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Seeking Sanctuary: The Word of God for the People of God

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Abstract

Sanctuary is a foundational concept in our Christian tradition. Oppressed and marginalized people of God have been seeking sanctuary, places of refuge and safety, since some of the earliest narratives in our Holy Scripture. But in this twenty first century first-world context, Scripture seems to be losing its appeal. There is a general agreement among both scholars and mainline clergy that the Bible is increasingly losing its authority as a centerpiece of Christian daily devotion and pastoral refuge; scripture is no longer a primary source of sanctuary for the general Christian population. But that does not mean that spiritual sanctuary is no longer needed.

This paper argues that appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, Scripture can still serve as a source of sanctuary for the people of God in times of great distress, and especially if the biblical stories can be heard as a long-lost family narrative; like Ancestor.com for God's family tree.

This paper explores the relationship between three communities of people seeking sanctuary more than two millennia apart: (1) the remnant left in Judah after the Babylonian invasion as recounted in the book of Jeremiah chapters 40-44, (2) undocumented immigrants of color in the United States of America after the presidential election in 2016, and (3) progressive Christians who, after the 2016 election, immediately felt themselves to be culturally marginalized, politically disconnected, and as virtual aliens in the land where they once felt that they belonged. All three communities seek sanctuary in the word of God. The remnant seeks God's word to direct them in their existential distress, contemporary undocumented immigrants seek sanctuary in Christian churches, and progressive Christians who offer such sanctuary do so in response to their own feeling of political alienation and according to the biblical warrant to

welcome the stranger, especially the stranger in need. May the conversation between these communities offer new ways in which the Word of God can provide sanctuary for the people of God.

Seeking Sanctuary: The Word of God for the People of God

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Introduction

Sanctuary is a foundational concept in our Christian tradition. Oppressed and marginalized people of God have been seeking sanctuary, places of refuge and safety, since some of the earliest narratives in our Holy Scripture. The classic example is the story of the exodus, the divine delivery of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt to freedom; to a land promised to be flowing with milk and honey, safety and refuge for sure.¹ But the exodus is not the only example of a marginalized people desperately seeking sanctuary in the story of God's extended family. The existential yearning for safety and refuge on the part of oppressed and peripheralized people threads through the narratives of our Holy Scripture from start to finish.

Sanctuary is also a yearning for spiritual safety and refuge. When the people of God have been in deepest despair they have long turned to the Word of God in search of such sanctuary for heart, mind, and spirit. Both the Jewish and Christian traditions direct the faithful to find safety and refuge in Holy Scripture.

But in this twenty first century first-world context, Scripture seems to be losing its appeal. At least that is the impression one might take away from the most recent Pew Forum Research as well as a seemingly unending stream of anecdotal evidence gleaned from and espoused by mainline Christian churches in the United States over the last several decades.²

1. *Thus said the Lord: I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.* (Exodus 3:8) This promised land of milk and honey is reiterated by YHWH in Ex 3:17, 13:5, and 33:3. And it is referenced again in Lev 20:24, Num. 13:27,14:8, and 16:13; Deut. 6:3,11:9, 26:9,15, 27:3, and 31:20; Jos. 5:6; Jer. 11:5, 32:22; and Ezek. 20:6 and 15. Jer 32:21-4 reads: *You brought your people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs and wonders, with a strong hand and outstretched arm, and with great terror; and you gave them this land, which you swore to their ancestors to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey; and they entered and took possession of it. But they did not obey your voice or follow your law; of all you commanded them to do, they did nothing. Therefore you have made all these disasters come upon them.* (NRSV)

2. Especially in the Northeast. "U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey," *Pew Research Center's Religion &*

There is a general agreement among both scholars and mainline clergy that the Bible is increasingly losing its authority as a centerpiece of Christian daily devotion and pastoral refuge; scripture is no longer a primary source of sanctuary for the general Christian population.³ But that does not mean that spiritual sanctuary is no longer needed. In fact, for Christian communities who seek to live by Gospel values in a political context in which Gospel values have little standing, the embrace of Scripture may provide spiritual refuge from cultural pressures to conform that is as fundamental to the survival of their faith tradition as is physical sanctuary to the survival of the remnant in ancient Judah and to undocumented peoples in the contemporary United States.

The following paper argues that appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, Scripture can still serve as a source of sanctuary for the people of God in a time of great distress, and especially if the biblical stories can be heard as a family narrative in which the reader encounters ancestors whose experiences fundamentally resonate with their own; if contemporary Christians can hear the stories told in ancient Scripture as part of God's family tree. But such spiritual sanctuary, such spiritual safety and refuge, can come not only in the recognition of common experiences with biblical ancestors and the assurance that they are connected to generations of faithful families, but also in the unending witness that God abides with God's people no matter what. Safety and refuge can be found in stories that assure contemporary readers that God is still with them, even when God seems absent, even when God's word in Scripture seems to be

Public Life Project (blog), September 28, 2010, <http://www.pewforum.org/2010/09/28/u-s-religious-knowledge-survey/>.

3. The *American Bible Society State of the Bible 2017* research shows that 2017 is the first year in their annual research in which any part of the polling segment claimed to be "Bible skeptical" (6%) or "Bible hostile" (13%), respectively. "The Bible in America: 6-Year Trends," Barna Group, accessed February 5, 2018, <https://www.barna.com/research/the-bible-in-america-6-year-trends/>.

ignored as though it no longer has power. One short, amazing, albeit relatively-unheard-of section from the book of Jeremiah offers such a witness.

This paper explores the relationship between three communities of people seeking sanctuary more than two millennia apart: (1) the remnant left in Judah after the Babylonian invasion of roughly 587 b.c.e. as recounted in the book of Jeremiah chapters 40-44, (2) undocumented immigrants of color in the United States of America after the presidential election in 2016, and (3) progressive Christians who, after the 2016 election, immediately felt themselves to be culturally marginalized, politically disconnected, and as virtual aliens in the land where they once felt that they belonged.⁴ The format of the following relational conversation between these three disparate communities includes four voices: (1) the canonical text, (2) one imagined member of the remnant in the text who speaks in a series of imagined letters to his imagined brother in exile, (3) an amalgam of the voices of contemporary undocumented immigrants in the US seeking sanctuary in a church in New England, and (4) the progressive Christian community that is seeking their own spiritual sanctuary by offering physical sanctuary to “others.”⁵ The resonating stories of marginalized people of God seeking sanctuary with God, and the ways in which God abides with them in their suffering, then and now, offers a glimpse into Scripture itself as a source of connection and sanctuary for generations of readers who find comfort in knowing that some things never change. Family provides belonging. And God still abides.

4. The choice of the text to be embraced in this project was inspired by Keith Bodner's excellent book *After the Invasion: A Reading of Jeremiah 40-44* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015).

5. This narrative is an amalgam of undocumented stories that have been told directly to me in the Greater Boston area between January 2017 and February 2018. The brutality of the political climate toward undocumented peoples in the U.S. makes confidentiality absolutely necessary. But every detail of this account is documented in my diaries. The Episcopal Parish of St. Paul, where I serve as the rector, has been offering sanctuary to one vulnerable family for the last several months.

The Ministerial Challenge: Scripture Is No Longer Spiritual Sanctuary

Most scholars agree that there has been a precipitous and increasingly well documented plunge in biblical literacy and overall biblical engagement over the last couple of generations.⁶ The plunge is not just among the increasing numbers of folks who claim no church affiliation (“nones”), but also by some who are the most loyal and regular churchgoers, at least in my own Episcopal parish and diocese. In my small church in New England, surveys conducted over the last four semesters have revealed in evidence what I, as the rector, have suspected with only anecdotally supported suspicion for quite some time. Scripture is decidedly out of fashion.

This is a serious existential problem for the whole of the Christian tradition. Scripture is no longer seen by every Christian as foundational to Christian identity or even as *the* primary resource for pastoral care. Seekers of spiritual safety and refuge in this generation are more apt to turn to therapists or Eastern meditation or pharmaceuticals than to the Bible. Even among people who identify as Christians, the word of God is no longer the sanctuary that it once was.⁷

Among the reasons for this trend toward a general disengagement with scriptural may be a contemporary perception of the Bible as a litany of rules and regulations to be followed rather than a collection of stories and truths that illuminate some of the deepest dimensions of our humanity. Maybe our relationship with Scripture would change if we surveyed the biblical narratives with the same curiosity and anticipation and hopefulness with which we survey our genetic roots via portals like Ancestry.com. The popularity and growth of such endeavors attests

6. By "biblical literacy" I mean a basic knowledge of the structure and contents of the Old and New Testaments. For more on the decline of religious knowledge in the United States see the *Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion in Public Life*. In this study, on average, Christians answered fewer than half of the 12 questions about the Bible correctly.

7 For much more on the current state of scriptural engagement see Brent A. Strawn's fascinating book *The Old Testament is Dying: A Diagnosis and Recommended Treatment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017).

to the compelling power of unearthed family stories in our contemporary world. The rampant popularity and rapid growth of DNA research in fleshing out family trees is testament to the contemporary hunger for a more full-fledged connection to our roots. It is not unreasonable, therefore, to suggest that the same might be true of revelations regarding our faith family; our religious DNA. Kinship is a powerful beacon, and Holy Scripture is nothing if not a light that illuminates the connections between and among generations of the family of God.

Regarding this point, Jeremiah 40-44 is a hidden gem. It is a little-known story of one generation of the family of God that offers a heretofore largely unheard-of dimension. While much of the biblical narrative is focused on the exiles, this pericope tells of the remnant left behind in Judah. It offers a fresh sense of kinship and belonging to generations of marginalized people of faith who, like the remnant in Judah, have little political power, few resources, and yet the agency to choose their fate; where they will go, as they seek safety and refuge from political violence and hostility in their own time and place.

Scholar Pete Diamond asks a central question underlying the following project: “Is there a role for autobiographical reflection in the critical analysis of Jeremiah?”⁸ This essay suggests that the answer is yes. It explores the role of such reflection through the lens of Scripture as a collection of family stories, each of which adds another piece to the broad puzzle that traces the experiences and the personality of the family of God, and maybe helps us to better understand who we are and from whence we have come. And too the voices of contemporary communities who are currently struggling with some of the same exigencies that plagued the remnant over

8. A.R. Pete Diamond and Louis Stulman, “Art and Atrocity, and the Book of Jeremiah,” in *Jeremiah Invented: Constructions and Deconstructions of Jeremiah*, eds. A.R. Pete Diamond and Louis Stulman (London, UK: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 89. His answer is yes.

two thousand five hundred years ago. All three of the communities addressed in this paper are desperately seeking sanctuary.

And, all choose to disobey the “law of the land” as they proceed. The Judahite remnant flees to Egypt against the Word of YHWH. Undocumented immigrants disobey the immigration law of the United States government. And progressive Christians who offer sanctuary in their sacred spaces practice civil disobedience on a variety of levels. And in all three cases, despite the outcomes, the Word of God participates. For the remnant, YHWH offers sanctuary if they stay in Judah. And for the contemporary communities the offer of sanctuary in Christian churches is founded on the biblical warrant to welcome the stranger, no matter what. The following paper is a conversation about how the Word of God for the people of God participates in the seeking and offering of sanctuary.

The Text: Jeremiah 40-44

Jeremiah 40-44 falls just beyond the coverage of the common lectionary - which ends at chapter 38 in this biblical book. And yet it is not at all insignificant in the wider narrative. It is the end of Jeremiah’s prophetic account and, in fact, the end of his life. And this section has several other features that make it both important in our larger family narrative and an excellent candidate for this interpretive exercise regarding the common experiences of those who are seeking sanctuary.

First, it includes the longest stretch in the book of Jeremiah in which God is absent. And, it also includes one of the most verbose pronouncements from God in any book in the Bible. This short narrative makes it clear that even though God sometimes seems absent in our darkest hours, God is still there. And God still has much to say; God is still speaking.

Also, the way in which the remnant makes its choices, albeit from limited options,

resonates with marginalized peoples of all generations in every generation, and makes this text perpetually relevant, even if it is generally unknown. And so, this narrative has many elements that recommend it as a scriptural sanctuary for people who are at risk of existential exile both physically and spiritually.

However, it has a serious drawback in the context of contemporary culture and may account for the rarity of its reading. As it is written, Jeremiah 40-44 is effectively inaccessible to the modern reader.⁹ In a cursory exercise, I asked ten random parishioners to read this section of Jeremiah and offer their feedback. The almost unanimous response was: "it is unreadable."¹⁰ Four of the ten participants in this exercise did not even finish all four chapters. The ancient convention of listing the familial connections of all of the privileged players in the text impedes the flow of the story and confuses the modern reader.

With this stumbling block in mind, the following includes a series of imagined letters between imagined voices that have been interspersed through the canonical text. They are letters that this author imagines might have been written by one member of the remnant in Judah to his brother who has been taken into exile in Babylon. It offers another perspective from the point of view of the ones who were not the victors. As Walter Brueggemann reminds us, the sanctioned canonical text is usually from the perspective of the ones who have, in the end, come out on top.¹¹ In this case, the voices of the remnant have been left out of the story. The letters are an

9. Ironically, given the thesis of this project, the preponderance of proper nouns (the listing of family relationships) was most often cited as that which makes Jeremiah 40-44 so very difficult to read and digest. It may be among the reasons why this story is so obscure. It is loaded with family identifiers that are not familiar to the contemporary reader. There are 274 proper nouns in this passage of 3,552 words.

10. This survey was taken among regular churchgoers at the Parish of St. Paul, all of whom have college degrees or are high school students in one of the best school systems in the nation. This survey was conducted in December 2017.

11. Walter Brueggemann, *Like Fire in the Bones: Listening for the Prophetic Word in Jeremiah*

attempt to read those voices back in. The following is an exercise in interpretive imagination, not historical accuracy.

Jeremiah 40-44 follows the plight of the Judahite¹² remnant after the Babylonian invasion in the sixth century before the common era.¹³ After the invasion of Babylon and a substantial number of Judahites are exiled (or deported) to Babylon, a small portion of the population is permitted to remain in Judah; a remnant to be overseen by a Judean governor, Gedaliah, who is appointed by the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar. Although this section of Jeremiah does not appear in the common lectionary, it has not gone unnoticed or unaddressed by scholars. Studies of this book offer a wealth of distinct and often creative characterizations and descriptions of this final chapter in the story in the life of the prophet Jeremiah.¹⁴ But for the purposes of this project, the focus of our reading is focused on the remnant as a vulnerable and contingent community of people seeking sanctuary. This remnant comprises the poorest in the land, says the text; the ones

(Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 95.

12. Kathleen M. O'Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise* (Minneapolis: MN, Augsburg Fortress Press, 2012). This is the term used in O'Connor's book for the people of Judah in this section of the book of Jeremiah.

13. In the Anglican/Episcopal tradition, the three-year lectionary includes nothing from Jeremiah after chapter 38. This section of the book is entirely absent from exposure in Sunday morning worship, and therefore altogether unfamiliar to any and all who experience Scripture only on Sunday morning. And so it is an unknown text without any of the prejudice or pre-interpretive baggage that comes with more well-known or popular texts. Consequently, this text can be approached on its own merits from the get-go. It is brand new to most of the general population; an especially fresh nugget of insight into the family of God to which all Christians belong. The Year D lectionary does include Jeremiah 42:1-7 and 43:1-7 on the thirty second Sunday in ordinary time, which is proper 27. Although, occasionally this proper is supplanted by All Saints Sunday as it was in 2016. In such a calendar year, this text does not even appear in the Year D lectionary. "The Year D Project: Year D - The Lections," *The Year D Project* (blog), accessed February 27, 2018, <http://theyearproject.blogspot.com/p/year-d-lections.html>.

14. This complex and often confounding section of Jeremiah has been characterized in myriad ways by various biblical scholars. In Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998) Brueggemann writes that "this pitiful flight to Egypt is the inversion and negation of the exodus." (339) He also cites Heinz Kremer as calling this section of Jeremiah the "passion narrative" of the book. (339) Daniel Berrigan writes that this section is the "Jeremiah Parable." In Daniel Berrigan, *Jeremiah: The World, the Wound of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 172.

whom the Babylonians think not worth deporting, suggests scholar Derek Kidner.¹⁵ Their only hope for survival is to properly discern the trustworthiness of those who can determine their fate. A constant theme in this text is the remnant's persistent question of who to trust with their safety and future prospects amid a volatile and violent political reality where they have few resources and no effective power, save their ability to choose where they will go. Who will lead them to sanctuary?

Part I: Jeremiah 40:1-6

The first chapter of this designated family diary is but six verses long. Several scholars have argued that this short pericope probably belongs at the end of the previous chapter 39.¹⁶ But Jeremiah 40:1-6 sets the stage for the ensuing ninety-three verses of the text, theologically and politically. This section is the beginning of the end of Jeremiah's prophetic witness.¹⁷ And although the opening words of this account lead us to expect a divine pronouncement (*The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord*) YHWH does not actually speak, at least not through the prophet Jeremiah, and not until chapter 42. Nonetheless, these first six verses tell us everything we are going to need to know about the predicament of this remnant population and their view of the trustworthiness of the prophet Jeremiah.

The Babylonian guard, Nebuzaradan, makes it clear from the get-go that Babylon, the

15. Derek Kidner, *The Message of Jeremiah*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 129.

16. Else K. Holt, "The Potent Word of God: Remarks on the Composition of Jeremiah 37-44" in *Troubling Jeremiah*, eds. A.R. Pete Diamond, Kathleen M. O'Connor, and Louis Stulman, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Series 260. (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 164.

17. There are ninety-nine chapters in Jeremiah 40-44 (40:1-16, 41:1-18, 42:1-22, 43:1-13, 44:1-30).

invader, is working at YHWH's behest and is in some sort of an alliance with YHWH's prophet. The first clue is that immediately following the statement that the word of the Lord is coming, the speaker is not Jeremiah, but Nebuzaradan. And he delivers what Walter Brueggemann says is the "theological warrant" for the whole section.¹⁸ The enemy invader states, as though he were preaching the faith, that the blame for the invasion and exile falls squarely on the shoulders of the Judahites who have failed to obey YHWH's voice. The soldier of Babylon, who seems to be speaking with the voice of a prophet of the God of Israel, says, in effect, we Babylonians are not the enemy, it is the remnant and their disobedience to their God that is to blame for their own suffering.¹⁹ Immediately, the table is set for confusion regarding God's word. These are the things that YHWH might say, but they are coming from the mouth of the invader. And so, from the very first section the remnant might ask if YHWH's word is truly YHWH's word. Or, is it the word of an enemy disguised as the word of the divine?

Likewise, in addition to the theological warrant, the Babylonian guard treats Jeremiah with almost astonishing mercy and generosity; more like a friend than a captive. In 40:4 Jeremiah is released from Babylonian captivity for the fourth time in as many chapters (37:17-21, 38:7-13, and 39:11-14).²⁰ The Babylonians offer Jeremiah his unabated freedom; his choice of where he wants to go *and* an allowance to sustain him. As Jeremiah is being unfettered the

18. *The Lord your God threatened this place with this disaster; and now the Lord has brought it about, and has done as he said, because all of you sinned against the Lord and did not obey his voice. Therefore this thing has come upon you.* (40:2b-3)

19. This warrant, stated at the start of the story, is to be replayed in the last chapter as the people of God again disregard the steadfast instruction of YHWH and risk the future of the family of Judah.

20. Steed Vernyl Davidson, "Chosen Marginality as Resistance in Jeremiah 40:1-6." In *Jeremiah (Dis)Placed: New Directions in Writing/Reading Jeremiah*, eds. A.R. Pete Diamond and Louis Stulman, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 529. (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2011), 151.

Babylonian guard says to him: *See, the whole land is before you; go wherever you think it good and right to go.* (40:4) And then the pericope concludes: *The captain of the guard gave him an allowance of food and a present, and let him go.* (40:5) Jeremiah is the recipient of an almost embarrassment of riches.

It must have begged the question in the minds of the remnant: With whom is Jeremiah allied? Is he a friend of ours or a friend of theirs? His favor with Babylon might almost be seen by the remnant as traitorous. He is not exiled to Babylon with the rest of the Judahite leadership. And so, the critical question might arise for the remnant as they encounter Jeremiah in this new reality: Can he be trusted? Again, the discernment of trustworthiness is a theological thread that warps and wefts it way through the entirety of this text, and is a particularly germane correlation between this ancient community and the contemporary community of undocumented immigrants.

The apparent answer as to whether or not Jeremiah can be trusted comes in verse 40:6 when, after the offer of complete freedom, the chance to go anywhere of his choosing, Jeremiah decides to stay with those who have been left behind in the land of Judah. He chooses to abide in the land with the “least” of God’s people.²¹ This clear decision of YHWH’s prophet to stay with YHWH’s people, despite their disobedient bent, is enduring evidence of YHWH’s abiding presence. In the person and presence of Jeremiah, says Kathleen O’Connor, the good news is that YHWH abides.²²

21. ...men, women, and children, those of the poorest of the land who had not been taken into exile to Babylon. (40:7)

21. Kathleen O’Connor, “Terror All Around: Confusion As Meaning Making,” *Jeremiah (Dis)Placed: New Directions in Writing/Reading Jeremiah*, eds. A.R. Pete Diamond, and Louis Stulman, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 529. (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2011), 78.

Dear Ahi,

May YHWH cause my brother to hear, this very day, tidings of good. We are fine. Although we know not why we have been left behind. We miss you and our family and all who have been taken from our land. Legions of our brethren from Ramah have passed through on their way to Babylon. And yesterday Jeremiah was with them. Fettered like a captive until the guard saw him. Then he let him go. Immediately. And get this, they told him that he could stay or go as he pleased. Can you imagine?! Stay or go as you please. Really?! We should be so lucky to have such a choice for ourselves.

Although, the decision might not be so simple. I mean, none of us want to leave Judah. Home is home. This land is our inheritance. And yet, we long to be reunited with you and Mala and...everyone we love and miss. Everything has changed. And so I am not even sure what I would choose, were the choice to be mine. To stay or to go.

But the prophet chose to stay with us. Why? We are not entirely sure. And although he has been with us in days of old, maybe he has been so wooed by the invaders that he has abandoned us. Maybe he is no longer with us, but against us. Still, he is here. And though we can take some comfort in knowing that with him, his God also abides here with us. We hope and pray that YHWH is guiding and watching over you as well. We live in hope. May our captors be apprised that we are abiding in our land until we get a sign from YHWH.

*Your brother, Jehleel*²³

Part II: Jeremiah 40:7-41:18

Unlike the theologically charged first section, this second section, says Brueggemann, is sheer reporting. It is "straight forward reportage concerning governance and conspiracy in post

23. The first line and the basic form of this letter is taken from the Lachish Letters. "Yadin Presents New Interpretation of the Famous Lachish Letters," *Center for Online Judaic Studies* (blog), June 23, 2008, <http://cojs.org/yadin-presents-new-interpretation-of-the-famous-lachish-letters/>. The Hebrew name Ahi means "my brother" and Jehleel can be translated as "God grievously afflicts."

587 b.c.e. Judah."²⁴ Further, writes Louis Stulman, a co-founding scholar of the Society of Biblical Literature Book of Jeremiah Consultation, the abundance of brazen violence and brutality perpetrated in this section, which happens without the presence of YHWH, shatters any suggestion of theodicy in the book of Jeremiah as a whole. If this mayhem can ensue, then YHWH is clearly not in control. Stulman writes, "The unabashed violence shows that the old moral certainties cannot account for the full gamut of human experiences."²⁵ Brueggemann writes that this chapter, "depicts a chaotic world [and] it does so without reference to God. This is the only major literary unit in the book in which God is absent."²⁶ The discovery of this story, almost entirely absent from our biblical lore, unlike the more familiar stories of Cain and Abel, Abraham and Sarah and Hagar, Moses and Joshua, and Esther and Ruth, is just the sort of detail that might show up in a long-lost family journal and which might shed a whole new light on one's understanding of the family gestalt.

Not surprisingly, this second section reads a bit like a political thriller filled with espionage and murderous detail, and a jarring reversal of fortune for the vulnerable remnant whose survival is ultimately at stake in the harsh thrust and parry between Judean and Ammonite power-players. The Babylonian king appoints Gedaliah (an erstwhile friend of Jeremiah's own family) to be governor over Judah.²⁷(40:7) When the few left in the land hear that Gedaliah is the governor, they come from Moab and Ammon and elsewhere with what must have been a feeling

24. Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming*, 339.

25. Louis Stulman, *Jeremiah*. Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 321-2.

26. Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming*, 327.

27. Gedaliah's father, Ahikam, had once saved Jeremiah's life. *But the hand of Ahikam son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah so that he was not given over into the hands of the people to be put to death.* (26:24)

of immense relief and surprise. Perhaps there is a future for them in the land of Judah. Perhaps they might enjoy a peaceful and prosperous life under the rule of a Judahite governor after all. The Scripture reads: *Then all the Judeans returned from all the places to which they had been scattered and came to the land of Judah, to Gedaliah at Mizpah; and they gathered wine and summer fruits in great abundance.* (40:12) The fortunes of the remnant seem to be turning toward a better life for themselves and their children, and not as exiles in a foreign land, but as heirs to the homeland that was given to them by God. Stulman describes this gathering of Judahites from far and near as a place of safety and refuge: “Citizens of Judah gather round the newly appointed governor in search of well-being and sanctuary.”²⁸ Gedaliah is the gift of sanctuary for this remnant who has been at risk of deportation since the dawn of the invasion.

Dear Ahi,

May YHWH cause my brother to hear, this very day, tidings of good. We are fine, actually better than fine. And we ask ourselves every day what we have done to deserve this blessing from YHWH. We are almost ridden with guilt for our good fortune. You remember Gedaliah the son of Ahikam? Remember? He delivered Jeremiah from almost certain death several years ago. Well his son has been appointed to be our governor! Blessed be God. We know not why we have been accorded such good fortune, but we do not ask. We do not question such blessings lest they be revoked for our bite of that apple. Suffice it to say that life is so unexpectedly good that we are nearly reeling. The harvest is plentiful, and we are finally hopeful that our future might still be here in our land.

And as this good news spreads, it has become a bit of a reunion here in Mizpah. All manner of neighbors returning from Moab and where ever they may have fled during the invasion. Our brothers are returning now. Oh Ahi, what did we do to deserve this?! We must have done something very, very good. You and Mala are in

28. Stulman, *Jeremiah*, 321-2.

our constant prayers.
Your brother, Jehleel

But in fairly short order, the peace and prosperity, the sanctuary, is in perilous jeopardy. Johanan, one of the Judahite leaders, alerts the governor Gedaliah to a plot that is directed by the Ammonite king, a longtime adversary of the Judahites. Johanan warns: *Are you at all aware that Baalis king of the Ammonites has sent Ishmael son of Nethaniah to take your life?*²⁹(40:14) But Gedaliah, in a naïve exhibit of extremely poor judgment, dismisses the warning as a “lie.” (40:16) Unfortunately, it is not.

Dear Ahi,
May YHWH cause my brother to hear, this very day, tidings of good. Life continues to be blessed. And even though we have heard rumors that there is some foreign opposition to Gedaliah’s governance, we are certain that YHWH will be our protector. Otherwise, why would we have been spared the exile? Why would YHWH have allowed us to remain in our land? Why on earth would Jeremiah have chosen to stay with us if we were in such jeopardy? And why would YHWH have given us the gift of Gedaliah if that gift were to be extinguished so soon? Surely YHWH is with us. Surely we can trust YHWH. We pray that the good tidings of YHWH are with you and our loved ones as well.
Your brother, Jehleel

The ensuing chapter recounts the horrific result of Gedaliah’s misjudgment; *his* failure to correctly assess the ones who are trustworthy and the ones who are not. In this narrative, poor judgment is not confined to the marginalized.

29. Walter Brueggemann describes the assassination as an act of pure resistance. “The assassination of Gedaliah is in fact an act of resistance against Babylonian governance.” Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming*, 340.

And so, says the text, in the seventh month, on behalf of the Ammonite king, Ishmael and his forces come to Mizpah and during a shared meal with the governor and his leaders they murder Gedaliah and everyone who is with him. And the next day the rampage continues. Ishmael feigns tears to lure a group of eighty “innocent pilgrims” (on their way to the temple bearing gifts for YHWH) into the city center where they too are summarily murdered. Their bodies are thrown into the large town cistern – along with Gedaliah and his troops. The text says that Ishmael, *filled the cistern with those whom he had killed.*³⁰ (41:9) The reason for the extended spree of violence and mayhem is unclear in the text, but the result of such sudden and unbridled brutality must have added a layer of terror in the hearts of the remnant, already helpless and vulnerable beyond the comprehension of anyone who has not experienced such contingency.

The text says that Ishmael takes, *all of the rest of the people who were in Mizpah....and set out across the Ammonites.* (41:10) But when Johanan hears what has happened, he rallies his forces and heads out to confront the brazen rebel Ishmael. The Judahite rescuers catch up with the fleeing caravan at Gibeon. And despite the expectation of a violent clash between the two forces, there is no description of any forceful confrontation between Johanan and Ishmael and their men. The text simply says: *All the people whom Ishmael had carried away captive from Mizpah turned and came back and went to Johanan.* (41:14) And Ishmael and his men “escape” over the mountains. The account of the exchange almost sounds as though the people were with Ishmael by their own choice. The text does not say that they were rescued. It says that they, *turned and came back.* It is a curious account. But it begs the question of agency. Did the

30. This piece of the story seems to harken back to the family stories in Genesis where Joseph is similarly dispatched (albeit alive) by his own brothers. (Genesis 37:24)

remnant follow Ishmael of their own volition? And if so, why did they go with the one who had just assassinated their governor? And what might that realization tell us about our family history?

After the exchange, Johanan and all of the remnant, *set out...intending to go to Egypt because of the Chaldeans; for they were afraid of them, because Ishmael son of Nethaniah had killed Gedaliah...*” (41:17-18a) The remnant, led by Johanan, heads for Egypt, the nearest place outside of Babylonian dominion. The text is fairly clear that a motivation for the flight of this Judahite contingent is a fear of Babylonian retaliation for the murder of Gedaliah. Fear always clouds good judgment. This remnant is vulnerable. They are at risk, or they perceive a risk. And their political landscape is in tatters.

Dear Ahi,

There has been a change of tidings, my dear brother. I write not from the fruitful fields of Mizpah, but from the harsh wilderness near Gibeon. And I fear that we may never return to our sanctuary. Gedaliah is dead. And so are his forces and too a whole contingent of mourners from Shechem who were just in the wrong place at the wrong time. Seventy dead. Ten were spared, although they were forced to hand over their entire harvest to the aggressors. But, better hungry than dead. The cistern in the city center was filled to overflowing with the carnage.

And then, after two days of mayhem, the son of Nethaniah and his men rounded up the entire community at Mizpah, I mean everyone, and they forced us to go with them to Ammon. Well, I say forced, we went without much resistance. After all, we had seen the carnage. We knew that they cared not for our lives, and so we obeyed their command without much ado. It was not worth the risk. As I am sure you will agree, better deported than dead.

But oh Ahi, where is YHWH? We did nothing to anger him. And yet here we are. Why were we spared your fate only to be subject to this? This is worse than exile. At least you are together with the community. We are out here on our own. But, the prophet is with us and so we live in hope.

Although we have been rescued from the marauders, we cannot go back. We are following Johanan and his men. They delivered us. Although we wonder where they were last week. And even though Johanan warned Gedaliah, he fears that we will all be held accountable for the dissent and the killing of Nebuchadnezzar's regent. We will not be safe in Mizpah, or any part of this land that is under the Babylonians. Johanan says that we must go to Egypt. Out of range. Beyond the reach of them. We have no time to make plans, and no choice but to trust the one who set us free. So we will go with Johanan.

I think we would have much preferred to have been exiled with you, than left in the land like this. At least we would have been together. Now, we have no idea where we are going or what we will find. Except that we are not safe here. All we have now is each other. Pray for us, Ahi, as we pray for you and our brothers. May good tidings be on their way for us all.

Your brother, Jehleel

This second section of the text is full of angst and gut-wrenching questions for the vulnerable remnant. Where are they to go? What are they to do? Who can they trust? And the absence of God's voice in this melee must accentuate the confusion and loneliness of the remnant. This notion that bad things happen to seemingly innocent people, even people of God, resounds through the ages with all manner of powerless communities under oppression or domination. And so this text echoes the timeless refrain: Where can the most peripheralized among us find safety and refuge?

Part III: Jeremiah 42:1-43:3

Chapter 42 heralds the return of the voice of YHWH in this narrative. The text reads,

All the commanders of the forces...and all the people from the least to the greatest approached the prophet Jeremiah and said, 'Be good enough to listen to our plea, and pray to the Lord your God for us—for all this remnant. For there are only a few of us left out of many, as your eyes can see. Let the Lord your God show us where we should go and what we should do. (42:2-3)

This text is almost emphatic that every member of this remnant is seeking YHWH's counsel.³¹ YHWH clearly has authority and agency in this world and is known as the source of safety and refuge for the Israelites. The God of Israel appears to hold considerable sway over the decision-making of the people. Clearly the people expect that the Word of God will be a source of safety and refuge.

What is not quite so clear is why the people begin their journey to Egypt before they consult their God. Verses 41:16-17 read: *Then Johanan son of Kareah and all the leaders of the forces with him took all the rest of the people whom Ishmael son of Nethaniah had carried away...And they set out, and stopped at Geruth Chimham near Bethlehem, intending to go to Egypt...* Why do they flee first and ask permission later?

Maybe because Gibeon in where they are. But the text explicitly says that they head for Egypt and *then* ask for YHWH's advice. Although maybe this is a question that belies a privileged reading of this text. It is the difference between asking what is the worst thing that can happen with so few options, and what is the best-case scenario if we put our abundant resources to work? Only those with plentiful resources can ask the latter. The most vulnerable are limited to the former. And as poorly chosen as their decision to leave Judah might seem, the flight to Egypt (where they perceive that some modicum of safety awaits) has a solid precedent in their own biblical family tree.

Nevertheless, the people ask Jeremiah to consult YHWH. And they promise to obey

31. The language used here to articulate this unanimous request of the prophet is reminiscent of the language used in Jeremiah 31:34 when YHWH proclaims a New Covenant to be written on every heart from the greatest to the least. Except it is reversed. Here it is from the least to the greatest. I wonder if that is because in the context of a covenant the greatest come first; a top-down proposition. But in this context it is all about the remnant who are at the bottom of the food chain.

YHWH's word. They insist that, *whether it is good or bad, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God.* (42:6) And so Jeremiah accepts the request and promises to take their query to their God. Everything in this exchange appears to honor the weight of the word of YHWH. The word of YHWH is expected to be the sanctuary of the people. Although, one could argue that the promise to obey YHWH regardless of the content of the divine exhortation could have been tacked on to the end of this petition, redacted by a disapproving storyteller who might have added this bit to emphasize some level of scorn for the remnant. As if to say: see they made the wrong decision *and* they went back on their own word! It might not be wise to weigh the remnant's promise to obey too heavily.

Dear Ahi,

May YHWH cause my brother to hear, this very day, tidings of good. We are awaiting our own tidings from the Lord our God. We gathered last night to decide where we go from here. We are so conflicted. We do not want to leave the land. But can we risk staying? If we will be accountable for Gedaliah's demise we will likely be killed, not deported. Oh how I wish that we knew what to do.

We have asked Jeremiah to ask YHWH to pray for us. Maybe God is still with us. His prophet is with us. Maybe he will tell us what to do, give us some comfort in our decision. If he will just confirm that we are to seek refuge in Egypt, the trip will be so much easier. And, we are half way there already. Pray for us, Ahi, as we pray for you and our community.

Your brother, Jehleel

It takes Jeremiah a full ten days to get back to the people with the response from the Lord their God. YHWH says, through the prophet Jeremiah,

If you will only remain in this land, then I will build you up and not pull you down; I will plant you, and not pluck you up; for I am sorry for the disaster that I have brought upon you. Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon, as you have been; do not be afraid of him, says the Lord, for I am with you, to save you and to rescue you from his hand. I

will grant you mercy, and he will have mercy on you and restore you to your native soil.
(42:10-12)

Who could ask for anything more? This response from the divine begins with the promise to build-up rather than pluck-up this remnant. Then there is an expression of divine regret. In words reminiscent of the divine regret expressed to Noah after the flood, YHWH says “I am sorry.” (42:10) This is one of only three instances in the entire Old Testament when YHWH offers such explicit remorse.³² And then after the promise of prosperity and the abject apology comes the assurance that among the options open to the remnant YHWH is the only one that they can and should trust. YHWH says through the prophet Jeremiah: *Do not be afraid of the king of Babylonian.... for I am with you to save you and to rescue you from his hand. I will grant you mercy, and he will.... restore you to your native soil.* (42:11-12) In this section that features a central question of trustworthiness, YHWH says unequivocally trust me. And if they do, the remnant is assured that they will live well in their homeland.

But if they do not, says YHWH to YHWH’s people, if they do not hear YHWH’s word and obey YHWH’s request that they stay in the land of Judah they will perish. The word of YHWH states unequivocally: *If you are determined to enter Egypt and go to settle there, then the sword that you fear shall overtake you there, in the land of Egypt; and the famine that you dread shall follow close after you into Egypt; and there you shall die.* (42:15b-16) This is the third set of if/then propositions made by YHWH in this chapter. The first (42:10-12) explains that if the remnant will stay in the land, then YHWH will protect them. The second (42:13-15) warns that if

32. The other two are Gen 6:7 and 1 Sam 15:35. *So the LORD said, "I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created -- people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them."* (Gen. 6:7 NRS) *Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul. And the LORD was sorry that he had made Saul king over Israel.* (1 Sam. 15:35)

the remnant continues to disobey the word of YHWH, then they will be subject to YHWH's wrath – with which they should be familiar. And the third (42:15b-16) states in no uncertain terms that if they go to Egypt, they will perish. There is no question regarding YHWH's explicit direction. Three times YHWH tells the remnant to stay in Judah. Judah is the place of safety and refuge, even if that has not been the experience of the remnant.

Nevertheless, it is equally clear that the people have agency to choose for themselves. And yet, the choice of whether to stay in the land that was given by YHWH *or* to go to a place they do not yet belong must be agonizingly difficult. Theirs is not the same sort of freedom to choose that was afforded Jeremiah when he was released in the first section. That was the freedom to go where *he* wanted to go, and it was accompanied by the resources to support his choice. This freedom is limited to two unsettling options. This is the freedom to trust YHWH that they will be safe in a land where they have just witnessed unspeakable violence against their own governor; violence that took place without YHWH's intervention. Or, the freedom to trust the Judahite leader in whose care they are currently traveling. The stakes are high. And there is little to guide them besides their own instincts.

How can they know if the sanctuary of YHWH's Word is worth the risk of returning to Judah? Why should they trust that YHWH's word is actually YHWH's word? They cannot afford to misjudge. Their lives literally depend upon their choice. These are the tight quarters in which marginalized people often make life-altering decisions.

When Jeremiah finishes delivering the word of the Lord, the people respond as Gedaliah responded to the warning that he was to be assassinated. The people say that Jeremiah is lying; the word that he delivers is not, they say, the word of YHWH. And so technically, the remnant does not choose to disobey YHWH, they rather choose to not *believe* that what they hear is

actually YHWH's word. And so their flight to Egypt might be seen to be less a matter of disobedience, and more a matter of distrust. As Gedaliah disbelieves the credible plot against his life, this people disbelieve the credible threat against theirs.

And so when the remnant, vulnerable and caught between a rock and a hard place (the aggressors in Babylon and the unknown prospects in Egypt) choose not to go back to the place that they know to be threatening and instead to take their chances in a new place, the interpretation is that they are disobedient. But really, maybe they are just afraid.

Dear Ahi,

We are truly between a rock and a hard spot, my brother. We asked for guidance from YHWH, but we got deception. The prophet has spoken, but it is hard to believe that he is speaking for the Lord our God. Why would YHWH want us to return to Judah? If YHWH wanted us in Judah, YHWH would have delivered Gedaliah from his fate. Do not fear Nebuchadnezzar, says the Lord. But where was the Lord when Nebuchadnezzar's governor was under mortal attack?

Why would YHWH need to offer mercy and restore us in the land? We are here, in this desperate place because YHWH deserted us. In answer to that, all we got was an apology. "I am sorry for the disaster that I have brought upon you." Does that sound like the word of the Lord to you? Why would el Shadai need to apologize? It just doesn't make sense. Instead it sounds like someone playing on our naïveté; someone trying to prevent our escape. Johanan believes that these words are not from YHWH, and he is the one who delivered us from Ishmael. He says this is a trick to lure us back so that we can be killed or exiled.

And honestly Ahi, as much as I miss you, I would rather take my chances in Egypt as a free man than constantly fear the retaliation of Babylon in exile. So we are no more certain of what to do or where to go now than we were before the prophet spoke. Keep us in your prayers, as you are in ours. Your brother, Jehleel

The remnant accuses Jeremiah's scribe Baruch of perpetrating what they consider to be the falsehood masquerading as the word of YHWH. And so this third section ends with another example of what can only be characterized as a failure to properly discern and distinguish between those who can be trusted and those who cannot. By requesting the word of their God from Jeremiah, the contingent of Judahites acknowledges the centrality of YHWH's word in the life of their community. But they grossly misjudge its credibility.

Part IV: Jeremiah 43:4-44:30

And so, despite YHWH's clear admonition, the text says that all of the remnant and their leadership, *came into the land of Egypt, for they did not obey the voice of the Lord.* (43:7) And they took with them the prophet Jeremiah and his scribe Baruch. Chapters 43 and 44 are primarily filled with a torrent of warnings from YHWH to the Judean remnant - nine hundred and fifty of the sixteen hundred words in chapters 43 and 44 are attributed to YHWH (almost 60%). And most of them are abject warnings promising the people's demise if they insist on disobeying the law of the land; the word of their God.

In verses 43:8-13 YHWH warns that Egypt is not as safe as it might have seemed. Babylon will eventually conquer Egypt, says the Lord, and the remnant will ultimately find itself again under the threat of Babylonian rule.³³ Further, YHWH makes clear to the remnant that the blood of their future destruction will be on their own hands. Further, in verses 44:1- 25 YHWH warns the disobedient contingent that they are destroying themselves with idolatry, and that they would do well to remember the similar sins of their ancestors. Their failure to remember and to act accordingly on such remembrance will bring Judah to an end, thus says the Lord. Remember

33. Although this was a threat that never materialized.

your family story says YHWH.

And finally, in verses 44:26-30 YHWH pronounces that all divine ties with this remnant will be cut if they disobey the divine instructions. And if that happens, the name of the Lord will no longer live on the lips of the people. YHWH promises to visit upon Egypt the same devastation that was visited upon Judah:

I am going to punish you in this place, in order that you may know that my words against you will surely be carried out: Thus says the Lord, I am going to give Pharaoh Hophra, king of Egypt, into the hands of his enemies, those who seek his life, just as I gave King Zedekiah of Judah into the hand of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. (44:29-30)

There is no question that YHWH is intervening here. The end of this story comes full circle and clears up any confusion that might have existed in the first section where the astoundingly amicable relationship between the prophet Jeremiah and the Babylonian aggressors might have seemed like a disconnect. YHWH's threat to destroy the disobedient remnant leaves little question with the reader of this Scripture that both the divine prophet and the Babylonian guard could be working in the service of the God of Israel. But the vantage point of the powerless remnant allows for a different assessment. This remnant does not consider their safety to reside in the intervention of a God who was absent as their governor was assassinated. And so for them, the lure of safety in far-off Egypt trumps the word of God in their homeland.

Ironically, the remnant returns to the place of their ancestors' liberation. Brueggemann suggests that, "This section is constituted by a series of harsh condemnations of the Egyptian venture and culminates with a subtle suggestion that this pitiful flight to Egypt is in fact the inversion and negation of the exodus."³⁴ The place from which they were delivered from

32. Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming*, 339. The theme of YHWH's deliverance of the Israelites from their enslavement in Egypt is front and center in the Torah, and beyond in the Old Testament. There are 57 attestations of the phrase "out of Egypt" and 69 attestations of the exact phrase "out of the land of Egypt." A total of 126 references to YHWH's deliverance of the Judahite ancestors.

bondage to be the people of God was to be the end of the line for this people of God. If there were ever an advertisement for the benefits that come with knowing one's family narrative, this text might be it.

Dear Ahi,

May YHWH cause my brother to hear, this very day, tidings of good. We have finally arrived in Tahpanhes, in Egypt. The prophet is still with us. Is YHWH still with us? It is hard to know. But we have arrived in safety, and so YHWH must be with us. We will continue to keep our vows and to honor the queen of heaven as did our ancestors. And they prospered. We will make our home here and our people will prosper again. I am sure of it.

Your brother, Jehleel

In the end, every one of the remnant heads for Egypt with Jeremiah in tow, even though as Stulman writes, "Jeremiah announces that Egypt will not provide sanctuary from King Nebuchadnezzar..."³⁵ And so Jeremiah himself is deported to Egypt. O'Connor explains Jeremiah's demise in words that are familiar to contemporary immigrants: "The final story we have about [Jeremiah's] life sets him among a different group of survivors, deportees...His own people deport him. This story portrays Jeremiah as an exile not to Babylon but to Egypt...to a place he finds hateful, inhospitable both to him and to his God."³⁶ In this respect, the prophet of YHWH not only remains and abides with God's people, but he himself becomes a deportee.

Chapter 44 is the last that we hear of Jeremiah. He is taken to Egypt by the remnant, almost as a hostage. And there he summarily disappears. Jeremiah is never heard from again; his

35. Stulman, *Jeremiah*, 330.

36. O'Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise*, 78-9.

ultimate fate is unknown. There is no record of his death. We know how God called him from before he was born (Jr. 1:4-11), and we know about his many brushes with death over the years of his ministry. But we do not know how he ends. We only know that he is forcibly transported, deported, to Egypt to meet an undisclosed fate.³⁷

And the fate of the remnant is likewise unknown. Did they find safety and refuge in Egypt after all? Did Egypt become their home, or was it forever a foreign refuge? Did their struggle and fear abate or was it intensified? Did they feel that they made the right choice? Did they regret not staying in Judah? Did they stay in relationship with YHWH? The questions abound. And they are the questions that might well be asked in reference to displaced peoples everywhere and in every generation.

And so, the ending is left virtually open for future interpretation. There is room for a sequel; room for future generations to interpret the ending for themselves, or to write a new one. As Brueggemann says, this section of Jeremiah is an "ending that does not end."³⁸ He says that it plunges into "unreadable lived experience." The searing pain it portrays lingers as a turbulent presence for generations to come and by refusing closure, the three endings (of which this is the first) continue the work of survival that gave rise to the book in first place.³⁹ And so, the next chapter is open for *us* to finish. Brueggemann writes that a, "recognition of theological-ideological intentionality in the book itself suggests that the reader of the book of Jeremiah is authorized by the book to continue the work of theological intentionality."⁴⁰ The conversation

37. O'Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise*, 80.

38. Brueggemann, *Like Fire in the Bones*, 86.

39. Brueggemann, *Like Fire in the Bones*, 86.

40. Brueggemann, *Like Fire in the Bones*, 26.

between the remnant in Judah and the contemporary community of undocumented immigrants in the United States is one way in which this work might continue.

The Contemporary Context: Undocumented Immigrants in the US

The story of this remnant in Judah after the invasion sparks an ember of recognition in thinking about the plight of many undocumented immigrants in the United States of America, especially after the 2016 presidential election, and particularly those seeking and in sanctuary. My Episcopal parish in Newton Highlands is currently offering sanctuary to a family who has at least one person at risk of immediate deportation. In many ways their stories and experiences echo those of the Judahite remnant from centuries ago. There is a common thread in the seeking of sanctuary among these generations of vulnerable peoples.

Although the remnant in Judah and undocumented immigrants in the U.S. are not the same, there are many similarities between their exigencies and experiences as marginalized, disadvantaged populations whose fortunes and even survival are tenuous and contingent on the favor of the political power structures in the land where they live. The axiomatic grounding that connects them is that their homeland is no longer their home. The community to which each belongs has no power in the land in which they live, and they are targets of hostile overlords who see them as an inconvenience at best and typically as a threat.

And so both the remnant and undocumented immigrants find themselves seeking safety and refuge as a matter of life and death. Rather than reducing these two communities to common elements, this correlation seeks to relate them in their common experiences; as an engagement between two communities whose identities and contexts, though not parallel, ensnare and compel them in similar ways. It would not be a stretch to see how these two communities, a remnant

accompanied by the prophet of God to Egypt and undocumented immigrants in sanctuary in a Christian church, might relate as generations of the same family system.

Like the Babylonian invasion in the sixth century b.c.e., the U.S. election in 2016 dramatically changed the national policy and prospects for those to who do not have a clear entitlement to the land. Although, the respective existential relationships to the land in which each is living differs dramatically. For the remnant, the land was their home before the invasion; it was their inheritance from their God. After the invasion, after the Babylonian conquest, they no longer belonged in the land as its heirs but became guests at the pleasure of the new landlords.

Undocumented immigrants in the U.S. have never been legally entitled to live in the land they have come to call home. And so their status and belonging in and to the land fundamentally differs from that of the Judahite remnant. But their political and practical situations and their prospects for the future are remarkably similar. First, like the remnant, immigrants that have come to the United States without documentation are usually the least of the least, and on the furthest margins of society. And, like the fleeing remnant, they have come to the United States to escape the threat of instability and violence and brutality in their native lands. Also, the threat of deportation is not dissimilar to the threat of exile in that both often destroy lives and always displace families. And finally, both exile and deportation often thrust vulnerable people into potentially dangerous territories that put their very survival at risk. Deportation, like exile, is a fate to be avoided at all costs.

But undocumented immigrants in the United States are always at risk of immediate detention and deportation by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (hereafter ICE) agency that wields the full power of the federal government. Their plight, however, has worsened appreciably since the 2016 presidential election. Like the Judahite remnant, they have no

political power, few resources, and only the fundamental options to stay in the U.S. illegally or go back to a place where they feel at risk, and often mortal risk. If they stay, they are at risk of being deported. And if they are deported, they will be cut off from their families and communities in the US, and often their lives will be in danger. And so although their situations may differ technically, their emotional and existential circumstances can be seen as very similar.

Here is a typical account, a fictionalized amalgam of several immigrant stories, that offers a glimpse into the plight of undocumented people in the U.S. after the election.

Part I: Coming to America

Graciella is American.⁴¹ She is Central American by birth, but a Central American who has lived in the United States for more than sixteen of her seventeen years. She has lived in New England for nearly all of her young life, traveling with her parents to Massachusetts from her native Honduras at the turn of the millennium when the political violence in her homeland began to heat up exponentially. Several members of Graciella's extended family were slain by gang extortionists. Graciella's family fled in search of safety. Unlike many undocumented immigrants who sought safety within U.S. borders by acquiring temporary visas (that might lead to applications for asylum which would provide a legal and longer-term protection), Graciella's family did not. For whatever reason, they left home immediately, in the dead of night and migrated north without any idea of where they would land or how they would survive when they got where they were going. They simply fled with Graciella and her sister in tow; not unlike the Judahites heading to Egypt with Johanan at the helm before seeking the advice of YHWH. The

41. Graciella is an amalgam of stories that this author has heard directly from undocumented immigrants living in the Greater Boston area between January 2017 and February 2018.

impulse toward safety and refuge is a powerful catalyst to action, albeit often a poor partner of good judgment. But not unlike the remnant who headed for Egypt despite the warning of YHWH, one could say that many undocumented immigrants came to the U.S. in search of sanctuary, despite the danger involved in defying the law of land to which they were migrating.

Graciella's family arrived in Chelsea, Massachusetts in February of 2000 and found a small kindred community; a small diaspora of Hondurans who shared their experience of political vulnerability both at home and in their new land; a small population of self-imposed exiles who had traded one danger for another in the name of survival and family coherence and possibly peace. Every undocumented immigrant has made a difficult choice to enter or remain in the U.S. without legal status. But in many if not most instances the options are but two: stay here without the blessing of the law or return to the fearful situation at home. Graciella's family decided to stay.

Part II: DACA and the 2016 Presidential Election

Graciella lived most of her childhood in the shadows of her neighborhood. She and her parents were ever at immediate risk of arrest, detention, and probable deportation back to Honduras. But in 2012 Graciella was offered a political reprieve. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security announced that, by executive order, it would stop deporting certain children who were brought to the United States by their parents; kids who ostensibly had no say in the decision to breach the border or to stay in the U.S. without proper documentation. The program was/is called Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), and it offers temporary stays of deportation (renewable every two years) to students whom the immigration department feels are

“low priority” on account of their “good behavior.”⁴² The thought is that these kids are not to blame for their “illegal status” as they have been captives of their parents; virtual deportees from their own homelands. DACA was intended to give these children some degree of safety and refuge so that they might attend school and even contribute to the common good by obtaining work permits without the level of vulnerability that comes with an undocumented status.⁴³

And so since 2012, Graciella and over 800,000 other undocumented children have come out of the shadows and applied for official status under DACA. Application, however, is not without risk. Candidates are required to offer their names, addresses, and family connections. But in return they are offered freedom from immediate fear, temporary sanctuary.

The sudden emergence of undocumented children from the margins is reminiscent of the far-flung remnant in Judah that gathered from Moab and Ammon around the land when they heard that Gedaliah had been appointed governor of Judah, both seem to be reprieved by executive order. The promise of a healthy harvest of wine and summer fruit to the remnant is echoed in the promise of DACA to undocumented youth in the U.S., both unexpected gifts of safety and refuge. And so if we were to read Jeremiah 40:7-11 with some interpretive imagination, substituting the new freedom that is DACA for the Judean governor that was Gedaliah, there is more than a bit of a parallel in the unexpected offer of security and even

42. On June 15, 2012, the Secretary of Homeland Security announced that certain people who came to the United States as children, and who meet several guidelines may request consideration of deferred action for a period of two years, subject to renewal. They are also eligible for work authorization. Deferred action is a use of prosecutorial discretion to defer removal action against an individual for a certain period of time. Deferred action does not provide lawful status.

43. So-called “Dreamers” get the name from a bi-partisan piece of legislation that would offer youth brought to the USA illegally by their parents to attend college and eventually apply for citizenship. DACA was established by Executive order, not legislation, and offers no path to citizenship. “Remarks by the President on Immigration,” *Whitehouse.gov*, June 15, 2012, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/06/15/remarks-president-immigration>. Retrieved February 21, 2018.

prosperity to a marginalized people who had grown used to living without even the most basic sense of belonging and hope for their future. Graciella's characterization of DACA was, "a gift from God." Such a gift, however, requires risking what comes when one comes out of the shadows.

The similarity between the two contexts continues when the reprieve is abruptly rescinded; by assassination in Judah and by a new presidential administration in the U.S. Like the remnant kidnapped by Ishmael, the climate for undocumented immigrants changed immediately with the 2016 presidential election. These flash points seem similar fulcrums of tension between hope and devastation for both of these marginalized communities. First they are lured out of the shadows with a promise of safety and refuge, and then they are even more endangered by a reactionary turn of events.

Likewise, the ways in which such vulnerable communities make decisions about where to go next cannot help but be informed by the trauma of their loss; the trauma that comes when the contingent protections of this life are summarily revoked; as in the assassination of Gedaliah by Ishmael and the revocation of DACA by the current administration. These experiences can confirm one's sense that there is no just order of things; nothing that preferences good over evil. Like Stulman's pronouncement that Jeremiah 40-41 signaled an end to the theodicy in that book, the current immigration policies in the US reveal a complete lack of respect or concern for the dignity of undocumented persons in our midst. The norms of behavior and due process are turned on their heads. And so if such powerfully destructive things can happen to such powerless people, then it is very hard to know whom to trust, and how to make good decisions.

Graciella's DACA status is set to expire soon. She does not have a plan.

Part III: Where To Go From Here?

The new presidential administration rocked the world of undocumented immigrants with a number of executive orders, in addition to the repeal of DACA, that rescinded and reneged on a variety of programs that previously offered both protection and a way forward for undocumented immigrants.⁴⁴ But perhaps the most insidious and damaging undercurrent of the new administration has been the slow but sure demonization of the entire community of undocumented people in the U.S., especially people of color.

Like the remnant, life on the contemporary undocumented margins requires the ability to respond immediately. Turn back or go to Egypt? Go underground or into sanctuary in a church? Every option is fraught with peril. And much is at stake. No option offers a guarantee of freedom. It is a difficult concept to grasp for those who have the luxury of power and privilege, those who have resources to put to use on their behalf. But for people who have no such luxury, life is often lived....immediately. That is to say, when one's survival is at stake, everything else can be left behind on a moment's notice. Safety and refuge are all that matter.

And that is how the Episcopal Parish of St. Paul came to welcome an undocumented family into sanctuary. Almost like heading to Egypt before asking for YHWH's guidance, this family forfeited all freedom of movement in this land and delivered themselves to the narrow place that is the undercroft of a small church. It was an incredibly difficult decision for them to make, not unlike the remnant's decision to proceed to Egypt. But difficult times demand that difficult decisions be made, and often immediately.

⁴⁴"Immigration under Trump: A Review of Policy Shifts in the Year Since the Election," *Migration Policy Institute*, accessed December 18, 2017, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/immigration-under-trump-review-policy-shifts>.

Part IV: Seeking Sanctuary

The last stop for an undocumented immigrant who is in an immediate threat of deportation is sanctuary. Sanctuary rests on the articulated, albeit not officially sanctioned, notion that there are “sensitive” spaces from which no one should be forcefully detained.⁴⁵ Such spaces have been identified by the federal government as schools, hospitals and churches. That does not mean that ICE cannot enter those spaces and arrest undocumented people. But, thus far, ICE has not yet breached churches. Thus far, churches have provided sacred space for undocumented people who have nowhere else to go. But it is not necessarily *safe* space. It is simply *sacred* space. And so the offer of sanctuary is fundamentally one of hospitality and holy friendship, not security.

Like Jeremiah who abided with the remnant as they fled to their peril, those who offer sanctuary to undocumented people do it at some considerable risk, on several levels. But that risk pales in comparison to the sacrifice and risk undertaken by the family who forfeits their freedom and puts their trust in a community of total strangers. People in sanctuary cannot leave without incurring enormous risk. Like the remnant who returned to Egypt, they willingly put themselves in a place of no freedom so that they might have some refuge. Although there is always the freedom to leave, staying is, like leaving was for the remnant, the only “safe” choice they have.

And so some progressive Christians, who have themselves felt displaced by the 2016 election, have chosen to walk with their undocumented neighbors, offering physical sanctuary as a means of seeking spiritual sanctuary. These hosts cannot protect undocumented people any

45. “FAQ on Sensitive Locations and Courthouse Arrests,” *U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement*, accessed March 2, 2018, <https://www.ice.gov/ero/enforcement/sensitive-loc>.

more than Jeremiah could protect the remnant. But they can offer the sanctuary of friendship, the safety and refuge of knowing that they are not alone. And even in such contemporary Christian communities where Scripture is no longer embraced as central to formation or discipleship, the act of offering sanctuary is in accordance with the biblical warrant to welcome the stranger.⁴⁶ In this way, albeit a round-about way, Scripture still functions as sanctuary.

Conclusion

Sanctuary is still a foundational concept in our Christian tradition. Both the Old and New Testaments instruct the faithful to welcome the stranger and offer sanctuary to those in need. The Old Testament makes clear that we are to welcome the stranger because we were once strangers too; our ancestors were strangers in the land of Egypt. Deuteronomy 10:19 states in no uncertain terms: *You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.* And so whether we acknowledge it or not, it is the word of God that undergirds the offering of sanctuary by contemporary communities of faith.

But there is another way in which Scripture is serving as sanctuary even for progressive, or maybe even especially for progressive contemporary congregations. The 2016 presidential election was a thoroughly traumatic experience for progressive Christians; possibly as spiritually traumatic as was physically traumatic the assassination of Gedaliah for the remnant, or the trauma that compelled undocumented immigrants to flee to the United States as the remnant fled to Egypt. On November 8, 2016 progressive Americans found themselves immediately and

⁴⁶ The word sanctuary is used 162 times in the two Testaments from Exodus to Hebrews, in the New Revised Standard translation, which is the version that is most often used in progressive congregations like the Parish of St. Paul. And the concept of loving the stranger is also prominent in Scripture: *You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.* (Deut. 10:19, NRS)

summarily on the outside of the political power structure in the United States of America.

Speaking for the small Episcopal Parish of St. Paul in Newton, MA, the majority of parishioners felt distraught, disconnected, and fearful for the way of life that many had expected to continue to move toward the Gospel values that they hold dear; values like mercy and compassion and inclusivity and welcoming the stranger. Progressive Christians no longer felt at home in the new political landscape, no longer felt that they belonged. They were aliens in their own land. It would not be a stretch to characterize the post-election status of this progressive Christian community as political homelessness. Gospel values seemed no more in fashion (or at least possible) than was/is the Scripture, ironically, from whence they hail. And so, like the ancient remnant and their undocumented neighbors, progressive Christians were in deep need of their own sort of sanctuary.

This project is predicated on the hope that such disaffected Christians might run, flee for their spiritual lives, as the remnant fled to Egypt and undocumented immigrants fled to the United States; so too might progressive Christians flee to a sanctuary they do not yet know: Holy Scripture. Perhaps the current political climate in the United States will provide just the impetus that is needed for progressive Christians to seek their own sanctuary in Scripture. Not in the ways that past generations sought sanctuary in Scripture, but in new and expansive ways that allow contemporary communities to claim the stories in the Bible as part of their own family tree, and to take seriously the responsibility to add the next chapter; to hear Scripture as perennially significant. And too, to acknowledge the biblical grounding for the ministry that is providing both physical sanctuary for undocumented immigrants and spiritual sanctuary for progressive Christians who are desperately seeking refuge from what they see as a cruel and dehumanizing political landscape. May these be new ways in which the Word of God provides

sanctuary for the people of God.

Appendix A

The Text of Jeremiah 40-44 (NRSV)

The words of YHWH are in purple

Jeremiah 40

40 The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord after Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had let him go from Ramah, when he took him bound in fetters along with all the captives of Jerusalem and Judah who were being exiled to Babylon.² The captain of the guard took Jeremiah and said to him, 'The Lord your God threatened this place with this disaster;³ and now

the Lord has brought it about, and has done as he said, because all of you sinned against the Lord and did not obey his voice. Therefore this thing has come upon you.⁴

Now look, I have just released you today from the fetters on your hands. If you wish to come with me to Babylon, come, and I will take good care of you; but if you do not wish to come with me to Babylon, you need not come. See, the whole land is before you; go wherever you think it good and right to go.⁵ If you remain, then return to Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon appointed governor of the towns of Judah, and stay with him among the people; or go wherever you think it right to go.' So the captain of the guard gave him an allowance of food and a present, and let him go.⁶ Then Jeremiah went to Gedaliah son of Ahikam at Mizpah and stayed with him among the people who were left in the land.

⁷ When all the leaders of the forces in the open country and their troops heard that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah son of Ahikam governor in the land, and had committed to him men, women, and children, those of the poorest of the land who had not been taken into exile to Babylon,⁸ they went to Gedaliah at Mizpah--Ishmael son of Nethaniah, Johanan son of Kareah, Seraiah son of Tanhumeth, the sons of Ephai the Netophathite, Jezaniah son of the Maacathite, they and their troops.⁹ Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan swore to them and their troops, saying, '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.'¹⁰ As for me, I am staying at Mizpah to represent you before the Chaldeans (Gedaliah is working for the Babylonians, but also representing the Jews to the Babylonians- dual responsibility) who come to us; but as for you, gather wine and summer fruits and oil, and store them in your vessels, and live in the towns that you have taken over.'

¹¹ Likewise, when all the Judeans who were in Moab and among the Ammonites and in Edom and in other lands heard that the king of Babylon had left a remnant in Judah and had appointed Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan as governor over them,¹² then all the Judeans returned from all the places to which they had been scattered and came to the land of Judah, to Gedaliah at Mizpah; and they gathered wine and summer fruits in great abundance.

13 Now Johanan son of Kareah and all the leaders of the forces in the open country came to Gedaliah at Mizpah ¹⁴and said to him, 'Are you at all aware that Baalis king of the Ammonites has sent Ishmael son of Nethaniah to take your life?' But Gedaliah son of Ahikam would not believe them. ¹⁵Then Johanan son of Kareah spoke secretly to Gedaliah at Mizpah, 'Please let me go and kill Ishmael son of Nethaniah, and no one else will know. Why should he take your life, so that all the Judeans who are gathered around you would be scattered, and the remnant of Judah would perish?' ¹⁶But Gedaliah son of Ahikam said to Johanan son of Kareah, 'Do not do such a thing, for you are telling a lie about Ishmael.'

Jeremiah 41

In the seventh month, Ishmael son of Nethaniah son of Elishama, of the royal family, one of the chief officers of the king, came with ten men to Gedaliah son of Ahikam, at Mizpah. As they ate bread together there at Mizpah, ²Ishmael son of Nethaniah and the ten men with him got up and struck down Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan with the sword and killed him, because the king of Babylon had appointed him governor in the land. ³Ishmael also killed all the Judeans who were with Gedaliah at Mizpah, and the Chaldean soldiers who happened to be there.

⁴ On the day after the murder of Gedaliah, before anyone knew of it, ⁵eighty men arrived from Shechem and Shiloh and Samaria, with their beards shaved and their clothes torn, and their bodies gashed, bringing grain-offerings and incense to present at the temple of the Lord. ⁶And Ishmael son of Nethaniah came out from Mizpah to meet them, weeping as he came. As he met them, he said to them, 'Come to Gedaliah son of Ahikam.' ⁷When they reached the middle of the city, Ishmael son of Nethaniah and the men with him slaughtered them, and threw them^{*} into a cistern. ⁸But there were ten men among them who said to Ishmael, 'Do not kill us, for we have stores of wheat, barley, oil, and honey hidden in the fields.' So he refrained, and did not kill them along with their companions.

⁹ Now the cistern into which Ishmael had thrown all the bodies of the men whom he had

struck down was the large cistern* that King Asa had made for defense against King Baasha of Israel; Ishmael son of Nethaniah filled that cistern with those whom he had killed. ¹⁰Then Ishmael took captive all the rest of the people who were in Mizpah, the king's daughters and all the people who were left at Mizpah, whom Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, had committed to Gedaliah son of Ahikam. Ishmael son of Nethaniah took them captive and set out to cross over to the Ammonites.

¹¹ But when Johanan son of Kareah and all the leaders of the forces with him heard of all the crimes that Ishmael son of Nethaniah had done, ¹²they took all their men and went to fight against Ishmael son of Nethaniah. They came upon him at the great pool that is in Gibeon. ¹³And when all the people who were with Ishmael saw Johanan son of Kareah and all the leaders of the forces with him, they were glad. ¹⁴So all the people whom Ishmael had carried away captive from Mizpah turned and came back, and went to Johanan son of Kareah. ¹⁵But Ishmael son of Nethaniah escaped from Johanan with eight men, and went to the Ammonites. ¹⁶Then Johanan son of Kareah and all the leaders of the forces with him took all the rest of the people whom Ishmael son of Nethaniah had carried away captive* from Mizpah after he had slain Gedaliah son of Ahikam--soldiers, women, children, and eunuchs, whom Johanan brought back from Gibeon.* ¹⁷And they set out, and stopped at Geruth Chimham near Bethlehem, intending to go to Egypt ¹⁸because of the Chaldeans; for they were afraid of them, because Ishmael son of Nethaniah had killed Gedaliah son of Ahikam, whom the king of Babylon had made governor over the land.

Jeremiah 42

¹ Then all the commanders of the forces, and Johanan son of Kareah and Azariah* son of Hoshai, and all the people from the least to the greatest, approached ²the prophet Jeremiah and said, 'Be good enough to listen to our plea, and pray to the Lord your God for us--for all this remnant. For there are only a few of us left out of many, as your eyes can see. ³Let the Lord your God show us where we should go and what we should do.' ⁴The prophet Jeremiah said to them,

'Very well: I am going to pray to the Lord your God as you request, and whatever the Lord answers you I will tell you; I will keep nothing back from you.' ⁵They in their turn said to Jeremiah, 'May the Lord be a true and faithful witness against us if we do not act according to everything that the Lord your God sends us through you. ⁶Whether it is good or bad, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God [not true!] to whom we are sending you, in order that it may go well with us when we obey the voice of the Lord our God.'

⁷ At the end of ten days the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah. ⁸Then he summoned Johanan son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces who were with him, and all the people from the least to the greatest, ⁹and said to them, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, to whom you sent me to present your plea before him: ¹⁰If you will only remain in this land, then I will build you up and not pull you down; I will plant you, and not pluck you up; for I am sorry for the disaster that I have brought upon you. ¹¹Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon, as you have been; do not be afraid of him, says the Lord, for I am with you, to save you and to rescue you from his hand. ¹²I will grant you mercy, and he will have mercy on you and restore you to your native soil. ¹³But if you continue to say, "We will not stay in this land", thus disobeying the voice of the Lord your God ¹⁴and saying, "No, we will go to the land of Egypt, where we shall not see war, or hear the sound of the trumpet, or be hungry for bread, and there we will stay", ¹⁵then hear the word of the Lord, O remnant of Judah. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: If you are determined to enter Egypt and go to settle there, ¹⁶then the sword that you fear shall overtake you there, in the land of Egypt; and the famine that you dread shall follow close after you into Egypt; and there you shall die. ¹⁷All the people who have determined to go to Egypt to settle there shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence; they shall have no remnant or survivor from the disaster that I am bringing upon them.

¹⁸ 'For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Just as my anger and my wrath were poured out on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so my wrath will be poured out on you when you go to Egypt. You shall become an object of execration and horror, of cursing and ridicule. You shall see this place no more. ¹⁹The Lord has said to you, O remnant of Judah, Do not go to

Egypt. Be well aware that I have warned you today ²⁰that you have made a fatal mistake. For you yourselves sent me to the Lord your God, saying, "Pray for us to the Lord our God, and whatever the Lord our God says, tell us and we will do it." ²¹So I have told you today, but you have not obeyed the voice of the Lord your God in anything that he sent me to tell you. ²²Be well aware, then, that you shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence in the place where you desire to go and settle.'

Jeremiah 43

⁴³When Jeremiah finished speaking to all the people all these words of the Lord their God, with which the Lord their God had sent him to them, ²Azariah son of Hoshai and Johanan son of Kareah and all the other insolent men said to Jeremiah 'You are telling a lie. The Lord our God did not send you to say, "Do not go to Egypt to settle there"; ³but Baruch son of Neriah is inciting you against us, to hand us over to the Chaldeans, in order that they may kill us or take us into exile in Babylon.'

⁴So Johanan son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces and all the people did not obey the voice of the Lord, to stay in the land of Judah. ⁵But Johanan son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces took all the remnant of Judah who had returned to settle in the land of Judah from all the nations to which they had been driven-- ⁶the men, the women, the children, the princesses, and everyone whom Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had left with Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan; also the prophet Jeremiah and Baruch son of Neriah. ⁷And they came into the land of Egypt, for they did not obey the voice of the Lord. And they arrived at Tahpanhes.

⁸ Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah in Tahpanhes: ⁹Take some large stones in your hands, and bury them in the clay pavement* that is at the entrance to Pharaoh's palace in Tahpanhes. Let the Judeans see you do it, ¹⁰and say to them, Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: I am going to send and take my servant King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon, and he* will set his throne above these stones that I have buried, and he will spread his royal canopy

over them. ¹¹He shall come and ravage 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. ¹²He* 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. ¹³He shall break the obelisks of Heliopolis, which is in the land of Egypt; and the temples of the gods of Egypt he shall burn with fire.

Jeremiah 44

¹The word that came to Jeremiah for all the Judeans living in the land of Egypt, at Migdol, at Tahpanhes, at Memphis, and in the land of Pathros, ²Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: You yourselves have seen all the disaster that I have brought on Jerusalem and on all the towns of Judah. Look at them; today they are a desolation, without an inhabitant in them, ³because of the wickedness that they committed, provoking me to anger, in that they went to make offerings and serve other gods that they had not known, neither they, nor you, nor your ancestors. ⁴Yet I persistently sent to you all my servants the prophets, saying, 'I beg you not to do this abominable thing that I hate!' ⁵But they did not listen or incline their ear, to turn from their wickedness and make no offerings to other gods. ⁶So my wrath and my anger were poured out and kindled in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; and they became a waste and a desolation, as they still are today. ⁷And now, thus says the Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel: Why are you doing such great harm to yourselves, to cut off man and woman, child and infant, from the midst of Judah, leaving yourselves without a remnant? ⁸Why do you provoke me to anger with the works of your hands, making offerings to other gods in the land of Egypt where you have come to settle? Will you be cut off and become an object of cursing and ridicule among all the nations of the earth? ⁹Have you forgotten the crimes of your ancestors, of the kings of Judah, of their* wives, your own crimes and those of your wives, which they committed in the land of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? ¹⁰They have shown no contrition or fear to this day, nor have they walked in my law and my statutes that I set before you and before your ancestors.

11 Therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: I am determined to bring disaster on you, to bring all Judah to an end. ¹²I will take the remnant of Judah who are determined to come to the land of Egypt to settle, and they shall perish, everyone; in the land of Egypt they shall fall; by the sword and by famine they shall perish; from the least to the greatest, they shall die by the sword and by famine; and they shall become an object of execration and horror, of cursing and ridicule. ¹³I will punish those who live in the land of Egypt, as I have punished Jerusalem, with the sword, with famine, and with pestilence, ¹⁴so that none of the remnant of Judah who have come to settle in the land of Egypt shall escape or survive or return to the land of Judah. Although they long to go back to live there, they shall not go back, except some fugitives.

15 Then all the men who were aware that their wives had been making offerings to other gods, and all the women who stood by, a great assembly, all the people who lived in Pathros in the land of Egypt, answered Jeremiah : ¹⁶As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we are not going to listen to you. ¹⁷Instead, we will do everything that we have vowed, make offerings to the queen of heaven and pour out libations to her, just as we and our ancestors, our kings and our officials, used to do in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. We used to have plenty of food, and prospered, and saw no misfortune. ¹⁸But from the time we stopped making offerings to the queen of heaven and pouring out libations to her, we have lacked everything and have perished by the sword and by famine.' ¹⁹And the women said,* 'Indeed we will go on making offerings to the queen of heaven and pouring out libations to her; do you think that we made cakes for her, marked with her image, and poured out libations to her without our husbands being involved?'

20 Then Jeremiah said to all the people, men and women, all the people who were giving him this answer: ²¹As for the offerings that you made in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, you and your ancestors, your kings and your officials, and the people of the land, did not the Lord remember them? Did it not come into his mind? ²²The Lord could no longer bear

the sight of your evil doings, the abominations that you committed; therefore your land became a desolation and a waste and a curse, without inhabitant, as it is to this day. ²³It is because you burned offerings, and because you sinned against the Lord and did not obey the voice of the Lord or walk in his law and in his statutes and in his decrees, that this disaster has befallen you, as is still evident today.'

24 Jeremiah said to all the people and all the women, 'Hear the word of the Lord, all you Judeans who are in the land of Egypt, ²⁵Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: You and your wives have accomplished in deeds what you declared in words, saying, "We are determined to perform the vows that we have made, to make offerings to the queen of heaven and to pour out libations to her." By all means, keep your vows and make your libations! ²⁶Therefore hear the word of the Lord, all you Judeans who live in the land of Egypt: Lo, I swear by my great name, says the Lord, that my name shall no longer be pronounced on the lips of any of the people of Judah in all the land of Egypt, saying, "As the Lord God lives." ²⁷I am going to watch over them for harm and not for good; all the people of Judah who are in the land of Egypt shall perish by the sword and by famine, until not one is left. ²⁸And those who escape the sword shall return from the land of Egypt to the land of Judah, few in number; and all the remnant of Judah, who have come to the land of Egypt to settle, shall know whose words will stand, mine or theirs! ²⁹This shall be the sign to you, says the Lord, that I am going to punish you in this place, in order that you may know that my words against you will surely be carried out: ³⁰Thus says the Lord, I am going to give Pharaoh Hophra, king of Egypt, into the hands of his enemies, those who seek his life, just as I gave King Zedekiah of Judah into the hand of King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon, his enemy who sought his life.'

In all four chapter: ~1,330 out of~ 3,500 words are the Word of YHWH

In chapters 42-44: ~1,330 words out of ~2350 (more than half!)

Lord and/or God does not appear between 40:3 and chapter 42:2, except in one reference to the temple of the Lord in 41:5.

Appendix B

The Waning Status of Scripture

For roughly the last fifteen hundred years, until the ascendancy of the millennial generation, the Christian story has arguably been the most well-known narrative in the Western world, and the Christian church has likewise been the most powerful and prominent "organization" therein. Yet, according to a growing number of reputable scholars and theologians,⁴⁷ for the last century, Western culture has been moving beyond the primacy of the Christian story and the Christian church into an era of post-Christendom.

In the practical realm of church affiliation and participation, there is no denying that attendance and membership in the mainstream Western Christian denominations (by almost any measure) has been in decline for at least the last half century, and is well substantiated by several reports and studies conducted in the last five years, including a 2014 Pew Research Study.⁴⁸ As the rector of a small Episcopal parish in Newton Highlands, Massachusetts⁴⁹ I can confirm this decline in accordance with my own experience.⁵⁰

47. See Frederick Denison Maurice, *Faith and Action* (1886), William Palmer Ladd *Prayerbook Interleaves* (1957), The Rev'd. Dr. Andrew McGowan Lectures at the 2017 Clergy Conference of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts.

48. "America's Changing Religious Landscape." *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project* (blog), May 12, 2015. <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>.

49. In addition to the decline in the Episcopal Church USA, New England is the most not-religiously-affiliated area of the country, with five of the six states ranking in the top six states with over 30% of the general population claiming to be "none's," according to this Pew Study. Lipka, Michael, and Benjamin Wormald. "How Religious Is Your State?" *Pew Research Center* (blog), February 29, 2016. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/02/29/how-religious-is-your-state/>.

4. According to a research study by the Episcopal Church USA, "Church Membership Shows Some Regional Growth, Overall Decline." *Episcopal Church*, March 28, 2016. <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/library/article/church-membership-shows-some-regional-growth-overall-decline>. At the Parish of St. Paul (where I have served as the rector since 2008) the average Sunday attendance has dropped from one hundred and forty in 1942 to roughly fifty-five in 2017, despite an almost doubling of growth in the population of the surrounding community. This trend is methodically documented over the course of the last

Accompanying this decline in attendance in the Episcopal church in New England, is a precipitous and increasingly well documented plunge in biblical literacy.⁵¹

This is a serious existential problem for the Episcopal Church, and for the whole of the Protestant tradition. Holy Scripture is one of three primary points of authority in the Anglican/Episcopal realm,⁵² along with tradition and reason. Theoretically, and actually, according to the tenets of the tradition, it is not possible to be a faithfully practicing Episcopalian without engaging and embracing Scripture. The website of the Episcopal Church USA clearly states:

The threefold sources of authority in Anglicanism are Scripture, tradition, and reason. These three sources uphold and critique each other in a dynamic way. **Scripture is the normative source for God's revelation and the source for all Christian teaching and reflection....**⁵³

If Scripture is the "normative source" of God's revelation, then an Episcopal faith community that is increasingly unfamiliar with Scripture will not be appropriately acquainted with that revelation. And if Scripture is the "normative source" for all Christian teachings and reflection, then a community that is not engaged with Scripture will neither be familiar with the basic tenets of discipleship, or the foundations of the Christian tradition for that matter. A

seventy-five years in Parochial Reports submitted annually to the Episcopal Church USA. "Data from 2016 Parochial Reports Now Available." *Episcopal Church*, September 21, 2017. <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/posts/publicaffairs/data-2016-parochial-reports-now-available>.

51. By "biblical literacy" I mean a basic knowledge of the structure and contents of the two Testaments. For more on the decline of Religious Knowledge in the United States see the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion in Public Life , In this study, on average, Christians answered fewer than half of the 12 questions about the Bible, correctly. "U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey." *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project* (blog), September 28, 2010. <http://www.pewforum.org/2010/09/28/u-s-religious-knowledge-survey/>.

52. The Episcopal "church" is, generally, the American arm of the Anglican Communion, although there are Episcopal entities in the Communion that are not specifically American.

53. "Authority, Sources of (in Anglicanism)." Episcopal Church, May 22, 2012. <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/library/glossary/authority-sources-anglicanism>.

"reasonable" level of biblical engagement seems necessary to the life and growth of "the church" in the same way that a basic familiarity with one's family history allows and encourages the continuation of family traditions. The longevity of Christian identity is predicated on Christians identifying with their tradition; with the narratives that hand over the tradition from generation to generation.

But the waning statistics regarding general biblical knowledge and the widespread observance of general indifference to the Bible is more than troubling to we who hold Holy Scripture to be both foundational and essential to the life and well-being of the Christian faith. The Bible is a primary source for the Christian tradition.

Appendix C

Customs & Immigration Statistics

An Overview of Immigration Policy Since the 2016 Election

Since the presidential election of 2016 in the United States, the national attitude toward undocumented immigrants has dramatically deteriorated.⁵⁴ Maybe not as dramatically as the change that occurred in 587 b.c.e. when the Babylonians sacked Jerusalem and displaced an entire people and their culture, save the remnant in Jr. 40-44. But it is a change that has inflicted a significant existential angst, a widespread and ever-present fear of deportation within an already vulnerable community. Among the most striking new dimensions of this administration's immigration policy is a widening of the net to include immigrants who have no criminal record, despite the national government's rhetoric that the focus is entirely on those who have records of criminal behavior.

The Washington Post reported on September 28, 2017 that: "the fastest-growing category of arrests since Trump's inauguration is those facing no criminal charges. The [Immigration and Customs Enforcement] agency arrested more than 28,000 'non-criminal immigrant violators' between Jan. 22 and Sept. 2 according to the agency's records, a nearly threefold increase over the same period in 2016."⁵⁵ Deportations are down, but arrests and detentions are up. More families are torn apart, more undocumented people are held in detention centers for indefinite periods of time.

The home page of the independent, nonprofit Migration Policy Institute website offers an overview of some of the post-election immigration policy shifts in this "One Nation Under God" in a brief titled: *Immigration Under Trump: A Review of Policy Shifts in the Year Since the Election*. Here is the synopsis:⁵⁶

54. See below for specifics on the January 25, 2017 Executive Order and its effects through the end of December 2017.

55. "Deportations Slow under Trump despite Increase in Arrests by ICE" in *The Washington Post*, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/deportations-fall-under-trump-despite-increase-in-arrests-by-ice/2017/09/28/1648d4ee-a3ba-11e7-8c37-e1d99ad6aa22_story.html?utm_term=.23ba4459483f.

56. "The Migration Policy Institute is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit think tank founded in 2001 in

This policy brief assesses the major policy shifts that have occurred since January 2017 via executive orders, agency memoranda, and changes to existing programs and practice. It finds that the White House has made a significant down payment on the candidate's immigration agenda, one of the most activist of any chief executive in modern times..... Among its major actions on immigration during 2017, the administration:...

- Reversed the decline in arrests of unauthorized immigrants in the U.S. interior that had occurred during the eight years of the Obama administration.
- Cancelled the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which is currently providing work authorization and temporary relief from deportation to approximately 690,000 unauthorized immigrants brought to the United States as children.
- Ended the designation of Temporary Protected Status for nationals of Haiti, Nicaragua and Sudan, and signaled that Hondurans and possibly Salvadorans may also lose their work authorization and protection from removal in 2018.

Fiscal Year 2017 ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations Report⁵⁷

On January 25, 2017, the President Donald J. Trump issued Executive Order 13,768, [Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States](#) (EO), which set forth the Administration's immigration enforcement and removal priorities. The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) February 20, 2017 memorandum, [Enforcement of the Immigration Laws to Serve the National Interest](#) (implementation memorandum) provided direction for the implementation of the policies set forth in the EO. The EO and implementation memorandum expanded ICE's enforcement focus to include removable aliens who (1) have been convicted of any criminal offense; (2) have been charged with any criminal offense that has not been

Washington, DC and dedicated to the analysis of the movement of people worldwide," says its website. The assessment of this non-partisan, nonprofit is that the prospects for immigrants have changed dramatically since the 2016 presidential election. "Immigration under Trump: A Review of Policy Shifts in the Year Since the Election." *Migration Policy Institute*, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/immigration-under-trump-review-policy-shifts>. There is an excellent comprehensive, full policy briefing available on this website.

57. All of the following information in this Appendix is from "FAQ on Sensitive Locations and Courthouse Arrests," *US Immigration and Customs Enforcement Website*, <https://www.ice.gov/removal-statistics/2017>.

resolved; (3) have committed acts which constitute a chargeable criminal offense; (4) have engaged in fraud or willful misrepresentation in connection with any official matter before a governmental agency; (5) have abused any program related to receipt of public benefits; (6) are subject to a final order of removal but have not complied with their legal obligation to depart the United States; or (7) in the judgment of an immigration officer, otherwise pose a risk to public safety or national security. The Department has directed that classes or categories of removable aliens are no longer exempted from potential enforcement.

The EO and implementation memorandum highlight the critical importance of interior enforcement in protecting national security and public safety and upholding the rule of law. This report presents and analyzes ICE ERO's FY2017 year-end statistics and illustrates how ICE ERO successfully fulfilled its mission in furthering the policies set forth in the EO and implementation memorandum.

Impact

The FY2017 statistics clearly demonstrate ICE's continued commitment to identifying, arresting, and removing aliens who are in violation of U.S. law, particularly those posing a public safety or national security threat, while restoring fidelity to the rule of law. In FY2017, ICE ERO conducted 143,470 overall administrative arrests, which is the highest number of administrative arrests over the past three fiscal years. Of these arrests, 92 percent had a criminal conviction, a pending criminal charge, were an ICE fugitive or were processed with a reinstated final order. In FY2017, ICE conducted 226,119 removals. While this is a slight overall decrease from the prior fiscal year, the proportion of removals resulting from ICE arrests increased from 65,332, or 27 percent of total removals in FY2016 to 81,603, or 36 percent of total removals, in FY2017. These results clearly demonstrate profound, positive impact of the EO. The 17 percent decrease in border removals shows the deterrent effect of strong interior enforcement, while the increase in interior removals restores the integrity of our nation's immigration system and enhances the safety and security of the United States.

A Telling Statistic

This table shows the uptick in arrests of non-criminals in 2017 over 2016. There is a slight increase (6.5%) in the arrest of convicted criminals. But the arrest of non-criminal

immigrants rose in 2017 by 147%.

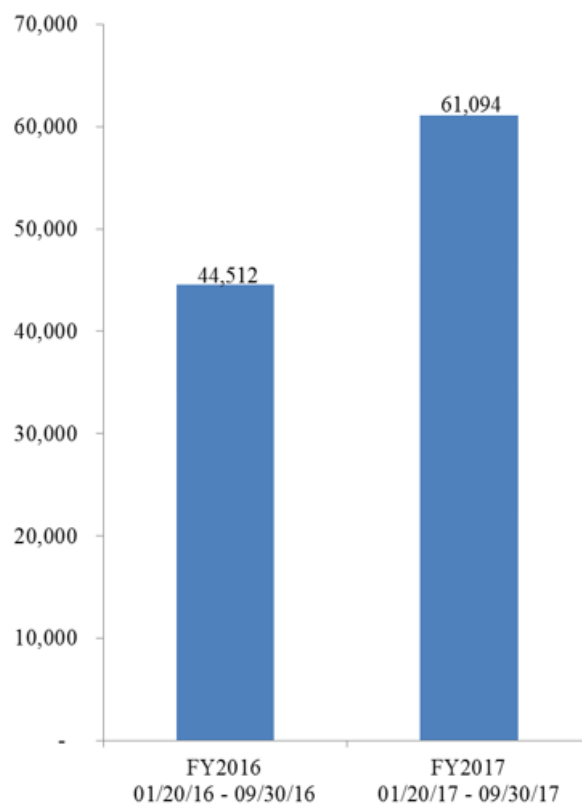
Table 5. FY2016 and FY2017 ERO Administrative At-Large Arrests by Criminality

FY2016-2017 ERO At Large Administrative Arrests by Criminality		
Criminality	FY2016	FY2017
Convicted Criminal	24,850	26,466
Non-Criminal Immigration Violators	5,498	13,600
Total	30,348	40,066

Interior Removals

A removal is the compulsory and confirmed movement of an inadmissible or deportable alien out of the United States based on an order of removal.⁶ Similar to the trends of ERO administrative arrests and book-ins, removals tied to ICE arrests increased during FY2017, especially from the start of the new Administration. Figure 12 shows a 37 percent increase in removals tied to interior ERO arrests when comparing January 20, 2016 through end of FY2016 with the same time period in FY2017.

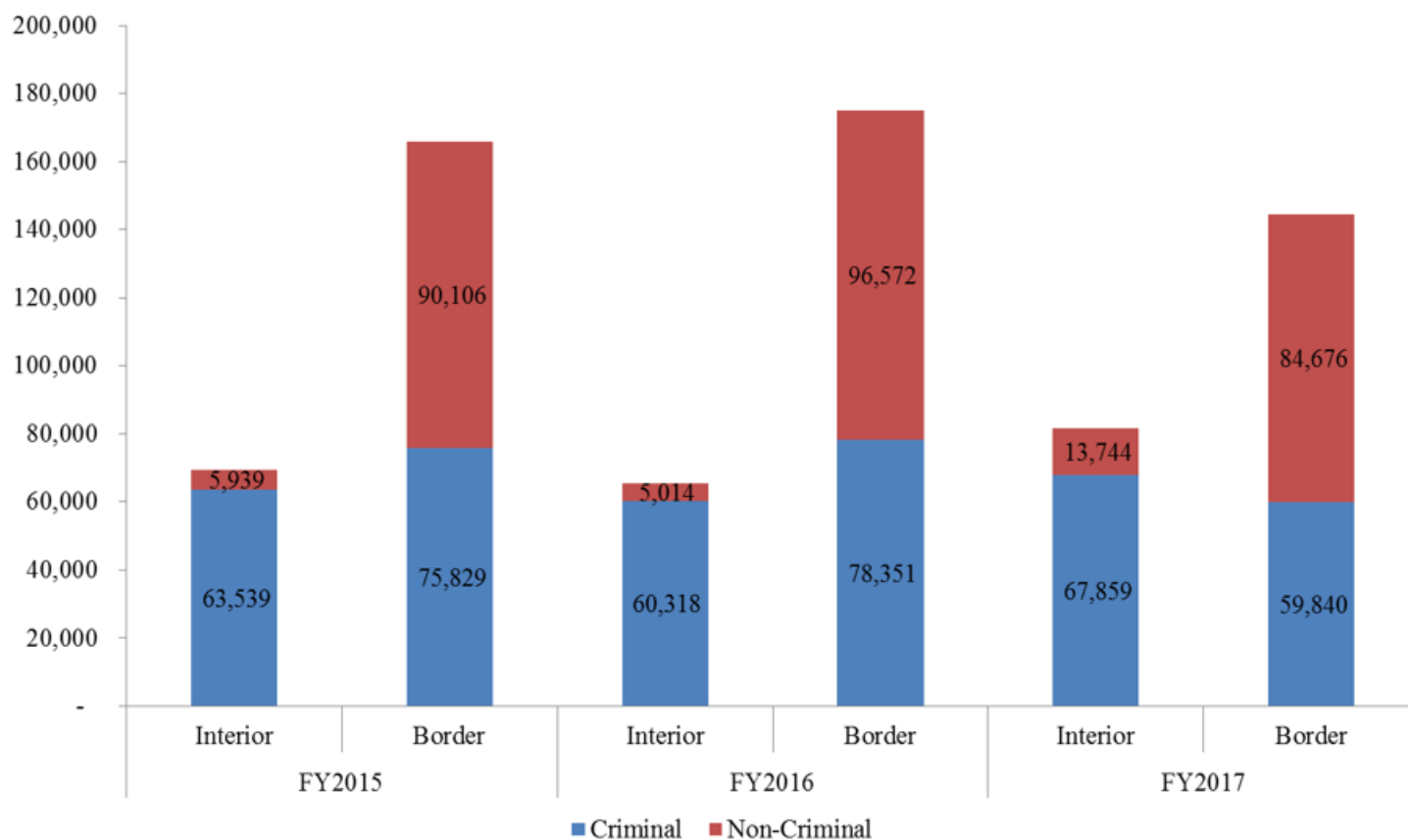
Figure 12. FY2016 and FY2017 ICE Interior Removals for January 20 to End of FY



Interior vests Border Removals

Figure 15 provides a summary of ICE-ERO removals for the past three fiscal years, broken down by interior versus border arrests, as well as criminals versus non-criminals. The drop-in border apprehensions offer important public safety benefits, as there was a 24 percent (18,511) decrease in criminal border removals from FY2016 to FY2017. At the same time, the renewed commitment to interior enforcement resulted in a 10 percent increase in ICE criminal removals from FY2016 to FY2017, with 53 percent of criminal removals resulting from ICE interior arrests.

Figure 15. FY2015 – FY2017 Interior vs. Border Program Removals by Criminality



This graph illustrates two important points vis-a-vis the general tenor and tone of the national attitude toward undocumented immigrants. First, the number of interior deportations dramatically increased in 2017. That is, many more UI's who had been living and working in the United States, most of whom had raised families here, were deported. More than double the number in 2015 and 2016. And second, the number of Border removals dropped precipitously; by 24% and 21% from 2016 and 2015, respectively. This signals a dramatic shift in the perceived welcome of UI's. The prospects have so dramatically deteriorated that a large percentage of people have stopped seeking refuge in the USA.

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