5:21–22). Daniel declares that while Nebuchadnezzar lifted up his heart in arrogance, was humbled, and then learned that “the Most High God has sovereignty over the kingdom of mortals, and sets over it whomever he will” (5:21), Belshazzar did not humble his heart, “even though [he] knew all this!” (בִּלְקַבֵּל דִּי כָל־דְּנָה יָדַעַת; 5:22).

Within the discursive world of Daniel 5, the humiliation and rehabilitation of Nebuchadnezzar around his acknowledgment of the Most High as the source of his sovereignty serves as a watershed moment in the history of YHWH’s dealings with Gentile kings. Now that the public spectacle of Nebuchadnezzar’s judgment and doxology were known, subsequent kings were without excuse if they did not act self-consciously in accordance with their rightful place in the hierarchy of sovereignty. As an exemplary case, Belshazzar’s hubristic affront against the God of the Jews violated the conditions for the maintenance of the Gentile imperium. And for

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<sup>538</sup> On the theology of divine presence in the temple implements and other sancta in Israelite thought, see Gary A. Anderson, “Towards a Theology of the Tabernacle and Its Furniture,” in *Text, Thought, and Practice in Qumran and Early Christianity: Proceedings of the Ninth International Symposium of the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature*, STDJ 84 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 161–94, and chapters 6 and 7 in idem, *Christian Doctrine and the Old Testament: Theology in the Service of Biblical Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 95–120, 121–33. See also, Pannkuk, “The Preface to Old Greek Daniel 5,” 225–26.

<sup>539</sup> In the OG version, Belshazzar: (1) desecrates the temple vessels, (2) blesses idols, and (3) omits praise to the eternal God (5:3–4). In the “preface” that is prefixed to the OG version, there is no mention of the desecration of the temple vessels, but only of (1) the praise of the palatial gods and (2) the omission of praise to the Most High God. For one proposal regarding the significance of these variants, see Pannkuk, “The Preface to Old Greek Daniel 5,” 221–24; see also Wills, *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King*, 145.



that reason, Belshazzar’s kingdom was brought to an end that very night: he was weighed in the scales and found wanting, and his kingdom was divided and given to the Medes and Persians (5:26–28). Importantly, Belshazzar’s violation of the conditions for imperial rule did not entail the judgment of the structure of Gentile empire itself: the *king* is judged but the *earthly kingdom* is transferred to yet another Gentile ruler: “Darius the Mede.”<sup>540</sup>

#### 5.2.4.2. *Daniel 6: The Power and Wishes of Darius the Mede*

Like Daniel 3 earlier in the cycle, the narrative of Daniel 6 explores the kind of conflict that could emerge when Jewish fidelity to the Most High God entailed disobeying the commands of the Gentile king.<sup>541</sup> But although these stories share some key themes and are driven by a similar plot structure, their discourse on the relationship between God and the Gentile king is oriented toward different ends. In Daniel 3, the refusal of the Jews to obey the king’s command on religious grounds sets up an explicit contest between Nebuchadnezzar and the God of the Jews in which one party has to prevail: “And who is the god who will deliver you (ישׁזבכוֹן) from my hands?” (3:15). The narrative conflict is only resolved when the Most High triumphs over Nebuchadnezzar by saving the young Jews from the fiery furnace.

The situation in Daniel 6 is quite different. Here the Gentile king, “Darius the Mede,”<sup>542</sup> is led by members of his court to issue an irrevocable interdict that would, unbeknownst to him,

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<sup>540</sup> Similarly, Davies, *Daniel*, 96; Frisch, *The Danielic Discourse on Empire*, 106.

<sup>541</sup> For a helpful discussion of the similarities between these narratives, see also Collins, *Daniel*, 272; Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty*, 143.

<sup>542</sup> The “Darius the Mede” referred to in 6:1 is not known from any other historical sources. As Collins points out, “[t]his designation does not actually appear in the story of the lions’ den. The original story undoubtedly referred to Darius I of Persia, who was noted for his organization of the satrapies” (Collins, *Daniel*, 264). The reference to “Darius the Mede” in 6:1 was, therefore, either introduced secondarily entirely or changed from “Darius the Persian.” Cf. Dan 6:1 in the OG, which has merely “Darius,” and 6:1 in LXX (Th), which also has merely “Darius,” though Daniel 5:31, immediately before, refers to “Darius the Mede.” The erroneous identification of Darius as “the Mede,” was likely motivated by the desire to fit the story within the prophetic prediction that Babylon

induce his beloved servant Daniel to commit a capital crime on religious grounds (6:7[8], 12[13]). The deceptive scheming of the Gentile courtiers sets up a scenario in which the king earnestly desires to save Daniel (6:14[15], 18–19[19–20], 23[24]) but cannot do so on account of his own political sovereignty (6:8[9], 12[13], 14–15[15–16], 17[18]).<sup>543</sup> The conflict of the narrative thus emerges around the question of whether or not the God of Daniel would act in accordance with the king’s wishes by saving Daniel from his own imperial policy. The resolution of the conflict, in other words, is only possible when the desires of the Gentile king and the actions of the Living God come into alignment with one another: “May your God, whom you faithfully serve, deliver you (ישיזבונך!)” (6:16[17]; cf. 3:15). This alignment obtains at the climax of the story, when Darius learns, to his sincere delight, that the God of Daniel has indeed fulfilled his wish to deliver Daniel from the lions (6:20–23[21–24], 27[28]).

Beyond merely illustrating the ability of Daniel’s God to rescue (6:20[21], 27[28]), the narrative alignment of God’s actions with the wishes of Darius makes a larger theological claim about Jewish religious practices within the structures of Gentile empire: namely, that they do no “harm” to the king. As Newsom has recognized, the central ideological claim of the text takes shape around this theme of “harm” (חבל; 3x in 6:22–23[23–24]):

Do Daniel’s religious practices “harm” the king in a way that makes them incompatible with the king’s sovereignty? Since the king does *not* wish Daniel to be harmed but is incapable of saving Daniel himself, the actions of the living God in saving Daniel align

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would be destroyed by the Medes (Isa 13:17; 51:11, 28; §3.5.3; see also Dan 9:1, 11:1); see R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel with Introduction, Indexes and a New English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1929), 141–45; H. H. Rowley, *Darius the Mede and the Four World Empires in the Book of Daniel: A Historical Study of Contemporary Theories* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1935), 57.

<sup>543</sup> Humphreys, “A Life-Style for Diaspora,” 221.

God's sovereign power with the wishes of the king and show Daniel's religious practices to be in harmony with, rather than in opposition to, the well-being of the king."<sup>544</sup>

The compatibility of Daniel's religious conduct with the well-being of the king is expressed explicitly in Daniel's report from the den following his miraculous deliverance: "My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths so that they would not harm me, because I was found blameless before him; *and also before you, O king, I have done no harm*" (6:22[23]). And Darius, for his part, appears to accept such an interpretation of matters: first, redirects the theme of "harm" by turning the tables on those Gentile courtiers who sought to entrap Daniel on religious grounds, submitting them to the very same harm they aimed to inflict upon Daniel (6:24[25]). And second, he concludes the episode—and the cycle of stories as a whole—by issuing another edict in which he decrees that people in all of his dominion of his kingdom (שלטן מלכות) "should tremble and fear before the God of Daniel" and confesses, much like Nebuchadnezzar before him (cf. 4:34[31]; 4:3[3:33]), the transcendent and eternal sovereignty of the God of Daniel, whose "kingdom shall never be destroyed (מלכותה די־לא תתחבל)," and whose "dominion has no end (שלטנה עד־סופא)" (6:26[27]). Thus, by the end of the narrative, the legitimacy of three-tiered hierarchy of sovereignty is reaffirmed from both sides of the imperial encounter: (1) by Daniel's fidelity to his God, which is shown to be compatible with the well-being of the king and (2) by the King's public confession of the sovereignty of the Living God that transcends his own. By imagining such compatibility between Jewish religious practice and the sovereignty of the Gentile king, the narrative posits, as Davies recognizes, an "identity of interest between the king, God, and God's people. There *is* no real conflict of interest between

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<sup>544</sup> Newsom and Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 191.

human and divine sovereignty, and perfect harmony under the supreme authority of God is both possible and to the benefit of all.”<sup>545</sup> And with that affirmation, the cycle of court tales comes to an end.

### **5.2.5. Containment: The Symbolic Work of Daniel 1–6**

As the authors and editors of the Danielic court tales set out to reflect on the ideological challenges presented by the Gentile king, they made a number of choices that shaped the character of their discourse and the symbolic work that this discourse performs. In light of the foregoing discussion, two of these choices warrant further discussion.

The first was the choice to adopt the model of divine delegation of sovereignty to the Gentile king that was first articulated in Jeremiah 27:5–6. This model provided the ideological starting point for understanding the source and relative status of the sovereignty possessed by a series of Gentile king throughout the collection. The individual tales imagine scenarios in which the Gentile kings are “put in their place” within the hierarchy of sovereignty constructed by this model through dramatic confrontations with the God of the Jews. And, as a larger narrative unit, the Nebuchadnezzar cycle imagines the king’s gradual education into this understanding of his own sovereignty, which comes to a culmination with his explicit acknowledgement and confession at the end of chapter 4. As I aimed to describe more fully in §3.5.2, this model of divine delegation is ideologically useful, because it is able to assimilate the sovereignty of the Gentile king within a Yahwistic framework by locating the structure of Gentile empire within the deity’s intentionality. But it also means that the very conditions of political domination and subservience that gave rise to these discursive responses are cast as theologically authorized by

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<sup>545</sup> Davies, *Daniel*, 93–94.

the deity. The appropriation of this model thus allowed for the court tales to contain the ideological challenges of imperialism within a symbolic framework constructed by discourse about the Jewish God. But this containment simultaneously reinforced the structures of empire theologically, or “from above.”

The second crucial decision was the choice to appropriate the genre of the court tale as the mode of discourse for exploring the sovereignty of the Gentile king “from below.” As Jeremiah’s oracle made explicit, the hierarchy of sovereignty constructed in Jer 27:5–6 entailed a corresponding hierarchy of servitude (so vv. 8–11). The court tales, with their typical cast of characters and stock plotlines set within the king’s court, provided a useful form of discourse for working out the implications of this hierarchy for Jewish life in diaspora. For the most part, the tales have no scruples about depicting the Jewish courtiers as remarkably loyal and successful servants of the king. But the kinds of conflicts inherent to the sub-genres of the court tale also provided opportunities to imagine the limits of such fidelity. Especially in the tales of contest in chapters 3 and 6 (and, to a lesser degree, chapter 1), the sovereign actions of the king create a crisis in which Jewish courtiers must decide whether or not to maintain ultimate religious fidelity to the Most High God. By imagining the divine deliverance of the Jews on account of their faithfulness, the stories provide a model of Jewish conduct that encourages and authorizes resistance to the king in circumstances where the king’s actions are misaligned with his rightful place in the hierarchy of sovereignty.

But although the genre of the court tale provided a useful discursive venue for exploring the limits of the king’s power, it also imposed restrictions on the extent to which this discourse

could call into question the ultimate legitimacy of that power.<sup>546</sup> As Lawrence Wills so perceptively recognized in his study of the court stories, the genre itself is bound up with an ideological commitment to the legitimacy court, the microcosm of the king's dominion:

[T]here generally exists in court legends the idea that it is the court where all moral conflicts have their just resolution. This is not, it should be emphasized, because the wisdom and virtue of the king render it so—Ahasuerus is obtuse, Cambyses is a fickle tyrant, and in *Ahikar* Asarhaddon is foolish and weak—but because the power and centrality of the court hold absolute sway over human events, and behind this temporal power is the hand of just retribution.<sup>547</sup>

Drawing on Wills's observations, Newsom has recognized that this "fundamental ideological commitment to the *legitimacy* of the court" is reflected and re-inscribed in the intrinsically comedic structure of the genre itself.<sup>548</sup> The Danielic court tales generally come to a comedic conclusion not only for the Jewish heroes but also for their main protagonist, the king, whose legitimacy is reaffirmed through lessons learned and the remarkably orthodox doxologies placed on his lips. Even in the case of Daniel 5, the only story in the collection that enacts total judgment on the king, the legitimacy of the office of kingship is affirmed (being transferred to Darius),<sup>549</sup> and the story struggles with its own comedic structure (Daniel is rewarded by the king

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<sup>546</sup> This aligns with the more general observation that many have drawn about the ultimately favorable view of the foreign court in the tales. An apt summary of this view, which supports the view that these stories belong to the relatively irenic time of the Persian period, was put forth clearly by Baumgartner: "Und das Verhältnis zum heidnischen Staat und seinem Oberhaupt ist nicht grundsätzlich feindlich; nur wenn der König von Größenwahn befallen wird oder wenn ihn Neid und Verleumdung gegen die hochgestellten Juden ausstachelt, kommt es zum Zusammenstoß. Dass alles ist nicht die Situation der Seleukidenzeit, sondern die der Perserzeit. Jene Geschichten sind somit älter als das Danielbuch" (*Das Buch Daniel*, 9). See also James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1950), 89; Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 310; Humphreys, "A Life-Style for Diaspora," 211–33, esp. 221.

<sup>547</sup> Wills, *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King*, 21; see also 22–23, 30–31.

<sup>548</sup> Newsom, "Resistance Is Futile!," 170.

<sup>549</sup> Similarly, Frisch, *The Danielic Discourse on Empire*, 106.

despite his message of inexorable doom).<sup>550</sup> The choice to appropriate a genre at home in the royal court itself was thus useful but ideologically fraught. Newsom captures the complexity clearly: “The structure of the genre allows the release of the frustrations of those who must work in the court, subject to the volatility of the king and the rivalries of the courtiers, but it also enacts an ideological containment that keeps those frustrations from become truly subversive to the order.”<sup>551</sup> The discourse of the Danielic court tales thus contains the ideological challenges presented by the sovereignty of the Gentile king, but in doing so, also re-inscribes a commitment to the legitimacy of the imperial structures to which this discourse responds in the first place.

### 5.3. THE DREAM-VISION OF DANIEL 2: SHATTERING THE STASIS

The ideologically stable view of empire endemic to the court tale genre and supported by the model of divine delegation of sovereignty obtains across all of Daniel 1–6, but with one crucial exception: the dream-vision of Daniel 2.<sup>552</sup> Through its creative appropriation of the “four-kingdoms schema,” the dream-interpretation sequence of chapter 2 sets the structure of legitimate Gentile empire within a finite temporal framework and posits a future in which the universal imperium previously possessed by a series of Gentile kings would be superseded by the eternal rule of the God of Heaven.

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<sup>550</sup> See Pannkuk, “The Preface to Old Greek Daniel 5,” 219; Newsom and Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 178. Cf. Wills, *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King*, 121. A similar tension occurs in Daniel 2; see Niditch and Doran, “The Success Story of the Wise Courtier: A Formal Approach,” 192.

<sup>551</sup> Newsom, “Resistance Is Futile!,” 170; similarly, Newsom and Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 13.

<sup>552</sup> See John J. Collins, “Nebuchadnezzar and the Kingdom of God: Deferred Eschatology in the Jewish Diaspora,” in *Loyalitätskonflikte in Der Religionsgeschichte: Festschrift Für Carsten Colpe*, ed. Christoph Elsas and Hans G. Kippenberg (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1990), 252; Collins, *Daniel*, 168; Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 311. Cf. Albertz, *Der Gott des Daniel*, 176; Rainer Albertz, “The Social Setting of the Aramaic and Hebrew Book of Daniel,” in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, ed. John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint, vol. 1 of *VTSup* 83 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 177.

**Figure 5.6: The Four-Kingdoms Sequence in Nebuchadnezzar's Dream Vision**

	<u>Image</u>	<u>Referent</u>
vv. 32, 38	Head of gold	Nebuchadnezzar (Neo-Babylonian Kingdom)
vv. 32, 39	Chest and arms of silver	Medes
vv. 32, 39	Middle and thighs of bronze	Persians
vv. 33, 40–41	Legs of iron, its feet part iron, part clay	Macedonians
vv. 42–43	Toes	Dynastic marriages of Seleucids and Ptolemies
vv. 34–34, 44–45	Rock cut from a mountain “not by human hands”	Everlasting Reign of God of Heaven/Jewish People (cf. Isa 51:1)

The explicitly eschatological horizon of this sequence (vv. 28, 44–45) sits at odds with the ideological containment of the rest of Daniel 1–6 in which there is no indication that the divine delegation of sovereignty to Gentile kings was intended to be limited in temporal scope.<sup>553</sup>

The tension between the eschatology of the dream-vision and the ideology of the genre in which it is set is one that scholars have tried to account for in various ways, especially by positing an earlier version of the dream and its interpretation in which an eschatological element was not yet present.<sup>554</sup> In my judgment, the most compelling analysis of the problem has been

<sup>553</sup> Kratz, *Translatio imperii*, 27–37; Newsom, “Resistance Is Futile!,” 174. Of course, in its present context early in the collection, the eschatological scenario of the dream vision colors how one reads the rest of the cycle, since the reader knows that the arrangement with the Babylonian and Medo-Persian rulers is temporary. Admittedly, as Albertz points out, the reasoning here with regard to Daniel 2 could be viewed as circular; “The Social Setting of the Aramaic and Hebrew Book of Daniel,” 177.

<sup>554</sup> Popular strategies have been to suggest that the vision was originally about a series of Babylonian kings, the series of kingdoms named in the book (Babylonian, Persian, Median, Greek), or the series of rulers named in the book (Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Darius, Cyrus) that was only later updated with an eschatological orientation during the Maccabean crisis, which requires the identification of redactional supplements; see, with various nuances, M. A. Beek, *Das Danielbuch: Sein historischer Hintergrund und seine literarische Entwicklung* (Leiden: Ginsberg, 1935), 39–47; Davies, “Daniel Chapter Two,” 399–400; Davies, *Daniel*, 48; Frölich, “Daniel 2 and Duetero-Isaiah,” 266–70. Cf. Kratz, *Translatio imperii*, 55–59, 146, 273; Reinhard G. Kratz, “The Visions of Daniel,” in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, ed. John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint, vol. 1 of *VTSup* 83 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 92–93; Odil Hannes Steck, “Weltgeschehen und Gottesvolk im Buche Daniel,” in *Wahrnehmungen Gottes im Alten Testament: Gesammelte Studien*, TB 70 (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1982), 263; C. L. Seow, “From Mountain to Mountain: The Reign of God in Daniel 2,” in *A God So Near: Essays on Old Testament Theology in Honor of Patrick D. Miller*, ed. Brent A. Strawn and Nancy R. Bowen (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 367; Holm, *Of Courtiers and Kings*, 488, n. 8. See also the scenario put forth in John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Vision of the Book of Daniel*, HSM 16 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), 42. For critical evaluations of these schemas, see already



articulated in a recent study by Carol Newsom.<sup>555</sup> Newsom begins by drawing on an insight from the comparative literary theorist Claudio Guillén that

[t]here are authors who fight, so to speak, against the genre they are using by injecting it with antibodies. Not all genres live peacefully in the center of a single work ... There are conventions and traditions that crash and collide with one another. Then the genre includes a contragenre within itself.<sup>556</sup>

Such an injection of a generic antibody is exactly what Newsom sees happening in Daniel 2, where the four-kingdoms schema of the dream-vision breaks through “ideological closure of the court tale” that serves as its discursive host.<sup>557</sup> Although Newsom is less optimistic about our ability to reconstruct precisely an earlier version of the tale than some,<sup>558</sup> she nevertheless rightly sees the injection of this counter genre as a secondary development within the tradition-history of

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Rowley, *Darius the Mede*, 161–73; Newsom and Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 79–80; see also Albertz, “The Social Setting of the Aramaic and Hebrew Book of Daniel,” 177, 184; John J. Collins, “Review of *Translatio Imperii* by Reinhard Gregor Kratz,” *JBL* 111 (1992): 703; Collins, *Daniel*, 168.

<sup>555</sup> “Resistance Is Futile!,” 173–76. See also Newsom and Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 63–65, 211–12.

<sup>556</sup> *The Challenge of Comparative Literature*, trans. C. Franzen (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 138. Anthea E. Portier-Young points out a stream of scholarship in the social sciences that has reckoned the spread of ideas to the spread of germs, which provides an interesting conceptual parallel to Guillén’s image of the antibody; see Anthea E. Portier-Young, “Apocalyptic Worldviews—What They Are and How They Spread: Insights from the Social Sciences,” in *The Seleucid and Hasmonean Periods and the Apocalyptic Worldview: The First Enoch Seminar Nangeroni Meeting Villa Cagnola, Gazzada (June 25–28, 2012)*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe, Gabriele Boccaccini, and Jason M. Zurawski, LSTS 88 (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 116–17.

<sup>557</sup> Newsom, “Resistance Is Futile!,” 174. See also, Kratz, “The Visions of Daniel,” 98.

<sup>558</sup> In his sophisticated analysis of the Danielic court tales, e.g., Reinhard G. Kratz reconstructs an earlier version of the tale lacking an eschatological horizon by excising key verses (e.g., vv. 28, 40–44) and by suggesting a different version of the dream’s original interpretation (*Translatio imperii: Untersuchungen zu den aramäischen Danielerzählungen und ihrem theologiegeschichtlichen Umfeld*, WMANT 63 [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1991], 55–59, 146, 273). Though Kratz’s literary-critical solution to this problem resolves the ideological tension between the dream-vision and the rest of Daniel 1–6, it is important to keep in mind that such reconstructive arguments are inevitably circular; see Collins, “Review of *Translatio Imperii* by Reinhard Gregor Kratz,” 703; Collins, *Daniel*, 168; Newsom and Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 215.

Daniel 2.<sup>559</sup> As I described earlier (§5.2.1.1), there are solid grounds for thinking that the narrative of Daniel 2 has its tradition-historical roots as far back as the Neo-Babylonian period, when Nabonidus publicly broadcast his dreams related to his anxiety about the security of his reign. And yet the dream-vision itself dates no earlier than the early Hellenistic period, since it alludes to the rise of the Macedonian empire and the inter-dynastic marriages between the Seleucids and the Ptolemies (2:33, 40–43).<sup>560</sup> The injection of the counter genre as witnessed in “the present content of the dream,” therefore, “does appear to be a later generation’s challenges to the original ideological vision of the story.”<sup>561</sup>

What inspired this later generation in the Hellenistic period to fight against the ideological closure that obtains in Dan 1–6? Newsom locates the rise of the impulse in the final decades of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, which saw Alexander the Great’s victories over the Persians and the subsequent cycle of violence between his successors who struggled to control Babylon between 311/10 and 308 BCE.<sup>562</sup> Babylonian texts roughly contemporaneous with the dream-vision of Daniel witness to the devastating cultural trauma of this period (*Chronicle of the Diadochoi* [ABC 10])<sup>563</sup> and the desire among Babylonians for divine intervention for the

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<sup>559</sup> For a survey of attempts to answer the question of whether the dream “may have originally had a different meaning or have been composed for a different context,” see Collins, *Daniel*, 169.

<sup>560</sup> The reference to inter-dynastic marriages in 2:43 is likely a later gloss and could refer to marriages that were arranged in 252 BCE or 193–92 BCE; see Collins, *Daniel*, 36.

<sup>561</sup> Newsom, “Resistance Is Futile!,” 174.

<sup>562</sup> Newsom, “Resistance Is Futile!,” 175. See also Kratz, “The Visions of Daniel,” 98.

<sup>563</sup> The so-called *Chronicle of the Diadochoi* (A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000], 25–26, 115–19) provides, as Susan Sherwin-White describes, “vivid glimpses of the horror and suffering of the war” that took place between Antigonos and Seleucus I as they struggled violently for control of Babylon from 311–308 BCE (“Seleucid Babylonia: A Case Study for the Installation and Development of Greek Rule,” in *Hellenism in the East: The Interaction of Greek and Non-Greek Civilizations from Syria to Central Asia after Alexander*, ed. Amélie Kuhrt and Susan Sherwin-White [London: Duckworth, 1987], 15; see also Susan Sherwin-White and Amélie Kuhrt, *From Samarkhand to Sardis: A New Approach to the Seleucid Empire* [London: Duckworth, 1993], 10). Describing the relevant years, the chronicle mentions a battle between the

establishment of a kingdom of peace. The so-called *Dynastic Prophecy*, an historiographical work composed by the intelligentsia of Babylon, provides an interesting point of comparison to Daniel 2.<sup>564</sup> The text presents itself as a series of predictions about the rise and fall of king(dom)s, beginning with the Assyrians and continuing through the early Seleucids. In one crucial passage, after reporting Alexander's initial defeat of the Persians (III 11–13), the text predicts that the Persian king will rally his army and, with the help of the “Enlil, Šamaš, and [Marduk],” defeat Alexander and restore well-being in the land (III 12–23).<sup>565</sup> Significantly, it is precisely here that the historiography of the *Prophecy* diverges from reality, for no such counter-defeat ever occurred and the Macedonians succeeded in taking over Babylon—a fact to which the rest of the *Prophecy* attests (col. IV).<sup>566</sup> Thus, similar to the dream-vision of Daniel 2, the *Prophecy* appears to preserve an *ex eventu* prophecy about the rise and fall of empires leading up to the

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two figures (rev. lines 15–17) and refers to “weeping and mourning in the land” (rev. lines 26, 39–40) and plundering of the city and countryside (rev. line 27). See also the account of these years in Diodorus Siculus, *The Library of History* XIX 90–100.9.

<sup>564</sup> For the *editio princeps*, see A. K. Grayson, *Babylonian Historical-Literary Texts*, Toronto Semitic Texts and Studies 3 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), 28–36. For an up-to-date transliteration and translation with textual notes, see Matthew Neujahr, *Predicting the Past in the Ancient Near East: Mantic Historiography in Ancient Mesopotamia, Judah, and the Mediterranean World*, BJS 354 (Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2012), 59–63. With regard to Daniel 2, see Newsom, “Resistance Is Futile!,” 174–75; Collins, *Daniel*, 168.

<sup>565</sup> For a critical analysis of alternative interpretations of these lines, see Neujahr, *Predicting the Past in the Ancient Near East*, 64–67.

<sup>566</sup> Col. IV is difficult to interpret due to its extremely fragmentary condition, and scholars therefore reconstruct the particular referents to various Macedonian rulers; see, alternatively, Grayson, *BHLT*, 27; Sherwin-White, “Seleucid Babylonia,” 14. The references to the later Macedonian leaders are, as Neujahr points out, “[t]he main objection against viewing Darius’s victory over Alexander as a legitimate attempt at prediction has been the fact that the composition continues beyond this point, and seems to narrate later reigns” (*Predicting the Past in the Ancient Near East*, 70; idem, “When Darius Defeated Alexander: Composition and Redaction in the Dynastic Prophecy,” *JNES* 64 [2005]: 107); Neujahr points out, however, that failed *ex eventu* prophecies were preserved and later updated in the cases of Daniel 12 and *Sybilline Oracles* 4, so the occurrence of this phenomenon in the *Dynastic Prophecy* should not come as a surprise.

(unfulfilled) desire for divine intervention against the early Macedonian rulers.<sup>567</sup> Newsom

observes that while

there is no indication that the author of Daniel 2 knew the Dynastic Prophecy directly, the Babylonian Jewish community would have been subject to the same shocks as their Babylonian neighbors and undoubtedly shared many of their cultural and intellectual resources for responding to such shocks. In such a context, established and stabilized ways of negotiating a *modus vivendi* with the ideology of an imperial power, such as are represented in the plot structures of the Daniel narratives, may no longer have seemed adequate or persuasive. And just as they had previously adapted and hybridized the genre of the court tale, so they also appear to have adapted and hybridized the cultural construct of historical prophecy based on a sequence of kingdoms.<sup>568</sup>

The political and social turmoil of the final decades of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE brought an end not only to the *Pax Persica*, but with it the ideological compromise that had been worked out during that era in the Danielic court tales. In order to shatter the ideological stasis of this discourse, the later tradents behind the dream-vision appropriated and reworked a new historiographical schema at home in Persian royal ideology.

### 5.3.1. The Theological Appropriation of the Four-Kingdoms Sequence

As many scholars have observed, the four-kingdoms sequence of the dream-vision in Daniel 2 resembles a historiographical schema attested in Persian, Greek, and later Roman sources that sought to understand (or promote) the significance of the transfer sovereignty from one kingdom

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<sup>567</sup> Similarly, Collins, *Daniel*, 168.

<sup>568</sup> Newsom, “Resistance Is Futile!,” 175. This would suggest that the dream-vision of Daniel 2 and the *Dynastic Prophecy* have an analogous function despite their different genres and literary structures. On the structural differences between Akkadian *ex eventu* works and Judean apocalypses, see Neujahr, *Predicting the Past in the Ancient Near East*, 162; Seth L. Sanders, *From Adapa to Enoch: Scribal Culture and Religious Vision in Judea and Babylon*, TSAJ 167 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 161, 161 n. 25: “... this recasting of non-narrative Akkadian genres into Judean narrative ones is typical. Indeed, in the Judean Aramaic text with the most broadly accepted, extensive foundation in Babylonian scholarly texts, Astronomical Enoch, precisely this transformation occurs: a Jewish visionary receives the contents of an Akkadian non-narrative genre as revelation.”

to another.<sup>569</sup> Significantly, the schema appears to be of Persian origin. Relying on “Persian authorities,” Herotodus relates a schema in which sovereignty was transferred from Assyria, Media, and then to the Persians (I.95). The same sequence is attested in another Greek writer, Ctesias (4<sup>th</sup> c. BCE; see Diodorus Siculus II 21.8; 28:8; 32:5–6; 34.6), who was court physician to Artaxerxes II (404–359 BCE) (see also Tobit 14:4–7; the *Sib. Or.* 4:49–101). As Collins observes, “[t]he ‘three-kingdom’ sequence of Assyria, Media, and Persia is plausibly explained as the official Achaemenid view of history, intended to establish the legitimacy of Persia as the heir to the earlier empires of the Near East.”<sup>570</sup> The likening of this succession of kingdoms to various metals also finds a close parallel in another ancient Persian source preserved in the Bahman Yašt (*Zand ī Wahman yasn* chapter 1; cf. *Denkard* 9.8), which describes a tree with four branches made of gold, silver, steel, and—remarkably—mixed iron, which each refer to four periods associated with successive kingdoms.<sup>571</sup> The tradents responsible for the dream-vision of Daniel 2 appear to have appropriated these Persian historiographical schema in order to make their own novel theological claims about Gentile empire.

The appropriation of this historiographical schema in the dream vision of Daniel 2 is marked by two, closely-related adaptations that would prove remarkably influential in early Jewish thought about Gentile empire. The first is that the schema is assimilated within a

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<sup>569</sup> See Joseph Ward Swain, “The Theory of the Four Monarchies: Opposition History under the Roman Empire,” *Classical Philology* 35 (1940): 1–21. The literature on this topic is vast; for helpful summaries in relation to the Book of Daniel, see Collins, *Daniel*, 164–70; see also Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 92–95.

<sup>570</sup> Collins, *Daniel*, 167; Kratz, *Translatio imperii*, 198–212.

<sup>571</sup> The likening of a sequence of ages to a series of metals of declining value is an old and likely international phenomenon, attested already by the time of Hesiod (ca. 800 BCE; *Works and days*, 1.109–201; see also Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.89–150). As Collins notes, however, the Persian sources provide the closest parallels to the dream-vision in Daniel 2; not only do the metals refer to kingdoms in the Bahman Yašt, but, as he suggests, the shared motif of the iron mixed with something else “can hardly be due to chance” (Collins, *Daniel*, 164). See also Frisch, *The Danielic Discourse on Empire*, 88–90.

Yahwistic framework: the sequence of Gentile kingdoms that had succeeded one another in possessing global dominion did so under the auspices of the Most High God of the Jews, who “changes times and seasons, deposes kings and sets up kings” (2:21a; 2:37; cf. §6). The second was the eschatologization of the schema: the sequence of kingdoms does not culminate with the rule of the Achaemenids, as the Persian sources would have it, but rather with the eschatological action of the Most High God, who would act after the rise of the Macedonians to pulverize the structure of Gentile empire itself and inaugurate a kingdom that would stand forever (2:35, 44).

Together these modifications allowed the tradents behind the dream vision of Daniel 2 to claim a measure of continuity with previous Danielic discourse on empire while simultaneously introducing a novel eschatological scenario. Although the casting of the schema within an *ex eventu* prophecy (2:1, 29, 45) ultimately served to support the belief that history would continue to unfold in accordance within Nebuchadnezzar’s dream beyond the rise of the Macedonians, it also cast the previous empires—Babylonian, Median, Persian, and even the Hellenistic—as legitimate occupants of universal kingship for a time, since their reigns are expressions of the deity’s unfolding plan for history.<sup>572</sup> In this respect, the oracle affirms the model of divine delegation of global sovereignty to the Gentile king articulated in Jer 27:5–6 and assumed throughout the rest of Daniel 1–6. At the same time, however, this appropriation of the four-kingdoms schema modifies the model of divine delegation by placing it within a finite temporal limit: the delegation of the universal imperium to Gentile kingdoms is now cast as a temporary arrangement that leads up to the inauguration of a divine kingdom that would possess universal

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<sup>572</sup> A similar observation about the retrospective affirmation of the legitimacy of the previous Gentile empires is made in Newsom and Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 64. Cf. Frisch, *The Danielic Discourse on Empire*, 98.

sovereignty for all eternity.<sup>573</sup> As I will attempt to show in the next chapter, the injection of this rudimentary four-kingdoms schema into Danielic discourse opened up new ways for conceptualizing the power of Gentile kings that would come to expression in an entirely different mode of discourse: the apocalypse.

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<sup>573</sup> Regarding this arrangement, Frisch (*The Danielic Discourse on Empire*, 100–1) makes the observation that

while taken together, Daniel 2 and 7 predict the eventual end of foreign empires, these texts are only anti-imperial to a certain extent ... Daniel 2 and 7 both reaffirm the permanence of empire as a universal construct ... The four kingdoms, or empires, are replaced by another kingdom, one that is both divine and everlasting ... the fifth kingdom is given to the Jewish people. The destruction of the four kingdoms, therefore, does not destroy the imperial phenomenon on earth; it only transfers its dominion.

While I agree with Frisch's observation, the insight could be nuanced, because the eschatological scenarios of Dan 2 and Dan 7 differ from one another in important ways. For the present, it is worth noting that Daniel 2 lacks any explicit reference to the subordination of the nations—a theme that becomes explicit in Dan 7:14, 27—and therefore is more evasive against the charge of reduplicating the structures of empire than is the vision of Dan 7.

## CHAPTER 6

## GOD AND THE GENTILE EMPEROR IN DANIEL 7

## 6.1. INTRODUCTION

Historians of science sometimes tell of an exchange that took place when Frederick the Great, King of Prussia, paid a visit to Schloss Tegel, the Berlin home of the young brothers Humboldt, Wilhelm and Alexander. According to Victor Wolfgang von Hagen's version of the story, Frederick came upon the budding intellectual giants as they were studying under the linden trees:

They sprang up and stood rigidly before him as he addressed himself first to the elder: "What is your name?" "Wilhelm von Humboldt, Sire." "Age?" "Ten years, Sire." "That is a good age to become a soldier?" "No, Sire, I wish to have my career in literature." The king then turned to the other boy, aged eight. "Name?" "Alexander von Humboldt, Sire." "Alexander." Frederick the Great pursed his lips. "Alexander, that is a beautiful name. I seem to recall an earth-conqueror by that name. Do you wish to be a conqueror?" "Yes, Sire—but with my head."<sup>574</sup>

This priceless piece of family lore continues to circulate, I suspect, because the desires of the precocious brothers were fulfilled in ways that even they, in all their youthful ambition, could hardly have foreseen. Wilhelm, of course, went on to become a famous philosopher and a formative architect of the modern Western university. And even more remarkably, Alexander—who was, interestingly enough, born within a month of Napoleon—did, in his own way, conquer the earth with his head. In the course of becoming the world's most famous naturalist, this last

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<sup>574</sup> *South America Called Them: Explorations of the Great Naturalists: La Condamine, Humboldt, Darwin, Spruce* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), 88. More concise accounts of this episode are recounted in Laura Dassow Walls, *The Passage to Cosmos: Alexander von Humboldt and the Shaping of America* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2009), 14–15 and Andrea Wulf, *The Invention of Nature: Alexander von Humboldt's New World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), 14.



great polymath developed a vision of nature itself so compelling that it has, as Andrea Wulf puts it, “passed into our consciousness as if by osmosis.”<sup>575</sup>

But I mention Alexander’s reply, and its fulfillment in his own work, because it encapsulates a larger truth that lies at the heart of this chapter: that profound ideas, like conquering armies, have the capacity to colonize cultures.<sup>576</sup> And indeed, in some ways, their march across minds is even more effective: requiring no rations, exacting no tribute, and respecting no borders, ideas can spread wider and last longer than even the most powerful of empires.

When studying antiquity, it is not always possible to pin down such mind-conquering ideas to singular individuals like Alexander or to identify the moments that they were first mustered and launched. But the eschatological appropriation of the four-kingdoms schema in the dream-vision of Daniel 2, I want to suggest, could be likened to just such an event. Formulated in the wake of the original earth-conqueror, Alexander the Great, this model for understanding the present status and ultimate end(s) of Gentile empire went on to colonize the minds of early Jews and Christians, and through their cultural progeny, a significant amount of Western political theology over the last two millennia.<sup>577</sup> My aim in this chapter is to trace the reception and

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<sup>575</sup> *The Invention of Nature*, 396.

<sup>576</sup> In recent decades, cultural and psychological anthropologists have developed compelling accounts of how cultural “models” or “schemas”—including ideas and worldviews—come to be shared by individuals on the cognitive level—or, “in their heads,” as I have put it. For a summary and model of how this form of “connectionism” might work neurologically, see Claudia Strauss and Naomi Quinn, *A Cognitive Theory of Cultural Meaning*, Publications of the Society for Psychological Anthropology 9 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 48–84; see also Bradd Shore, *Culture in Mind: Cognition, Culture, and the Problem of Meaning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3–71. For a helpful account of how apocalyptic ideas could spread, drawing especially on the epidemiological models developed among social scientists, see Portier-Young, “Apocalyptic Worldviews,” 116–20.

<sup>577</sup> As Brennan W. Breed observes, “[t]he four-kingdoms schema found in Dan 2 and 7 has proved to be one of the most influential time-structuring devices in all of world history” (Carol A. Newsom and Brennan W.

development of this model within the book of Daniel itself. In response to the cultural turmoil following the rise of the Seleucid empire and, later, the outright persecution of traditional Judaism by Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the heirs of the Danielic court tales recast the four-kingdoms schema in a new form of discourse that allowed their audiences to engage with the ideological challenges of understanding Gentile imperialism on different imaginative grounds. The most decisive step in this direction was taken by the author of Daniel 7, who took up the schema from Nebuchadnezzar's dream-vision and reworked it in the first full-blown apocalypse in Danielic discourse. I therefore proceed by tracing the tradition-historical development of the four-kingdoms schema from Daniel 2 to Daniel 7 in order to observe how the changes in (1) genre, (2) symbolic imagery, and (3) eschatology reshaped the model for understanding the relationship between God and the Gentile emperor. Attending to these developments in Daniel 7 will allow us to understand how the vision appropriated the four-kingdoms sequence within an apocalyptic framework and prepared the way for ideological engagement with Gentile empire in the later visions of Daniel 8–12.

## 6.2. FROM DANIEL 2 TO DANIEL 7

In the previous chapter (§5.3), I drew on Carol Newsom's insight that the theological appropriation of the four-kingdoms schema in the dream-vision of Daniel 2 could be likened to the injection of a generic antibody into the court tales of Daniel 1–6. Administered to fight against the ideologically static view of Gentile empire worked out in the Danielic court tales, the injection of this eschatologized version of the schema set the divine delegation of sovereignty to

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Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, OTL [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014], 85). See also Brennan W. Breed, "Daniel's Four Kingdoms Schema: A History of Re-Writing World History," *Interpretation* 71 (2017): 178–89.

Gentile kings—and with them, their empires—within a finite temporal framework, inviting readers to peer beyond the scope of human history in anticipation of the imminent and everlasting kingdom of God. This model for understanding the present status and future end of Gentile empire managed to break through the ideological closure of Daniel 1–6, which had become untenable following the conquests of Alexander the Great and the violence wrought by his successors, the Diadochoi. But once this eschatological schema was injected into the court tale of Daniel 2 and took up its place in its generic host, it opened up a new way of conceptualizing the problem of Gentile empire that would take on a life of its own within a new mode of discourse: the apocalypse.<sup>578</sup> The schematization of history into discernible patterns or periods leading up to the eschatological resolution of contemporary conflicts through *vaticinia ex eventu* became an important theme of early Jewish apocalyptic literature.<sup>579</sup> The recasting of the four-kingdoms sequence in the apocalyptic vision of Daniel 7 marked an important step in this direction and thus played a pivotal role in the development of early Jewish apocalyptic theology and the resources available for formulating the relationship between God and the Gentile king.

### 6.2.1. A Pivotal Vision: Daniel 7 within Danielic Discourse

Tracing the tradition-historical development from Daniel 2 to the vision of Daniel 7 is difficult, however, because the provenance of the vision is a matter of some dispute. Like the other

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<sup>578</sup> Similarly, Newsom, “Resistance Is Futile!,” 176.

<sup>579</sup> E.g., the later Danielic visions (chs. 8, 9, 10–12), the *Apocalypse of Weeks* (1 En. 93:1–10 + 91:11–17), the *Animal Apocalypse* (1 En. 85–90; especially the rule of the seventy shepherds in 89:59–90:19); 4 Ezra 11:1–12:39, which recasts the four-kingdoms sequence and bears many points of contact with Dan 7 (the connection to Daniel being made explicit in 12:11–12; see Michael Edward Stone, *Fourth Ezra: A Commentary on the Book of Fourth Ezra*, Hermeneia [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990], 345–49, 361, 366); 2 Bar 39; *Apoc. Abr.* 28–29; see also 4QpsMoses<sup>c</sup> (4Q390) 1; 4QFourKingdoms<sup>b</sup>Ar (4Q553) 5 II; and the apparent anxiety about the prolongation of the period in 1QpHab VII 5–14. It should be noted that the interpretation of Jeremiah’s prediction of Jer 25:12 and 29:10 in relation to Lev 26:34 in 2 Chr 36:21 also attests to an early move toward periodization outside of an apocalyptic context; see also Tobit 14:4–7.

apocalypses in the collection (chs. 8, 9, 10–12), Daniel 7 clearly alludes to the figure of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (henceforth: AIVE; vv. 8, 11a, 20–22, 24–25) and therefore dates to the era of that ruler’s reign (175–164 BCE). More precisely, because the vision seems to know of AIVE’s decree suppressing the traditional cult in Jerusalem in 167 BCE (7:25b) but does not mention the king’s desecration of the temple only a few months later (cf. 8:11–13, 9:27; 11:31; 12:11), its current form can be dated more precisely to late 167 BCE, the period just before that pivotal event and the dawn of Maccabean crisis in Judah (167–164 BCE).<sup>580</sup> There is, however, a major strand of research that has called into question whether these allusions to AIVE belong to the earliest stratum of the vision, suggesting instead that they represent secondary updates to an older, pre-Maccabean version of the apocalypse.<sup>581</sup> This research has proceeded largely along literary-critical lines and has focused on v. 8, which first alludes to AIVE as a “little horn”—a figure that recurs in easily excisable scenes throughout the rest of the vision (11a, 20–22, 24–25).<sup>582</sup> Critics have observed that this verse contains a number of oddities when set against the

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<sup>580</sup> Following Collins, *Daniel*, 35, 324. For less specific proposals dating the current form of the vision to the earlier part of AIVE’s activities, see Louis F. Hartman and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Book of Daniel*, AB 23 (New York: Doubleday, 1978), 214; Rainer Albertz, “The Social Setting of the Aramaic and Hebrew Book of Daniel,” in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, ed. John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint, vol. 1 of *VTSup* 83 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 187–88.

<sup>581</sup> For a comprehensive overview up to ca. 1950, see H. H. Rowley, *The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the Old Testament* (London: Lutterworth, 1952), 237–47; continuing through the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, see John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 278–80; see also Kratz, *Translatio imperii*, 24–25.

<sup>582</sup> This literary-critical argument received its most influential formulation in a seminal study by Gustav Hölscher, who identified the passages about the “10 horns” and the “little horn” in vv. 7:7bβ, 8, 11a, 20–22, 24–25 as secondary redactions to a 3<sup>rd</sup> century vision (“Die Entstehung des Buches Daniel,” *TSK* 92 [1919]: 113–38, esp. 120–21). Hölscher’s arguments were taken up in an important study by H. Louis Ginsberg, who modified the proposal by reassigning the references to the 10 horns in 7b, 20a, and 24a to the original stratum, with Antiochus IV being the original referent of the 10<sup>th</sup> horn (*Studies in Daniel* [Philadelphia: JPS, 1948], 16, 18–19); Ginsberg was followed closely by Hartman and Di Lella, who went further in identifying the author of Daniel 9\* as the tradent responsible for the glosses related to the “little horn” in Daniel 7 (*The Book of Daniel*, 13, 209, 215). As will become clear in the following analysis, I find Hölscher’s model most persuasive. The unity of Daniel 7 has also been questioned on source-critical grounds, most influentially by Martin Noth, “Zur Komposition des Buches Daniel,” *TSK* 98/99 (1926): 143–63, who proposed that the prose descriptions of the four beasts and the poetic visions of the Ancient of Days (7:9–10) and the One like a Son of Man (7:13–14) were sources that have been brought together;

rest of the chapter, including unexpected vocabulary,<sup>583</sup> irregular syntax,<sup>584</sup> and, more generally, its intrusiveness within the structure of the vision, since it (along with v. 11a) interrupts the description of the fourth beast and its destruction (7:7, 9–10, 11b–12).<sup>585</sup> As John Collins has objected, none of these literary-critical considerations is decisive in itself, and it is possible to read the oddities as stylistic choices employed in order to draw attention to the significance of AIVE.<sup>586</sup> But although one may not be able to escape the circularity of such arguments, there are

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this line of thought is developed in Peter Weimar, “Daniel 7. Eine Textanalyse,” in *Jesus und der Menschensohn: Für Anton Vögtle*, ed. Rudolf Pesch and Rudolf Schnackenburg (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1975), 15–16, 25–26; Karlheinz Müller, “Der Menschensohn im Danielzyklus,” in *Jesus und der Menschensohn: Für Anton Vögtle*, ed. Rudolf Pesch and Rudolf Schnackenburg (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1975), 40–42. As was pointed out already by Hubert Junker, however, dividing the sources between the vision of the four beasts and the One like a Son of Man destroys the nice “Gegensatz” that obtains between them (*Untersuchungen über literarische und exegetische Probleme des Buches Daniel* [Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1932], 31); see also Aage Bentzen, *Daniel*, HAT 19 [Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1937], 29–30); cf. Müller, “Jesus und der Menschensohn,” 41–42. In my judgment, the contrasting images are complementary and are therefore best viewed as belonging together naturally from the earliest compositional level of the vision.

<sup>583</sup> Most obviously, the interjection אלו is used rather than ארו as it is elsewhere in the chapter (7:2, 5, 6, 7); see Hölscher, “Die Entstehung des Buches Daniel,” 120; Ginsberg, *Studies in Daniel*, 11; Hartman and Di Lella, *The Book of Daniel*, 201; Koch, *Das Buch Daniel*, 69. Cf. Otto Plöger, *Das Buch Daniel*, KAT 18 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1965), 106–7; Collins, *Daniel*, 279.

<sup>584</sup> The verb following the interjection in 7:8 (see previous note) is in the perfective aspect (סִלְקַת), while elsewhere in the chapter the interjections are followed by participles (vv. 2–3, 5, 7). So Ginsberg, *Studies in Daniel*, 11.

<sup>585</sup> See Collins, *Daniel*, 279. Furthermore, it is possible that the reference to Antiochus IV as “another horn, a little one” (קרן אחרי זעירה), is borrowed from Dan 8:9 (Heb. קרן אחת מצעירה), which is certainly contemporaneous with Antiochus; see Ginsberg, *Studies in Daniel*, 70 n. 37; cf. Collins, *Daniel*, 280, who points out that the other direction of influence is also possible, since Dan 8 is certainly dependent upon Dan 7 more generally.

<sup>586</sup> Collins, *Daniel*, 279; idem, *The Apocalyptic Vision of the Book of Daniel*, HSM 16 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), 127–32; idem, *Daniel: With an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature*, FOTL 20 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 74–78. The unity of the chapter still commonly defended, but generally not on literary-critical grounds (though see Plöger, *Das Buch Daniel*, 106–7; James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ICC [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1950], 96). Rowley, e.g., thought the excision of the proposed interpolations leaves the vision without a satisfying meaning (*The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the Old Testament*, 254–62), and Norman W. Porteous was “very hesitant” about a vision of the fourth king without a little horn, since he thought that the time of Alexander the Great “fails to produce ... a situation of sufficient urgency to account for the conviction that the supernatural destruction of the fourth kingdom was imminent” (*Daniel*, OTL [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965], 95–96); see also Plöger, *Das Buch Daniel*, 106–7; Montgomery, *The Book of Daniel*, 96. According to my analysis, neither of these objections hold.

additional and complementary reasons for positing a version of Daniel 7 that antedates the crises brought about by AIVE.

The most compelling of these have to do with the fact that Daniel 7 is, in crucial respects, more similar to the dream-vision of Daniel 2 than it is to the other Danielic apocalypses in chs. 8–12. This similarity obtains on at least two important fronts. The first and most obvious is that Daniel 7 is the only Danielic apocalypse that was, like the court tales in chs. 2–6, composed in Aramaic. It is hard to account for why Daniel 7, if it had been composed in the same setting and only a very short time before the other Danielic apocalypses, was the only one of them to be composed in Aramaic. A simpler solution is that Daniel 7 stemmed from the same general social setting as the rest of the Aramaic Daniel tradition in the Babylonian Diaspora, including the eschatological redaction of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream vision in Daniel 2.<sup>587</sup> The second and perhaps most important is the essential *thematic* difference between the visions in Daniel 2 and 7 and those related to the Maccabean crisis in chs. 8–12. Carol Newsom has put the matter clearly:

What is often overlooked ... is that the focus of the eschatological expectations of ch. 7 differentiate it from the following apocalypses. Like ch. 2 but unlike chs. 8–12, here Dan 7 is focused on the expectation of an eternal dominion by the earthly representatives of the Most High God. The concerns and expectations of chs. 8–12, by contrast, have to do with the fate of the temple and its sacrifices and the fate of “the wise” ... Political dominion by Israel as a representative of God’s sovereignty on earth is no longer a topic in chs. 8–12.<sup>588</sup>

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<sup>587</sup> It is partly on these grounds that proponents of the influential Aufstockungshypothese (see Koch, *Das Buch Daniel*, 63–65) place the composition of Daniel 7 in Aramaic (sometimes long) before the composition of Daniel 8–12. Some have gone so far as to suggest that the redaction of Dan 2 and proto-Daniel 7 stem from the same compositional layer; see Kratz, *Translatio imperii*, 48–55; Kratz, “The Visions of Daniel,” 98.

<sup>588</sup> Newsom and Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 216; see also 11–12. Reinhard Gregor Kratz makes a quite similar observation: “Vom ‚Reich Gottes‘ ist hingegen ausschließlich im aramäischen Buchteil Dan 2–7, nicht mehr im hebräischen Teil 8–12 die Rede, was oft übersehen wird, aber höchst bezeichnend ist” (“Reich Gottes und Gesetz im Danielbuch und im werdenden Judentum,” in *The Book of Daniel: In the Light of New Findings*, ed. A. S. van der Woude, BETL 106 [Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993], 441–42 [see also 442–43]). See also Albertz, “The Social Setting of the Aramaic and Hebrew Book of Daniel,” 175, 193; Montgomery, *The Book of Daniel*, 95.

The observations that Daniel 7 shares a language of composition and central ideological concern with Daniel 2 and yet shares a genre with the Hebrew apocalypses in chs. 8–12 suggests that Daniel 7 played a pivotal role in the development of Danielic discourse.<sup>589</sup> The vision was composed in Aramaic after the dream-vision of Daniel 2, whose main theme it takes up and recasts in a new generic mode as the first Danielic apocalypse. And later, as the literary-critical evidence also suggests, this vision was updated during the early stages of AIVE's dealings with the Jews and before the Hebrew apocalypses in Daniel 8–12 were composed to address a different set of ideological crises. By this reckoning, Daniel 7 originally served, as many scholars have suggested, as an eschatological supplement to the cycle of Aramaic court tales in Daniel 1/2–6.<sup>590</sup>

But just when and where was proto-Daniel 7 composed? Here, too, there is disagreement. Proposals span the entire range of possibilities, from the time of Alexander the Great (late-4<sup>th</sup> century BCE) in the Eastern Diaspora to the years immediately preceding the Maccabean crisis in Judah (ca. 169–167 BCE).<sup>591</sup> The diversity of views on this matter suggests that the available

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<sup>589</sup> For a concise summary of data along these lines, see Davies, *Daniel*, 58, 60. See also Collins, *Daniel*, 323. For this reason, Norman W. Porteous called Dan 7 the “Hertzstück” of the book (*Das Danielbuch*, ATD 23 [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962], 77).

<sup>590</sup> Already Hölscher and Haller used the language of “Nachtrag” or “Anhang”; see Hölscher, “Die Entstehung des Buches Daniel,” 122; Max Haller, *Das Judentum: Geschichtsschreibung, Prophetie und Gesetzgebung nach dem Exil*, 2nd ed., Die Schriften des Alten Testaments 2.3 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1925), 273.

<sup>591</sup> On the early end of the spectrum, see Noth, “Zur Komposition des Buches Daniel”; W. F. Albright, “The Date and Personality of the Chronicler,” *JBL* 40 (1921): 117, who located the Aramaic part of Daniel in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century in Babylonia (and who may have placed it even earlier if not for his unwarranted conviction that the Greek loan-words in Dan 3 required a date after Alexander the Great); Newsom and Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 58–59; Newsom, “Resistance Is Futile!,” 178; Koch suggests that the basic strand of the vision should be located in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, if not during the turbulent years of Alexander the Great (*Das Buch Daniel*, 70). Others have located the impulse behind the composition of proto-Daniel 7 during the chaos wrought by Antiochus III in Syria-Palestine; so Jürgen-Christian Lebram, *Das Buch Daniel*, ZBK 23 (Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1984), 21, 84, who dates the composition after 200 BCE; and Albertz, who locates the composition in Palestine slightly earlier during the invasions of Antiochus III and Ptolemy IV/V from 221 BCE (Albertz, “The Social Setting of the Aramaic and Hebrew Book of Daniel,” 190). On the latest end of the spectrum, Hartmann and Di Lella, following the lead of Ginsberg, place the composition only a few years before the horn-redaction, between the events described in 2 Macc

evidence is insufficient for making a definitive verdict. But in my judgment, locating the composition in the Babylonian Diaspora in the early Hellenistic period (late-4<sup>th</sup> to early-3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE) makes the most sense of the most data. Three considerations are most important.

To begin with, positing a similar provenance between the dream-vision of Daniel 2 and the apocalyptic vision of Daniel 7 provides a simple and compelling explanation of their shared language of composition and ideological concerns—important commonalities that I have already mentioned.

Second, the cultural turmoil of the protracted wars of succession in Babylonia and the emergence of the Seleucid empire supply sufficient stimuli for the impulse to reflect further on the sovereignty and impending judgment of the Hellenistic kings in a new discursive mode. As I described briefly in the previous chapter (§5.3), the wars of the Diadochoi were extremely traumatizing for the residents of Babylon, as the *Chronicle of the Diadochoi* and the *Dynastic Prophecy* attest; the latter document even appears to preserve an *ex eventu* prophecy that attests to the desire among some Babylonian scribes for divine intervention in resolving these oppressive conflicts. With no end in sight, the protracted clashes of the war-driven *Diadochoi* would continue to spur theological reflection on the meaning and end of Gentile political sovereignty.<sup>592</sup>

And finally, the Babylonian Diaspora provides a plausible, if not likely, setting for the composition of such an early apocalypse. For it was in Babylon(ia) that the earliest Jewish apocalypses, and the basic literary conventions of that genre, began to take shape around the

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4:7ff. and those in 1 Macc 1:11, 20–23, that is, after 169 BCE and but before the desecration of the temple in 167 BCE (Hartman and Di Lella, *The Book of Daniel*, 13, 209, 214).

<sup>592</sup> Most recently, see Newsom and Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 58–59; Newsom, “Resistance Is Futile!,” 178.



dawn of the Hellenistic period. The most compelling evidence for this development is provided by the early Enoch literature, core sections of which have unbreakable points of contact with late-Babylonian culture that are best explained by social contacts between Jews and Babylonian scribes working in Aramaic.<sup>593</sup> Although the Enochic and Danielic discourses most likely did not emerge from a single Jewish group, they do appear have developed along a parallel track. In both cases, the discourse that grew around a Jewish figure connected with Mesopotamian learning was later augmented by historical apocalypses with *ex eventu* prophecies related to the crisis brought about by AIVE in Judah.<sup>594</sup> In the case of Daniel, the development of Daniel's character in the court tales as one with "enlightenment, understanding, and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods," (Dan 5:11 [cf. OG]; cf. 1:17), especially as an interpreter of dreams and other mysteries in the court of Gentile kings in the Eastern Diaspora (Dan 2\*, 4, 5), made him a useful peg on

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<sup>593</sup> This is especially the case for seminal traditions within the *Book of the Watchers* (esp. *1 En.* 6–11) and the *Astronomical Book* (*1 En.* 72–82 [cf. 4Q208–211]). On the Babylonian provenance of these traditions, see especially the recent and learned studies by Henryk Drawnel, including those on the background of (1) the Enochic astronomy (*The Aramaic Astronomical Book [4Q208–4Q211] From Qumran: Text, Translation, and Commentary* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2011], esp. 301–10); (2) the list of illicit sciences transmitted in *1 En.* 8:3 (idem, "Between Akkadian *ṭupšarrūtu* and Aramaic ܛܫܦܪ: Some Notes on the Social Context of Early Enoch Literature," *RevQ* 95 [2010]: 373–403; idem, "Knowledge Transmission in the Context of the Watchers' Sexual Sin with the Women in *1 Enoch* 6–11," *BibAn* 2 [2012]: 129–31) and (3) the violent activities of the giants (idem, "The Mesopotamian Background of the Enochic Giants and Evil Spirits," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 21 [2014]: 14–38). On the Mesopotamian background of the Enoch figure more generally, see James C. VanderKam, *Enoch and the Growth of an Apocalyptic Tradition*, CBQMS 16 (Washington, DC: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1984), esp. 33–51, 52–71, 91–104; Helge S. Kvanvig, *Roots of Apocalyptic: The Mesopotamian Background of the Enoch Figure and the Son of Man*, WMANT 61 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1988), 214–342; Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 45–51. But see also the methodological caution about the limited evidence for these contacts by Mladen Popović, "The Emergence of Aramaic and Hebrew Scholarly Texts: Transmission and Translation of Alien Wisdom," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Transmission of Traditions and Production of Texts*, ed. S. Metso, H. Najman, and E. Schuller, STDJ 92 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 81–114. See also Seth L. Sanders's recent survey of exemplars of transmission and his observations about the significance of the rise of the division of scribal labor among scribes working various on clay and parchment for the transmission of Babylonian learning (*From Adapa to Enoch: Scribal Culture and Religious Vision in Judea and Babylon*, TSAJ 167 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017], 193).

<sup>594</sup> The developing *Gestalt* of Enoch as antediluvian sage and seer made him a useful figure for composing additional pseudepigraphal apocalypses structured by *ex eventu* prophecies related to the Maccabean crisis, as the *Apocalypse of Weeks* (*1 En.* 93:1–10 + 91:11–17; 167–164 BCE) and the *Animal Apocalypse* (*1 En.* 85–90; 165–161 BCE) clearly attest; see Drawnel, "Some Notes on the Social Context of Early Enoch Literature," 396.

which to hang visions about the ultimate end(s) of Gentile kingdoms. Taking a cue from the redactor of Daniel 2, the author of proto-Daniel 7 appears to have done so in Aramaic prior to the reception of the collection in Judah, where the vision was updated and eventually augmented by the composition of additional Danielic apocalypses in Hebrew in the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century (Dan 8, 9, 10–12).<sup>595</sup>

In short, locating the provenance of proto-Daniel 7 in the Babylonian Diaspora during the early Seleucid period provides an elegant explanation of (1) its language of composition and fundamental ideological concerns, (2) the traumatic political circumstances that precipitated its composition, and (3) its place within the development of early Jewish apocalyptic literature more generally.

### 6.3. DANIEL 7: ANGELIC MEDIATION, THE MYTHIC, AND THE ESCHATON

Although the apocalyptic vision of Daniel 7 shares a basic ideological concern and social setting with Nebuchadnezzar's dream vision in Daniel 2, its recasting of the four kingdoms schema was innovative in several crucial respects. The most important of these have to do with (1) the change of genre, (2) the different set of symbolism that it employs for depicting the Gentile kingdoms, and (3) its more developed eschatological scenario. These innovations had important consequences for how the developing Danielic discourse made sense of the relationship between God and the Gentile king.

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<sup>595</sup> A similar model was sketched already by W. F. Albright: "We may therefore place the Aramaic section of Daniel somewhere in the third century, a century or a little more after the composition of Ezra ... It is practically certain that this part was written in Babylonia, since, if it were known in Palestine when the author of Daniel II [=Dan 8–12] wrote, his work could not have been successful" ("The Date and Personality of the Chronicler," *JBL* 40 [1921]: 117). See also Adam C. Welch, *Visions of the End: A Study in Daniel and Revelation* (London: James Clarke, 1922), 54. See now Newsom and Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 18–19, 58–59, 216.

### 6.3.1. A Generic Shift

Unlike the redactor of Nebuchadnezzar's dream vision in Daniel 2, the author of Daniel 7 chose to compose an entirely new revelatory vision. This compositional freedom allowed the author to recast four kingdoms schema in significantly different ways. Perhaps most fundamentally, the author reframed the schema in the form of an apocalyptic vision in which the revelatory content is mediated through a Jewish recipient and an angelic attendant of the Most High.<sup>596</sup> It is no longer a Gentile king—Nebuchadnezzar—is who is the recipient and beneficiary of divine revelation concerning “what will happen at the end of days/hereafter” (2:28; cf. 2:29, 45; 10:14).<sup>597</sup> This basic shift might signal that conditions on the ground had deteriorated to the degree that the mediation of God's will and intentions for history through a Gentile king had become untenable—a shift perhaps also reflected in the negatively-marked portrayal of the Gentile kingdoms as monstrous *Mischwesen* (see further below).<sup>598</sup> But it also came with important rhetorical consequences. Choosing a Jewish protagonist invites the audience to

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<sup>596</sup> The oft-cited definition of the genre of apocalypse from Semeia 14 identifies the mediation of revelation “by an otherworldly being to a human recipient” as an integral aspect of Jewish apocalypses (John J. Collins, ed., *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, Semeia 14 [Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979], 9). This hierarchy of mediation from God—Angel(s)—Seer (+audience), however, is not always present; in *Words of Michael* (4Q529, 4Q571[?]; 6Q23[?]), the revelatory content does not appear to be explicitly transmitted to a human recipient, while in the Enochic *Animal Apocalypse*, there is no angelic mediator; similarly, Daniel A. Machiela, “The Aramaic Dead Sea Scrolls and the Historical Development of Jewish Apocalyptic Literature,” in *The Seleucid and Hasmonean Periods and the Apocalyptic Worldview: The First Enoch Seminar Nangeroni Meeting Villa Cagnola, Gazzada (June 25–28, 2012)*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe, Gabriele Boccaccini, and Jason M. Zurawski, LSTS 88 (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 150.

<sup>597</sup> On the Aramaic phrase *בְּאֶחָרִית יוֹמָא* in Dan 2:28 (cf. 10:14) see Seow, “From Mountain to Mountain: The Reign of God in Daniel 2,” 364–5.

<sup>598</sup> This is not to say that the more general shift towards apocalyptic in Second Temple Judaism was an entirely reactive phenomenon triggered by the power and oppression of Gentile kings. As Matthew Goff has argued persuasively, the new cultural circumstances of the Hellenistic age brought about a “broader crisis of identity and knowledge” to which apocalypticism, with its focus on knowledge, hidden and revealed, became a compelling response; “A Blessed Rage for Order: Apocalypticism, Esoteric Revelation, and the Cultural Politics of Knowledge in the Hellenistic Age,” *HeBAI* 5 (2016): 193–211, quotation 206. The revelatory framework of Daniel 7 could thus be viewed as part of a larger revolution in discourse about knowledge in the Hellenistic age.

identify with the *recipient* of the revelation. This identification is important rhetorically, because those who identify with Daniel are integrated into the vision's hierarchical chain of divine knowledge that runs from the Most High God through an angelic attendant and ultimately to Daniel, who discloses his experience in first-person discourse. The rhetoric of Daniel 7 configures members of its implied audience as knowledgeable insiders whose identification with Daniel integrates them within the ultimate hierarchy of knowledge.<sup>599</sup>

The integration into this hierarchy of knowledge takes on another level of significance in light of the relative dating of the vision. Since the vision of Daniel 7 is set subsequent to Nebuchadnezzar's initial vision in ch. 2 (cf. 7:1 and 2:1), the knowledge that is ultimately transmitted to the implied audience represents an additional revelation that was granted to Daniel about what would happen in the future (cf. 2:28). The vision of Daniel 7 thus frames itself as a supplement to the initial vision presented in chapter 2, granting the implied audience with a deeper understanding of the nature of the imperial powers and their role within God's plan for history. This supplemental understanding augments the original vision most decidedly in the new set of symbolic imagery employed to depict the imperial powers and the more elaborate eschatological scenario that the vision presents.

### **6.3.2. The Mythic and the Monstrous**

Daniel 7 breaks the mold of Daniel 2 by recasting the four-kingdoms schema in quite different symbolic terms. One major point of difference lies in the set of images employed to depict the sequence of Gentile king(dom)s: whereas Nebuchadnezzar had seen a statue comprised of a

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<sup>599</sup> Newsom rightly observes that "one of the core aspects of the rhetoric of apocalyptic is the identification of the audience with the seer, the audience and the seer with the angels, and the angels with God" (Newsom, "The Rhetoric of Jewish Apocalyptic Literature," 213. The configuration of the audience as insiders is also facilitated by rhetoric of secrecy and disclosure in the vision's narrative frame (Dan 7:1, 28).

sequence of degrading metals, Daniel observes a series of four hybrid creatures emerge from the Great Sea. Attending to this shift, and especially to the significance of the mythic overtones of the new constellation of images, will help us to grasp key aspects of how the author of Daniel 7 understood Gentile empire theologically.

### 6.3.2.1. *The Identification of Mythic Imagery in Daniel 7*

Especially since the discovery of previously-unknown mythological-literary texts from Mesopotamia and Ugarit in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, critics have observed the mythic overtones of a number of elements within the vision of Daniel 7.<sup>600</sup> The discussion has centered on two aspects of the imagery. The first is the designation of “the Great Sea” (יַמַּא רַבָּא) as the place from which the monstrous *Mischwesen* emerge after being stirred up by the four winds of heaven (7:2–3). The image of the sea, together with its association with the monstrous, recalls a set of mythic themes attested throughout the Near East in which deities combat the forces of chaos represented by the SEA itself or the SEA-MONSTERS found therein. This *Chaoskampf* tradition is known especially from the cosmology of the Babylonian *Enūma Eliš*, in which Marduk, using winds and a great net, defeats Tiamat, the personified primeval ocean, in the creation of the ordered cosmos.<sup>601</sup> Although the Hebrew Bible does not relate a full version of this myth, such a *Chaoskampf* tradition does stand behind a wide variety of biblical traditions in

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<sup>600</sup> This trajectory of scholarship was launched in 1895 by the seminal discussion by Hermann Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton: A Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12*, trans. K. William Whitney Jr., The Biblical Resource Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 205–14; for overviews of the history of scholarship on this front, see Klaus Koch, *Das Buch Daniel*, ed. Till Niewisch and Jürgen Tubach, EdF 144 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980), 230–34; Carsten Colpe, “ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου,” *TDNT* 8:408–77; Collins, *Daniel*, 280–94.

<sup>601</sup> For an overview of the theme of the mythic sea across Near Eastern literature, see Fritz Stolz, “Sea יָם,” in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, 2nd, Extensively Revised ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 737–42.

which YHWH's power over the forces of chaos represented by the SEA or SEA-MONSTERS surfaces within the discourse.<sup>602</sup> Sounded by the presence of the Great Sea and the hybrid creatures that emerge from it, the overtones of this mythic imagery ring clear in Daniel 7. But just how they *function* in the score of the vision is less transparent, and this issue has been muddled by a second focus in recent scholarship.

Following the emergence of Ugaritic texts from Ras Shamra in the years following 1929, many scholars have gone further to identify the motif of the SEA in Daniel 7 as part of a larger constellation of mythic elements known especially from the Ugaritic Ba'al cycle (CAT 1.1–1.6).<sup>603</sup> In this myth, “Ba'al, Rider of the Clouds” (*rkb 'rpt*; CAT 1.2 IV 29), defeats Yamm, the sea deity, and eventually receives an eternal kingship from the high-god 'Ilu (El), who has a hoary beard and bears the epithet *'ab šnm*, which is commonly rendered /'abū šanīma/, “Father of Years.” On the surface level, the similarities to the vision of Daniel 7 are immediately

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<sup>602</sup> For the most detailed references to such a conflict, see Pss 18:8–16 [7–15]; 74:12–17; 89:10–11 [9–10]; Nah 1:3b–5; more allusively, see Jer 5:22; 31:35; Hab 3:8, 15; Pss 29:3, 10; 46:3–4 [2–3]. This conflict is also refracted through YHWH's splitting of the sea in the exodus; see Exod 15:8–10; Pss 66:5–6; 77:17–21 [16–20]; 106:6–11; see also Isa 51:9–11, where YHWH's power over the waters in the exodus provides the grounds for anticipating an analogous return from exile. Likewise, this power is related to the splitting of the Jordan in Joshua 3–4 in Ps 114. In a number of further traditions, which are important for understanding Daniel 7, the theme of *conflict* in YHWH's power over the Sea has all but disappeared, and such forces are depicted as the largely passive objects of YHWH's mighty acts as creator; see especially the Priestly creation account in Gen 1:1–2:4a (esp. 1:2, 6–10, 20–21); Job 38:8–11 (see Collin Robinson Cornell, “God and the Sea in Job 38,” *JHS* 12 [2012]: 15); Ps 104:6–7; cf. Job 40–41. In the case of Isa 27:1, YHWH's victory over the Leviathan and the Sea Dragon (ההגנין) are projected into the eschatological future, “on that day ...”.

<sup>603</sup> Otto Eissfeldt, *Baal Zaphon, Zeus Kasios und der Durchzug der Israeliten durchs Meer*, BRA 1 (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1932), 25–30; J. A. Emerton, “The Origin of the Son of Man Imagery,” *JTS* 9 (1958): 225–42; Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 17; Bentzen, *Daniel*, 58–65; Collins, *The Apocalyptic Vision of the Book of Daniel*, 96–106, esp. 105–6; John J. Collins, “Stirring up the Great Sea,” in *Seers, Sybils and Sages in Hellenistic-Roman Judaism*, JSJSup 54 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 143–46, 150–55; Collins, *Daniel*, 286–94; John J. Collins, “The Legacy of Canaan in Ancient Israel and Early Christianity,” in *Biblical Essays in Honor of Daniel J. Harrington, SJ, and Richard J. Clifford, SJ: Opportunity for No Little Instruction*, ed. Christopher G. Frechette, Christopher R. Matthews, and Thomas D. Stegman (New York: Paulist, 2014), 76–81; John Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 151–78.

apparent: here also there is a sea (יָם) and the One like a Son of Man comes “with the clouds of heaven” (עַם עֲנִי שָׁמַיָא אַתָּה) and receives eternal dominion and kingship from the head of the divine council (7:13–14), who bears the epithet “Ancient of Days” (עֲתִיק יוֹמִין) and who has hair like pure wool (כְּעֶמֶר נָקֵא), which is, presumably, white (7:9). What is less clear, however, is how we are understand the nature and significance of these similarities. In my judgment, the widespread notion that the vision of Daniel 7 is in some way indebted to the mythic *pattern* or narrative template of the Baʿal cycle is beset by a number of problems that render these similarities largely superficial.<sup>604</sup>

The most significant problem for my purposes is that the major building blocks of tradition that together provide the narrative structure of the vision are attested in Jewish sources of much closer temporal and geographical propinquity than a fragmentary myth attested only in the second millennium whose transmission to the Hellenistic period is difficult to trace.<sup>605</sup> These building blocks are twofold: (1) the four-kingdoms sequence from Daniel 2, which provides the schematic framework for the vision of the four beasts in 7:1–8, and (2) the forensic judgment type-scene (7:9–10), which is drawn from a stock set of imagery associated with the heavenly throne that was also utilized independently in other early Jewish apocalyptic texts from the

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<sup>604</sup> For critical evaluations of the proposed parallels, see Arthur J. Ferch, “Daniel 7 and Ugarit: A Reconsideration,” *JBL* 99 (1980): 75–86; Carol A. Newsom, “The Reuse of Ugaritic Mythology in Daniel 7: An Optical Illusion?,” in *Biblical Essays in Honor of Daniel J. Harrington, SJ, and Richard J. Clifford, SJ: Opportunity for No Little Instruction*, ed. Christopher G. Frechette, Christopher R. Matthews, and Thomas D. Stegman (New York: Paulist, 2014), 85–100. See also the sober evaluation by Colpe, “ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου,” 8:416–20.

<sup>605</sup> This methodological point is driven home most compellingly by Newsom, “An Optical Illusion?,” 90–91. In order to account for the transmission of the Canaanite traditions over a millennium later, scholars often suggest that the traditions were mediated through the royal cult in Jerusalem and preserved in the Hebrew scriptures; see, e.g., Paul G. Mosca, “Ugarit and Daniel 7: A Missing Link,” *Bib* 67 (1986): 496–517; Collins, “Stirring up the Great Sea,” 150–54; Day, *God’s Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea*, 165.

greater Enochic tradition (*1 En.* 14:18–21; 90:20; *Book of Giants* [4Q530 II 17–18]).<sup>606</sup> As Carol Newsom has observed clearly, it was the “creative work of the author of Daniel 7 ... to bring these two culturally formed templates together.”<sup>607</sup> The recognition that the basic structure of the vision is comprised of these two building blocks—a vision of four beasts followed by a forensic judgment type-scene—throws into relief the crucial fact that in Daniel 7 *there is no battle* between the sea or the beasts that emerge from it and the Ancient of Days or the new delegate of his sovereignty, the One like a Son of Man.<sup>608</sup> In fact, it is not until *after* the fourth beast is put to death and destroyed following the court proceedings (7:11–14, 16–18, 22–23, 26–27) that the One like a Son of Man arrives on the scene to receive eternal kingship and dominion (7:13–14, 17, 22, 27). He does not earn his right to sovereignty by triumph over the beasts; he merely receives it as the next and final delegate chosen by the Most High. Thus, when one works backwards from the more culturally proximate source materials, the parallels to the mythic structure the Baʿal cycle, with its essential conflict between Baʿal and Yamm, begin to

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<sup>606</sup> For the model of a common source that accounts for the similarities and differences between these throne visions, see Jonathan R. Trotter, “The Tradition of the Throne Vision in the Second Temple Period: Daniel 7:9–10, 1 Enoch 14:18–23, and the Book of Giants (4Q530),” *RevQ* 25 (2012): 452; Newsom and Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 228; Carol A. Newsom, “The Reuse of Ugaritic Mythology in Daniel 7: An Optical Illusion?,” in *Biblical Essays in Honor of Daniel J. Harrington, SJ, and Richard J. Clifford, SJ: Opportunity for No Little Instruction*, ed. Christopher G. Frechette, Christopher R. Matthews, and Thomas D. Stegman (New York: Paulist, 2014), 95; Amanda M. Davis Bledsoe, “Throne Theophanies, Dream Visions, and Righteous(?) Seers,” in *Ancient Tales of Giants from Qumran and Turfan: Contexts, Traditions, and Influences*, ed. Matthew Goff, Loren T. Stuckenbruck, and Enrico Morano, WUNT 360 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 82; Devorah Dimant, *From Enoch to Tobit: Collected Studies in Ancient Jewish Literature*, FAT 114 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 46.

<sup>607</sup> Newsom, “An Optical Illusion?,” 91.

<sup>608</sup> So Ferch, “Daniel 7 and Ugarit: A Reconsideration,” 80; Stefan Beyerle makes a similar point: “... the ‘Son of Man’ remains rather passive. On the contrary, the Baal cycle highlights Baal’s active role within the context of his rise to kingship” (“The Imagined World of the Apocalypses,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature*, ed. John J. Collins [New York: Oxford University Press, 2014], 378). This is admitted by Collins as one of the “important differences” between Dan 7 and the Ugaritic myth, but Collins suggests that this could be explained by the fact that “[w]e have here a distinctively Jewish adaptation of the myth, which emphasizes the sovereignty of the supreme God ... Since the ‘one like a son of man’ receives dominion after the death of the beast, it is reasonable to assume that he has in some way triumphed over it” (Collins, “Stirring up the Great Sea,” 146).



disappear.<sup>609</sup> This is important to recognize, because the methodological error of mapping the mythic pattern of the Baʿal cycle onto Daniel 7, which sometimes follows from the recognition of similarities between the two, can lead to a misapprehension of how the mythic imagery actually functions within the vision.<sup>610</sup>

### 6.3.2.2. *Excursus: Tenuous Parallels in Imagery between the Baʿal Cycle and Daniel 7*

Although there may be compelling religio-historical reasons for identifying vestiges of Elistic imagery in the depiction of YHWH elsewhere in the Bible,<sup>611</sup> the lines of dependence that are drawn between these deities in the vision of Daniel 7 are more tenuous than is sometimes recognized. This is worth flagging here briefly, because the proposed parallels in *imagery*—comprised mainly of physical descriptions and epithets—are often leveraged to support the larger claim that there are also lines of dependence in terms of a larger *mythic pattern* or *narrative structure*. One such parallel that often invites comparison is the similarity in agedness between the Ancient of Days and El. In my judgment, this similarity is limited to their hoary hair (and even here the image of the Ancient of Days’s hair as white may function to indicate purity rather than agedness).<sup>612</sup> The supposed parallel between YHWH’s epithet as the “Ancient of Days”

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<sup>609</sup> This is the point made by Newsom, who argues that the parallels might be best described as a sort of “optical illusion,” apparent to modern comparative scholars who are steeped in both the *Ugaritica* and early Jewish apocalyptic texts (readerly intertextuality) rather than as the product of authorial intertextuality (“An Optical Illusion?”).

<sup>610</sup> This is most apparent in those studies that ascribe the same *function* or *role* to Baʿal and the One like a Son of Man; see Collins, “Stirring up the Great Sea,” 141; Day, *God’s Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea*, 152. See Newsom, “An Optical Illusion?”.

<sup>611</sup> See, e.g., the discussions in Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 32–43; John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, JSOTSup 265 (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 13–41.

<sup>612</sup> See Mosca, “Ugarit and Daniel 7: A Missing Link,” 501.

(עתיק יומין) and El's as *'ab šnm* (see CAT 1.1 III 24; 1.2 I 10; 1.4 VI 24; 1.5 VI 2; 1.6 I 35; 1.17 VI [fully restored at 1.2 III 6 and partially at 1.3 V 7]) rendered /' abū šanīma/, “Father of Years,” rests on philologically shaky grounds. The problem is that the noun *šnt* /šān(a)tu/, the *nomen rectum* in this construction, is grammatically feminine and always rendered with the fem. plur. *šnt* /šānātu/ in less ambiguous contexts elsewhere in the Ugaritic corpus.<sup>613</sup> This problem is compounded by the fact that there are other possible interpretations, including, for example, the deity *Šnm*, who, along with *Ṭkmm*, carries (‘*ms*) the drunken *'Ilū* in CAT 1.114.18–19—an act which Danel describes to Aqhat as a service provided by a model son in CAT 1.17 I 30<sup>614</sup>—and who appears in the Amarna letters.<sup>615</sup> It is also possible to identify different roots underlying *šnm*, which would eliminate the parallel altogether, including √*šny*, “to pass away,” which could convey the idea of mortality and thus “Father of Mortals,”<sup>616</sup> and the Arabic roots √*snw* or √*sny* “to shine,” or “to be exalted.”<sup>617</sup> What leads those to render the epithet as “Father of Years” is that it would fit with the description of El's hoary beard (CAT 1.3 V 1–3, 23–25; 1.4 V 3–5),<sup>618</sup> the only clear indication of his anthropomorphic agedness in the Ugaritic corpus (the evidence

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<sup>613</sup> See Josef Tropper, *Ugaritische Grammatik*, AOAT 273 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2000), 300; Cyrus H. Gordon, “El, Father of Šnm,” *JNES* 35 (1976): 261; cf. Frank Moore Cross's conjecture that the masc. plur. reflects a “frozen formula” preserved from an older Canaanite dialect (*Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973], 16 n. 24; Jason Bembry, *Yahweh's Coming of Age* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011], 63 n. 5) and the observation that both the masc. and fem. plur. of שנה occur in biblical Hebrew.

<sup>614</sup> So Gordon, “El, Father of Šnm,” 61–62.

<sup>615</sup> So Anton Jirku, “Šnm [Schunama] der Sohn des Gottes 'Il,” *ZAW* 82 (1970): 278–79.

<sup>616</sup> So Otto Eissfeldt, *El im ugaritischen Pantheon* (Berlin: Akademie, 1951), 31.

<sup>617</sup> So Marvin H. Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts*, VTSup 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1955), 33, 61; Ulf Oldenburg, *The Conflict Between El and Ba'al in Canaanite Religion*, Numen Supplement 2 3 [Leiden: Brill, 1969], 17–18; see also N. Wyatt, “The Story of Dinah and Schechem,” *UF* 22 (1990): 446–47; N. Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit*, 2nd Rev. Ed. (London: Sheffield/Continuum, 2002), 410 n. 35.

<sup>618</sup> This is acknowledged explicitly by Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 17 n. 17.

drawn from questions about El's virility in CAT 1.23 30–76, which has been a matter of some debate, is anything but clear).<sup>619</sup> Finally, it is possible to identify less ambiguous *biblical* parallels to the epithet Ancient of Days, including “God of Eternity/Ages” (אל עולם, Gen 21:33; אלהי עולם, Isa 40:28), “Ancient God” (אלהי קדם, Deut 33:27 [with MT and LXX]), and “Lord of Eternity/Ages” (מרה עלמיא, 1QGenApoc. 21:2), which are arguably more likely candidates for informing the biblical author's imagination.<sup>620</sup> Similarly, although this critique does not speak to a supposed vestige of Elistic imagery, it should also be noted that Ba'al's epithet as the “Rider of the Clouds” finds only a tangential parallel with the image associated with the One like a Son of Man in 7:13, where the image functions not as an epithet but as a narrative predicate, much like does in elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (see Ps 104:3).<sup>621</sup>

### 6.3.2.3. *The Function of the Mythic Imagery in Daniel 7*

What finally makes it possible to understand the function of the mythic imagery is to recognize the central ideological concerns that the vision intends to address and how it goes about addressing them. Like the redactor of Daniel 2, the author of Daniel 7 was faced with the challenge of rendering the present cultural tribulation under the Hellenistic rulers theologically meaningful. The eschatologized version of the four-kingdoms schema provided a useful template

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<sup>619</sup> Some see in this episode evidence of El's lack of virility, which we must overcome by ritual means (Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts*, 40–44; Marvin H. Pope, “Ups and Downs in El's Amours,” *UF* 11 [1979]: 701–8; Bembry, *Yahweh's Coming of Age*, 71), while others see the episode as a clear demonstration of his impressive virility as a young, “rigorously fertile” god (B. Cutler and J. MacDonald, “On the Origin of the Ugaritic Text KTU 1.23,” *UF* 14 [1982]: 34; see also Mark S. Smith, *The Rituals and Myths of the Feast of the Goodly Gods of KTU/CAT 1.23: Royal Constructions of Opposition, Intersection, Integration, and Domination*, SBLRBS 51 [Atlanta: SBL, 2006], 88).

<sup>620</sup> Similarly, Newsom, “An Optical Illusion?,” 99.

<sup>621</sup> Similarly, Newsom, “An Optical Illusion?,” 99.

for doing so, because it had the capacity to emplot the present within the unfolding drama of the Most High's plans for history that would soon come to a climactic end. Rhetorically, this emplotment is made persuasive through the convention of *vaticinium ex eventu*, which constructs a compelling pattern of prediction and fulfillment that confirms God's control over the historical process and frames its continued fulfillment as inevitable. What is crucial to notice is that this construction of reality locates the origin and end of Gentile empire *entirely within God's intentionality*. Far from representing a threat to God or to God's purposes that must be overcome, the sovereignty possessed by the four Gentile empires and even the cultural tribulation that they so violently produce are actually tokens of God's control.<sup>622</sup> By taking up the four-kingdoms schema from Daniel 2, the author of Daniel 7 was able to (re)affirm the Most High's utter control over the Gentile empires and their designated role in his creative plans for history. In this respect, the echoes of the *Chaoskampf* in Daniel 7 function to express the Most High's control over chaotic potentiality for his creative purposes (see below).

But although emplotting the adverse experiences under Gentile empire within the Most High's plans for history had the capacity to render them meaningful, it could not change the events and circumstances themselves. The vision is, fundamentally, a symbolic response. It reacts to a particular set of conditions in the world, and these conditions provide the raw materials of experience that have to be interpreted and encoded symbolically. The raw materials of experience taken up by the author of Daniel 7 were comprised of the manifest power possessed and expressed by a series of Gentile empires, culminating in the seemingly

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<sup>622</sup> As Gunkel paraphrased the message: "Know, however, that what you now experience *is* God's will. He has ordained all of this according to his unfathomable wisdom, and he has shown it to his prophets in vision for many generations ... At the same time, however, consider that you are also even now in God's hands. Not one of all these things happens in opposition to God. Even the tyrant and his horrible regime are ordained by God" (*Creation and Chaos*, 207).

unparalleled violence wrought by the Hellenistic king(dom)s. There could be no denial of the terrible power of these king(dom)s. The vision of Daniel 7 symbolizes this terrible power and its destructive capacities by depicting the Gentile empires as monstrous *Mischwesen*, which, by their very nature, are intrinsically dangerous. It was toward the dual challenge of depicting the Gentile king(dom)s as delegates created to fulfill the plan of the Most High for history—*ruled*—and yet intrinsically dangerous by their very constitution—*unruly*—that the mythological imagery was put to use so compellingly in Daniel 7.

#### 6.3.2.3.1. Creating the Beasts out of the Sea

As in a number of earlier biblical traditions in which the conflictual aspects of God's control over the SEA have all but disappeared (Gen 1:1–2:4a; Job 38:8–11; Ps 104:6–7; cf. Job 40–41), the Great Sea in Daniel 7 is a passive object of God's creative action. The closest parallel is to the opening lines of the Priestly creation account, where the divine wind (רוח אלהים) sweeps over the cosmic waters at the beginning of God's creative activity in bringing order out of chaotic potentiality (Gen 1:2; see also vv. 6–10, 20–21).<sup>623</sup> Similarly, in Daniel 7:2 the four winds of heaven (ארבע רוחי שמיא) act upon the Great Sea in order to stir up the four beasts, which are likewise products of God's creative action. The Great Sea, therefore, does not pose a threat to the Most High's power and control over history, as the image often functions in mythological contexts. It is not an active agent, let alone a personified divine enemy. Rather, as in the Priestly creation account, the echoes of the *Chaoskampf* tradition function to emphasize the Most High's

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<sup>623</sup> See Hartman and Di Lella, *The Book of Daniel*, 211; Klaus Koch, "Die Winde des Himmels über dem Völkermeer (Dan 7,1f): Schöpfung oder Chaos?," in "Unter dem Fußboden ein Tropfen Wahrheit": *Festschrift für Johann Michael Schmidt zum 65jährigen Geburtstag*, ed. Hans-Joachim Barkenings and Uwe F. W. Bauer (Düsseldorf: Pesseverband der Evangelischen Kirche im Rheinland e.V., 2000), 43–46; Newsom and Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 221.

utter control over chaotic potentiality for his creative purposes, which here include the creation of four Gentile empires.<sup>624</sup> But precisely because these echoes may still be heard, the overtones of the chaotic SEA may also function to communicate that there is something intrinsically dangerous about this creative activity—a danger that expresses itself in the destruction wrought by the four beasts.<sup>625</sup>

That the stirring up of the sea by the four winds of heaven leads to the emergence of the four beasts signals that they, too, are a part of the Most High’s activity in making use of chaotic potential for his creative purposes for history.<sup>626</sup> That the beasts are created to fulfill the Most High’s purposes for history is especially clear in the description of the first three beasts. Like the Great Sea from which they emerge, there is no indication that these beasts possess their own agency. They are, rather, the passive objects of God’s activity.

**Figure 6.1. The Four-Kingdoms Schema in Proto-Daniel 7**

	<u>Beast</u>	<u>Imagery</u>	<u>Referent</u>
v. 4 (12, 17)	1st	Like a lion with eagles’ wings; wings plucked off (מריטו); lifted (נטילת) and made to stand (הקימת) on two feet; given (יהיב) a human mind	Nebuchadnezzar/ Babylonian Empire
v. 5 (12, 17)	2nd	Like a bear; raised (הקמת) on one side, three tusks in mouth; told (אמרין לה): “Arise, devour many bodies”	Median Empire
v. 6 (12, 17)	3rd	Like a leopard; four wings of a bird on back; four heads; dominion was given (יהיב) it	Persian Empire

<sup>624</sup> See also 4 Ezra 13:3, which is certainly dependent upon Daniel 7, where the winds stir up the “Human One” savior *from the heart of the Sea!*

<sup>625</sup> Similarly, Newsom, “An Optical Illusion?,” 93.

<sup>626</sup> The “four winds” occur in several texts across the biblical corpus and function primarily in two ways. First, as in Dan 7:2, they can function as instruments of YHWH, as in Jer 49:36, where the winds scatter Elam as exiles, and Ezek 37:9, where they breath upon the slain that they may live. The second function is to express the idea of the totality of the earth; see Dan 8:8; 11:4; Zech 2:6; 2 Esdr 13:5; Matt 24:31; Mk 13:27; see also Rev 7:1.

v. 7, 12, 17, 19, 23	4th	“terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong”; great iron teeth; devouring (אכלה), breaking in pieces (מדקה), stamping what was left with teeth (רפסה); different from all beasts that preceded it	Seleucid Empire
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In addition to the use of the divine passive throughout vv. 4–6, the notion that the first three beasts do not possess independent agency that is hostile to YHWH is supported by the intertext from which the sequence of lion, leopard, and bear is most likely drawn:

So I will become like a lion to them  
 Like a leopard I will lurk beside the way.  
 I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs,  
 and I will tear open the covering of their heart;  
 There I will devour them like a lion,  
 As a wild animal would mangle them. (Hosea 13:7–8; NRSV)<sup>627</sup>

As Newsom observes, these similes in Hosea are “all comparisons for God’s hostile agency. Whatever the violence done by these three kingdoms, it is not activity opposed to God but activity commissioned by God.”<sup>628</sup> The violence perpetrated by the first three beasts (see v. 5b) is thus not activity that produces a conflict with the Most High. Rather, in continuity with the stream of biblical tradition running from Jeremiah (§3) to Second Isaiah (and Ezra-Nehemiah; §4) and the Danielic court tales (§5), the vision affirms that the beasts are delegates of divine sovereignty (see v. 6b), chosen—even created—to carry out the Most High’s plans for history.<sup>629</sup>

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<sup>627</sup> See Austin Marsden Farrer, *A Study in St. Mark* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), 225; Emerton, “The Origin of the Son of Man Imagery,” 227; Day, *God’s Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea*, 156–57; Collins, *Daniel*, 295; Kratz, “The Visions of Daniel,” 95; Newsom, “An Optical Illusion?,” 94–95.

<sup>628</sup> Newsom, “An Optical Illusion?,” 94–95. Similarly, Kratz states: “The *passivum divinum* in 7:4–6 makes it clear that these empires do not operate through their own strength but rather through God’s dispensation; this is why they assume the form of the divine likenesses in Hos 13:7–8” (“The Visions of Daniel,” 96).

<sup>629</sup> Contra Collins (*Daniel*, 323): “No longer are the gentile kings seen as legitimate, if temporary, agents of the divine sovereignty. They are now viewed as beasts from the sea.”

### 6.3.2.3.2. The Fourth Beast: A Culpable Agent?

The relationship between God and the fourth beast, however, is a bit more complicated. For the use of the divine passive gives way in the depiction of the fourth beast, which alone appears to act with a measure of agency: it devours (אכלה), crushes (מדקה), and stamps what is left with its feet (תדקנה; תדושנה; רספה)—all without an explicit command from the divine voice (7:7, 23).

The attribution of agency to the fourth beast introduces an unresolvable ambiguity in how the vision understands the beast's destructive activities. For the vision affirms both (1) that the beast's activities are part of the Most High's plan for history, since it too is stirred up from the Great Sea, and (2) that the beast will be judged for its behavior ("books were opened"), deposed, and destroyed (7:10, 11b). The ambiguity persists because the vision never clarifies exactly what renders the beast culpable. This ambiguity creates the interpretive space for at least two possibilities to emerge.

The first is that the beast could have misused its agency in transgressing the bounds of its commission through excessive violence. The notion that God's designated agents may pervert their commissioned role through uncooperative behavior can provide a theologically satisfying, even if conceptually difficult, response to the problem of evil, because it allows one to draw a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate exercise of power that comes ultimately from God. This distinction emerges in the oracle of Isaiah 10:5–15, in which the King of Assyria, though but a mere instrument in the hand of YHWH, exceeds his divine commission for destructive activity and thereby incurs guilt (§2). Perhaps an even more relevant model emerges in the *Animal Apocalypse*, where God, in the final periods of history, delegates control over his people, the "sheep," to seventy angelic "shepherds" (*1 En.* 89:59–90:19). As part of their new charge, God commissions the shepherds with the task of destroying a select number of sheep



(89:60). But he also *foresees* that his new delegates will exceed their commission: before handing over the sheep, he commands an angel to record carefully the activities of his shepherds, because he knows that “they will destroy more of them than I have commanded them. Every excess and destruction that is done by the shepherds, write down—how many they destroy at my command, and how many they destroy on their own” (89:61–62).<sup>630</sup> Fulfilling what God had foreseen, the shepherds then proceed to exceed their commission (89:65, 69). As Nickelsburg summarizes, “God is aware of this malfeasance of office before he delivers the sheep to the shepherds, but his foreknowledge is accompanied by God’s determination to hold the shepherds responsible for their actions.”<sup>631</sup> It is possible that the author of Daniel 7 similarly understood the destructiveness of the fourth beast as a “malfeasance of office,” a perverse misuse of agency exceeding the divine commission. But the Danielic vision lacks the kind of explicit reflection on the themes of foreknowledge and culpability found in the *Animal Apocalypse* that could point directly toward this interpretation.

A second possibility is that the beast’s climactically destructive activities are supposed to represent a direct outworking of the Most High’s plans for history. In this case, the beast would be judged precisely for fulfilling its designated role in history (cf. Dan 8:23). This notion can also provide a theologically satisfying response to the experience of evil within a framework that upholds divine providence. For God’s active determination or permission of wicked activities by wicked agents can set up a great historical drama in which God can gain glory by defeating and judging them. YHWH’s hardening of Pharaoh’s heart in Exodus 5–15 (Exod 7:3, 13–14, 22; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10) functions in this way by enabling a great showdown in which YHWH

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<sup>630</sup> Translation from George W. E. Nickelsburg,, *1 Enoch 1*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001).

<sup>631</sup> *1 Enoch 1*, 390.

can ultimately triumph gloriously over Pharaoh and his army. Similarly, the Hodayot, with their completely deterministic worldview, affirm that God created humans in base wickedness in order to gain glory by graciously electing some people for angelic glorification while justly judging the rest for their wickedness;<sup>632</sup> later Calvinist theology regarding the reprobate would make analogous claims.<sup>633</sup> But again, because the vision of Daniel 7 does not reflect explicitly on the themes of foreknowledge or responsibility for transgression, its logic of culpability remains unclear.

The conceptual tension that obtains in the depiction of the fourth beast is not without parallel. Indeed, the combination of a deterministic view of history with an emphasis on the eschatological judgment of the agents of evil that are never fully autonomous—be they wicked humans, evil spirits, or political powers—is characteristic of the apocalyptic worldview. The mythological overtones of the imagery employed in the vision of Daniel 7 enhance the drama of this ambiguity, because they give voice to both emphases: the four beasts, which are stirred up from the chaotic SEA, are created by the Most High to fulfill a pre-determined role in history—*ruled*—and, especially in the case of the fourth beast, they are intrinsically dangerous—*unruly*—and will be judged for the role they play.

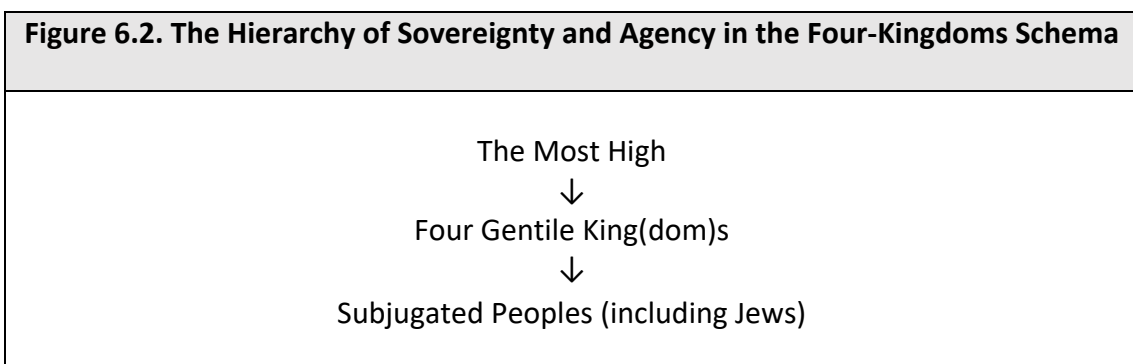
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<sup>632</sup> This anthropology is worked out in the lengthy *Niedrigkeitsdoxologien* that pervade the Hodayot but is articulated perhaps most explicitly at 20:27–28. For a similar point, see Carol A. Newsom, “Deriving Negative Anthropology through Exegetical Activity: The Hodayot as Case Study,” in *Is There a Text in This Cave? Studies in the Textuality of the Dead Sea Scrolls in Honour of George J. Brooke*, ed. Ariel Feldman, Maria Cioatã, and Charlotte Hempel, STDJ 119 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 260.

<sup>633</sup> See, e.g., *French Confession of Faith* XII; *Belgic Confession* XVI; *Westminster Confession* 3.VI–VII.

#### 6.3.2.4. The Character of the Response in Proto-Daniel 7: Response and Responsibility

In the previous section, I began to describe how the four-kingdoms schema could render the present experience of imperial domination meaningful by emplotting it within the Most High's unfolding plans for history. This is an effective strategy, because it locates the raw data of experience within an indigenous theological framework, relegating the sovereignty and destructive activities of the Gentile king(dom)s within and under the intentionality of the Most High. Within the context of an *ex eventu* prophecy, this framing affirms (1) God's utter control over the Gentile empires in the past and present and (2) the inevitability of the eschatological judgment in the future. And like the responses to imperial domination examined in previous chapters, it also constructs hierarchies of sovereignty and agency in which the God of the Jews is at the top.



But although this strategy could render the experiences under Gentile empires meaningful and provide grounds for anticipating the imminent resolution of the crisis, a necessary entailment of this framing is that it also makes the Most High responsible for the very cultural tribulation that elicited a response in the first place (similarly, see §§2, 3, 4, 5). This form of theological responsibility is the price that monotheism, whether functional or explicit, simply must pay if

adverse experiences are to be assimilated within a theological framework upheld by divine providence.

This theological impact of responding to the particular conditions of Gentile imperialism is most acute in the depiction of the fourth kingdom. For the vision acknowledges—even exposes—the truly terrible nature of this beast, which it describes as “fearsome, dreadful, and very powerful ... exceedingly terrifying” (7:7, 23) and yet affirms that it, too, was created by the Most High to fulfill his creative purposes in history. On a subtler level, the imagery employed to describe the beast and its destructiveness may reflect the same imagery that the Seleucid rulers used to represent their own power. All that is said about the physical makeup of the fourth beast in the first part of the vision is that it has great iron teeth (7:7; cf. 7:19). This image first and foremost recalls the description of the fourth kingdom in Daniel 2 as “strong as iron; just as iron crushes and smashes everything it shall crush and shatter all these [previous kingdoms]” (2:40). But the reference to *iron teeth* and *stamping* likely alludes to the famous war elephants of the Diadochoi, which, according to classical sources, were deployed by the hundreds in their battles for succession.<sup>634</sup> Significantly, the war elephant became a—if not *the*—carefully propagated symbol for Seleucid power in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century. For the first time in the ancient Near East, the image became a prominent motif on the official numismatic iconography under Seleucus I, who emblazoned elephants on his coins shortly after his shared victory over Antigonos at Ipsus (301 BCE) and over Lysimachus at Curupedio (281 BCE; see Fig. 6.4).<sup>635</sup>

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<sup>634</sup> E.g., Plutarch relates that Antigonos brought 75 elephants to the battle of Ipsus, while the allies together brought 400 elephants (*Demetr.* 28); Diodorus Siculus, for his part, reports that Seleucus brought 480 elephants (*Bib. hist.* 20.13). See Dieter Bauer, *Das Buch Daniel*, Neuer Stuttgarter Kommentar: Altes Testament 22 (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1996), 151–52. Cf. Day, *God’s Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea*, 157.

<sup>635</sup> For a discussion of Seleucus’s minting of these coins and the significance of the geographical location of the royal mints, see R. A. Hadley, “Royal Propaganda of Seleucus I and Lysimachus,” *JHS* 94 (1974): 60–62. The significance of the occurrence of this motif is made all the clearer by the fact that this motif was largely absent in



**Figure 6.3. Silver Tetradrachm with Laureate Head of Zeus and Elephant-Drawn Chariot from Susa, from ca. 295 BCE.**<sup>636</sup>



**Figure 6.4. Commemorative Silver Tetradrachm with Horned Horse and Elephant from Pergamum, 281 BCE.**<sup>637</sup>

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ancient Near Eastern coins prior to this period; see Urs Staub, “Das Tier mit den Hörnen: Ein Beitrag zu Dan 7,7f,” in *Hellenismus und Judentum: Vier Studien zu Daniel 7 und zur Religionsnot unter Antiochus IV*, by Othmar Keel and Urs Staub, OBO 178 (Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 71; see also Panagiotis P. Iossif and Catharine C. Lorber, “The Elephantarches Bronze of Seleucos I Nikator,” *Syria* 87 (2010): 148.

<sup>636</sup> Houghton and Lorber, *Seleucid Coins*, 1: Introduction, Maps, and Catalogue:15; Houghton and Lorber, *Seleucid Coins*, vol. 2: Appendices, Indices, and Plates, figs. 1.2; Plate I. Arthur Houghton and Catherine Lorber, *Seleucid Coins: A Comprehensive Guide. Part I: Seleucus I through Antiochus III* (Lancaster, PA; New York: Classical Numismatic Group; American Numismatic Society, 2002), vol. 2: Appendices, Indices, and Plates, figs. 177.1a; Plate X.

<sup>637</sup> Houghton and Lorber, *Seleucid Coins*, 1: Introduction, Maps, and Catalogue:15; Houghton and Lorber, *Seleucid Coins*, vol. 2: Appendices, Indices, and Plates, figs. 1.2; Plate I.



**Figure 6.5. Silver Stater of Seleucus I, with Head of Zeus and Elephant from Susa, ca. 288/7 BCE.**<sup>638</sup>

Seleucus's association with elephants became such that, according to Plutarch, some of the king's own contemporaries referred to him simply as "Elephant-Commander" (ἐλεφαντάρχης).<sup>639</sup> In light of the centrality of elephants and elephant imagery in Seleucid iconography, royal pageantry, and military practice, Paul Kosmin has even quipped that "[t]o think Seleucid is to see elephants ...."<sup>640</sup>

If the reference to iron teeth and stamping does represent an allusion to the elephant imagery employed by Seleucus I, the vision would represent Seleucid power and destructiveness with the same imagery chosen by the Gentile king himself. By doing so, the vision fully acknowledges the power and destructive capacity of the Seleucid regime but assimilates this power into an exclusively Yahwistic framework. The image impressed on the royal coins by Seleucus also made an impression on the vision's depiction of YHWH's plan for history.

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<sup>638</sup> Houghton and Lorber, *Seleucid Coins*, 1: Introduction, Maps, and Catalogue:75; Houghton and Lorber, *Seleucid Coins*, vol. 2: Appendices, Indices, and Plates, figs. 187.1a; Plate II.

<sup>639</sup> Plutarch reports (*Dem.* 25) that Demetrius, when he arrived at the Isthmus of Corinth, was pleased to hear that they heralded him as "king" but Seleucus as "Lord of Elephants" (ἐλεφαντάρχου); similarly, *Mor. prae. ger. reip.* 823c-d (paralleled in Athenaeus *Deip.* 261, citing book 14 of Phylarchus's long-lost history).

<sup>640</sup> *The Land of the Elephant Kings: Space, Territory, and Ideology in the Seleucid Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 3.

### 6.3.3. A New Eschatological Scenario

Daniel 7 also presents a different and much more elaborate eschatological scenario than the vision in Daniel 2. The most significant innovations were two-fold: (1) the introduction of a forensic judgment type-scene in which the judgment of the fourth beast marks the end of the delegation of sovereignty to Gentile kings and makes way for the inauguration of an everlasting kingdom; and (2) the delegation of eternal kingship and sovereignty to the angelic One like a Son of Man, the holy ones of the Most High, and the “people of the holy ones of the Most High.”

Following a description of the climactically destructive activity of the Seleucid empire, the vision shifts suddenly to a forensic judgment type-scene (7:9–10). While the details about the sublime throne chariot and the myriads of angelic attendants are quite vivid, the description of the court proceedings themselves is quite concise: we are informed simply that the court sat in judgment and that “books were opened” (7:9–10). Because the contents of these books are not described (see also Dan 12:1), it remains unclear exactly how what was written in them relates to the judgment of the fourth kingdom. Within the context of a judgment scene, the books almost certainly contained an account of the beast’s deeds.<sup>641</sup> But even here an ambiguity persists. For in early Jewish apocalyptic literature, heavenly books preserve not only records of acts committed (*1 En.* 89:61–77, 90:14–17; *Jub.* 4:17–24; 39:6; *2 En.* 19:5; 22:10; 40:13; 47:2; 50:1; 52:2–3; *T. Abr.* 12 [Rec. A]; 10:16–11:10 [Rec. B]; *Apoc. Zeph.* 3:5–9; 7:1–11; see also 4QpapApocJer B [?] [4Q483]) but also accounts of eras and events that have been predetermined by God—so-called books of “fate” or “destiny” (*1 En.* 81:1–4, 93:2; 103:2; 106:19; 108:7, 15; *Jub.* 1:5–6, 26; 5:13–14, 17–18; 6:23; 23:32 4QAgnes of Creation A [4Q180] 1, 3–4; 1QH<sup>a</sup> IX 24; 4QInstruction

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<sup>641</sup> Similarly, Leslie Baynes, *The Heavenly Book Motif in Judeo-Christian Apocalypses 200 B.C.E.–200 C.E.*, JSJSup 152 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 86.

2 I 14–18; Dan 10:21–12:4). Both of these valences may be in view in Daniel 7, since the vision affirms that the beast’s activities are a part of the Most High’s plan for history and yet that it is somehow culpable for carrying them out. What is clear is that the opening of the books is followed by the judgment of the fourth beast, which is slain, put to death, and given over to annihilation by fire (7:11b). The agent of destruction, at last, is destroyed.

According to the rest of the vision, the violent destruction of the fourth beast will mark the end of the delegation of sovereignty to monstrous Gentile king(dom)s and the beginning of a new arrangement that would last forever. The sovereignty of the Most High would still be expressed through delegation, but there would be new delegates: (1) the “One Like a Son of Man,” (7:14), (2) “the holy ones of the Most High,” (7:18, 22) and (3) “the people of the Holy Ones of the Most High” (7:27). The precise identification of these parties has been one of the most contested issues in the interpretation of Daniel 7, and indeed of the whole biblical tradition.<sup>642</sup> In recent decades, however, a compelling consensus has emerged that identifies these respective parties as (1) an angelic representative of God’s people, most likely Michael,<sup>643</sup> (2) the angelic host,<sup>644</sup> (3) and God’s people on earth,<sup>645</sup> which together are concurrent delegates of eternal kingship and sovereignty.

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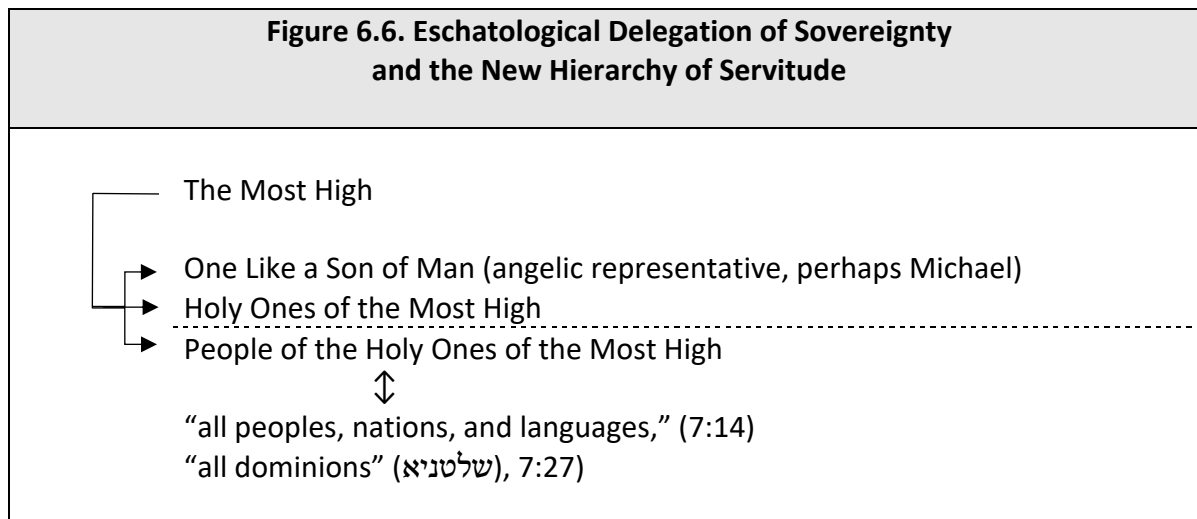
<sup>642</sup> As Collins remarks regarding the phrase “one like a son of man”: “Scarcely any passage in the Hebrew Bible has engendered as much controversy as this phrase” (*Daniel*, 304).

<sup>643</sup> See, e.g., Nathaniel Schmidt, “The Son of Man in the Book of Daniel,” *JBL* 19 (22–28): 1900; Müller, “Jesus und der Menschensohn,” 76; André Lacocque, *The Book of Daniel*, trans. David Pellauer (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), 133; Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 182; Day, *God’s Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea*, 167–74. This interpretation has found support especially from the emergence of traditions about Michael among the Dead Sea Scrolls; see 1QM XVII 7–8; cf. 11QMelchizedek.

<sup>644</sup> See John J. Collins, “Saints of the Most High קדושי עליון,” in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, 2nd, Extensively Revised ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 718–22; Collins, *The Apocalyptic Vision of the Book of Daniel*, 123–52; Collins, *Daniel*, 314.

<sup>645</sup> Cf. 1QM XII 8.





This new model of the eschatological delegation of sovereignty marks a substantial development of the simpler model in Daniel 2 in three important respects. The first is the introduction of the notion of angelic sovereignty and kingship. This idea probably represents a development of the old tradition in Deut 32:8, where it is said that the Most High apportioned the nations according to the number of the sons or angels of God (with LXX: *υιων/αγγελων θεου*; and 4QDeut<sup>f</sup> XII 14: *בני אלוהים*). The notion of national angelic representatives is also taken up later in Daniel 10–12, where the heavenly “prince” of God’s people is explicitly identified as the angel Michael (Dan 10:21, 12:1; see also 10:13; 1QM XVII 6–9; Rev 12:7), who battles against the princes of the other nations in the heavenly counterpart to the earthly conflict. But the idea of an angelic ruler and representative functions differently in Daniel 7. Here, as I have tried to show, there is neither a conflict in the heavens nor a battle between the One like a Son of Man and rival superhuman powers. The angelic figure is simply the next and final delegate chosen by the Most High for eternal sovereignty. Rhetorically, the image of the angelic, human-like one who comes from above (“with the clouds of heaven”) and who will rule in the future functions as a counterpoint to the monstrous, inhuman(e) kingship currently held by the Gentile empires who

are stirred up from below.<sup>646</sup> Daniel 7 thus envisions a new order in which sovereignty will be possessed by the angelic representative of the Jewish people and that will be characterized as heavenly and human(e) rather than chaotic and monstrous.

Second, the vision states explicitly that the final, eternal kingship will belong to the Jewish people. When God informed Nebuchadnezzar “what shall be hereafter,” in Daniel 2, the Babylonian king saw a stone “cut out, not by human hands,” that crushes the statue representing the previous kingdoms and then becomes a mountain that fills the whole earth (2:34–35, 44–45), which represents the eternal kingdom finally established by God (2:44–45). The image of the rock cut from stone most likely refers to the people of God (cf. Isa 51:1; §5). But the reference to the people of the holy ones of the Most High (7:18, 27) makes this notion explicit in Daniel 7.<sup>647</sup> The vision thus constructs a hierarchy of sovereignty in which the people are aligned with the power of the Most High through identifications with their heavenly counterparts, Michael and the angelic host.<sup>648</sup>

Finally, Daniel 7 explicitly addresses the fate of all other nations in this new eschatological arrangement. Daniel 2 stated only that the structure of Gentile imperium would be pulverized by the “stone cut out, not by human hands” (2:34). In that scenario, it is unclear what

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<sup>646</sup> For similar observations, see Junker, *Untersuchungen*, 31; Bentzen, *Daniel*, 29–30; Albertz, “The Social Setting of the Aramaic and Hebrew Book of Daniel,” 185; Newsom and Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 219; Kratz, “The Visions of Daniel,” 97; Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 326–27.

<sup>647</sup> So Hartman and Di Lella, *The Book of Daniel*, 208.

<sup>648</sup> As Collins observes, there is some inherent ambiguity between the saints in heaven and on earth, since pious communities such as that responsible for the sectarian documents among the Dead Sea Scrolls could believe themselves “to be mingling with the angels in the eschatological time” (Collins, *Daniel*, 314). See, e.g., the remarkable hymn preserved in 1QH<sup>a</sup> XXV 34–XXVII c.2 par. 4QH<sup>a</sup> II 18–V c. 3; 4QH<sup>c</sup> I 1–III. See also Heinz-Wolfgang Kuhn, *Enderwartung und gegenwärtiges Heil: Untersuchungen zu den Gemeindeliedern von Qumran mit einem Angang über Eschatologie und Gegenwart in der Verkündigung Jesu*, vol. 4 of *Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), 44–78.

role, if any, the nations would play in the eschaton. But Daniel 7 states explicitly that “all peoples, nations, and languages” will serve (√פּלח) the One like a Son of Man (7:14) and, correspondingly, that all dominions (√שלט) will serve and obey (√פּלח, √שמע) the people of the holy ones of the Most High forever (7:27). The vision thus constructs corresponding hierarchies of sovereignty and servitude (see Figure 6.7; cf. §3.5.2). The previous arrangement by which God had delegated sovereignty over all nations to Gentile king(dom)s (cf. Dan 3:4, 7, 29; 4:1; 5:19; 6:25 [see §5]; see also Jer 27:5–6 [§3.5.2]) would be reversed for all eternity.

<b>Figure 6.7. Hierarchies of Sovereignty and Servitude, Present and Eschatological</b>	
<b><u>Temporary Present</u></b>	<b><u>Eternal Future</u></b>
The Most High	The Most High
↓	↓
Four Gentile King(dom)s	Son of Man—Holy Ones—Jewish People
↓	↓
Subjugated peoples (including Jews)	All peoples, nations, and languages; All dominions

### **III.3.1. Power, Desire, and the Replication of Dominance**

The new eschatological scenario undoubtedly offered an ideologically satisfying solution to the problem of Gentile empire. The model is rooted in an underlying ethic of retributive justice in which the deeds of the monstrous empires would be remembered and punished (even if they were predetermined). Within the context of a *vaticinium ex eventu*, the sense of inevitability about this outcome could help make contemporary afflictions in the present bearable—even necessary and therefore meaningful. These aspects of the eschatological model made proto-Daniel 7 a rhetorically and theologically powerful response to the problem of Gentile empire.

What should not be missed about this eschatological scenario, however, is that the vision replicates and reinforces the essential structure of imperial dominance and servitude to which it responds in the first place. This replication is made remarkably clear by the reference to groups that will be subordinate to the People of the Holy Ones of the most High as “all peoples, nations, and languages,” which elsewhere in Daniel refers to those who were subjected to Nebuchadnezzar and Darius (7:13; 3:4, 7, 29; 4:1; 5:19; 6:25). Such replication is a common side-effect of resistance as response.<sup>649</sup> The desire to escape a particular position of structural subordination can easily slip into a desire merely to overturn the tables within that structure. Even if the vision posits that the new kingdom would be ruled by heavenly and earthly delegates of sovereignty who would presumably manifest divine justice and holiness, it does not ultimately do away with the hierarchy of national dominance and subordination. In fact, its construct of in-group supremacy differs from those of the previous Gentile empires “only in that its power is now established forever.”<sup>650</sup>

#### 6.4. THE HORN REDACTION: THE MOST HIGH AND ANTIOCHUS IV EPIPHANES

In 167 BCE, as conditions in Jerusalem and Judah under AIVE were quickly escalating into a cultural crisis, the depiction of the fourth and final beast was augmented by the so-called “horn

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<sup>649</sup> See Anthea E. Portier-Young, “Jewish Apocalyptic Literature as Resistance Literature,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature*, ed. John J. Collins (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 152–53. Similarly, Stephen D. Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse: Postcolonialism and the New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006), 119; Greg Carey, “Symptoms of Resistance in the Book of Revelation,” in *The Reality of Apocalypse: Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation*, SBLSS 39 (Atlanta: SBL, 2006), 169–80. Ideological critics of Revelation have posited this kind of replication of imperial values, including those values about gender (Tina Pippin, *Death and Desire: The Rhetoric of Gender in the Apocalypse of John* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992], 72, 98, 104), wealth (Robert M. Royalty Jr., *The Streets of Heaven: The Ideology of Wealth in the Apocalypse of John* [Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998], 246), and the way of viewing the world as imperial spectacle (Christopher A. Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire: Monsters, Martyrs, and the Book of Revelation* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004], 115).

<sup>650</sup> Newsom, “Resistance Is Futile!,” 176–77.

redaction” in 7:7bβ, 8, 11a, 20–22, 24–25.<sup>651</sup> This redactional layer refers to ten horns and another, little horn that comes up among them, plucking up three of the previous ones (7:7bβ–8), which together represent a series of Hellenistic kings culminating in the rise of AIVE. Although there have been attempts to identify the ten horns with ten of AIVE’s royal predecessors, the number ten more likely functions as a schematic figure as it does in many other early Jewish apocalyptic texts (*I En.* 93:1–10 + 91:11–17; 4Q387 2 II 3–4 (par. 4Q385a 4 1); 11QMelch II 7; *Sib. Or.* 1\*; 2\*, 3:156–61; 4:49–101; see also 4Q180 1 5; 4Q181 2 3; 4Q182 2 1–3; *I En.* 10:12).<sup>652</sup> The numerical scheme functions to frame the rise of AIVE as the final, climactic ruler in the series of Gentile kings—one who “seemed greater than the others” (Dan 7:20b).

Through the additions about the “little horn,” the redactor of Daniel 7 integrated the activities of AIVE into the eschatological scenario developed already in the earlier version of the vision. The references to AIVE’s activities in this update are threefold: First, he is said to speak arrogantly, including words against the Most High (7:8b, 11a, 20, 25). The content of this arrogant speech is not supplied in the vision. It has been proposed that this speech against the Most High might refer to AIVE’s novel claim of being “God manifest,” which was broadcast, for

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<sup>651</sup> The signs of redactional activity are rather clear: (1) the reference to the ten horns 7:7bβ comes only after the summarizing statement: “And it was different from all the beasts that preceded it” (see also v. 24.b); Hölscher, “Die Entstehung des Buches Daniel,” 121; most recently, see Newsom and Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, 225); (2) the different interjection in 7:8 (אלו rather than ארו); (3) the double occurrence of הוזה הוית in 7:11; and (4) the separate interpretation scene regarding the horns. Contra Ginsberg, who thinks that the ten horns are not secondary (*Studies in Daniel*, 16, 18–19; followed by Hartman and Di Lella, *The Book of Daniel*, 13, 209, 215). Cf. also Collins, *Daniel*, 279.

<sup>652</sup> See Adela Yarbro Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 80–83. That a schema of ten-fold periodization was common and influential as a structuring device is seen especially in the 10 weeks of the *Apocalypse of Weeks*, where, as Loren T. Stuckenbruck has observed, “[i]t is interesting that the writer chose not to conclude the account of eschatological events at the end of week seven, but rather added an addition three periods ... to round out the scheme in week ten” (*I Enoch 91–108*, CEJL [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007], 53–54). For the identification of the three ousted kings, see Collins, *Daniel*, 321.

instance, on some of his coins.<sup>653</sup> This blasphemous claim may be what the redactor has in view. But the claim may also be simply stereotypical, for the motif of arrogant speech by foreign kings leading to God's judgment is attested frequently in earlier biblical traditions (Isaiah 10:5–15 [§2]; 2 Kgs 19:22–23, 28; see also Dan 4:30–31 [§5.2.3.4]; cf. Jer 50:31–32; Ps 2:2–3). The second claim is that the little horn waged war against “the holy ones of the Most High,” and was even prevailing over them (7:21) and wearing them out (7:25). By analogy to the little horn's infliction of violence upon the stars in Dan 8:10 and in light of the distinction between the “holy ones” and the “people of the holy ones” in proto-Daniel 7, this image might frame AIVE's activities as a conflict with angelic powers and thus imbue them with cosmic significance.<sup>654</sup> But it is also possible, and in my judgment more likely, that the “holy ones” in the redaction simply refers to the saints on earth, since (1) there is still no reference to a conflict between the Son of Man and the fourth beast, (2) it is unlikely that angels would be given into the hand of AIVE as 7:25b states (see below), and (3) the distinction between the angelic holy ones in heaven and the saints on earth is often blurred in Jewish texts of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE.<sup>655</sup> Finally, it is said that the little horn “shall attempt to change the sacred season and the law” (7:25). This statement almost certainly refers to the directives of AIVE mentioned in 1 Macc 1:44–5, which decreed that those in Jerusalem and Judah should observe customs that were “strange to the land” and “to forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary, to profane sabbaths and

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<sup>653</sup> See Collins, *Daniel*, 321–22; John J. Collins and Adela Yarbro Collins, *King and Messiah as Son of God: Divine, Human, and Angelic Messianic Figures in Biblical and Related Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 52.

<sup>654</sup> So Collins, *Daniel*, 322.

<sup>655</sup> See n. 648 above.

festivals ...” (see also 2 Macc 6:6). These redactional supplements update Daniel’s vision by integrating the activities of AIVE up to 167 BCE into the depiction of the fourth beast.

Although the supplements of the little-horn redaction update the vision, they do not fundamentally change the version of the four-kingdoms schema constructed by proto-Daniel 7. They merely augment it. For this reason, the redaction preserves a large measure of continuity with the underlying model. This continuity has at least two important consequences for understanding how the redaction models the relationship between AIVE and the Most High God. First, the power and activities of AIVE are framed as part of the Most High’s creative plan for history: horns and all, the fourth beast is still stirred up from the sea by the four winds of heaven. The redactor, in fact, reflects explicitly on the role of AIVE within the final stage of the divine plan by delineating the length and status of AIVE’s sovereignty in this period. Recalling the image of YHWH giving over (נתן) his people into the hand of (ביד) Nebuchadnezzar in earlier texts within the biblical tradition (Jer 20:4; 21:7 [§3.5.1]; Dan 1:1–3 [§5.2.3.1]; cf. 4Q243 13 3=4Q244 12 2–3), the redactor, using the divine passive, states that the holy ones “shall be given into his hand/power (יתיהבון בידה) for a time, two times, and half a time” (7:25b). Like the determinism intrinsic to the four-kingdoms schema, the reference to “a time, two times, and half a time,” which probably refers to three and a half years, delineates AIVE’s activities within a finite period that was determined by the Most High (cf. Dan 8:14; 9:27; 12:11, 12). Moreover, as with the activities of the four beasts in proto-Daniel 7, the framing achieved by the *vaticinium ex eventu* identifies the activities of AIVE during this period, including his manifest power over the holy ones (7:25–26), as tokens of God’s continued control.

It is here that the second consequence becomes salient: by doubling down on the strategy of locating the activities of AIVE within God’s plan, the redactor further develops the idea that

the final stage of history will be marked by climactic violence inflicted by the last Gentile king. In fact, it is just when the expression of Gentile tyranny appears strongest and comes to its most monstrous expression that history will come to an end through divine intervention. This historiographical model introduces a hermeneutical principle that has an almost infinite capacity to assimilate adverse experiences in the present: the worse things get, the more they are to be seen as testimony of God's control and thus the more meaningful they become. This hermeneutical principle was foundational for the heirs of Daniel 7 as they attempted to discern the meaning of AIVE's activities within God's creative plan for history. Although the visions in Daniel 8, 9, and 10–12 did not set out to model the relationship between God and AIVE, they did attempt to discern patterns in the development of history culminating in the climactic events of 167–164 BCE in order understand a different set of theological concerns about the fate of the temple and of the wise,<sup>656</sup> who, like their predecessors, took up the responsibility of giving understanding to many (cf. 11:33).

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<sup>656</sup> See, e.g., Newsom, "Political Theology in the Book of Daniel: An Internal Debate," 566.



## CHAPTER 7

## CONCLUSION: THE CHAPTERS AND THE STORY

In this study I set out to understand the content and character of the theological responses to Gentile imperialism in the Hebrew Bible, especially as these responses took shape in discourse about the relationship between God and the Gentile king. I proceeded by analyzing the key texts preserved in biblical tradition in which this relationship is foregrounded as a topic of discourse. Each of these texts provided a snapshot of how the biblical authors responded theologically to the political conditions and ideological challenges of Gentile imperialism at crucial chapters in the story of ancient Judah. Having analyzed these discrete chapters, we are now in a position to tell the larger story that they together comprise: the longitudinal development of biblical discourse about God's relationship to the Gentile king from the 8<sup>th</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE. Charting the lines of continuity and discontinuity across this story will allow us to observe (1) the common themes and discursive strategies running throughout these chapters and (2) the impact that responding to Gentile king(dom)s had on the depiction and historical development of ideas about YHWH.

### 7.1 COMMON THEMES AND STRATEGIES: DISCOURSE ON AGENCY AND RELATIVE SOVEREIGNTY

The texts taken up in this study represent a kind of response literature. They preserve discursive reactions to immutable facts of experience and conditions of political subordination that could not be altered or overcome by physical resistance. The locus of the cultural work performed by these texts is the realm of the symbolic, that contested space in which the meaning of such immutable events and circumstances may be claimed and delineated through acts of interpretation. In view of the previous chapters of this study, it is possible to identify two main

discursive themes that emerge as interpretive strategies throughout these symbolic responses: (1) the attribution of the agency behind the activities of the Gentile king to YHWH and (2) the construction of hierarchies of sovereignty in which YHWH's supremacy over the Gentile king is asserted and maintained.

### 7.1.1. Discourse on Agency

From beginning to end and without exception, the biblical texts relegate the activities of the Gentile king(dom)s under YHWH's active agency. In the 8<sup>th</sup> century oracle of Isaiah 10:5–15 (§2), the prophet explicitly contested the agency behind the Assyrian king's imperial activities, attributing to the king a false consciousness about his own agency by which he incurs guilt and likening him to a mere instrument in the hand of YHWH. Throughout much of Jeremiah (§3.5.1), Nebuchadnezzar, that king who destroyed Jerusalem and its most important political and cultural institutions, was identified as an agent of YHWH's judgment on his own people—a notion echoed in the historical prologue of the Danielic court tales (§5.2.3.1). These Jeremianic oracles configured YHWH and Nebuchadnezzar into a chain of effective agency; in some cases, the distinction between the actions of the two figures was blurred even to the point of vanishing. In the period leading up to 539 BCE, Second Isaiah explicitly claimed that YHWH was the agent behind Cyrus the Great's activities, identifying YHWH as the one who had initiated the Persian king's successful endeavors in the past and who would continue to work through him in the destruction of Babylon and the restoration of Judah (§4.3.2.1). And finally, the vision of Daniel 7 relegated the activities of the four Gentile empires under God's active agency by depicting them as monstrous *Mischwesen* who were created and commissioned by the Most High to fulfill his creative plans for history (§6.3.2).

### 7.1.2. Discourse on Relative Sovereignty

Closely related to the theme of agency is that of relative sovereignty. Several of the texts identify YHWH as the source of the Gentile king's power by configuring the two into hierarchies of sovereignty. The most influential formulation was articulated in Jeremiah 27:5–6 (§3.5.2), in which YHWH, in his sovereign freedom as the sole creator of the cosmos, decides to delegate sovereignty over the whole earth to his “servant,” Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. This model was taken up in the thought of Second Isaiah, who further established and developed the link between YHWH's freedom as creator and his election of a Gentile king, in this case, Cyrus. (§4.3.2). The model of YHWH's delegation of global sovereignty to Nebuchadnezzar was absolutely foundational for the Danielic court tales (§5.2), which took this construct as their starting point for exploring the relationship between divine and imperial sovereignty and the implications of this relationship for Jewish life in diaspora. The redactor of Daniel 2 (§5.3) likewise affirmed the model of divine delegation that he had received from his predecessors but made a crucial modification through the eschatological appropriation of the four-kingdoms schema. This new schema set the delegation of sovereignty to a series of Gentile king(dom)s within a finite temporal limit prior to the eschatological manifestation of God's rule (cf. Jer 27:7; 25:11–14; 29:10). The eschatologized version of the four-kingdoms schema was then taken up in the apocalyptic vision of Daniel 7, which reiterated YHWH's delegation of sovereignty to the four Gentile empires but posited a three-fold delegation of eternal sovereignty to the One like a Son of Man, an angelic host, and the Jewish people on earth (§6.3.3).

### 7.1.3. King of Kings: Response, Responsibility, and Monotheism

I have argued throughout this study that the discourse about agency and relative sovereignty served, in each case, to frame the events and circumstances of Gentile imperialism within an *exclusively Yahwistic* theological framework. This rhetorical and theological framing functioned in at least two closely related ways. First, it fenced out rival interpretations of events, including those that would attribute power and agency to the Gentile king or his god(s). In fact, apart from the anti-idol polemic of Second Isaiah, the god(s) of the Gentile powers are never even alluded to in these texts (see, e.g., §2.3.2). And second, this framing had the capacity to render the experiences and conditions of imperialism, whether for doom or for boon, theologically meaningful by grounding their origin or purpose within the power and intentionality of YHWH. This was an especially vital strategy in responding to defeat and domination: events and circumstances that could have been interpreted as proof of YHWH's lack of power and inferiority—or impotence—were rather (re-)affirmed as expressions of his power and ultimate superiority—or omnipotence. This interpretive strategy differed significantly from the common ancient Near Eastern theology of defeat by which the vanquished interpreted defeat in terms of the local patron deity's active abandonment on account of some displeasure with the populace or the land (see §§2.4.1; 3.5.1.3). In the biblical texts surveyed in this study, it is the local patron deity of the defeated (or threatened) populace, YHWH, who actively works in, through, and over the conquering king(dom). The claim is unflagging throughout the biblical texts: YHWH is in supreme control over the Gentile king(dom)s, whose power comes from, or is an expression of, his own. YHWH is *King* of kings in the superlative sense.

Crucially, however, this claim also means that YHWH is *King of kings* in the genitive sense. For the rhetorical and theological framing of Gentile imperialism within an exclusively

Yahwistic framework identified YHWH as (1) the ultimate source of sovereignty behind the Gentile kings and (2) the agent ultimately responsible for the conditions to which the biblical authors responded in the first place, including the king of Assyria's destructive activities in the West (§2), Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Jerusalem and possession of global sovereignty (§§3; 5), the rise and flourishing of Cyrus (§4), and the monstrous activities of the Hellenistic Diadochoi (§§5.3; 6). In other words, the theological *response* that affirmed YHWH's ultimate sovereignty and agency over Gentile kings entailed YHWH's ultimate *responsibility* for the power possessed by such kings and what that power made possible, whether for good or for bad. Such theological responsibility is the price that monotheism, whether functional or explicit, simply must pay.<sup>657</sup>

In this regard, by tracing the relationship between theological response and theological responsibility, this study offers a contribution to our understanding of the role that responding to Gentile imperialism played in the development of monotheistic discourse in ancient Judah. To begin with, my analysis of Isaiah 10:5–15 corroborated and advanced a thesis first championed by Baruch Levine: namely, that First Isaiah's response to the universalizing claims characteristic of the Assyrian empire through rhetorical contestation produced what is arguably the first functionally monotheistic discourse in the Hebrew Bible, since YHWH is here, for the first time, depicted as the exclusive orchestrator of events on the international scene (§2.3.2).<sup>658</sup> But the

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<sup>657</sup> Thomas C. Römer makes a similar observation: "In polytheistic systems, the existence of misfortune and evil is not problematic. There are always demons, chthonic deities, or other frightening gods that are responsible for bad things affecting human beings. The problem arises in a one-god centred system" ("Yhwh, the Goddess and Evil: Is 'Monotheism' an Adequate Concept to Describe the Hebrew Bible's Discourses about the God of Israel," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 34 [2013]: 4–5).

<sup>658</sup> See Baruch A. Levine, "Assyrian Ideology and Israelite Monotheism," *Iraq* 67 (2005): esp. 411, 422. See also Hays, "Isaiah as Colonized Poet: His Rhetoric of Death in Conversation with African Postcolonial Writers," 69–70.

longitudinal structure of this study also made it possible to observe how such an exclusively Yahwistic framework for explaining geo-political events was maintained and reworked throughout the rest of the biblical discourse on the relationship between God and the Gentile king. The oracles of Jeremiah (§3) and the discourses of the book of Daniel (§§5, 6) were likewise functionally monotheistic, explaining the activities and global sovereignty of the Gentile king(dom)s strictly in terms of YHWH's own agency and ultimate sovereignty. The same must also be said of the oracles of Second Isaiah, where we may go even further, since the prophet's articulation of the most explicitly monotheistic discourse in the entire Hebrew Bible functions largely to justify YHWH's election of Cyrus (§4.3.2.3). Thus, in view of the longitudinal analysis of these texts, it is possible to see that the formulation of exclusively Yahwistic responses to the conditions and ideological challenges of Gentile imperialism gave rise to discourse that was functionally and even explicitly monotheistic. Crucially, although each of these responses was formulated in response to unique historical situations and challenges, when they are read together like a flip-book, what emerges is a larger narrative in which YHWH is the sole sovereign directing geo-political events on the international stage over time according to his plan for history—what would later be named divine providence. Significantly, by the early Hellenistic period, the eschatological redaction of Daniel 2 and the apocalyptic vision of Daniel 7 already appear to recognize this narrative, which they reify and make explicit in their use of the four-kingdoms schema in explaining the course and telos of history (§§5.3; 6.3.2–3). The highly responsive and contextually shaped discourse about YHWH's sovereign agency over the Gentile king(dom)s thus appears to have played a substantial role in the development of monotheistic discourse in the Hebrew Bible.

## 7.2. The Nature of Response: Hybridity and Symbolic Work

Another theme that recurs in several chapters of this study is that the process of responding theologically to the conditions of Gentile imperialism had an impact on how YHWH was conceived and depicted in biblical discourse. A response is a reaction. The texts about God and the Gentile king react to particular conditions in the world, and these conditions provide the partial grounds on which the responses must take shape. Significantly, these conditions that somehow had to be assimilated into a Yahwistic framework were comprised not only of the experiences of cultural trauma or liberation but also of the ideational content that was inextricably linked to them. In several cases, the biblical authors were responding to the ideological constructs that were formulated and propagated by the dominant imperial powers. The act of responding to these constructs, whether by explicit or implicit contestation or by direct cultural appropriation, meant that depictions of YHWH were partly shaped by imperial discourse and the ideology that this discourse served. Because the historical manifestations of the structures of Gentile empire could not be altered or denied but only assimilated into a Yahwistic framework, this effect of response often meant that YHWH was configured into the position and role of the imperial patron deity. In Isaiah 10:5–15, the concrete encounter with Neo-Assyrian propaganda led to a *counterclaim* by which YHWH was explicitly depicted as the deity who wields the Assyrian king as an instrument of his wrath—the very same role that the imperial deity Aššur plays in the Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions (§2). The influential model of divine delegation of sovereignty to Nebuchadnezzar as it was articulated in Jeremiah likewise appears to have been an appropriation of a model first formulated in Assyrian royal ideology; in the context of Jeremiah, the adoption of this model functioned to identify YHWH as Nebuchadnezzar’s patron deity and thus served to affirm and authorize the structure of Gentile

empire itself (§§3.5.2.5; 5.2.5; 6.3.2.4). In the redaction of Daniel 2 and the vision of Daniel 7, the eschatological appropriation of the four-kingdoms schema, which was originally of Persian origin (§5.3.1), set YHWH's delegation of sovereignty to Gentile kings within a finite temporal horizon but nevertheless—and necessarily—reaffirmed the theological legitimacy of the four Gentile empires in the final eras of history (§§5.3; 6.3.2). The discourse about Cyrus in Second Isaiah (and Ezra) demonstrates this dynamic perhaps most exquisitely. Densely populated with conventional imagery found in royal texts from the cuneiform tradition as well as parallels to the Pro-Persian propaganda that circulated in Babylon, Second Isaiah depicted YHWH as the patron deity of Cyrus, explicitly identifying the Persian king as YHWH's beloved "servant" and "anointed one," to whom he granted imperial success (§4.3.2.2–3).

And here we may observe quite clearly that the theological responses to imperial constructs that had an impact on the depiction of YHWH also had an impact had an impact on the traditional Judean royal theology. The centripetal force of assimilating the activities and imperial structures of the Gentile king into an exclusively Yahwistic framework could not leave this theology untouched. With their competing claims for YHWH's patronage, there was little room for both the Davidic king and the Gentile emperor. Thus the oracles of Jeremiah did away with the old notion of the inviolability of Zion while configuring Nebuchadnezzar as YHWH's "servant" (JerMT) into whose hands YHWH would put Jerusalem, its leaders, and its populace for destruction. In order to make room of Cyrus and his role in YHWH's plan, Second Isaiah—in contrast to the hopes of Ezekiel and Habakkuk—transferred the "sure and gracious promises made to David" to his people as a whole; this transferral created space for Cyrus, YHWH's new and beloved royal servant, to occupy the office of YHWH's anointed (4.3.2.2–3). Moreover, the ubiquitous discourse about agency and sovereignty by which Gentile imperialism was



assimilated into an exclusively Yahwistic framework had a centrifugal force, disassociating YHWH's activity and power from his land, temple, and monarchy. The acts of responding to the conditions and ideological constructs of Gentile empires thus had an observable influence on the discourse about the national deity and traditional royal theology of the biblical authors, who were attempting to make theological sense of their experience from the position of cultural and political subordination.

But in addition to the impact of imperialism on the biblical discourse produced from the position of political subordination, I have also tried to point out the fact that the discourse of the imperial powers was likewise shaped by their encounters with subordinate peoples, including the people of YHWH. Taking advantage of the willingness of conquered populations to understand their defeat or subordination within their own indigenous ideological constructs, Gentile rulers would depict themselves as acting or ruling under the patronage of the deities of the subordinate peoples. The biblical texts provide historically plausible witnesses to this dynamic. According to the important historiographical source reflected in both 2 Kings 18–20 and Isaiah 36–39, the Assyrian Rabshakeh purported that King Sennacherib received a prophecy from YHWH himself, commanding him to attack Jerusalem (Isa 36:10 // 2 Kgs 18:25; §2.4.2; see also Jer 40:2–3; §3.5.1.4.3). The most vivid and historically reliable examples of such accommodation, however, are attested in the propaganda of the Persian kings, who sought to attract and harness local support by assimilating themselves into the indigenous political and ideological structures of subdued peoples. Presenting themselves as rightful heirs to local dynasties, ruling in the name of local patron deities, and acting to restore and promote local cults—including the temple and cult in Jerusalem—the Persian kings offered a measure of cultural continuity to conquered populations in exchange for cooperation and compliance. In Babylon, Cyrus was careful to frame

his rule within the structures of Babylonian royal ideology, which allowed him to stage his successful takeover as a restorative event—staging that is tantalizingly similar to that of Second Isaiah and Ezra 1:2–4 // 2 Chr 36:22–23 (§4.2.4). The statue of Udjahorresnet provides clear evidence that Cyrus’s heir, Cambyses, pursued a similar strategy after conquering Egypt, where he took on an Egyptian title, restored the temple of Neith whom he worshipped, and comported himself according to Pharaonic norms. The agents of imperial diplomacy were thus often willing to concede space in their ideological justifications for dominance to those whom they dominated. Although such measures of accommodation or concession ultimately served as shrewd strategies of control, they were at the same time implicit acknowledgments of the limits of the imperial construction of reality. However dominant the imperial powers might have been, they could not have established and maintained their political hegemony without a measure of active participation of subordinate peoples. The imperial propaganda thus functioned to bolster imperial power while at the same time exposing the limits of this power. Each side of the imperial encounter thus made use of the ideological constructs of the other as they framed the realities of dominance and subordination.

### *7.2.1. Hybridity*

What emerges at this discursive interface between the dominant and subordinate groups is best described by what postcolonial critics have come to recognize as “hybridity,” which, as John W. Marshall summarizes,

encompasses several locations in the literal and social geography of the colonial encounter. It is the condition of creative and contentious mixing of traditions and cultures that the colonized subject must negotiate. It flowers in the colonial elite's value-laden embrace of elements of the subject culture. “Hybridity” also names the compromised condition of colonial authority—most critically the contradictory conditions of authoritarian colonial discourse that the partial agency of the colonized exploits ...

Hybridity straddles discourses of authority and subordination, assimilation and resistance  
 ...<sup>659</sup>

What I have tried to show throughout this study is that the biblical texts and the imperial ideology reflected in royal inscriptions attest to the discursive sites of this contentious mixing. By attending to the ways in which the discourses of both the biblical authors and the Gentile empires interacted with and influenced one another during key encounters across the 8<sup>th</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BCE, I have tried to make the case for the methodological utility of a “historical-critical postcolonialism” for the analysis of the texts of the Hebrew Bible, especially for recognizing the complex dynamics of cross-cultural interaction that influenced the development of biblical discourse.<sup>660</sup>

### 7.2.2. *The Merely Symbolic: “Minding” the Gentile King in Biblical Discourse*

Finally, I have tried in this study to show how the discursive strategies for configuring God’s relationship to Gentile kings could perform powerful symbolic work on the ideological challenges presented by Gentile imperialism. In particular, I have argued that the ubiquitous discourse about YHWH’s ultimate agency and sovereignty had the capacity to render the experiences of imperial domination meaningful by encompassing their origin and end within an exclusively Yahwistic theological framework through acts of interpretation. This kind of symbolic work is precisely what discourse has the capacity to do: to transmute intractable problems—social or otherwise—into the realm of the symbolic, where they become malleable

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<sup>659</sup> John W. Marshall, “Hybridity and Reading Romans 13,” *JSNT* 31 (2008): 164, 166. See also Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 23.

<sup>660</sup> A phrase also coined, as far as I can tell, by John W. Marshall in his “Postcolonialism and the Practice of History.”

and it is possible to invent “imaginary or formal ‘solutions’” to resolve them.<sup>661</sup> But although the biblical discourse could perform powerful symbolic *work* on ideological problems that could not be resolved by sword or shield, this work was, to some extent, *merely* symbolic. For such acts of interpretation, as Jameson rightly observes, “leave the real untouched.”<sup>662</sup> This is not to say that the biblical texts did not have consequences in the “real world,” especially as they were received by communities that believed in their interpretation of reality: Isaiah 10:5–15 could encourage the deferment of political action, the Cyrus Songs could promote political accommodation, and so forth. But the texts themselves, as responses to immutable political conditions, do their work on the symbolic plane, touching only the subjective experiences of their ready audiences.

The “merely” symbolic character of this work is illustrated clearly in a major theme that emerged at the surface in a number of texts analyzed in this study: the discourse about the Gentile king’s *perceptions* of reality, especially concerning the ultimate agency and sovereignty of YHWH behind his own. This theme was taken up in two different types of discourse. First, in the prophetic oracles of Isaiah 10:5–15 and the Cyrus Songs of Second Isaiah, the *perceptions* or *knowledge* of contemporary kings provided a locus for negotiating reality in more or less real time. In Isaiah 10:5–15, the prophet contested the Assyrian king’s first-person statements about his own activities and thereby attributed him with a false consciousness about his own agency—a misapprehension that rendered the king culpable before YHWH (§2.3.5). In a similar but inverted manner, Second Isaiah acknowledged that Cyrus was unaware of the fact that it was YHWH who had summoned him by name and armed him for battle but anticipated that (1) Cyrus

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<sup>661</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 79; Newsom, “God’s Other: The Intractable Problem of the Gentile King in Judean and Early Jewish Literature,” 36.

<sup>662</sup> See Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 79–81, quotation 81.

would come to know this fact and that, through Cyrus, (2) the world would come to know that YHWH alone is God (45:3–5; §4.3.2.1.3).

Second, the more reflective discourse regarding YHWH’s relationship to Gentile kings in biblical narrative was patterned by the theme of leading the king from ignorance to knowledge of YHWH for YHWH’s glorification. The court tales of Daniel 1–4 together tell the story of Nebuchadnezzar as he gradually moves from ignorance to knowledge about the true nature of his sovereignty through confrontations with the power of the God of the Jews, ultimately leading to the imagined scenario that the king glorified YHWH by recognizing him publicly as the source of his earthly sovereignty (§5.2.3–4). The Exodus story, with its ultimate showdown between YHWH and Pharaoh, develops along similar lines, since the defeat of Pharaoh causes him and his army to know just who YHWH is (see Exod 5:2; §4.3.2.3.1).

Given the Hebrew Bible’s near universal reticence to lift the veil enshrouding the inner thought-life of the characters who occupy its pages,<sup>663</sup> the discursive foregrounding of the knowledge and perceptions of the Gentile king is rather remarkable. The fact that this theme recurs in several of the texts analyzed in this study suggests that the “mind” of the foreign king provided a useful locus for performing symbolic work on the problems presented by the king’s

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<sup>663</sup> This reticence is a hallmark of biblical literature, especially biblical narrative; see, e.g., Erich Auerbach, “Odysseus’ Scar,” in *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 3–23; Joel Rosenberg, “Bible: Biblical Narrative,” in *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts*, ed. Barry W. Holtz (New York: Summit Books, 1984), 32; Barry W. Holtz, “Midrash,” in *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts*, ed. Barry W. Holtz (New York: Summit Books, 1984), 180; Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, New and Rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 146; Susan Niditch, *The Responsive Self: Personal Religion in Biblical Literature of the Neo-Babylonian and Persian Periods*, AYBRL (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 123. Beyond this discourse about the figure of the Gentile king, readers are only at times clued into the reasoning behind a character’s actions through brief notices sewn throughout the texts; see, e.g., Gen 20:11; 36:7, 9; 32:8, 20; Exod 2:14; 1 Sam 1:13; 18:11, 17, 21; cf. 20:26; 27:11–12; 2 Sam 14:15–17; 2 Kgs 5:20; 20:9; Neh 6:2, 9; Esther 3:6; Dan 6:10; see also the remarks about the mental life of the wicked in some of the Palms (10:4, 6, 11; 41:9[8]; 56:6[5]; 57:6[7]; 64:6–7[5–6]). Rarely, however, are such considerations foregrounded in biblical discourse.

power and activities. In the case of the narratives in Daniel and Exodus, the ignorance attributed to the kings created a conflict that allowed the biblical authors to inflict symbolic defeat on the kings by bringing them into the knowledge of YHWH's superior power through imaginative judgment. In the case of the real-time responses to contemporary kings, the mind of the king provided a locus for negotiating "what was really happening" in the king's activities without, of course, changing the events themselves. Thus, despite what the Assyrian king might have said or thought about his own military activities, the prophet insisted that the king was but a mere instrument wielded by YHWH for YHWH's purposes. And despite Cyrus's apparent ignorance of YHWH, Second Isaiah affirmed that Cyrus was nevertheless fulfilling YHWH's predetermined plan for history.

The recognition that the biblical discourse about God and the Gentile king reacts to immutable conditions in history and performs powerful yet symbolic work on these conditions raises an important question for confessional biblical theology, where the "merely" symbolic work of biblical texts is brought into contact with beliefs about the way things really are. The historical methodology guiding this study has framed the biblical responses as discursive strategies for making theological sense of the rival sovereignty possessed and expressed by the Gentile king exclusively "from below." From this perspective, the biblical texts analyzed in this study represent profound human struggles for meaning from the perspective of those at the mercy of indomitable political powers. But from a confessional theological perspective, biblical discourse does not represent merely a human projection on to the stage of history but rather testifies to the God of the Bible's actual responsibility for the very conditions about which the texts speak. From this perspective, the key events in the history of Judah examined in this study represent chapters in the drama of YHWH's relationship with his people, a drama in which

historical events are guided by divine providence, which “strongly and sweetly movest,” even through the tyrants of the world who know not what they do.<sup>664</sup>

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<sup>664</sup> From George Herbert, “Providence,” line 2.

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