Uncovering the naked:

The economic dimension of nakedness in the Hebrew Bible and the innovations of Isaiah 58

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Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
August 2023

Abstract

This study challenges the consensus that to "feed the hungry and clothe the naked" (Isa 58:7; Ezek 18:7, 16) represents a charitable ideal for the righteous. Through an interdisciplinary examination of the language of "nakedness" in the Hebrew Bible, it argues that the economic dimension of the Hebrew lexemes ערום and ערוה is more pervasive and significant than is generally recognised. An extensive word study with the assistance of comparative Semitic texts leads to fresh interpretations of Deut 24:1; 1 Sam 20:30; 2 Sam 6:11-23; Isa 20:4; and Job 1:21, and sheds light on the rhetorical function of the notorious personified city texts. A meticulous close reading of Isaiah 58 probes the social context of the text to identify "the naked." Through the additional analysis of three key postexilic texts (from Neh 5; Lev 25; Ezek 18), the study proposes that the original life setting of the motif, as it appears in Ezek 18, is the social obligation of providing for dependent close kin, quintessentially, one's elderly parents. Isaiah 58 constitutes a two-fold social innovation. It suggests that creditors have a social obligation to provide for those whose land they have seized as if they were dependent kin, since they all belong to the “household of Jacob.” It also calls for the abolition of a hypothetical legal instrument, the מטה (not "yoke," vv. 6, 9), whereby land pledged as security was acquired from defaulting debtors. It constitutes a rare example of a prophet’s call to justice demanding a specific amendment to legal-economic practice rather than effectively maintaining the status quo. As such, it presents an inspiring model for those fighting for a more equitable society today.

Acknowledgements

This thesis is a team effort. On the personal front, I want to express my deepest gratitude to my husband Jon, who facilitated and supported this obsession with the patience of Job. On the professional front, heartfelt thanks are due to my relay team of supervisors, Carly L. Crouch, Tarah Van de Wiele, Sara Parks, Cat Quine, Marian Kelsey, and Matthew Duncombe. You started me off, ran alongside, picked me up when I tripped, cheered me on, and guided me over the finish line. For your generosity in going above and beyond to see the project progress, I can't thank you enough. Lastly, I am hugely grateful to the army of family members, friends, and colleagues who generously helped and encouraged me every step, in small ways and large. We finally made it!

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List of Abbreviations

Standard abbreviations follow *The SBL Handbook of Style*, 2nd ed., Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014 and are not listed. Additional abbreviations are listed below.

BMO	Barcino Monographica Orientalia
CDA	*A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian*. Edited by Jeremy Black, Andrew George, and Nicholas Postgate. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000
CAL	*The Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon.* Edited by Stephen A. Kaufman, et al. (https://cal.huc.edu)
CDCH	*The Concise Dictionary of Classical Hebrew.* Edited by David J. A. Clines. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009
EBibNS	Études bibliques. Nouvelle série
EHLL	*Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*. Edited by Geoffrey Khan et al. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2013
GNT	Good News Translation (Today's English Version, 2nd ed.)
HBM	Hebrew Bible Monographs
HeBAI	*Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel*
JAEI	*Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections*
NCV	New Century Version
ORA	Orientalische Religionen in der Antike
PEPP4	*The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Edited by Roland Greene et al. 4th ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012.
SAK	Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur
SBLAB	Society of Biblical Literature Academia Biblica
StBoT	Studien zu den Bogazköy-Texten
TADAE	*Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt.* Edited by B. Porten and A. Yardeni. 4 vols. Jerusalem: Magnes, 1986–1999
WiBiLex	*Das wissenschaftliche Bibellexikon im Internet* (https://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/wibilex/)

1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the study

Nakedness is clearly visible in the Hebrew Bible. It plays a prominent role in Genesis 2–3 and is found across a variety of genre, including narrative, law, poetry, and prophetic oracle.[1] As body-focused research in the humanities has swelled in popularity over the last two decades, clothing and dress have also attracted the attention of biblical scholars working with texts, alongside ancient historians and archaeologists interested in life in ancient Israel. Against this backdrop, nakedness in the Hebrew Bible has emerged as a distinct topic of interest. A large, edited volume on clothing and nudity[2] and several essays, including one from this author,[3] have been published recently and "nakedness" now appears amongst the entries in biblical lexica.[4]

However, biblical scholars have rarely questioned *what is meant* by individual references to nakedness. The language has been taken at face value. Despite the cognitive turn in linguistics and its impact on the understanding of the relationship between language, embodied experience, and thought,[5] biblical scholarship has been slow to grasp its consequences for reading ancient texts. Critical, to my mind, is the full appreciation of linguistic meaning being

[1] I beg to differ with Holger Gzella, "Nudity and Clothing in the Lexicon of the Hebrew Bible," in *Clothing and Nudity in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. C. Berner et al. (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 217–35, who claims "the theme plays no major role in narrative accounts" (218).
[2] Christoph Berner et al., eds., *Clothing and Nudity in the Hebrew Bible* (London: T&T Clark, 2019).
[3] E.g., Hilary Lipka, "Shaved Beards and Bared Buttocks: Shame and the Undermining of Masculine Performance in Biblical Texts," in *Being a Man: Negotiating Ancient Constructs of Masculinity*, ed. I. Zsolnay (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 176–97; Sarah G. Turner-Smith, "Naked but Not Ashamed: A Reading of Genesis 2:25 in Textual and Cultural Context," *JTS* 69 (2018): 425–46; Laura Quick, "'Like a Garment Eaten by Moths' (Job 13:28): Clothing, Nudity and Illness in the Book of Job," *BibInt* 30 (2022): 46–65.
[4] See, e.g., Frank H. Gorman, "Nakedness," *NIDB* 4:217; Renate Brandscheidt, "Nacktheit (AT)," *WiBiLex* (https://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/stichwort/28635/); also, Liz Wilson, "Nudity," *ER* 10:6739–43.
[5] See Dirk Geeraerts, "Introduction: A Rough Guide to Cognitive Linguistics," in *Cognitive Linguistics: Basic Readings*, ed. D. Geeraerts (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2006), 1–28 (3-6).

context-dependent *at both ends*, production[6] and reception. A locution within a text is an entry point to a textual, historical, social, and cultural context in which it contributes to sense and meaning creation. It is a window to a three-dimensional world rather than a flat picture of fixed relations. Standing at different viewpoints in the room of our world furnishes different angles on the wide world of the text, providing a richer understanding of the connotations associated with that locution in its own context.

Rather than a study of a phenomenon called "nakedness" or "nudity"[7] in the Hebrew Bible, this investigation constitutes a study of the *language* of "nakedness" in the Hebrew Bible, inspired by cognitive semantics, cognitive linguistics, and contextual approaches to discourse. My suspicion is that, historically, there has been too much reliance on Hebrew dictionaries, leaving the lexical semantics to the dictionaries' compilers, and failing to scrutinise how lexemes and locutions are used in their textual context. The main contribution of this study is specific to its subject matter. I propose that the Hebrew lexemes ערוה and ערום often convey an economic sense of destitution, emptyhandedness, or emptiness in preference to the exposure of skin through an absence of clothing. The invariable translations "nakedness" and "naked" are misleading. I also propose the existence of a new lexeme (מטה), several new translations, and some fresh interpretations, offered in

[6] To this we can add, the processes of transmission that result in the Masoretic Text, henceforth, MT.

[7] English language scholarship on art has traditionally distinguished between "naked/nakedness" and "nude/nudity." See, Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1956). Such distinctions presuppose certain interpretations of the meaning of the uncovered body that depend on context and aesthetics. (See, e.g., the discussion in Julia M. Asher-Greve and Deborah Sweeney, "On Nakedness, Nudity and Gender in Egyptian and Mesopotamian Art," in *Images and Gender: Contributions to the Hermeneutics of Reading Ancient Art*, ed. S. Schroer, OBO 220 [Fribourg: Academic Press, 2006], 115–19). In recent years this traditional terminological distinction has been criticised. See Anna-Katharina Höpflinger, "Clothing and Nudity from the Perspective of the Study of Religion," in C. Berner et al., *Clothing and Nudity,* 7. Furthermore, both terms tend to be translated into French as "*nu/le nudité*" and into German as "*nackt/die Nacktheit,*" blurring any distinctions that might have prompted the choice of terms by an English writer. This study uses "naked" and "nakedness" as unmarked terms, to the exclusion of "nude" and "nudity." It is explicit in the discussion when the terms are associated with merit or demerit.

the course of the investigation. A second contribution to scholarship consists in my methodology, as a case study in an integrated, interdisciplinary approach to ancient text, as advocated by Ellen van Wolde.[8] This open, agile, contextual, literary, and historical approach can produce unexpected insights and new, satisfying, interpretations that are harder to come by with more conventionally structured approaches.

1.2 Overview of the study

The first half of the study gives a thorough, but not comprehensive, overview of texts with the Hebrew lexemes ערוה and ערום (traditionally, "nakedness" and "naked"). The broad sweep of texts covers a variety of contexts and a wide range of people and entities who are said to be "naked." Only limited attention can be given to each group of texts, so I necessarily rely on existing scholarship in many cases. The second half of the study takes a more individual, contextual approach, yielding rich results, but only after an open, wide-ranging investigation taking numerous twists and turns, as clues are followed. Along the way insights emerge concerning ancient Hebrew language and thought, from the micro level of individual lexemes and idioms to the macro structures of rhetorical units, cultural behaviours, and worldviews.

Chapter 2 looks at ערוה associated with human bodies. Taboos loom large behind its employment to refer to illicit sexual relations between kin (Lev 18, 20; Ezek 22:10), genitalia (Exod 20:26; 28:42), and bodily emissions (Deut 23:14–15). Two previously opaque references, supposedly to the "nakedness" of female bodies, are illuminated by readings of economic destitution (Deut 24:1; 1 Sam 20:30). In Chapter 3, the same economic sense of ערוה also sheds light on the prophetic "city-as-woman" texts (Isa 47:3; Ezek 16:8, 36–37;

[8] See Ellen van Wolde, "Towards an 'Integrated Approach' in Biblical Studies, Illustrated with a Dialogue between Job 28 and Job 38," in *Congress Volume: Leiden 2004*, ed. A. Lemaire, VTSup 109 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 355–80.

23:10, 18, 29; Hos 2:11; Nah 3:5; Lam 1:8). Recognising that the "nakedness," i.e., destitution, refers primarily to the cities, not the body of a metaphorical woman, also leads to recognising references to the encroachment on sacred space and removal of treasures from temples. A single text describing a soldier fleeing ערום (Amos 2:16) is obviously "empty-handed" rather than without clothes, which is what the typical translation "naked" implies.

In Chapter 4, the economic sense is again paramount for the king of Persia in the Aramaic text Ezra 4:14. Recognising the language that clusters around the economic sense of ערוה, I offer a new interpretation of King David's "uncovering" as also fundamentally an economic matter (2 Sam 6), although the language of "nakedness" is absent. King Saul's unsuitability is demonstrated as, like the fleeing soldier, he falls "empty-handed" (1 Sam 19:24). The two prophets Micah and Isaiah who "go ערום" (Mic 1:8; Isa 20), are mourning, which gives an opportunity to suggest mourning attire involves partially undressing. Countering the prevailing opinion that prisoners of war were routinely stripped of clothes before deportation, I suggest Isaiah's oracle predicts mourning for the Kushites and Egyptians, the destruction of city walls to their foundations and economic plundering, as before.

The last chapter of the word study argues that the language of "nakedness" in Job 1:21 and Qoh 5:14 combines connotations of impoverished beginnings, financial loss, and mourning. The lexeme ערוה as destitution also describes the impoverished early lives of the cities in Hos 2 and Ezek 16. The outcome of the word study is strong evidence that the Hebrew lexemes ערוה and ערום have a wider range of connotations than is generally acknowledged. In particular, economic lack constitutes a predominant theme.

At the end of the word study, three texts (Isa 58:7; Ezek 18:7, 16; 2 Chr 28:15) emerge that share a distinctive collocation of "the naked" and "the hungry" within contexts of the provision of food and clothing, framed as righteous behaviour. The first two are curiously opaque about the identity of those thus

labelled. Commentators often maintain that the distinctive formulation draws on a common West Asian "stock motif that was understood to exemplify moral blamelessness,"[9] but none question the consensus that "the naked" and "the hungry" are simply the impoverished.

Dissatisfied with this answer as the end of the matter, the remainder of the study constitutes an investigation of who "the naked" might be, taking the rich text of Isaiah 58 as the prime focus. Chapter 6 consists of preparatory groundwork, sketching an historical and textual backdrop for the investigation. It lays out some initial background information on the historical economic context of the postexilic texts and gives two brief biblical surveys of the language of hunger and famine and the provision of food and clothing.

In Chapters 7 and 8, Isa 58 is subjected to a two-part close reading. Although a provisional interpretation emerges, the traditional translation of מוטה/מטה as "yoke" (vv. 6, 9) remains problematic for uncovering the identity of "the hungry" and "the naked." Chapter 9 places Isa 58 in conversation with three common conversation partners, Isa 61, Zech 7–8, and Neh 5:1–13. The latter clarifies the importance of a kin-based view of community and points to debt mechanisms as a potential cause for destitution. It also suggests that the gesture of "shaking" and its associated vocabulary refers to depriving people of their property (v. 13), an action that would fit with the obscure references to מטה in Isa 58.

Chapter 10 follows a trail of clues to the referent of מטה through a lexico-philological overview and Lev 25:35–38 to conclude that it indicates the consequences of a legal-financial agreement by which debtors who defaulted

[9] Bradley C. Gregory, "'Bread to the Hungry and Clothes to the Naked': A History of a Prophetic-Sapiential Motif from Tobit to the Syriac of Ben Sira," in *Ben Sira in Conversation with Traditions: FS N. Calduch-Benages*, ed. F. M. Macatangay and F.-J. Ruiz-Ortiz, DCLS 47 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2022), 96; cf. Moshe Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1995), 222–23, who suggests it "belongs to the humanistic ideal of wisdom literature" which "is the heritage of the Ancient East."

lost control of their land. I conclude that Isa 58 constitutes a call to wealthy Yahwists located in the vicinity of Jerusalem to treat members of their community in need as kin. They are exhorted to provide for the livelihood of those who have fallen under their authority as a result of the מטה and who are now destitute. At the same time, the biblical writer calls for the abolition of the מטה, whereby land, or its usufruct, is forfeited to creditors.

The last substantive chapter, Chapter 11, puts this hypothesis to Ezek 18. Reading through a legal lens and comparing Ezek 18:7, 16 with Ezek 22:7 supports the hypothesis that giving food to the hungry and covering the naked refers to a householder's obligations of long-term maintenance to their close kin. It suggests further that the prime responsibility of care was to one's elderly parents. This interpretation of the moral imperative to "cover the naked" as a duty towards one's family, as economic dependents, is substantially more convincing than the prevailing understanding that it refers to an ideal attitude of charitable largesse to be extended in a limitless fashion to any and all who are poor and needy. Third Isaiah's innovation is to extend this customary family duty to those from whom one has seized land. This may be restorative justice but is hardly charity.

1.3 Lexico-philological introduction to the language of "nakedness"

There is a slight paradox in the visibility of nakedness in the Hebrew Bible. The motif and the language of nakedness may be significant in the contexts in which it appears and be widely distributed across genres and books, yet both remain relatively infrequent. Its visibility is partly influenced by salience bias, as a topic with a high emotional valence for many readers. There is also a canonical and a theological effect. The motif of nakedness in the story of the first humans in Gen 2–3 brings the subject to the fore at the beginning of the canon. It has also gained undue prominence in Christian anthropology through its entanglement in the doctrines of "the Fall" and original sin. Works

of art portraying the creation story across two millennia have ensured that the motif of nakedness and interpretations of it have permeated European culture. The presence of the phenomenon of nakedness also appears unambiguous because of the consistent translation of a limited pool of Hebrew terms as “naked” and “nakedness” (in modern English versions, at least).

The next four chapters constitute a word study of ערוה and ערום, with some of their variants, covering an extensive range of biblical texts. An exhaustive treatment is beyond the scope of this project, resulting in two notable omissions. Adam and Eve[10] make hardly an appearance and Noah[11] even less. The work here provides a foundation for the focused treatments these complex pericopes deserve, which must await a later occasion.

The two Hebrew lexemes ערוה and ערום, appearing in total 86 times, are almost invariably translated “nakedness” and “naked.”[12] The most common lexeme is the noun ערוה with 54 occurrences.[13] The form עריה (6 occurrences) is sometimes labelled a byform, although it is not always used as a substantive.[14] The descriptor ערום and its byform עירום (16 and 10 times) are semantically related to the noun but have a moderately distinctive usage pattern, overlapping only in Isa 20, Ezek 16, 23, and Hos 2.[15] The two lexemes, together with five more variants,[16] are associated semantically with the verb

[10] The lexeme ערום/עירום occurs in Gen 2:25; 3:7, 10, 11.
[11] The lexeme ערוה occurs in Gen 9:22–23.
[12] On the “nakedness” lexicon, see Gzella, “Nudity and Clothing in the Lexicon.”
[13] ערוה: Gen 9:22–23 (3x); 42:9, 12; Exod 20:20; 28:42; Lev 18:6–19 (24x); 20:11, 17–21 (7x); Deut 23:15; 24:1; 1 Sam 20:30; Isa 20:4; 47:3; Ezek 16:8, 36–37 (3x); 22:10; 23:10, 18, 29; Hos 2:11; Lam 1:8. Also, Aramaic ערוה in Ezra 4:14.
[14] E.g., Gzella, “Nudity and Clothing in the Lexicon,” 222. עריה is found in Ezek 16:7, 22, 39; 23:29 (as descriptor); Mic 1:11 (in doubt; see *BHS*); Hab 3:9.
[15] ערום: Gen 2:25; 1 Sam 19:24; Isa 20:2, 3, 4; Isa 58:7; Hos 2:5; Amos 2:16; Mic 1:8; Job 1:21 (x2); 22:6; 24:7, 10; 26:6; Qoh 5:14. Byform עירום: Gen 3:7, 10, 11; Deut 28:48; Ezek 16:7, 22, 39; 18:7, 16; 23:29.
[16] Ten occurrences in total: מער 1 Kgs 7:36; Nah 3:5; מערם 2 Chr 28:15; מורה Judg 13:5; 16:17; 1 Sam 1:11; מעור Hab 2:15; ערר Isa 23:13; 32:11; Jer 51:58.

ערה.[17] In several stems (mostly *piel* and *hiphil*) and depending on the object, ערה is translated "to lay bare, uncover, expose," "to empty," and "to pour out."[18] Akkadian cognates also have a wide range of senses. For example, the adjective *erû* can be glossed "naked, empty, empty-handed, destitute."[19] These wide semantic ranges hint that ערוה and ערום may be more polysemous than the typical and supposedly "literal" translations "nakedness" and "naked" imply. Retaining the quotation marks around these glosses throughout the study functions as a reminder that, despite the English translation tradition, they may not encapsulate appropriately the sense of the Hebrew terms in context.

This word study is organised around conventional groupings and commonalities in the contexts in which ערוה and ערום appear. It transpires that these provide at best a rough guide to interpretation. The four thematic categories addressed in each chapter are: taboos and euphemisms, wartime, kings and prophets, and loss and provision.

The first category provides an opportunity to note one significant way the semantics of a lexeme associated with "nakedness" might change over time. Semantic change, which is often evidenced in polysemy, is relevant to each of the four categories and underlies the open, contextual approach to interpretation taken here. For some texts there are contextual indications that two or more senses and layers of meaning may be discerned. For other texts, it may be difficult to tell which senses were current when the text was first written down. Awareness of diachronic semantic change is particularly

[17] Henceforth referred to as the ערה family of terms, they are not necessarily etymologically related. See H. Niehr, "ערה *ʾārâ*," *TDOT* 11:343–49; H. Niehr, "עָרוֹם *ʿārôm*," *TDOT* 11:349–54.
[18] Total 15 occurrences: Gen 24:20; Lev 20:18, 19; Isa 3:17; 22:6; 32:15; 53:12; Hab 3:13; Zeph 2:14; Ps 37:35; 137:7; 141:8; Lam 4:21; 2 Chr 24:11.
[19] *CAD* 4:320–21 "*erû*" (cf. *CDA* 80 "*erû III*" "to be naked," G stem "is destitute"; D stem "strip bare" head, "strip" mother [for childbirth]). Other important Akkadian cognates include *CAD* 10:21–22 "*mērênu*" ("nakedness, emptiness"); *CAD* 20:265–66 "*ūru B*" ("genitalia"). Note the associated homonyms *CAD* 4:323–24 "*erû B*" ("grinding slab, saddle quern"; cf. *CDA* 80 "*erû II*"); *CAD* 20:261–64 "*ūru A*" ("roof").

pertinent for reading ancient and multi-layered texts such as those in the Hebrew Bible, which were written, redacted, and transmitted over several centuries. The semantic range of a lexeme at any one point in time is narrower than the wide, and sometimes contradictory, semantic range that can be observed across a long period of time but is simply an effect of the inevitable telescoping that results. New senses can be acquired, and older ones forgotten. The emotive valance of a word tends to change more slowly than what it refers to. Pejorative connotations, in particular, may adhere to a lexeme long after the referent from which the negative valences were acquired has been forgotten. A lexeme already associated with pejorative connotations is ideal for referring to taboo subjects, obscuring the subjects and making it hard to identify what is being referred to. As we embark on this word study, then, it is appropriate to remind ourselves of the truism that context – linguistic, social, historical, and cultural – is crucial to sense creation. As Dirk Geeraerts expresses it:

> Rather than to think of them as carriers of clearly distinguishable and clearly identifiable packages of information, it is more appropriate to think of words as having meaning potential, that is, of having the possibility to express a flexibly defined range of meanings when they are put to use in a given context.[20]

[20] Dirk Geeraerts, "How Words and Vocabularies Change," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Word*, ed. J. R. Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 417.

2 The language of nakedness and taboos and euphemisms

The most concentrated cluster of the language of "nakedness" in the Hebrew Bible is found in Lev 18 and 20 within lists of prohibited behaviours. These two chapters alone contain thirty-two occurrences of ערוה. A handful of isolated occurrences in the books of Exodus, Deuteronomy, and 1 Samuel also associate the term with opprobrium. These attestations share an employment of ערוה in relation to a person or their body in a way that suggests we may be dealing with taboos and euphemisms. The texts also illustrate how much easier it can be to discern connotations, in this case, negative connotations, than what is being denoted or referred to. In particular, it can be very hard to set aside the presumption of perceiving an unclothed, exposed human body in the text.

Taboos tend to be motivated by norms of social acceptability, delicacy, and propriety, or by religious or superstitious beliefs. They exert a constraining influence, often leading to avoidant behaviour and speech. Body parts, bodily emissions, and sexual activity are common taboo domains,[21] and these are all potentially in the frame when the language of "nakedness" is applied to a human subject. When it is necessary to refer to something subject to taboo or simply considered unpleasant, embarrassing, or offensive in a particular social and cultural context, the typical solution is to be indirect and use circumlocution or the stylistic device of euphemism. Harm or offence is considerably reduced by selecting a word that has a positive or neutral emotive force in that discursive context. Euphemism therefore functions by "borrowing" a word that is already related in some way. This word may normally be used for a different referent or be a foreign word from another language. This word then acts as a euphemism to "shield" discourse

[21] Keith Allan and Kate Burridge, *Forbidden Words: Taboo and the Censoring of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1–28.

participants from the negative valance of what it denotes. If ערוה is used euphemistically in any of these texts, by definition, its connotations include an at least neutral, if not positive, emotive valance in that particular context. At the same time, whatever is being denoted is necessarily considered unpleasant, offensive, or otherwise unmentionable.[22]

However, over time, through repetition and other reinforcing influences, the previously positive emotive force of a word used euphemistically may be eroded, or contaminated by what it denotes, so that it shifts towards the negative pole. Conventionalization may ultimately produce a true diachronic semantic change either in what is denoted (denotational meaning) or in a word's connotations (non-denotational aspects of meaning) or both. A lexeme may acquire such a consistently negative emotive value that it can be used to insult and express odium. Eventually it may itself become subject to linguistic taboo.[23] The stylistic device of euphemism through conventionalization can drive surprisingly rapid semantic change, easily within the human lifespan. The potential association of the two lexemes ערוה and ערום with human bodies, not just human persons, puts them at high risk of being subject to these pressures of pejoration.

This chapter exemplifies the challenges taboos and euphemisms present to those reading ancient texts. At a distance, it is not a simple matter to discern whether ערוה is being used literally, conveying a usual or predominant sense, or metaphorically, conveying a more occasional sense, perhaps within a stylistic device such as euphemism.[24] In addition, it is not at all clear what the

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[22] On euphemisms in the Hebrew Bible, see Andy Warren-Rothlin, "Euphemisms and Bible Translations," *EHLL* 1:866; Scott B. Noegel, "Euphemism in the Hebrew Bible," *EHLL* 1:869–71; Marvin H. Pope, "Euphemism and Dysphemism in the Bible," *ABD* 1:720–25; and Stefan Schorch, *Euphemismen in der Hebräischen Bibel* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000).

[23] See, e.g., Armin Burkhardt, "Euphemism and Truth," in *Tropical Truth(s): The Epistemology of Metaphor and Other Tropes*, ed. A. Burkhardt and B. Nerlich (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 355–72; Kate Burridge, "Taboo Words," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Word*, ed. J. R. Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 416–30.

[24] The technical terms *usuelle Bedeutung* and *okkasionelle Bedeutung* were first used by Hermann Paul, *Prinzipien der Sprachgeschichte* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1880).

predominant sense of the term was in any period. Uncertainty as to what ערוה denotes may prevail, even if it seems clear it is used as a euphemism, with a positive or neutral emotive value, to be polite, or as a "dysphemism" with a negative emotive value, with the intent to offend. The first section considers the isolated texts Exod 20:26; 28:42; Deut 23:15; 24:1; 1 Sam 20:30. The second focuses on the concentrated cluster of "nakedness" lexemes in Lev 18 and 20, together with Ezek 22:10.

2.1 Genitalia and other potential euphemisms

Because the Akkadian cognate *ūru* can denote female or male genitalia,[25] it would not be surprising to find the same true of ערוה in biblical Hebrew. In the texts in this section ערוה is personal, with negative connotations. The contexts have often led scholars to conclude ערוה is a euphemism for genitalia. It remains possible, however, that it conveys a sense of material lack, better glossed by "nakedness" (lacking clothes), "emptiness" (lacking contents), or "emptyhandedness" (lacking possessions), senses which are also found in Akkadian cognates. Alternatively, the standard translation "nakedness" may be most apposite if a simple sense of having no clothes on, or being partially undressed is predominant. The texts associating ערוה with women are considered first, then those associating it with men.

The lexeme ערוה makes a unique appearance in direct speech in an insult that King Saul hurls in anger at his son Jonathan, as he becomes aware of his allegiance to Saul's rival, David.

> "Son of a perverse one of rebelliousness (בן נעות המרדות)! Do you not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your disgrace and to the disgrace of the 'nakedness' of your mother? (לבשׁתך ולבשׁת ערות

[25] More commonly the former (Stephanie L. Budin, "Female Sexuality in Mesopotamia," in *Women in Antiquity: Real Women across the Ancient World*, ed. S. L. Budin and J. M. Turfa [Abingdon: Routledge, 2016], 13).

אמך)?[26] [(v.31)]For as long as the son of Jesse lives upon the earth, you and your kingship shall not be established. Now send and bring him to me, he is a son of death."[27]

1 Sam 20:30b–31[28]

There is no doubt about the overall pejorative intent of the insult. The feminine noun נעות "perverse one" (עוה *niphal*) in the opening expression does not refer to Jonathan's mother but to David, who has rebelled against Saul. We should read בן "son" in the sense of "member of a group." The whole initial name-calling expression accuses Jonathan of being a subordinate of David.[29] It expresses incredulity that he, the heir to the throne, should subordinate himself to his father's (and thus his own) political rival. The lexeme בשׁת, usually glossed "shame" but here translated "disgrace," indicates failure, the loss of status, and "subordinance shame."[30] Jonathan's "disgrace," which is much more than an emotion, is spelled out in stark, material terms. As long as David lives, he has no hope of a prosperous life ahead of him. His choice of David is a choice of death: either David's or his own.[31]

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[26] LXX εις αἰσχύνην ἀποκαλύψεως μητρός σου "to the shame of your mother's uncovering" (NETS). According to BAGD, 92, ἀποκαλύψις "uncovering, revealing" is only used figuratively in Second Temple literature.

[27] This final phrase, equivalent to "he shall surely die," expresses an accusation of a crime deserving a death sentence, or a summary guilty verdict (cf. 2 Sam 12:5); Pietro Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice: Legal Terms, Concepts and Procedures in the Hebrew Bible*, JSOTSup 105 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 357–58.

[28] All translations of biblical and other ancient texts are my own, unless indicated otherwise.

[29] P. Kyle McCarter, *I Samuel*, AB 8 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 343; David T. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 520; *pace* Jonathan Y. Rowe, *Sons or Lovers: An Interpretation of David and Jonathan's Friendship* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 119–21. On the ancient west Asian trope of feminising the enemy, see the next chapter.

[30] Thomas Kazen, "Viewing Oneself Through Others' Eyes: Shame between Biology and Culture in Biblical Texts," *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 84 (2019): 67.

[31] Cf. 1 Sam 20:14–17. The repetition of "son of Jesse" (vv. 30–31) emphasises the issue of a rival dynastic house. Most scholars agree that in ancient west Asia, dynastic change meant the extermination of the previous dynastic line. See Sophia R. C. Johnson, "Kingship and Covenant: Reconsidering the Oath of David and Jonathan," *JBL* 141 (2022): 646; also, Rowe, *Sons or Lovers*, 99.

Only the expression ערות אמך potentially refers to Jonathan's biological mother. The proposal that it is a euphemistic reference to his mother's genitals, intended to insult Jonathan further, as some commentators conclude, is unconvincing against the broader biblical picture.[32] The main thrust of the insult is concerned with dynastic succession and personal security. It fits the rhetorical context better to interpret the expression as referring to some material risk to Jonathan's mother in the future associated with his choice. A key may lie in the warning that he and his kingdom will not be established (כון *niphal*). This verb, which is commonly associated with "kingdom" and "throne,"[33] is also used to convey productivity and provision in terms of material goods.[34] Jonathan's being "established" probably refers to the appropriate economic independence of an adult son.[35] An heir was obliged to care for his mother on his father's death.[36] Not to be able to do so through death or poverty (as a permanent fugitive) would risk the material disgrace of the "nakedness" or, rather, "destitution" of one's mother, interpreting בשׁת and ערוה economically.[37] We shall return to evaluate this proposal at the end of this study.

The lexeme ערוה is also associated with a woman in a legal text in Deut 24:1–4 concerning divorce and remarriage. A man is prohibited from remarrying a woman he previously divorced but who, since then, has been married to

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[32] E.g., "Jonathan … has disgraced his mother's genitals, whence he came forth"; McCarter, *I Samuel*, 343; cf. Tsumura, *First Samuel*, 520.
[33] In ten and seventeen verses, respectively.
[34] E.g., Ps 65:10; 68:11; 78:20; 90:17; 102:29; 147:8; Job 27:16–17; 38:4; Prov 6:8; 24:3; 30:25; I Chr 22:3, 5, 14; 29:2–3, 16, 19; 2 Chr 2:6, 8; 17:5; 26:14.
[35] Shunya Bendor, *The Social Structure of Ancient Israel: The Institution of the Family (Beit' Ab): From the Settlement to the End of the Monarchy*, JBS 7 (Jerusalem: Simor, 1996), 123–24, suggests the three actions of building a house, planting a vineyard, and taking a wife symbolise a young adult's transition to establishing his own "House of the Father." Cf. Deut 20:5–9; 28:30; Isa 65:21–22; Amos 5:11; Zeph 1:13.
[36] See Jonas C. Greenfield, "Adi Baltu – Care for the Elderly and Its Rewards," in *28. Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale in Wien*, AfO 19 (Horn: Berger, 1982), 309–16; also, Ekaterina E. Kozlova, "Abraham's Burial (Genesis 25.9): An Idyllic Burial or a Dispute over Inheritance?" *JSOT* 42 (2017): 177–97 (191–195).
[37] David Lambert, "Honor I. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament," *EBR* 12:330–33, emphasises the material aspects of honour. He suggests that terms for "shame" may need reassessing. E.g., קלון (Prov 3:35) should be understood as "diminishment" and/or "exposure."

another. The first divorce is initiated when the woman no longer finds favour in her husband's eyes "because he found (מצא) in her the 'nakedness of a thing' (ערות דבר)"[38] (v. 1). The negative connotations of the expression are without doubt, but scholarship is uncertain about what it denotes.[39] Again, it is important to consider the context of the whole rhetorical unit. The motivation for the two divorces is described differently. In the second case, the husband "hates" (שׂנא) the woman and subsequently divorces her. Alternatively, this second man dies, leaving her a widow (v. 3). The equivalence of the woman's resulting state and the legal technical term שׂנא suggest that this second divorce is without justification and the husband would have to pay a heavy penalty.[40] The woman would retain her dowry and possibly receive some compensation. By contrast, the first divorce has valid legal grounds, which is indicated by the different initial justification. The first husband would retain the woman's dowry and she would leave his house empty-handed. The law prohibits the first husband from re-marrying the former wife (v. 4) and thereby profiting from, whilst hypocritically reversing, his earlier verdict that she was unfit to be his wife.[41]

The theme of property is the common thread running through the three scenarios of a woman divorced with just cause, divorced without cause, and widowed (Deut 24:1–4). There are numerous ancient west Asian legal texts which stipulate that a woman is to go from a house "naked" or without her

[38] LXX ἄσχημον πρᾶγμα "shameful thing" (NETS); cf. "something objectionable" (NRSV); "something obnoxious" (NJPS); "some indecency" (Raymond Westbrook, "The Prohibition on Restoration of Marriage in Deuteronomy 24:1–4," in *Studies in Bible, 1986*, ed. S. Japhet, ScrHier 31 [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1986], 388).

[39] See, e.g., Eve L. Feinstein, "When Is a Man Allowed to Divorce His Wife?" (2018), https://thetorah.com/article/when-is-a-man-allowed-to-divorce-his-wife; Westbrook, "The Prohibition," 398–99.

[40] On שׂנא, see Bruce Wells, "The Hated Wife in Deuteronomic Law," *VT* 60 (2010): 131–46; cf. Alejandro F. Botta, "Hated by the Gods and Your Spouse: Legal Use of שׂנא in Elephantine and Its Ancient Near Eastern Context," in *Law and Religion in the Eastern Mediterranean: From Antiquity to Early Islam*, ed. A. C. Hagedorn and R. G. Kratz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 105–28.

[41] This interpretation follows Westbrook, "The Prohibition."

clothes in connection with a legal change in relationship. Traditionally interpreted as a symbolic humiliation by the public exposure of the former wife's bare body, the sentence of leaving the house "naked" may not have involved a radical removal of clothing to the point of immodesty, nor been simply symbolic. It was probably a performative declaration, economically motivated, which referred to the legal and material relinquishing of all property claims and possessions. This would include the woman's most valuable outer garments which had to be left behind,[42] even if she had woven them herself.[43] It seems to me that the situation in Deut 24:1 is analogous to these accounts. The expression ערות דבר is not itself a euphemism for misconduct, of a sexual or any other nature.[44] Instead, it refers to the sentence or *consequences of* misconduct that constitutes legal grounds for divorce and should be translated "a matter demanding/of empty-handedness"[45] or "an empty-handedness/destitution matter."[46] The context-dependent expression is a metonym for "the legal grounds for divorce."[47] The sentence of ערוה stands for the verdict, which is that the husband has "found

[42] John Huehnergard, "Biblical Notes on Some New Akkadian Texts from Emar (Syria)," *CBQ* 47 (1985): 428–34, suggests an economic motive in addition to an undoubted "element of humiliation" (432). Closer to my interpretation, see Peggy Day, "Adulterous Jerusalem's Imagined Demise: Death of a Metaphor in Ezekiel XVI," *VT* 50 (2000): 285–309. She suggests nakedness might "correspond to as well as symbolize the fact that such a woman would forfeit the goods she brought into the marriage" (299). Cf. discussion of these and similar texts concerning the economics of marriage and divorce in Brad E. Kelle, *Hosea 2: Metaphor and Rhetoric in Historical Perspective*, SBLAB 20 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 61–79.

[43] Cf. Deut 21:13, in which a captive woman must remove her old clothes before marrying her captor. Textile production was largely women's work. See Marie-Louise Nosch, Henriette Koefoed, and Eva Andersson Strand, eds., *Textile Production and Consumption in the Ancient Near East: Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Iconography*, Ancient Textiles Series 12 (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2013); and further references in Scott B. Noegel, "Evil Looms: Delilah-Weaver of Wicked Wiles," *CBQ* 79 (2017): 187–204.

[44] Westbrook, "The Prohibition," 388, suggests "the type of misconduct referred to in Codex Hammurabi 141-142 and m. Ketub 7:6"; cf. Kelle, *Hosea 2*, 72.

[45] A "reversed construct state" is unusual but not unknown in biblical Hebrew. (See comment by Feinstein, "When Is a Man Allowed to Divorce His Wife?", n. 5.) It seems to me that legal jargon, like a euphemistic expression, might be precisely where an unusual form might appear.

[46] On three main juridical senses of the noun דבר, see Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 212–13. Here a sense of finality indicates it refers to a decision, sentence, or verdict.

[47] Cf. Kelle, *Hosea 2*, 72.

(מצא)[48] in her" evidence of misconduct warranting divorce. Therefore, in neither of the two texts associated with women, 1 Sam 20:30 and Deut 24:1, does ערוה denote genitalia or the exposure of the human body. Both refer to an economic lack.

The same expression ערות דבר appears in a completely different, male-dominated, context just ten verses earlier. A short pericope in Deut 23 addresses the purity of the Israelite war camp (vv. 10–15), which is to be guarded against "any evil thing" (כל דבר רע, v. 10). The explanation given is that YHWH is in the midst of the camp, so it is "holy" (קדוש). Measures are to be taken lest YHWH "sees in you 'the nakedness of a thing' (יראה בך ערות דבר)[49] and turns away from you" (v. 15). Within this textual frame, two representative examples illustrate the principle in action. Procedures are outlined for when a soldier experiences a nocturnal emission (vv. 11–12) and for designating a place outside the camp for defecation (vv. 13–14). The expression ערות דבר (v. 15) obviously denotes something offensive. It may refer to the second example only.[50] However, the structure of the pericope suggests that the expression refers to both types of bodily emission. It is therefore possible that ערוה which derives from the verb ערה, carries the sense of "emptying, pouring out"[51] rather than the exposure of a body part, as "nakedness" implies. A general sense of being unclothed can be ruled out, due to the very specific examples given, as can a narrower sense of revealed genitals. Inadvertent genital exposure would presumably necessitate additional prohibitions, such as regulations concerning clothing adjustments.[52] A possible translation, then, is "an emptying matter." It is euphemistic by means of circumlocution, referring only vaguely to what it

[48] For examples of מצא as indicating juridical certainty, see Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 248–49.
[49] LXX ἀσχημοσύνη πράγματος "a disgrace of a matter" (NETS).
[50] A less ambiguous euphemistic reference to relieving oneself is found in 1 Sam 24:4, when King Saul, on campaign, enters a cave to "cover his feet"; McCarter, *I Samuel*, 383.
[51] See Gen 24:20.
[52] See below.

denotes. Although the details of the expression remain vague, the justification that YHWH might witness this behaviour suggests that the idea of sacred space is a crucial factor here. This implies a religious, rather than social, taboo.[53] If the concept of sacred space seems out of place in Deuteronomy, we can observe that Deut 23:10–15 is often allocated to a late, postexilic, redaction.[54]

A religious taboo also underlies a directive prohibiting priests from ascending steps to an altar to perform their sacrificial duties, so that "your 'nakedness' (ערוה) is not exposed (גלה *niphal*) on it" (Exod 20:26).[55] Most commentators propose ערוה is a euphemism for male genitals,[56] while the verb גלה retains its usual concrete sense of "to uncover, expose, reveal." The similar senses of the related verb ערה "to bare" and גלה are an indicator of the circumlocution typical of euphemistic employment. Curiously, the text offers no solution, such as the building of a ramp or wearing of protective undergarments. One of three verses which address concerns with various altar designs (vv. 24–26), the writer appears to be making a polemical statement against the cultic use of stepped altars. It is likely that this postexilic text is a response to an altar in

[53] Anselm C. Hagedorn, *Between Moses and Plato: Individual and Society in Deuteronomy and Ancient Greek Law*, FRLANT 204 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 173, points out that, although Deut 23:10–15 is often included with other additional war laws in Deuteronomy, it is more concerned with matters of purity; see, similarly, 1QM 7:6–7, noted by Jessi Orpana, "Clothing and Nudity in Second Temple Literature," in C. Berner et al., *Clothing and Nudity,* 347.

[54] Eckart Otto, "The History of the Legal-Religious Hermeneutics of the Book of Deuteronomy from the Assyrian to the Hellenistic Period," in *Law and Religion in the Eastern Mediterranean: From Antiquity to Early Islam*, ed. A. C. Hagedorn and R. G. Kratz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 236; Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 162, 165.

[55] LXX ὅπως ἂν μὴ ἀποκαλύψῃς τὴν ἀσχημοσύνμν σου ἐπ᾽αὐτου "so that you do not reveal your shame upon it" (NETS).

[56] E.g., Shalom M. Paul, "The Shared Legacy of Sexual Metaphors and Euphemisms in Mesopotamian and Biblical Literature," in *Sex and gender in the ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 47. Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Helsinki, July 2–6, 2001, II*, ed. by S. Parpola and R. M. Whiting (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2002), 489–498; Schorch, *Euphemismen*, 183–84.

use in the Second Temple period and reflects the position of an oppositional group.[57]

This contrasts with the more constructive approach in two verses which constitute a late addition to the description of the priestly garments for Aaron and his sons in Exod 28.[58] Verses 42–43 give instructions for linen undergarments to be made לכסות בשׂר ערוה "to cover 'flesh' of 'nakedness'" (v. 42).[59] They are to be worn within the sanctuary complex, lest the priests bring guilt on themselves and die (v. 43). Christoph Berner's explanation that the unique and overdetermined compound expression בשׂר ערוה "genitals of nakedness" is the result of a conflation of different source texts is convincing. One source is Lev 16:4. Inserted into a description of Aaron's vestments for the rites of atonement we read that undergarments are to be worn על בשׂרו "over his male member." One of the clues that this too is a late addition to its context is the contrast with the employment of בשׂר as "skin, flesh" in the rest of the chapter.[60] The other source text is Exod 20:26, from which the lexeme ערוה is imported. In its canonical position, Exod 28:42–43 thus provides a solution to the unsolved dilemma concerning stepped altars in 20:26 and, in a statement to the effect, indicates that the requirement of linen undergarments is to be an ordinance for all time, foreshadowing Lev 6:3; 16:4. There is strong literary evidence from redaction criticism that priestly undergarments were a late postexilic innovation. The purported reason for

[57] Christoph Berner, "'Mind the Step!' (Exod 20:26), or, Even Better: 'Wear Breeches!' (Exod 28:42–43). The Issue of (Un-)Covering One's 'Shame' in Cultic Legislation," in C. Berner et al., *Clothing and Nudity*, 421–23. If the text is polemical, the overdetermined turn of phrase may be pejorative and not euphemistic. See discussion of the same lexemes in Lev 18, 20 below.
[58] Nathan MacDonald, "The Priestly Vestments," in C. Berner et al., *Clothing and Nudity*, 437; Berner, "'Mind the Step,'" 423–25.
[59] LXX καλύψαι ἀσχημοσύνην χρωτὸς αὐτῶν "to hide the shame of their flesh" (NETS).
[60] This in turn seems to have been inserted into Lev 6:3*; Berner, "'Mind the Step,'" 427–28. Cf. Exod 39:28; Ezek 44:18.

them, to prevent inadvertent exposure of genitals in a cultic context, may reflect an early historical contact with Greek culture.[61]

This section has considered several isolated texts that employ the lexeme ערוה to refer to negatively evaluated conditions or behaviours in gendered contexts. Two late texts, Exod 20:26; 28:42, use the lexeme in different formulations to denote male genitalia. They reflect priestly concerns around inadvertent exposure in a sacred space and show signs of intertextuality, the latter depending to some extent on the former. The expression ערות דבר in Deut 23:15 also reflects concerns about what is acceptable in sacred space but probably refers to male bodily emissions rather than male genitalia. The same expression is found in Deut 24:1 in connection with a wife divorced on legal grounds. A new interpretation proposes that the expression should be translated "an empty-handedness matter." It reflects the manner in which she is to be divorced, leaving her husband's house without any property of her own. Similarly, an unusual incidence of ערוה within historical narrative (1 Sam 20:30) is probably not referring to a mother's genitals, as generally assumed, but to her economic privation. In none of these texts does ערוה refer simply to being unclothed. The variability across biblical texts suggests that ערוה did not have a usual sense of the baring of a physical body across the whole biblical period. The earlier texts, which happen to associate the lexeme with females, probably refer to economic lack. The texts in which bodily "nakedness" may be denoted are late and associate the lexeme in various ways with the uncovering or "emptying" of male bodies in sacred space. The following section builds on these observations of polysemy by examining the largest concentrated cluster of "nakedness" lexemes, found within the Holiness Code of Leviticus.

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[61] Berner, "'Mind the Step,'" 428–31. For late Second Temple texts concerning nakedness, see, e.g., Jub 3:30–31; 7:20; 2 Macc 4:10–17; and the Qumran community regulations concerning walking naked without duress (1QS 7:12b and parallels) and exposure of genitals (1QS 7:13b–14a and parallels); also, the commentary on the latter by Charlotte Hempel, *The Community Rules from Qumran*, TSAJ 183 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 211–213; Orpana, "Second Temple Literature."

2.2 Illicit sexual relations amongst kin

Almost two-thirds of the occurrences of ערוה are found in Lev 18 and 20 in the context of sexual intercourse, to which can be added Ezek 22:10.[62] Lev 18:6–23 contains a series of prohibitions largely concerned with illicit sexual activity, addressed in the second person to a male addressee.[63] Similar content, expressed in the third person, is found in Lev 20:9–21.[64] According to the frame around these series, the behaviours are practices of foreign nations,[65] a stereotypical insult that probably has no basis but emphasises abhorrence and cultural separation. The metaphor of the land vomiting[66] elicits a visceral, physical disgust, amplifying the evocation of moral disgust.[67] The strongly negative evaluation of the behaviours listed is beyond doubt. The the whole community of Israel[68] is to observe these laws so that they might be "holy."[69]

The core of both series are incest laws, summed up in the generic opening verse of the series in Lev 18.

איש איש אל כל שאר בשרו לא תקרבו לגלות ערוה

אני יהוה

[62] 32 out of 54 occurrences are found in Lev 18:6–19; 20:11, 17–21.
[63] The one exception is Lev 18:21, "giving" offspring to Molech.
[64] The one exception is Lev 20:9, not "cursing" (קלל *piel*) one's parents.
[65] Lev 18:3, 24–25, 27–28; 20:23.
[66] Lev 18:24–28; 20:22–24. See, e.g., Brent A. Strawn, "On Vomiting: Leviticus, Jonah, Ea(a)Rth," *CBQ* 74 (2012): 445–64; Rebekah Welton, *'He Is a Glutton and a Drunkard': Deviant Consumption in the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 211–23; Phillip M. Bollinger, "The 'Earth' and Consumption in the Hebrew Bible: Land That Swallows, Eats, and Vomits" (Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, PhD diss., 2020).
[67] On disgust and the concept of pollution, see Eve L. Feinstein, *Sexual Pollution in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 11–41; also, Thomas Staubli, "Disgusting Deeds and Disgusting Gods. Ethnic and Ethical Constructions of Disgust in the Hebrew Bible," *HeBAI* 6 (2017): 457–87; Thomas Staubli, "Feces: The Primary Disgust Elicitor in the Hebrew Bible and in the Ancient Near East," in *Sounding Sensory Profiles in the Ancient Near East*, ed. A. Schellenberg and T. Krüger, ANEM 25 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2019), 119–43.
[68] Lev 18:2; 19:2; 20:2.
[69] The distinction between licit and illicit behaviours is made with lexemes cognate with טמא "to be impure, unclean" (Lev 18:20, 23–24, 27–28, 30; 20:3, 25) and קדש "to be holy" (19:2; 20:7–8, 26).

> No one shall approach any close relative[70] to "uncover nakedness";
> I am YHWH
>
> Lev 18:6

The prohibitions of kin-based sexual relations in Lev 18:6–18, which extend from the addressee's parents to his granddaughter, are ordered according to the degree of kinship. Kinship is here equally defined by filiation (consanguinity) and affinity (marriage alliance), an equivalence explicitly stated in Gen 2:24.[71] The sexual transgressions in Lev 20:10–21 correspond with severe sanctions by which they are ordered.[72] Kin-based sexual relations are addressed in vv. 11–12, 14, 17, 19–21. Certain sexual relationships with close kin are described as זמה "depravity" (18:17; 20:14).[73]

The prohibited sexual relations between kin are presented as religiously motivated sexual taboos. Our prime interest, however, is not the details of the particular relationships which are forbidden and their underlying logic, but the language employed, which is distinctive, vague, and indeterminate.[74] The lexeme ערוה is found in Leviticus only within these two chapters, where it is used in three ways: as part of the technical expression גלה ערוה *piel*; standing alone in a construct noun phrase; and alongside other members of the ערה

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[70] Literally, "flesh of his flesh"; cf. Lev 25:49.

[71] See Christophe Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch. A Study in the Composition of the Book of Leviticus*, FAT II 25 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 432–36. He points to the argument for this postulate made by Susan Rattray, "Marriage Rules, Kinship Terms and Family Structure in the Bible," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1987 Seminar Papers*, ed. K. Richards, SBLSP 26 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 537–44. Notably, it is sexual relations with the mother that heads both kinship lists (Lev 18:7; 20:11; cf. stepmother in 18:8). It also may stand paradigmatically for "incest" in Ezek 22:10; also, Deut 23:1; 27:20.

[72] Nihan, *From Priestly Torah*, 430–31, 447, 450. He argues that Lev 20 was conceived from the beginning as a complement to Lev 18 (453).

[73] Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, trans. R. E. Clements, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 345, notes that the term is associated with sexual offences in Lev 18:17; 19:29; 20:14; Jer 13:27; Job 31:11; and Ezek 16, 22–24 (where fourteen of 29 occurrences are found). It acts as a heading for violations of sexual taboos in Ezek 22:9c–11 (458).

[74] For detailed engagement with the topic, see, e.g., Deborah W. Rooke, "The Bare Facts: Gender and Nakedness in Leviticus 18," in *A Question of Sex? Gender and Difference in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond*, HBM 14 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2007), 20–38; Feinstein, *Sexual Pollution*, 100–131; Johanna Stiebert, *First-Degree Incest and the Hebrew Bible: Sex in the Family* (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 45–87.

family. It is difficult to determine whether the terms are used literally or metaphorically, euphemistically or pejoratively. Nevertheless, some cautious observations can be made about each of these usage patterns.

First, there is universal agreement amongst scholars that the combination X–ערות גלה *piel* in these chapters is a technical expression to refer to sexual intercourse,[75] as the parallel use of other terms for sexual activity suggest.[76] Lev 20 uses one of the more common terms for sexual intercourse in parallel with this idiom on its first appearance in the chapter, apparently to eliminate any doubt about its referent.[77] This suggests that the expression was not in common use amongst the text's imagined audience when Lev 20 was written.[78]

ואיש אשר ישכב את אשת אביו
ערות אביו גלה

> A man who lies with his father's wife
> has uncovered the nakedness of his father.
>
> Lev 20:11a

Despite the consensus that the behaviour referred to is sexual intercourse, attempting to translate the idiomatic expression X–ערות גלה *piel* strictly as "to have sexual intercourse with" or "to copulate with" is not possible in every case.[79] Several verses, including Lev 20:11a, would produce statements

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[75] This is not necessarily so elsewhere. Note the same expression with a different sense, of inadvertent self-exposure, in Exod 20:26, discussed above; cf. Isa 47:3; Ezek 16, 23 where the subjects are personified cities, discussed below. The expression does not occur in Gen 9:21–24 but its components are present separately.

[76] As discussed by Stiebert, *First-Degree Incest*, 51–55.

[77] Indeed, on every appearance in Lev 20, the expression is used in parallel with a more familiar term for sexual intercourse (vv. 11, 17, 20–21). Some verses refer to kin-based sexual relations without using either the idiomatic expression or the lexeme ערוה (vv. 12, 14).

[78] Nihan, *From Priestly Torah*, 442. He views this as confirmatory evidence that Lev 18 depended on an earlier document, which was as a consequence not amenable to explanatory comments, unlike chapter 20. He notes also that the list was probably a late creation from priestly circles.

[79] Contra, e.g., Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, AB 3A (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 1534.

prohibiting sexual intercourse with certain males, which is probably not the intended sense in these cases.[80]

Second, the expression is only applied to sexual relations *within the close kinship group*. In both chapters, in addition to incest, it is used in a prohibition against intercourse with a menstruating woman or wife (18:19; 20:19) but is not used for any other illicit sexual behaviour, including with a neighbour's wife (18:20; 20:10). The technical expression refers to behaviour that is obviously evaluated negatively in almost every case.[81] It seems highly likely that, in the context of Lev 18, 20 and Ezek 22:10, the expression was understood to have inherently negative connotations and was employed as a "dysphemism," rather than a polite euphemism. Its negative valence predominates, obscuring and potentially over-riding what is denoted.

A final observation is that the expression is overdetermined, since ערוה is cognate with ערה "to lay bare, uncover, expose" and גלה *piel*[82] also has the usual sense of "to uncover, expose, reveal."[83] The expression could almost be glossed "to expose exposure" or "to bare bareness." Overdetermination has the effect of simultaneously narrowing the semantic clues available for interpreting the technical expression whilst intensifying its semantic specificity. In this context, the intensification of its negative moral valance makes it even more likely that it was used pejoratively to express opprobrium and moral disgust.

We turn next to observations about when the lexeme ערוה stands alone. It is strongly emphasised in Lev 18, placed as the first locution in eleven

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[80] See, also, Lev 18:7, 14; 20:20, 21.
[81] Possible exceptions are Lev 18:18, 19; 20:18.
[82] In Leviticus, this verb is confined to this expression and these two chapters.
[83] The same verb is found in Deut 23:1; 27:20, where a similar idiomatic expression, "to uncover (גלה *piel)* the 'wing/hem' of his father" (כנף אביו), appears in parallel with and follows a prohibition of sexual intercourse with one's father's wife. The conjunction כי in 27:20 may indicate that this expression is a motive clause, explaining the consequences of sexual intercourse with the father's wife for the father.

consecutive verses and appearing 24 times in the fourteen verses vv. 6–19. It thus plays a prominent role in the series and in the heavily stylised chiastic structure of many of the verses.[84] The numerous repetitions of X/Y–ערות in the vicinity of X–ערות גלה *piel,* often within motive clauses, have the effect of weakening the adhesion between the technical expression's components and therefore any idiomaticity. For example,

ערות אשׁת אביך
לא תגלה
ערות אביך הוא

> The nakedness of the wife of your father
> do not uncover;
> it is the nakedness of your father.

Lev 18:8

This weakening accounts for the difficulty discerning whether the lexeme and expression are being employed as technical terms or should be read "literally." The most common hypothesis is that ערוה denotes genitals within the expression and alone.[85] While this interpretation works for Exod 20:26, it produces incongruity in Lev 18, 20, seeming to suggest that the ערוה of the wife (her genitals) is the ערוה of her husband (his genitals).[86] One solution proposes the existence of an underlying conceptualisation that "sexual partners share the same 'nakedness,' having been joined at the genitals."[87] Despite the "one flesh" of Gen 2:24, there seems to be insufficient biblical support for this "anatomical metaphor."[88] There are also difficulties with the alternative suggestion that the underlying logic is of the woman being the sexual property of her partner (or father).[89] In this framework, the incest

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[84] See Jörn Halbe, "Die Reihe der Inzestverbote Lev 18:7–18," *ZAW* 92 (1980): 60–88.
[85] E.g., Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1534; Feinstein, *Sexual Pollution*, 110.
[86] See the cases when the woman's husband is *ego*'s father (Lev 18:7, 8; 20:11), brother (18:16; 20:21), and uncle (20:20).
[87] Feinstein, *Sexual Pollution*, 111.
[88] Stiebert, *First-Degree Incest*, 54.
[89] See Feinstein, *Sexual Pollution*, 111–13; also, Jon L. Berquist, *Controlling Corporeality: The Body and the Household in Ancient Israel* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 85–89; Sandra Jacobs, "'The Disposable Wife' as Property in the Hebrew Bible," in *Gender*

prohibited in Lev 18, 20 is conceptualised as inappropriate encroachment on the property of close male relatives. But this argument runs aground with Lev 18:10, where the motive for the prohibition of sexual relations with granddaughters is that theirs is "your nakedness."

The rhetoric of the incest laws in Lev 18 has two main functions: to define the behaviours as "defiling" (טמא) and to identify the close kin with whom sexual relations are forbidden. The motive clauses that name the relative (e.g., "she is your mother" v. 7) and refer to kinship (e.g., "she is your father's kin" v. 12) support the second aim. Perhaps the motive clauses expressed as statements such as "it is the nakedness (ערוה) of your father" (vv. 8, 16) are harnessed towards the first aim by referring to the catastrophic negative consequences of "uncovering the nakedness" of the women *for the named man*. The personal threat of ערוה for the men may correspond to the threat of being "cut off" from the people (v. 29) and the threat of the land "vomiting" out its inhabitants (vv. 25, 28). This line of interpretation points to the possibility that ערוה in these motive clauses is associated with a loss of religio-social or economic capital.

The proposal that the ambiguous expression הוא X–ערות "it is X's nakedness" is a vague reference to the consequences of the illicit sexual behaviour is supported by its absence from Lev 20. It is not required there as a motive clause to emphasise the consequences of incest since the appropriate sanctions are given in detail. However, an echo of the incessant repetition of ערוה in chapter 18 is created in chapter 20 by the inclusion of relatively rare expressions employing ערוה and cognate terms, each occurring only in verses that also contain the technical expression X–ערות גלה *piel*.[90] This reverberating

and Methodology in the Ancient Near East: Approaches from Assyriology and Beyond, ed. S. L. Budin et al., BMO 10 (Barcelona: Edicions Universitat Barcelona, 2018), 337–55.

[90] Namely, ראה את ערוה "to see 'nakedness'" (Lev 20:17, 2x); ערה *hiphil* "to lay bare" (vv. 18, 19); and ערירי "childless" (vv. 20, 21). According to the talionic principle, the site of divine punishment of sexual transgression should be the reproductive organs, as noted by Milgrom,

effect points to the negative connotations of ערוה also adhering to the rest of the ערה family. The expression ראה את ערוה "to see 'nakedness'" (Lev 20:17 2x) seems to be the only text that uses ערוה to refer to "genitalia," here both male and female, which compares with the usage seen in Exod 20:26; 28:42.[91] I maintain that this is the strongest candidate for an employment of ערוה as a body part in Lev 18, 20, but with such strong negative associations, I am cautious about referring to it as a "euphemism."

To sum up, only one verse in Lev 18, 20, namely Lev 20:17, possibly employs ערוה to denote a part of the physical body, as a reference to sexual organs. Elsewhere, when ערוה appears in construct, it is attached to a male personal figure and may indicate a social or economic lack. It does not refer to a lack of clothes. The expression ערוה גלה is used to refer to illicit sexual intercourse with close kin. It was probably not a widely used idiom and was intended to express odium. Most distinctively, these texts contain a striking rhetorical exploitation of the negative emotive value that adhered, by the time of writing, to ערוה. The stylistic devices employed magnify these pejorative connotations, as in an echo chamber, to produce a powerfully alienating litany of abhorrent behaviours to be avoided.

2.3 Chapter summary

In the texts in this chapter, ערוה has been used to refer to a lack of property (Deut 24:1) or provision (1 Sam 20:30), bodily emissions (Deut 23:14–15), genitalia (Exod 20:26; 28:42; Lev 20:17), and illicit kin-based sexual relations (Lev 18, 20; Ezek 22:10). In no cases does "nakedness" refer to a lack of clothing specifically or general bodily exposure. Note, though, that where MT

Leviticus 17–22, 1757. Notably, עריריי "childless" is attributed to men in Gen 15:2; and Jer 22:30, and never to women alone. Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 553, n. 153, suggests the sense "stripped of honour" and the interpretation "without succession," giving further references.

[91] I am cautious because ראה has strong associations with becoming aware of a crime or misdeed. (See Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 70–71.) If that sense predominates here, then it supports the idea of ערוה as a religio-social or economic wrong, not a body part.

consistently has ערוה, the LXX has ἀποκαλύψις “uncovering” (1 Sam 20:30),[92] ἄσχήμον “shameful, indecent” (Deut 24:1), ἀσχημοσύνη “shame = private parts” (Exod 20:26; 28:42; Deut 23:15; Lev 18, 20), and αἰσχύνη “shame, disgrace” (Ezek 22:10).[93] Perhaps we can trace here an arc of semantic change. Perhaps ערוה was originally borrowed from an adjacent semantic domain, of material or economic lack, in order to act as a dysphemism with a negative emotive value to denote some specific aspect or condition of the human body subject to taboo, such as genitalia and bodily emissions in sacred space. It seems to be in late texts that the lexeme and the verbs seeing (ראה), covering (בסה), and exposing (גלה), become associated with the physical body, rather than simply the person. Later still, on translation into Greek, the term is often replaced with lexemes associated with shame. ערוה may have completed a journey from borrowed term applied to human bodies to irreparably tainted taboo word by the end of the biblical period. In the process, its economic dimension may have been first obscured and later forgotten.

The discussion of texts in this first category has demonstrated the possibility of semantic change and the importance of the emotive value of lexemes. This suggests that in the following chapters, the interpretation of texts requires great sensitivity to context and the emotive value of the language used. The cluster of texts in this chapter had physical human bodies in the background to which the lexeme ערוה is connected. This is not necessarily so for texts in the context of war, despite first appearances.

[92] The cognate verb ἀποκαλύπτω translates גלה in Exod 20:26; the relevant verses in Lev 18, 20; and Ezek 22:10.
[93] Apart from the first, glosses taken from BAGD.

3 The language of nakedness in wartime

After Lev 18, 20 and Ezek 22:10, the second most significant group of occurrences of ערוה are texts, mostly from the Prophets, which employ the lexeme with respect to a female subject in a context of war and destruction (Isa 47:3; Ezek 16:8, 36–37; 23:10, 18, 29; Hos 2:11; Lam 1:8; cf. Nah 3:5).[94] This treatment builds on current interpretations which understand the subject as a personified city or country. With the assistance of comparative material, I argue for the term having a strongly, if not predominantly, economic dimension. The second, very brief section focuses on another wartime prophetic text (Amos 2:16) which includes an attestation of the second key lexeme associated with "nakedness," the descriptor ערום. The rhetorical context suggests that it indicates a loss of possessions that are worn or carried, but not a complete lack of clothing.

3.1 Cities

The expressions "to uncover ערוה" and "to see ערוה" are found in a collection of notorious, mostly prophetic, texts. The most well-known are the elaborate discourses addressed by YHWH to a female personified Jerusalem in Ezek 16 and 23, which have high concentrations of lexemes from the ערה family.

> I will uncover (גלה *piel*) your "nakedness" (ערוה) to them,
> and they will see (ראה) all your "nakedness" (ערוה)
>
> Ezek 16:37b (also, vv. 36–37a)

> They shall treat you with hate,
> and they shall take away all you have toiled for,
> and leave you "naked and bare" (עירם ועריה);[95]

[94] See, also, the more obscure occurrences in Gen 42:9, 12; Isa 20:4, noted and discussed in later sections.

[95] The double description, unique to Ezekiel (and here translated as NRSV), intensifies the connotations of the language of "nakedness." It is found in two slightly different forms (ערם ועריה 16:7, 22; עירם ועריה 16:39; 23:29). For discussion, see the later section "Lack and loss." The lexeme עריה is probably an Aramaic equivalent to ערם, as found in Ahiqar, C1.1.166

> the "nakedness" (ערוה) of your whoredom, your wantonness, and your harlotry will be exposed (גלה *niphal*).
>
> Ezek 23:29 (also, vv. 10, 18)

In Nahum, similar language is addressed to Babylon.

> I will let the nations look (ראה *hiphil*) on your "nakedness" (מער)
> And kingdoms on your "shame" (קלון).
>
> Nah 3:5b[96]

The historical background of these texts is warfare. The effects of experiencing and witnessing the brutal killing, assault, rape, and other atrocities against men, women, and children must have been horrendous.[97] The military attacks on walled cities and their violent destruction shattered kingdoms, local economies, and worldviews. Yet, in their attempt to make theological sense of these events through the personification of cities, these "texts of terror," to use Phyllis Trible's classic term,[98] appear to indicate that public violation and indecent exposure were viable options for controlling women's bodies and sexuality. The language is coarse, the actions abusive, and the shared understanding, that the victims deserve such treatment,

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(*TADAE* 3:46). In *TADAE* Porten and Yardeni translate the Aramaic lexeme with Hebrew ערם and "naked" (3:47). For the translation "cold," see "Ahiqar," trans. James M. Lindenberger (*OTP* 2, 502).

[96] Also: "Your 'nakedness' (ערוה) shall be uncovered, also your 'reproach' (חרפה) shall be seen" (Isa 47:3); "I shall uncover her 'shamelessness' (נבלות) in the sight of her lovers" (Hos 2:12); "All who honoured (כבד *piel)* her despise her, for they have seen her 'nakedness' (ערוה)" (Lam 1:8). The Hebrew lexeme ערוה in these texts is translated variously in LXX by ἀσχημοσύνη (Ezek 16:8; Lam 1:8); αἰσχύνη (Isa 47:3; Ezek 16:36, 37; 23:10, 18, 29; Nah 3:5); κακία (Ezek 16:37).

[97] See, inter alia, Pamela Gordon and Harold C. Washington, "Rape as a Military Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible," in *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets*, ed. A. Brenner, FCB 8 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 308–25; Paul A. Kruger, "Women and War Brutalities in the Minor Prophets: The Case of Rape," *OTE* 27 (2014): 147–76; cf. Peggy L. Day, "'Until I Come and Take You Away to a Land like Your Own'. A Gendered Look at Siege Warfare and Mass Deportation," in Adams and Turfa, *Women in Antiquity*, 521–32. The lenses of trauma theory and disaster studies are increasingly being brought to bear on these disturbing texts, as the influence of contextual trauma on their composition is acknowledged more widely.

[98] Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives, 40th Anniversary Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2022).

whether at human or divine hands, ethically horrifying.[99] Since the 1990s, feminist scholars have turned their attention to these texts, determined to challenge the silent acceptance or quiet ignoring that previously prevailed, thanks to the historically patriarchal scholarly guild. Engagement continues, often focused on the so-called "marriage metaphor"[100] and the metaphorization of cities.[101]

3.1.1 The rhetorical function of the texts

However, here I would like to explore the function of the language of "nakedness." The previous chapter suggested that the negative connotations of ערוה and its related vocabulary in Lev 18, 20 (and Ezek 22:10) was significant for the message being communicated. The pejorative intent of this language in these prophetic texts is possibly even more obvious. The initial step towards discerning the rhetorical function of the texts is to recognise that their prime subject is the *city*. The language draws on conventions and

[99] It is important to acknowledge their disturbing nature for contemporary readers and historically, a concern which has been addressed in extensive scholarship. See, e.g., the contributions in the section "On the Pornoprophetics of Sexual Violence" in Athalya Brenner, ed., *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets*, FCB 8 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 244–365; and, more recently, Athalya Brenner-Idan, "Pornoprohetics Revisited, Decades Later," in *Prophecy and Gender in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. L. J. Claassens and I. Fischer, Bible and Women 1.2 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2021), 359–71; and Rhiannon Graybill, *Texts After Terror: Rape, Sexual Violence, and the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).
[100] See, e.g., Sharon Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors in Hosea, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel*, OTM (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); and Marta Garcia Fernández, "The Marriage Metaphor in the Prophets: Some Gender Issues," in Claassens and Fischer, *Prophecy and Gender*, 277–92.
[101] See, e.g., Karolien Vermeulen, *Conceptualizing Biblical Cities: A Stylistic Study* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), especially ch. 3 "The personified city" (37–92), and ch. 5 "Bodyscapes" (121-141); and Christl M. Maier, "Daughter Zion and Babylon, the Whore: The Female Personification of Cities and Countries in the Prophets," in Claassens and Fischer, *Prophecy and Gender,* 255–76.

metaphors for describing city destruction.[102] The military realities of siege warfare are readily discernible in the wider textual context.[103]

> v.40They shall bring up a mob against you,
> and they shall stone you and cut you to pieces with their swords.
> **v.41**They shall burn your houses and execute judgments on you
> in the sight of many women.
>
> Ezek 16:40–41a

The personification of cities as female in biblical texts occurs *exclusively* in contexts of city destruction, either recent or imminently threatened,[104] and *primarily* for "capital" cities, seats of dynastic political power.[105] Texts that go as far as depicting women engaged in fornication and adultery and therefore deserving of punishment[106] seem to elaborate on a metaphor that corresponds to cities and rulers who have engaged in inappropriate international political and economic behaviour, including making and breaking alliances, for which they deserve to be punished.[107] Brad Kelle suggests:

> Certainly the violation of women as a metaphor fits the destruction of capital cities, for the stripping, penetration, exposure, and humiliation

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[102] Kelle, *Hosea 2*, 91–94; Brad E. Kelle, "Wartime Rhetoric: Prophetic Metaphorization of Cities as Female," in *Writing and Reading War: Rhetoric, Gender, and Ethics in Biblical and Modern Contexts*, ed. B. E. Kelle and F. R. Ames (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 99–102.

[103] E.g., Ezek 16:39–41; 23:23–26; Jer 6:1–30. On siege warfare, see Paul B. Kern, *Ancient Siege Warfare* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 9–85; Israel Eph'al, *The City Besieged: Siege and Its Manifestations in the Ancient Near East*, CHANE 36 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 35–113.

[104] Kelle, *Hosea 2*, 91; Kelle, "Wartime Rhetoric," 99–102.

[105] Kelle, "Wartime Rhetoric," 103–4. This is reflected in the primary texts which concern Jerusalem (Ezek 16, 23; Jer 13:22–27; Lam 1:7–10), Samaria (Hos 2; Ezek 23), Babylon (Isa 47:1–5), and Nineveh (Nah 3:1–7); also, Tyre (Ezek 26:7–21) and Damascus (Jer 49:23–27).

[106] Kelle, "Wartime Rhetoric," 102; Kelle, *Hosea 2*, 62–63; Day, "Adulterous Jerusalem."

[107] Kelle, *Hosea 2*, 94–109. For the metaphorical employment of זנה in Ezekiel, see Peggy L. Day, "A Prostitute Unlike Women: Whoring as Metaphoric Vehicle for Foreign Alliances," in *Israel's Prophets and Israel's Past*, ed. B. E. Kelle and M. B. Moore (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 167–73. Words sharing this root appear some two dozen times in Ezek 16 and 23. Compare the collocation of "prostitute" and references to sexual activity in the treaty of Assur-nerari V with Mati-ilu king of Arpad (SAA 02 002 v 8).

> of the women is analogous to siege warfare, with its breaching of the wall, entrance through the gate, and so forth.[108]

However, just because correspondences between the domains of sexual violation and military assault on a walled city can be identified, does not mean that they were necessarily exploited analogically by the texts' composers. Various rhetorical strategies may have been employed in parallel.

Stepping back from the metaphor, the conventionalised, vituperative language of these texts points to them constituting ideological critique. If the women represent cities, the cities must, in turn, stand for some social entity in the frame. Kelle suggests there is an emerging consensus that "these texts engage in the rhetorical act of feminizing at least a portion of their male audience."[109] Support for this view comes from the "gendered language of warfare" used in ancient west Asian texts which describe weak and defeated enemies as women, whether warriors, rulers, cities, or countries.[110] Ezek 16:41, cited above, is just such an example: the ruling class and their soldiers, as metaphorical and stereotypically "weak" women, will witness but not be able to prevent, Jerusalem's destruction. In ancient texts, hyperbolic language emphasises the significant, desirable qualities of hegemonic masculinity by contrasting them with an exaggerated opposite: a vulnerable, defenceless, sometimes sexually violated, female. The performance of hegemonic

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[108] Kelle, "Wartime Rhetoric," 104. On "entering" (בוא), see Pope, "Euphemism and Dysphemism." See, also, Deut 20:10–20 and the discussion of its sexual-military language in Harold C. Washington, "Violence and the Construction of Gender in the Hebrew Bible: A New Historicist Approach," *BibInt* 5 (1997): 346–47. For an Assyrian "catalogue" of methods for capturing cities, see Eph'al, *The City Besieged*, 20–23; and for besieged cities opening gates, 43–52. On architectural openings as female sexual metaphors, see Cynthia R. Chapman, *The Gendered Language of Warfare in the Israelite-Assyrian Encounter* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 108–10, 152, 162; also, Paul, "Shared Legacy." Note the significance of the entrances to the Jerusalem temple in the visions of Ezek 8, 40–47, as indicated by the high frequency of פתח "opening," also possibly a euphemism for "vulva" (e.g., Isa 3:26; Hos 2:15; Mic 7:5; cf. Gen 4:7; Job 31:9–10; Prov 5:8–9; Song 7:13).

[109] Kelle, "Wartime Rhetoric," 104.

[110] See Chapman, *Gendered Language*; Claudia D. Bergmann, "'We Have Seen the Enemy, and He Is Only a 'She'": The Portrayal of Warriors as Women," in Kelle and Ames, *Writing and Reading War*, 129–43; Uroš Matić, *Violence and Gender in Ancient Egypt* (London: Routledge, 2021), 113–36.

masculinity is characterised by strength, sexual virility, and military prowess. In both the arenas of sex and siege warfare the actions of the ideal male as the penetrating dominant party performatively create the asymmetry of power that distinguishes them from the penetrated or "pierced" submissive party.[111]

However, metaphors "bleed," transferring elements from vehicle (or source) to target and back again. Also, unavoidable intertextual processes operating between the world of the text and the internal mental world of the reader can blur their boundaries.[112] Our reading of the "gendered language of warfare" as feminisation may have as much to do with our own cultural context as the ancient one. Within an androcentric, patriarchal worldview, feminine imagery is a ready rhetorical vehicle. But masculinities are relative, so perhaps it is more accurate to read the imagery as mobilised towards the more fundamental goal of *demotion, downgrading,* or *diminishment* to a subordinate masculinity.[113] These prophetic passages engage in the rhetorical diminishment of the powerful ruling elites that ruled the city-states. Strategies of feminisation may play a part but not the dominant role.

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[111] Note how the fatally injured King Saul fears being pierced with a sword by the Philistines (1 Sam 31:4, cf. Judg 9:53–54; 1 Chr 10); also, the visual and phonological similarity between נקבה "female" and the verb נקב "to pierce," as observed by Athalya Brenner, *The Intercourse of Knowledge: On Gendering Desire and "Sexuality" in the Hebrew Bible*, BibInt 26 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 11–12. On masculinity, see, e.g., Ovidiu Creangă, "Variations on the Theme of Masculinity: Joshua's Gender In/Stability in the Conquest Narrative (Josh 1–12)," in *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond*, ed. O. Creangă, Bible in the Modern World 33 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2010), 83–109; Susan E. Haddox, "(E)Masculinity in Hosea's Political Rhetoric," in Kelle and Moore, *Israel's Prophets*, 174–200; Martti Nissinen, "Relative Masculinities in the Hebrew Bible," in Zsolnay, *Being a Man*, 221–43.

[112] Text World Theory is a helpful model for understanding discourse as a dynamic cognitive process; see Joanna Gavins, *Text World Theory: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

[113] On the concept of subordinate masculinities, see Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity, 2005); and R. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender & Society* 19 (2005): 829–59; also, Stephen M. Wilson, "Biblical Masculinity Studies and Multiple Masculinities Theory: Past, Present, and Future," in *Hebrew Masculinities Anew*, ed. O. Creangă, HBM 79 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2019), 19–40.

3.1.2 "Nakedness" in the city-as-woman imagery

The language of "uncovering" and "seeing" "nakedness" in these texts is, I suggest, put in service of the rhetorical aim of status diminishment, but not necessarily feminisation. The following discussion also raises questions about the extent of the imagery of the city-as-woman. Starting with the source domain of the city-as-woman, scholars of comparative literature have not found any supporting evidence of sexual violence against women as real-life punishments for adultery. Instead, a variety of ancient west Asian texts use the language of "stripping," removing clothes, and being "naked" on leaving a house or husband to indicate the forfeiting of property and entitlements entailed by a legal change in status, typically, the marital relationship, as discussed above.[114] This legal background would fit with the observation that the vocabulary appears conventionalised but the expressions are, in most cases, too varied to be idiomatic.

Turning next to the target domain of the city-as-woman imagery, the question becomes what the language might correspond to in the context of city destruction, whether literarily or materially.[115] Turning again to comparative literature, I propose that the vocabulary of "nakedness," bareness, and "shame," uncovering and exposing, refers to the ceasing of the cult and city life and the material realia of the plundering and destruction of temple and

[114] See Day, "Adulterous Jerusalem"; and Kelle, *Hosea 2*, 62–64. Kelle (63) notes references to men as subject to an act of stripping on a change of status; in an Ugaritic text, where the subject is the son/heir of a royal divorcing mother (R. Yaron, "A Royal Divorce at Ugarit," *Or* 32 [1963]: 21–31 here, 23); and in a Hittite law, to indicate the legal ejection of a son by his mother (Paul A. Kruger, "The Marriage Metaphor in Hosea 2:4–17 against Its Ancient Near Eastern Background," *OTE* 5 [1992]: 7–25, here 13).

[115] For biblical descriptions, see Ezek 16:39; 26:7–21; Nah 2:10; Lam 1:8–10; cf. 2 Kgs 25:1–21. See, e.g., Jacob L. Wright, "The Deportation of Jerusalem's Wealth and the Demise of Native Sovereignty in the Book of Kings," in *Interpreting Exile: Displacement and Deportation in Biblical and Modern Contexts*, ed. B. E. Kelle, F. R. Ames, and J. L. Wright, SBLAIL 10 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2011), 105–33; Julie Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel: The City as Yahweh's Wife*, SBLDS 130 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1992), 114, suggests that the inspection of Jerusalem's treasures by Babylonian envoys (2 Kgs 20:12–19//Isa 39:1–8), which the texts' editors blamed for their later looting, might lie behind Ezekiel's motif of "gazing" on "nakedness."

city. "Seeing," with the objects of "nakedness" and "shame," has the legal sense of "witnessing."[116]

This proposal is supported by Mesopotamian texts on city and temple destruction through warfare. In a literary text, Nineveh (that is, Assyria) is accused of destroying Babylon and removing treasures from the inner sanctuary of Esagila, the temple of Marduk, normally only seen by certain priests.

> [The proper]ty of the Esagila and Babylon you exposed and you sent [to Nineveh][117]

When Babylonians are accused by Assyrians of selling their own temple treasures to Elam, it is spoken of in terms that also suggest a "religious infraction" of holy space.[118] For example:

> They put their hands on the possessions of Esagil, the palace of the god, an inaccessible place (*ašar la ari*)[119]

In second and third millennium Sumerian city laments, the violation of the innermost sanctuary of a temple through destruction is consistently described in terms of exposure to *sight*.

> The people could see the bedchamber, its room which knows no daylight. The Akkadians could look into the holy treasure chest of the gods.[120]

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[116] Yael Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture: Sensory Perception in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), 232.
[117] BM 55467, obvs 4; Pamela Gerardi, "Declaring War in Mesopotamia," *AfO* 33 (1986): 30–38 (36–37).
[118] Israel Eph'al, "Stages and Aims in the Royal Historiography of Esarhaddon," *ORIENT* 49 (2014): 51–68 (54). He cites Esarhaddon 104 i 28–33; 105 i 31–37; 111 i 6'–10'; 114 i 14–19.
[119] Esarhaddon 104 i 28–30 (http://oracc.org/rinap/Q003333/).
[120] The Curse of Akkad, 129–130; as cited by Gerardi, "Declaring War in Mesopotamia," 37; translation from https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/section2/tr215.htm. On the city lament tradition, which associates goddesses with cities but does not personify cities as women's bodies, see F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep O Daughter of Zion: A Study of the City Lament Genre in the Hebrew Bible*, New edition. (Roma: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1999); Although no manuscripts are known from beyond the Old Babylonian period, it has recently been argued that the city lament tradition may have survived into the first millennium; Selena Wisnom, *Weapons of Words: Intertextual Competition in Babylonian Poetry: A Study of Anzû, Enūma Eliš and Erra and Išum*, CHANE 108 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 216–44.

Lam 1:10 suggests the ancient Israelites had a similar conceptualisation of an exclusive, sacrosanct space at the heart of the temple in Jerusalem.

> The enemy has spread his hand over all her precious things (מחמדים);
> she has even seen the nations enter her sanctuary,
> those whom you forbade to enter your assembly.
>
> Lam 1:10

The correspondences observed support the proposal that the "nakedness" and "laying bare" of the biblical texts have concrete referents in the wartime treatment of the temple and city and the aftermath of its despoiling.[121] Temple access violations, the removal of treasures, and destruction are portrayed in several of the Mesopotamian city laments. The result, as the Sumerian lament addressed to the female goddess of the city Urim declares, is that "Your house has been laid bare."[122] Similarly, in Lamentations, a personified Jerusalem recalls "all the precious things (מחמדים) that were hers in days of old" before her downfall (Lam 1:7a), before the text continues,

> All who enriched (כבד *piel*)[123] her regard her as worthless (זלל *hiphil*),[124]
> For they have seen (ראה) her "nakedness" (ערוה).
>
> Lam 1:8b[125]

3.1.3 Conclusion

Refining my earlier proposal, I suggest that the "nakedness" and "shame"[126] of the cities in the notorious prophetic texts, to which Lam 1:7–10 should be added, may not refer primarily to female body parts. Their predominant

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[121] The neo-Babylonian text cited above similarly juxtaposes, or conflates, temple and city.
[122] *Lament for Urim*, 346; translation from https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/section2/tr222.htm. This is expressed with a lexeme that can be translated "emptiness."
[123] Lambert, "Honor I."
[124] The translation follows *DCH*. The rare verb occurs also in Jer 15:19; Lam 1:11; cf. Ps 12:9.
[125] Cf. Ezek 16:39; 23:29.
[126] On the need for the reconsideration of Hebrew terms for "shame," which may suggest the diminishment of a "material self," see Lambert, "Honor I," 333.

reference, it seems to me, is to the loss of treasures, economic destitution, and the literal "emptiness" of temple, palace, and city after paying tribute and bribes for protection and after being plundered by the enemy. The verb גלה *piel* with the sense "to uncover, expose, reveal, make known" and ראה "to see, witness" are both employed with ערוה to the same ultimate purpose. They meld the cultic violations of intrusion into the temple and seeing what should not be seen, which is taboo, with the witnessing of the political catastrophe of the removal of the economic wealth of the city, so that temple and palace are laid "bare." This interpretation reasserts the primacy of the target of the metaphor, the city, for the understanding of "uncovering" and "seeing" "nakedness," challenging the current consensus that tends to attach it preferentially to the metaphorical layer of a human body.[127] A corollary of this interpretation is the tentative proposal that a significant rhetorical aim of these texts is to describe and reinforce the diminishment of the cities' rulers in *economic* terms and to associate them with the violation of deeply held religious taboos. Furthermore, the "nakedness" of the destroyed city indicates a change of economic and social status as well as a material loss of property and goods for city and city rulers, as the comparative literature from the social context of divorce and disinheritance suggests.

3.2 Soldiers

Amos 2 contains a brief poetic description of the effect of YHWH's day of judgement on Israel, presented in terms of the devastating reversals that troops might experience in defeat on the battlefield (vv. 14–16). In the final colon the bravest warriors are said to "flee naked," using the descriptor ערום.

[127] Space precludes a discussion of whether this constitutes a challenge to the perception of a literary trope of sexual violence against cities in these texts, which, in any case, should be undertaken from a variety of perspectives, including those with lived experience. The last thing I want to do is dispute the existence of violence against women. To quote Catherine Keller, "to claim that because the text does not intend misogyny it is innocent of its metaphoric subtext is to sweep women's ashes under the carpet" (*Facing Apocalypse: Climate, Democracy and Other Last Chances* [Boston: Beacon, 1996], 77). The reception history of these texts also needs to be held to account.

One who is strong of heart among the warriors,
Naked (ערום) shall flee on that day.

Amos 2:16

I contend that this refers to the loss or abandonment of martial equipment and not necessarily to a loss of all clothing. By using "naked," as the majority do, English translations are misleading.[128]

Cynthia Chapman suggests that nakedness in the context of war may be a visual metaphor for feminization of the enemy on the basis of the language and iconography of warfare in ancient west Asia.[129] My study of neo-Assyrian iconography found nakedness most strongly correlated with death, but this symbolism is by no means consistent. Assyrian soldiers can be depicted naked swimming across a river while a dead enemy soldier floats in water fully clothed.[130] In ancient west Asian texts feminisation and the employment of "nakedness" language are two distinguishable rhetorical strategies that are not intrinsically correlated. They may share, however, the rhetorical aim of *diminishment to a lesser masculinity*, thereby establishing and consolidating the status of the rightfully victorious superior over the deservedly defeated, weak subordinate.[131] Notably, there is no human enemy in the wider context of Amos 2:6–16. Instead, the loss of the expected powers and accoutrements of champion warriors in vv. 14–16 is caused by YHWH as divine judge (v. 2a).

In the immediate context of v. 16b, it is the verbal form ינוס "he flees" that plays the primary role in meaning construction, as it inverts the "standing

[128] Notable exceptions are GNT, LB, NJPS, NLT, NCV.
[129] Chapman, *Gendered Language*, 160–61.
[130] E.g., in Paul Collins, *Assyrian Palace Sculptures* (London: British Museum, 2008), see unclothed Assyrian soldiers swimming across the Euphrates (42–3, ME124541; 44–5, ME124543); an enemy falling from battlements, skirt round waist, "exposed and therefore vulnerable" (50–1, ME124554); an enemy falling clothed from battlements to join another lying "stripped naked in death" (64–5, ME115634); clothed dead enemy floating in a river (102–3, ME124802a). The commentary suggests that assumptions about the symbolism of nakedness inconsistently influence interpretation.
[131] See the discussion in the previous section.

firm" expected of the אמיץ לבו בגבורים in battle.[132] The lexeme ערום contributes to the sense of defeat this creates by referring to the *manner* in which even the bravest of champions will run away.

In the material world as opposed to the literary one, fleeing a battlefield having removed all or most of one's clothes oneself, or having had them removed by others, is unrealistic.[133] Very probable, however, is the intentional dropping of weapons and armour to flee "empty-handed" and unencumbered. This is precisely the picture described in 2 Kgs 7:15, when fleeing Arameans leave the road strewn with "garments and weapons" (בגדים וכלים). In Neh 4:17, the battle-readiness of the men rebuilding Jerusalem's walls is demonstrated by them not removing (פשׁט) clothing (בגדים) and keeping their javelin in their hand. The weak points of a soldier's attire, suggesting what might be lost accidentally, are indicated in the pen-sketch in Isa 5:27, which portrays awe-inspiring Assyrian soldiers for whom "not a belt on their hips is loose, not a sandal-thong broken." It seems certain that ערום in Amos 2:16 is employed to indicate the intentional throwing away of heavy weaponry, armour, and cloaks, and the potential accidental loss of belts and sandals.[134] As such it has connotations that point to the translation "empty-handed," or more loosely, "unarmed," in preference to "naked."

3.3 Chapter summary

Both ערוה and ערום in the context of warfare, whether used for cities or soldiers, have pejorative connotations. Comparative literature suggests that the vocabulary of "uncovering" and "seeing" "nakedness" (ערוה)[135] found in Lamentations, Ezekiel, and other prophetic texts belongs primarily to the

[132] Comparison with the other verbs in Amos 2:14–15 suggests that "strength of heart" indicates a firmness of stance. See Ps 27:14; 31:25; cf. Deut 2:30; 15:7.
[133] On the other hand, fallen soldiers, injured or dead, might be stripped for booty, e.g., 1 Sam 31:8, 10.
[134] The account of Saul dressing David in his own armour and sword suggests these were emblematic of elite warriors (1 Sam 17:38–39, 18:4).
[135] Also, מער: Nah 3:5; מעור: Hab 2:15.

economic domain. With respect to a city and its rulers, it refers to the economic loss to a kingdom consequent on tribute, taxes, plundering, and pillaging. It may also, secondarily, refer to the cultic violations of the viewing and removing of cultic items and the exposure of empty sancta to the skies through the physical destruction of roofs. For human beings, there is textual evidence that losing possession of clothes and a state described as ערוה were associated with divorce with cause and other legal terminations of familial relationship in which the subject leaves without property or inheritance. This may be the prime source domain of the metaphorical language of "nakedness" for personified cities.

A single text in Amos which describes warriors fleeing "naked" (ערום) on defeat refers to the abandonment and loss of certain crucial items carried or worn by elite troops, such as weaponry and armour, alongside clothing items. This interpretation suggests that bodily exposure is unlikely to be the primary attribute that ערום denotes. The next chapter continues the examination of texts in which "naked" vocabulary is attributed to a single human person. There is also some thematic overlap with this chapter, as a king is often understood as the ultimate warrior. Wartime is also the setting of the texts dealing with the two prophets.

4 The language of nakedness around kings and prophets

Several accounts connect "nakedness" with prominent figures from Israel's history, which is surprising given the association with loss which is emerging. Apart from Adam and Eve and the drunken Noah from the primeval history, there are five key accounts with "naked" protagonists featuring kings Saul (1 Sam 10:1–16; 19:18–24), David (2 Sam 6; 1 Chr 15), and Artaxerxes (Ezra 4:14), and the prophets Micah (Mic 1:8), and Isaiah (Isa 20). Notably, each scenario involves the "nakedness" of men.[136] The "nakedness" of the kings, explicit or implicit, is consistently discomfiting and negatively evaluated. Similarly, Isaiah the prophet going "naked" is a "sign and wonder" (Isa 20:3). My interpretation proposes that the "nakedness" of Artaxerxes (ערוה) and the "uncovering" of David (with the verb גלה) are both references to impoverishment. Saul's falling "naked" (ערום) is consistent with the interpretation of Amos 2:16. It indicates the temporary loss of possessions due to immediate events and is highly symbolic. Turning to the prophets, Micah and Isaiah going "naked" indicates a state of mourning, not captivity. In addition, Isa 20 also employs the vocabulary of "nakedness" to portray city destruction and defeat, in line with the city texts examined in the previous chapter.

4.1 Kings

4.1.1 The king of Persia

Two of the three accounts of kings strongly associate the language or concept of "nakedness" and "uncovering" with economic factors. Tucked away in the Aramaic portion of the book of Ezra, the "nakedness" of the Persian king is

[136] Eve's nakedness is not distinguished from Adam's in Gen 2:25–3:24 either.

often hidden behind the translation, as the following two examples demonstrate.[137]

> It is not fitting for us to witness (למחזא) the king's dishonour (ערות מלכא).
>
> Ezra 4:14b (NRSV)
>
> The shame of the king (ערות מלכא) is not appropriate for us to look upon (למחזא).
>
> Ezra 4:14b[138]

The sentence appears in a Judean text purportedly reporting a letter from the "adversaries" of Judah (v. 1), Samarian officials (vv. 6–11, 17), to King Artaxerxes in Persia. The letter warns the king of potentially reduced royal revenue from Jerusalem if it were rebuilt, due to its rebellious reputation (vv. 1–22). The tone of the letter is obsequious.[139] Harm to the king's royal interests[140] is expressed in financial terms (v. 13).[141] All the literary clues suggest that the "king's nakedness" refers to a primarily economic or financial matter.

A cognate Hebrew term is used in a comparable context of tax collection in another, probably later, postexilic text. 2 Chr 24:11 describes the emptying (ערה *piel*) of a money chest in the Jerusalem temple by the king's officers. This supports my contention that the "nakedness of the king" in Ezra 4:14 has

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[137] *CAL*, s.v. "*ʿrwh, ʿrwt* ," gives the gloss "nudeness" and suggests it is used figuratively in Ezra 4:14. Despite this statement, it gives the translation "nudity," without scare quotes. This is in line with the tradition of English translations of Hebrew ערוה. The following discussion assumes that there is currently no evidence of a substantive difference between the semantics of Aramaic *ʿrwh* and Hebrew ערוה.

[138] John A. Cook, *Aramaic Ezra and Daniel: A Handbook on the Aramaic Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), 34.

[139] Lexemes for "king" and "kingship" appear seven times in Ezra 4:12–16. On "the salt of the palace" as indicating loyalty, see Cook, *Aramaic Ezra and Daniel*, 46; cf. Jason M. Silverman, "The Taxes of God and King? Taxation in Persian Period Judaean Materials," in *Taxation in the Achaemenid Empire*, ed. K. Kleber, Classica et Orientalia 26 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2021), 370–71.

[140] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezra–Nehemiah: A Commentary*, OTL (London: SCM, 1988), 109.

[141] The terms are Akkadian loanwords that reflect the Persian tax system; Silverman, "The Taxes," 356–58.

specifically financial connotations and refers to the "bareness" or "emptiness" of the king's treasury. A preferred translation might be "the impoverishment of the king." This example extends the scope of possible referents for "uncovering" and "seeing" the "nakedness" (ערוה) of capital cities to the specific, concrete scenario of an empty treasure-house.

The translations "dishonour"[142] and "shame,"[143] as in the two English translations of Ezra 4:14b cited above, reflect the Greek ἀσχημοσύνην βασιλέως of the LXX. This is an early euphemistic replacement, indicating the negative connotations that the LXX translators perceived to adhere to the Aramaic ערות מלכא in their cultural context.[144] Elsewhere in the MT, Hebrew words translated "dishonour" and "shame" appear alongside or instead of ערוה "nakedness."[145] There is, however, no evidence that ערוה was ever employed as a euphemism in Hebrew or Aramaic biblical texts where a lexeme for "shame" might be anticipated. A translation of "disgrace" or "shame" is therefore not appropriate here. Translators need to be cautious wherever euphemisms and other metaphors may be involved. It is very easy to unintentionally obscure with anachronistic, euphemistic translations.

It is also easy to read into a passage an occasional sense that was not adopted until some years later or was not employed across all the Aramaic and Hebrew-speaking and -writing communities. A financial sense of ערות מלכא is certainly uppermost in Ezra 4. There is no doubt that a lack of funds would have been deeply dishonouring for a ruler and the negative emotive value of the expression is without doubt. However, since this is a postexilic text, it is possible that "seeing" ערוה had, at the time of its composition, gained further

[142] E.g., NRSV, NJPS.
[143] E.g., Cook, *Aramaic Ezra and Daniel*, 34; also, NASB.
[144] This fits with the pattern already discussed above, whereby the LXX often translates the MT's ערוה with a Greek lexeme for "shame." Cf. "The principal things of life are water, bread, clothing, and a house to cover one's shame (ἀσχημοσύνην)" (Sir 29:21). No Hebrew version is currently extant, but it seems likely that ערוה was employed in the Hebrew original.
[145] See, e.g., the variations on "seeing nakedness" with lexemes for "shame" in Isa 47:3; Jer 13:26–27; Hos 2:12; Nah 3:5.

pejorative connotations of the inappropriate uncovering of physical bodies.[146] In the context of a fictional letter actually composed by Judean religio-political rivals, a *double entendre*, intended to poke fun at the Samarian letter-writers or the Persian king or both, might be rather likely.

4.1.2 King Saul

The relevant narratives of Saul and David each have two versions. Curiously, the kings' "nakedness" (explicit for the former, implicit for the latter) comes and goes in each account, suggesting that it might be a sensitive subject for later redactors.

Two alternative accounts of Saul prophesying purportedly give an aetiology for the saying "Is Saul also among the prophets?" (1 Sam 10:11, 12; 19:24). The saying is odd, given the relative unimportance of prophesying within the overall narrative of Saul's life and career. In the simpler account (10:10–12) Samuel anoints Saul for kingship. Saul then sets out on a journey and meets a procession of musicians and prophets. Seized by the spirit of God, he prophesies (v. 10). This simple account contrasts sharply with the tone and hyperbole of the second version (19:18–24), which is set within an attempt to capture his rival, David. Saul sends three groups of envoys to complete the mission, but each in turn meet a band of prophets and begin to prophesy, abandoning their mission. Eventually going himself, Saul also encounters the prophets, but continues on to where David is sheltering with Samuel. Once there,

> He also took off (פשט) his clothes (בגדים) and he also prophesied before Samuel and he fell down naked (ויפל ערם) all that day and all night.
>
> 1 Sam 19:24ab

[146] Cf. Exod 20:26; 28:42; Lev 18, 20; see discussion above.

In the larger frame of his demise, Saul's disrobing, even if he only removed an outer garment[147] and belt, may symbolise the progressive divestment of his kingship and his own responsibility for it.[148] "Falling" (נפל) also becomes a literary marker of his ignominious end.[149] The removal of clothing items proves he too is abandoning his mission. He is no longer battle-ready nor, more seriously, is he attired as the chief warrior should be.[150] This second aetiology of the odd saying about Saul, set within a frame of rivalry with David, is probably later and functions rhetorically to indicate Saul's unsuitability as a military leader. Its language is harnessed in the service of a bi-directional negative critique: of Saul and his kingship and of the charismatic ecstasy displayed by the prophetic group, in which Samuel, notably, does not participate. The latter may indicate a current cultic concern for 1 Samuel's redactors.[151]

4.1.3 King David

The lexical "uncovering" (גלה) of David seems to have just as strongly pejorative connotations for ancient tradents as that of Saul, but not for the same reasons. Intriguingly, the accounts of David's "uncovering" also occur in the context of cultic practice, in narratives describing the return of the ark to Jerusalem in 2 Sam 6 and 1 Chr 15. No lexeme associated with the ערה family is found in either text. Yet it is my suspicion that the theme of the "king's 'nakedness'" is central to the earlier version, where it is to be understood with a double sense, as a (potential) economic destitution and as immodest undress risking genital exposure in a cultic setting.

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[147] As S. R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Books of Samuel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1890), 160.
[148] Ora Horn Prouser, "Suited to the Throne: The Symbolic Use of Clothing in the David and Saul Narratives," *JSOT* 71 (1996): 27–37, (29).
[149] Subsequently Saul "falls" full-length at Samuel's words, with "no strength in him" (1 Sam 28:20) and kills himself by "falling" on his sword (1 Sam 31:4).
[150] Cf. Amos 2:16, discussed above; also, 1 Sam 17:38–39; 18:4.
[151] Christophe Nihan, "Saul among the Prophets (1 Sam 10:10–12 and 19:18–24): The Reworking of Saul's Figure in the Context of the Debate on 'Charismatic Prophecy' in the Persian Era," in *Saul in Story and Tradition*, ed. C. S. Ehrlich and M. C. White, FAT 47 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 88–118, especially 103–6.

In 2 Sam 6, in a second attempt at the ark's return, David takes a leading role, sacrificing every few steps (v. 13). He dances vigorously before the ark in a linen ephod, but his wife Michal looks on, despising him (vv. 14, 16). Festivities over, she accuses him sarcastically of "honouring himself" (כבד *niphal*) as he has "uncovered himself" (גלה, *niphal*, 2x) "before the eyes of his servants' maids" (v. 20). The current consensus is that Michal's comment reflects the standard moral evaluation of David's bodily exposure, by dancing whilst scantily clad, as immodest and particularly inappropriate for a king.[152] David justifies his celebrating (שחק *piel*) before YHWH on the basis of his election as ruler in place of Michal's father Saul and declares his readiness to diminish himself even further (2 Sam 6:21–22). The narrative concludes with a divine talionic (measure-for-measure) punishment for Michal, who dies childless (v. 23).[153]

Yet there is something odd about the apparently positive appraisal of David's implicit self-exposure which sits uncomfortably with the wider textual witness, even if Exod 20:26; 28:42, which directly address cultic self-exposure, are late texts. The Chroniclers were sufficiently disconcerted by the implications of immodesty to describe David's dress ambiguously (as a fine robe *and* an ephod; 1 Chr 15:27) and to omit the dialogue with Michal found in 2 Sam 6:20–23.

The oddness may hint at a layer of meaning that has been overlooked. A key to interpretation may be found in the triple occurrence of גלה *niphal* in v. 20,

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[152] E.g., David T. Tsumura, *The Second Book of Samuel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 120. On bodily exposure as immodest, as in Gen 2:25–3:7, see Turner-Smith, "Naked but Not Ashamed"; Kazen, "Viewing Oneself Through Others' Eyes: Shame between Biology and Culture in Biblical Texts," 67.

[153] There are numerous treatments of this text. See, inter alia, Ian D. Wilson, "The Emperor and His Clothing: David Robed and Unrobed before the Ark and Michal," in *Dress and Clothing in the Hebrew Bible: "For All Her Household Are Clothed in Crimson,"* ed. A. Finitsis, LHBOTS 679 (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 109–24; Sarah Schulz, "The Dancing David: Nudity and Cult in 2 Sam 6," in C. Berner et al., *Clothing and Nudity,* 461–75.

including a polysemic paronomastic infinitive (כהגלות נגלות). This hints at the possibility of two senses of the "uncovering" or "exposure" which Michal accuses David of: economic ruination and the immodest exposure of a physical human body. The former is supported by the interpretation of the primarily economic "nakedness," or destitution, of the king in Ezra 4:14, and, more generally, the argument that the "uncovering" of capital cities (with גלה) involves a loss, or removal, of economic resources.

Reading the account through an economic lens, there is a sharp contrast between the extravagance of David's second, successful, attempt to bring the ark to Jerusalem and the relative simplicity of the first, failed, attempt. On the second occasion, it is the recognition of YHWH's material blessing (ברך *piel)* of the household of Oded-Edom the Gittite (vv. 11–12) that inspires David, spurring him on to make the procession a lavish occasion. I contend that the critical factor lies in David's liberality, evident in the sacrifices (vv. 13, 17–18) and the blessing (ברך *piel*) of the people with gifts of food (vv. 18–19; cf. Ps 132:15). Such royal extravagance, which risks emptying the king's coffers, might indeed raise a queen's ire.[154] Michal sarcastically likens his liberality to that of a destitute man who spends all his money. A second layer of meaning may, at the same time, hint at immodest bodily exposure, but it is impossible to be sure about this and such a reading may be the outcome of later connotations of the language and cultural attitudes.

> "How the king of Israel honoured himself (כבד *niphal*) today! You uncovered yourself (גלה *niphal*) today before the eyes of (לעיני) your servants' handmaids[155] like one of the empty/worthless ones (הרקים)[156] might totally expose themselves (גלה *niphal*)!"

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[154] On the importance of a king's wealth and the associated suggestion that the כבוד of the king refers to possessions, see, briefly, Marc Zvi Brettler, *God Is King: Understanding an Israelite Metaphor* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1989), 55–56.
[155] Cf. "I will uncover (גלה *piel*) her 'shame' (נבלות) in the sight of (לעיני) her lovers" (Hos 2:12). Perhaps "your servants" is an ambiguous reference to David's political and military allies and followers, which included Obed-Edom (Tsumura, *Second Samuel*, 116), and the "handmaids" is a pejorative feminising reference to his allies' soldiers; cf. 1 Sam 20:30; Ezek 16:41.
[156] Cf. Neh 5:13.

Michal's implicit accusation that David would impoverish himself is punished by her own humiliation in the non-opening of her womb, a form of "poverty." David, however, maintains that while his liberal generosity might temporarily "diminish" him (קלל *niphal*), he will ultimately be "honoured" (כבד *niphal*) amongst the populace and his allies' men (v. 22), that is, his wealth will increase.[157] As the monarchic period receded, the economic dimension of the text may have become a casualty of the inevitable forces of semantic drift. Also, genital exposure in a cultic setting became taboo. Additionally, as encounter with the Greek world drove attitudes to bodily nakedness to become a cultural marker, hints of the bodily nakedness of the ideal king David were too much for the Chronicler.

Summarising these three cameos, the cases of Artaxerxes and David extend the interpretations of the "nakedness" of capital cities as fundamentally economic. Kings should not be "uncovered" (גלה) nor their "nakedness" (ערוה) "seen" or "witnessed" (ראה) because the success of kings, like cities, is closely associated with their wealth. For soldiers and military leaders, like Saul, being ערום has pejorative connotations of being inadequately equipped for fighting. Qualifying "fleeing" (Amos 2:16) and "falling" (1 Sam 19:24), the rhetorical harnessing of "naked" vocabulary presses home the inversion of the expected status quo for champion warriors and military leaders by their abandonment of weapons and military gear. As a loss of personal possessions, this mirrors the status-lowering economic dimension of the substantive ערוה and the verb גלה with respect to capital cities and kings Artaxerxes and David.

[157] See Lambert, "Honor I," on "honour" as the "expanse of the material self." The verb כבד *niphal* may have a sense here of "to abound" or "to enrich oneself."

4.2 Prophets

Unlike the kings, the nakedness of the two named prophets is puzzlingly public and purportedly prolonged.[158] Isaiah and Micah are both said to "walk naked" with חלך "to go, walk" and ערום (Isa 20:2–4; Mic 1:8). This section considers the form of deficiency this language indicates, concluding that it can be placed on a continuum with the specific circumstances of the elite soldier who "flees naked" and King Saul who "falls naked." In the latter cases it describes the loss of primarily military equipment associated with role and status that constituted a practical encumbrance. In the case of Micah and Isaiah, the descriptor indicates a removal of outer garments which are similarly associated with role and status, but in order to perform mourning. Isaiah 20 contains a concentrated cluster of lexemes associated with "nakedness," including both ערום and ערוה, which necessitate careful disentangling with the assistance of comparative materials. This process enables us to identify the juxtaposition of language of city destruction and personal, embodied, mourning.

The broad background context of Isa 20 and Mic 1 is again warfare and, specifically, the threat of attack by the Neo-Assyrian army.[159] Both are surprisingly difficult texts. Even when treated as univocal, scholars disagree on the function, symbolism, and connotations of "going naked" and on the degree of nakedness implied. The main interpretations are that "going naked" is a sign of defeat;[160] that it symbolises the state of captives taken into

[158] Isaiah is said to go "naked and barefoot" "for three years" (Isa 20:3). Scholars debate the positioning of the phrase "for three years" and the pragmatics of the behaviour. See, with further references, J. J. M. Roberts, *First Isaiah*, Hermeneia (Fortress, 2015), 268–271.
[159] This is not to make any claims about when the texts reached their "final form"; see, e.g., Julia M. O'Brien, *Micah*, Wisdom Commentary 37 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), xlii–lv.
[160] E.g., James L. Mays, *Micah: A Commentary*, OTL (London: SCM, 1976), 54.

exile;[161] or that it describes dressing appropriately for petitionary mourning.[162]

4.2.1 Micah

Setting Isa 20 aside for the moment, the immediate literary context of Mic 1:8 is self-evidently one of mourning.

> For this I will lament (ספד) and wail (ילל *hiphil*);
> I will go (אילכה) undressed (שׁילל)[163] and naked (וערום);
> I will make lamentation like the jackals,
> And mourning like the ostriches.
>
> Mic 1:8

There is a high concentration of mourning-related language in the wider context, especially in vv. 9, 16, supporting the conclusion that it is a form of lament. This verse is orientated Janus-fashion in two directions: backwards towards the past destruction of Samaria described in the preceding verses (vv. 6–7) and forwards towards the threat facing Jerusalem and other towns described in those following (vv. 9–16). The purview of the verse thus encompasses both retrospective lament and proleptic petitionary mourning.[164]

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[161] Often with recourse to the warning of deportation in Mic 1:16. E.g., Hans W. Wolff, *Micah: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1990), 58; Marvin A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets. Volume Two: Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 353; Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *Micah: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 64–65.

[162] E.g., Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 274; Saul M. Olyan, *Biblical Mourning: Ritual and Social Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 31, n. 12; O'Brien, *Micah*, 14.

[163] MT *ketiv* שׁילל, *qere* שׁולל.

[164] Mays, *Micah*, 54–55; Smith-Christopher, *Micah*, 63–64; O'Brien, *Micah*, 14. Mic 1:11 has been left out of this discussion because of its many technical difficulties. While the MT has עריה בשׁת, there is disagreement amongst the sources, opening the verse to a variety of interpretations, most involving corrections. Some interpreters include a lexeme denoting "nakedness" in some form, e.g., NRSV; NJPS; Smith-Christopher, *Micah*, 67, 73–74; O'Brien, *Micah*, 15; Erin Runions, *Changing Subjects: Gender, Nation and Future in Micah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 128–29; others do not, e.g., LXX; Mays, *Micah*, 49, 56–57; Nadav Na'aman, "The House-of-No-Shade Shall Take Away Its Tax from You," *VT* 45 (1995): 518–19.

The lexemes ספד "to lament, mourn," and ילל *hiphil* "to wail" (v. 8aα) also occur together in appeals to mourn in Jer 4:8; 49:3, and Joel 1:13. In all four texts, a change of clothing is directly associated with this mourning. Unlike Mic 1:8, the other three verses call for special clothes to be donned, expressed with חגר "to gird" and שׂקים "sackcloth." Numerous biblical passages associate mourning with tearing garments and putting on sackcloth.[165] One would assume that putting on sackcloth necessitated removing some clothing. However, very few texts explicitly refer to undressing in the context of mourning. Aside from Mic 1:8 and Isa 20:2, David walks barefoot up the Mount of Olives, praying for Absalom's defeat (2 Sam 15:30), the king of Nineveh removes an outer robe before donning sackcloth (Jonah 3:6), and the "princes of the sea" remove robes and embroidered garments before sitting on the ground (Ezek 26:16).[166] Lastly, Ezek 24:17, 23 imply that footwear and turbans were customarily removed in mourning in the exilic period.[167] The behaviour described as "going ערום" (Mic 1:8) is

[165] On sackcloth, see Nahum Ben-Yehuda, "Textile Production in the Iron Age Ancient Near East," in C. Berner et al., *Clothing and Nudity,* 56–57; Wolfgang Zwickel, "Fabrication, Functions, and Uses of Textiles in the Hebrew Bible," in C. Berner et al., *Clothing and Nudity*, 192, 199; Salvatore Gaspa, *Textiles in the Neo-Assyrian Empire: A Study of Terminology* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018), 99, 244–45, 260, 411, 415.

[166] See, also, Isa 32:11b–12a, which calls for lament in the face of imminent attack, either mixing motifs of arming oneself for battle with mourning or using "girding loins" as shorthand for "girding loins with sackcloth": פשׁטה וערה וחגורה על חלצים על שׁדים ספדים "Strip and make yourselves bare; gird your loins; lament/beat your breasts." Contrast these with the unique case of the king of Samaria who tears his garment and, surprisingly, is observed to be wearing sackcloth "on his flesh" beneath (2 Kgs 6:30). There is an implicit change of clothing in the reverse direction from sackcloth (for mourning) to dress appropriate for rejoicing in Ps 30:12: לי פתחת שׂקי ותאזרני שׂמחה "You have taken off my sackcloth and girded me with joy"; see, also, Jdt 10:3. On mourning and rejoicing behaviours, see Gary A. Anderson, *A Time to Mourn, a Time to Dance: The Expression of Grief and Joy in Israelite Religion* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991).

[167] Cf. 1 Kgs 20:31–2. It seems likely that the removal of headgear was practised more often than translations suggest, given the attestation of other head-related mourning behaviours, described as putting ash on one's head, shaving, "baring one's head," and "making oneself bald." See, e.g., Isa 3:24; Ezek 27:31; Mic 1:16; Job 1:20; also, Lev 10:6; 21:10. See Saul M. Olyan, "Ritual Inversion in Biblical Representations of Punitive Rites," in *Worship, Women, and War: Essays in Honor of Susan Niditch*, ed. J. J. Collins, T. M. Lemos, and S. M. Olyan (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2015), 138–39.

consistent with the huge amount of evidence that clothing manipulation and hair and headwear adjustments were an aspect of mourning.[168]

The association of "girding on sackcloth" with mourning and the evidence of other texts containing ערום (including Gen 3:10–11), argue against ערום in Mic 1:8aβ indicating complete bodily, and genital, exposure.[169] In the context of mourning, ערום probably refers to some voluntary disrobing resulting in dress normally incompatible with public life (indicated by the verbal root הלך). A member of the elite might remove, in addition to sandals, an outer mantle, fine sash, and turban. To be dressed only in an undershift probably had the social connotations of being "undressed,"[170] whether or not the shift was belted with sackcloth.[171] Indeed, "girding on sackcloth" and, in some contexts, just "girding,"[172] might stand *pars pro toto* for a whole sequence of actions involving the exchange of normal public, military, courtly, or cultic, garments for attire appropriate for mourning. I suggest "going ערום" in Mic 1:8 is probably a reference to the whole exchange or removal of clothing for mourning.

Returning briefly to the text, the prophet's walking is described with the *hapax legomenon* שׁילל (or, following *qere*, שׁולל; v. 8aβ). Syntactically it should

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[168] Cf. Smith-Christopher, *Micah*, 64, who claims that "'going naked' does not seem to be a common Israelite practice associated with mourning or lamentation."

[169] Similarly, *HALOT* 882–83, which translates "lightly dressed (in under-garments only)" here and in Isa 20:2–4.

[170] There are instructive parallels in the Akkadian expressions *qabla rakâsu* and *qabla paṭâru*, literally "to bind the girdle" and "to loosen the girdle," which can also be translated "to dress" and "to undress" or "to dress in a (normal) girded garment" and "to dress in an ungirded garment." A. Leo Oppenheim, "Studies in Akkadian Lexicography II," *Or* 14 (1945): 239.

[171] It seems to me that sackcloth, which was probably a rough, stiff, dark fabric made of goats' hair used for transporting goods, was not worn alone as an undergarment or loincloth. Instead, it was generally worn as a sash or girdle tied around the waist and hips *on top of* a shift. This fits with its frequent collocation with חגר "to gird" and פתח "to loose, untie," also used with sashes, weapons, and armour. (Gzella, "Nudity and Clothing in the Lexicon," 225, also notes the former.) Cf. KTU 1.5 vi 15–16, 32–3. In contrast to mourning, "girding with joy," (Ps 30:12; 65:13), may reflect the wearing of a fine, decorative, or colourful girdle for celebrations.

[172] As in חגרו וספדו הכהנים "gird and lament, you priests," which occurs in parallel with "come pass the night in sackcloth, ministers of my God" (Joel 1:13); also, Isa 32:11.

take semantic priority over ערום, as the first descriptor, but its sense was already unclear to ancient translators and a breakthrough is unlikely.[173] Based solely on its usage in Mic 1:8, I propose it is a general descriptor from the semantic domain of undressing, either semantically superordinate or roughly equivalent to ערום. Given my conclusion that Micah is engaging in customary mourning behaviour for petitionary purposes, and that any "nakedness" was probably partial, my preference is to compromise with the suitably ambiguous "undressed."[174]

4.2.2 Isaiah

Isaiah 20 is responsible for several misconceptions about "nakedness" in the Hebrew Bible, therefore it warrants close attention. As with Mic 1, the backdrop is the Assyrian military campaigns in the eastern Mediterranean region, but the text has probably been subject to development and redaction. The central thrust is that Isaiah's state of undress, ערום ויחף "naked and barefoot" (v. 2), is a sign-act, warning of the defeat of Egypt and Kush.[175] I propose that, in Isa 20, ערום describes human figures who are partially naked, or semi-dressed for the sake of mourning. The lexeme ערוה refers primarily to an economic characteristic of a geo-political entity. The lexeme שׁת is

[173] The MT *qere* שׁולל is probably dependent on Job 12:17, 19 where שׁולל appears with הלך *hiphil,* and was rendered αἰχμαλώτους "captive" by the LXX translators. However, Mic 1:8 LXX has πορεύσεται ἀνυπόδετος καὶ γυμνή "she shall go unshod and naked" (NETS), taking Samaria as subject; see Bruce K. Waltke, *A Commentary on Micah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 67.

[174] Alternatively, "disrobed." Assuming corrections, so the same lexeme appears in Mic 1:8 and Job 12:17, 19, all refer to the divesting of outer robes, sash, and headgear, thus removing the items of clothing that communicated identity, social status, and social role. In combination with הלך, the implication is an ongoing condition of mourning and petitionary prayer.

[175] A detailed treatment of the development of the chapter and its layers is beyond the scope of this project. See, inter alia, L. Bronner, "Rethinking Isaiah 20," *OTWSA* 22–23 (1979): 32–52; Csaba Balogh, *The Stele of Yhwh in Egypt: The Prophecies of Isaiah 18-20 Concerning Egypt and Kush*, OtSt 60 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 305–333; Paul M. Cook, *A Sign and a Wonder: The Redactional Formation of Isaiah 18–20*, VTSup 147 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 125–45; Andrea Beyer, "Nudity and Captivity in Isa. 20 in Light of Iconographic Evidence," in C. Berner et al., *Clothing and Nudity,* 491–98.

primarily an architectural feature here, although it may, secondarily, denote a human body-part.

> v.3Just as my servant Isaiah has walked (הלך) naked and barefoot (ערום ויחף) for three years,
> as a sign and a portent against Egypt and Ethiopia,
> v.4so shall the king of Assyria lead away
> the Egyptians as captives and the Ethiopians as exiles,
> both the young and the old,[176] naked and barefoot (ערום ויחף),
> with buttocks uncovered (וחשׂופי שׁת),
> to the shame of Egypt (ערות מצרים).
>
> Isa 20:3–4 (NRSV)

The cluster of "naked" lexemes makes it hard to disentangle literary and historical worlds to read Isa 20 in its cultural context.[177] Further, commentators and readers may be influenced by mental images of the Nazi death marches in World War II. Interpretive distortions that arise from our misreadings of the literary and historical worlds can then mutually influence each other. I suggest that two potentially distorting preconceptions need to be laid aside before we can turn to examining the text.

First, many scholars start by understanding the expression ערום ויחף "naked and barefoot" (vv. 2, 3, 4), used for Isaiah and for the Egyptians and Kushites, as necessitating a complete absence of clothes and footwear. The initial instruction to Isaiah to undo the sackcloth from his hips and remove his sandals (v. 2) is read as supporting evidence from the "literary world" that he removed all clothing. However, even without considering Mic 1:8, the picture

[176] A common merism to indicate totality. Cf. "I did not leave a single person of his land – ma[le] and female, young and old – I brought (them) out and counted (them) as booty" (Ashurbanipal 003 vi 27–29; http://oracc.org/rinap/Q003702/).
[177] Compare the obviously ahistorical hyperbole: "Tammarītu, his brothers, his family, (and) the seed of his father's house, together with eighty-five nobles who march at his side, fled to me from Indabibi, and (then) crawled naked (*miranušúnina*, from *mērênu*, "nakedness") on their bellies and came to Nineveh" (Ashurbanipal 011 iv 23–27; http://oracc.org/rinap/Q003710/).

being built up from biblical texts[178] is that being ערום need not indicate a complete absence of clothing. Admittedly, this leaves the puzzle of the instructions to Isaiah still to be addressed, but we will turn to this in due course.

Second, some scholars also read v. 4 and Isaiah's sign-act as employing a well-known symbolism of nakedness as a mark of prisoners, explaining that it was the custom to strip captives of clothing and footwear.[179] Such appeals to the "historical world" seem to depend largely on the apparent "explanation" given in Isa 20 itself.[180] On occasion, the statement is illustrated by examples of iconographic material lying at the intersection of nakedness and captivity. But to argue from single cases is faulty generalisation. Further, the complex nature of visual communication tends to be overlooked. The numerous cases where captivity is indicated or nakedness portrayed without the other are ignored, as is the possibility of "nakedness" being only partially undressed.[181]

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[178] Gen 3:7–11; 1 Sam 19:24; Amos 2:16.

[179] See, inter alia, Bronner, "Rethinking Isaiah 20"; Ronald E. Clements, *Isaiah 1–39*, The New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 175; Robert D. Biggs, "Nacktheit. A. I. In Mesopotamien," *RlA* 9:64–65, (65); David S. Vanderhooft, *The Neo-Babylonian Empire and Babylon in the Latter Prophets*, HSM 59 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1999), 181–82; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 19 (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 101; Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets Vol. II*, 353; S. Tamar Kamionkowski, *Gender Reversal and Cosmic Chaos: A Study on the Book of Ezekiel*, JSOT 368 (London: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 63; Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, "Ezekiel in Abu Ghraib: Rereading Ezekiel 16:37–39 in the Context of Imperial Conquest," in *Ezekiel's Hierarchical World: Wrestling with a Tiered Reality*, ed. S. L. Cook and C. Patton (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 150–51; Tracy M. Lemos, "Shame and Mutilation of Enemies in the Hebrew Bible," *JBL* 125 (2006): 225–41; Balogh, *Stele of YHWH*, 315; Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 271; Olyan, "Ritual Inversion"; Rainer Kessler, "'When You See the Naked, Cover Them!' (Isa. 58:7). The Clothing of the Poor as an Act of Righteousness," in C. Berner et al., *Clothing and Nudity*, 332–33; Jürgen van Oorschot, "Nudity and Clothing in the Hebrew Bible: Theological and Anthropological Aspects," in C. Berner et al., *Clothing and Nudity*, 243; Zwickel, "Fabrication," 188.

[180] Also, 2 Chr 28:15, discussed in the next chapter.

[181] A collection of the iconographic evidence typically drawn upon by biblical scholars can be found in Beyer, "Nudity and Captivity," 496–97. The treatment of captives is shown to be more complex in Stephanie Reed, "Blurring the Edges: A Reconsideration of the Treatment of Enemies in Ashurbanipal's Reliefs," in *Ancient Near Eastern Art in Context*, ed. J. Cheng and M. H. Feldman (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 101–30. The accessibility of Assyrian images and their ability to act as propaganda is questioned by Paul Collins, "Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Violence: Warfare in Neo-Assyrian Art," in *Critical Approaches to Ancient Near Eastern Art*, ed. B. A. Brown and M. H. Feldman (Boston: de Gruyter, 2013), 619–44. He suggests images

This approach is hugely problematic on several fronts, but largely because it conflates an overly literal interpretation of literary texts and inconsistent iconographic representation with historical realities, with the outcome that Isa 20 is read as confirmatory evidence that nakedness symbolises captivity. This conclusion is then used to interpret other biblical texts, particularly Mic 1:8, and can result in circular reasoning.

Scholars of ancient Mesopotamia interpret neo-Assyrian deportation differently.[182] The long journey to the homeland was costly in army manpower and put pressure on provisioning requirements *en route*. However, it was worth the effort to deliver the deportees in good condition, "so that they could bring the greatest possible economic, military and political benefit to Assyria."[183] Certainly, victorious soldiers would claim their reward from the valuable items on the battlefield, including weapons, belts, sandals, and clothing. But it is very unlikely that the most basic clothing and footwear were routinely stripped from prisoners of war at capture, despite the occasional literary declaration by victors of restitution through their largesse.[184]

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were often small, dark, inaccessible, and in some cases virtually invisible to the naked eye (621-622). This is taken up in more detail in Ariel Bagg, "Where Is the Public? A New Look at the Brutality Scenes in Neo-Assyrian Royal Inscriptions and Art," in *Making Pictures of War: Realia et Imaginaria in the Iconology of the Ancient Near East*, ed. L. Battini, Ancient Near Eastern Archaeology 1 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2016), 57–82; and Davide Nadali, "Images of War in the Assyrian Period: What They Show and What They Hide," in L. Battini, *Making Pictures of War*, 83–88.

[182] Much evidence comes from royal administrative correspondence. See the king's letter reminding the recipient to take responsibility for the provisioning of captives (SAA 19 006; http://oracc.org/saao/P224478/); also, Bustenay Oded, *Mass Deportations and Deportees in the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1979), 35–40; Stefan Zawadzki, "Hostages in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions," in *Immigration and Emigration within the Ancient Near East: Festschrift E. Lipinski*, ed. K. Van Lerberghe and A. Schoors, OLA 65 (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 449–58 (456–7); Davide Nadali, "The Impact of War on Civilians in the Neo-Assyrian Period," in *The Other Face of the Battle: The Impact of War on Civilians in the Ancient Near East*, ed. D. Nadali and J. Vidal, AOAT 413 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014), 101–11; David L. Petersen, "Prophetic Rhetoric and Exile," in *The Prophets Speak on Forced Migration*, ed. M. J. Boda et al., SBLAIL 21 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2015), 9–18.

[183] Oded, *Mass Deportations*, 35.

[184] Smith-Christopher, *Micah*, 64; see, e.g., 2 Chr 28:15; Esarhaddon 104 v 21–24.

Turning now to examine the text, there is a contradiction at the end of Isa 20:4, where the final two expressions of the last bicolon apparently confirm an absence of clothing.[185] My argument is that these phrases both refer primarily to the economic and physical destruction wrought on cities and city-states in warfare. They reflect common west Asian concerns and literary motifs associated with conquest, destruction, and the ruination of economies.

The first phrase of v. 4cα, וחשופי שת, belongs to the literary motifs of architectural destruction found in comparative and Hebrew literature and refers to architectural foundations, not the metaphorical "foundations" or buttocks of people. Many Akkadian texts from the eighth to the sixth century refer to "foundations."[186] A particularly common phrase, usually in contexts of building completion, is the merism *ultu uššêšu adi gabadibbišu* "from its foundation to its parapet/crenellations." It is often collocated with *rēšu*, "head, summit, top, superstructure of a building."[187] The merism is also used, *pars pro toto,* for a city's conquest and utter devastation in war[188] and the same vocabulary is employed for the demolition necessary for solid reconstruction.[189] Several texts, with various verbs, refer to the "uncovering"

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[185] Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 320–21, has "the nakedness of Egypt," bracketed, and suggests that the phrase may be a gloss "with the purpose of replacing dorsal with frontal nudity" (321).

[186] Common lexemes include *išdu*, *uššu* and *temmēnu*. See Richard S. Ellis, *Foundation Deposits in Ancient Mesopotamia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

[187] E.g., in an inscription describing Sennacherib's rebuilding of the *Akītu*-house in Assur in 683, for the celebration of the new year, "I raised its superstructure. From its foundations to its crenellations I completed it …" (Sennacherib 168, 32–3). The symbolic significance of the "head, top" of a temple is suggested by the Sumerian name of Marduk's temple in Babylon, the *Ésagil(a*), "the house that raises its head/whose top is lofty." The analogy of bodies and buildings underlies the universal tendency for semantic borrowing between these domains. However, a different explanation probably lies behind the polysemy of *ūru*, which can mean "roof" or "genitalia" (*CAD* 20).

[188] The Bavian Inscription describes Sennacherib's destruction of Babylon in 689: "The city and its houses – from foundation to parapet – I destroyed, I devastated, I burned"; Sennacherib 223 50–51; Marc Van De Mieroop, "A Tale of Two Cities: Nineveh and Babylon," *Iraq* 66 (2004): 1–5 (1). See, e.g., Sargon II's Eighth Campaign Letter to the Gods (Sargon II 65, lines 165, 178, 180, 188, 195, 260); Sargon II 7 134; Erra IV 126.

[189] Mark J. Boda, "From Dystopia to Myopia: Utopian (Re)Visions in Haggai and Zechariah 1–8," in *Utopia and Dystopia in Prophetic Literature*, ed. E. Ben Zvi, Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society 92 (Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society; Göttingen; Vandenhoeck &

and "revealing" of foundations. For example, with *nawāru* "to be(come) bright, to uncover," here translated "laid bare":

> *samītsu issuḫma unammir temmēnšu*
>
> He tore down its parapet and laid bare its foundation.[190]

I contend that the expression וחשׂופי שׁת (Isa 20:4cα) should be interpreted as related to the nine biblical texts in contexts of warfare in which lexemes for "foundation/s" (יסוד, מוסדה, שׁת) appear with verbs for uncovering (גלה), laying bare (ערה), and destruction (הרס, אבל),[191] reflecting common west Asian literary motifs. For example,

> Then the channels of the sea were seen and the foundations of the world uncovered (יגלו מסדות תבל)
>
> 2 Sam 22:16//Ps 18:15
>
> If the foundations are destroyed (השׁתות יהרסון), what can the righteous do?
>
> Ps 11:3
>
> I will pour her stones into the valley and I will uncover her foundations (ויסדיה אגלה)
>
> Mic 1:6
>
> I will break down the wall that you have coated with whitewash, and bring it to the ground, so that its foundation will be uncovered (ונגלה יסדו)
>
> Ezek 13:14

Ruprecht, 2006), 222; Jamie Novotny, "Temple Building in Assyria: Evidence from Royal Inscriptions," in *From the Foundations to the Crenellations: Essays on Temple Building in the Ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible*, ed. M. J. Boda and J. Novotny (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2010), 115–18.

[190] Sargon II, 125 i 36. Novotny, "Temple Building," 116, n. 46, notes that this is a citation from an earlier inscription. See also, with *amāru* "to see/be seen," Nabonidus 16 ii 18; 29 iii 28; with *petû* "to open" Nabonidus 27 i 50-52, Nebuchadnezzar II 23 ii 13.

[191] Six occurrences of יסוד: with גלה "to uncover" (Ezek 13:14; Mic 1:6); ערה "to lay bare" (Hab 3:13; Ps 137:7); הרס "to tear down" (Ezek 30:4); and אבל "to devour" (Lam 4:11); two parallel occurrences of מוסדה with גלה "to uncover"(2 Sam 22:16//Ps 18:15); two occurrences of שׁת: with הרס "to tear down" (Ps 11:3); and, potentially, with חשׂף "to strip, lay bare" (Isa 20:4).

> Its [Egypt's] abundance will be taken and its foundations torn down (ונהרסו יסודתיה)
>
> Ezek 30:4

The Hebrew lexeme שׁת probably originally only had the sense of "foundation,"[192] as in Ps 11:3.[193] In post-exilic Hebrew it may have been, in addition, employed as a euphemism for "buttocks." But there are only two suggested attestations, Isa 20:4 and 2 Sam 10:4,[194] and doubt lingers.[195] The west Asian literary tradition, the potentially preexilic date of the first layers of Isa 20, and the context of threatened defeat point to "foundation" being the primary sense of שׁת in v. 4, contrary to the English versions. The general sense of the accompanying verb חשׂף "to make bare, strip"[196] fits the semantic range of the other examples.[197] Consequently, I propose translating חשׂופי שׁת (v. 4cα) as "the baring/stripping of foundations."[198] It refers to the physical destruction of cities to their foundations and is used metaphorically for the collapse and disestablishment of political entities.

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[192] As, also, its cognates in Ugaritic and Phoenician; Schorch, *Euphemismen*, 213.

[193] Cat Quine, "The Bird and the Mountains: A Note on Psalm 11," *VT* 67 (2017): 470–79, suggests a preexilic date for the psalm (478).

[194] The lexeme appears in the story of David's envoys who had their garments cut in half עד שׁתותיהם "to their 'buttocks'" (2 Sam 10:4). I wonder if there may an intentional *double entendre*, given the older, original sense. The Ammonites' gesture may be a (literary) politically provocative act that references architectural or dynastic destruction "to their foundations."

[195] Although it is thought that שׁת for "foundation" became a casualty of the processes of pejorativization, Mishnaic Hebrew attests only to the original sense. Both senses are attested in Aramaic, although I have not been able to ascertain for which periods. See Schorch, *Euphemismen*, 213. A possible fourth related occurrence in Isa 19:10 is considered an ancient crux. See, e.g., Balogh, *Stele of YHWH*, 207, 217; Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 256–8.

[196] Cf. the root חשׂף in probable contexts of city destruction in Isa 47:2; Jer 13:26, 49:10.

[197] Of eight attestations, three occur in contexts of the fall of capital cities or city-states (Babylon, Isa 47:2; Jerusalem, Jer 13:26; Edom, Jer 49:10). The parallelism of חשׂף with גלה in Jer 13:22, 26 suggests the expression in Isa 20:4 is not far removed from the biblical prototype of יסוד with גלה found in Mic 1:6 and Ezek 13:14. Isa 47:2 and Jer 13:26 are often understood as employing metaphors of personification and describing physical and sexual abuse. My stance, as argued above, is sceptical that the latter was the biblical writers' intention.

[198] The target lexeme is, however, singular. Perhaps the translation "(its) foundation bared" is possible.

The following phrase ערות מצרים (v. 4cβ) has strong affinities with the use of ערוה in relation to capital cities, already discussed above. It thus has primarily economic connotations in construct with "Egypt."[199] The argument against taking ערוה as a euphemism for "shame" or "dishonour," as is almost universal in English versions, does not need to be repeated.[200] More appropriate translations are "the destitution, depletion, ruination of Egypt" or "the baring, emptying (of) Egypt."[201] It primarily refers to the loss of economic assets through the plunder of wealth and treasures, causing "emptiness."

The proximity of ערוה to שׁת may look highly suggestive for both carrying an additional sense associated with body parts. However, I suspect that such an interpretation is influenced by a prior expectation of complete nudity, as discussed above. Four additional factors make me cautious about accepting that a secondary sense of the exposure of genitalia and buttocks was an original double layer to the text, as is the current consensus. First, I am unable to find evidence for personification as embodiment in the Akkadian texts that describe city destruction. The existence of architectural technical terms that are also known as terms for body parts is not sufficient evidence. Second, there is similarly no evidence for personification in the contexts of the other eight Hebrew attestations of the literary motif of "uncovering foundations." This includes Ps 137:7 and Hab 3:13, where the verb ערה is juxtaposed with יסוד "foundation/s" in contexts of wartime destruction. Here, as also elsewhere, the synonymy of ערה with גלה is demonstrated. Third, literary indications of the personification of Egypt in the surrounding text of Isa 20 are lacking. Fourth, the supporting evidence for ערוה as "genitalia" is from post-exilic texts, as discussed previously. It is my contention that it is only possible to *read back* into this text from a later period a pair of euphemisms for body

[199] Prophetic texts often speak about geopolitical entities, whether cities, city-states, of "lands," in similar terms. Even though "Egypt" and "Kush" were not cities like Babylon or Nineveh, the entities are often treated literarily as if they were.
[200] See above. ESV is a rare exception.
[201] The unvocalised text could be read as the substantive ערוה in construct form or the infinitive construct of ערה *piel*, as in Hab 3:13b.

parts. To do so is to treat a diachronic lexicon as synchronic. In sum, it is my contention that Isa 20:4c contains two expressions referring to the destruction of Egypt, the first physically, and the second economically. Further, I would like to challenge the consensus that there is an original secondary, body-related, sense to these expressions, whether associated with a metaphorical body of Egypt or the bodies of Egyptian and Kushite deportees. It seems to me that further evidence is required if this second interpretation is to be upheld.

Literarily, the two expressions in v. 4c make a smooth transition to the following verse where the two-part parallelism continues.[202]

וחשׂופי שׁת ערות מצרים

וחתו ובשׁו[v.5]

מכושׁ מבטם ומן מצרים תפארתם

The baring of foundations, the ruination of Egypt

[v.5]And they shall be failed and let down[203]

by Kush to whom they looked[204] and Egypt their magnificence

Isa 20:4c–5

Verse 4 portrays the conquest of Egypt, ruled at the time by the Kushites,[205] and the deportation of its people by the Assyrians. In v. 5, the imagined audience (possibly in Ashdod or Jerusalem) is warned that Kush, the military experts, will be an unreliable ally and fail to prevent the Assyrian advance. Egypt's wealth will fail to be of help and will come to nothing.[206]

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[202] The almost double reference to Kush and Egypt in Isa 20:4c–5 reflects chiastically the double mention of Egypt and Kush in vv. 3b–4a.

[203] See Yael Avrahami, "בוש in the Psalms – Shame or Disappointment," *JSOT* 34 (2010): 295–313; also, Kazen, "Viewing Oneself Through Others' Eyes: Shame between Biology and Culture in Biblical Texts," 65–67.

[204] See Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 268; cf. Zech 9:5.

[205] The Kushite Twenty-Fifth Dynasty ruled Egypt from mid-eighth to mid-seventh century.

[206] These themes of military aid and wealth are consistently found in biblical references to Kush and Egypt, e.g., 2 Kgs 18:20–24; Isa 7:18–22; 30:2–7; 31:1–3; 36:4–10; 45:14; Jer 2:14–19, 36–37; 46:2–26; Ezek 30:2–26 (captives are mentioned in vv. 17–18). For other examples of the verb בוש as "to be militarily defeated," see Jer 2:36, 17:18; 20:11; 48:20; Mic 3:7.

Having demonstrated that v. 4c concerns the cities and nation of Egypt and not bodily exposure, we can return to the most prominent "naked" language in Isa 20, the threefold repetition of the expression ערום ויחף. This twice describes Isaiah's behaviour (vv. 2–3) and once the Kushite and Egyptian captives (v. 4). The rhetoric implies that being "naked and barefoot" has well-understood connotations and associations, so it works as a "sign" (v. 3).

Being stripped of clothes was not characteristic of the treatment of prisoners and deportees historically, as argued above. Instead, going "naked and barefoot" constitutes mourning behaviour. The strong association between city destruction and mourning in ancient west Asia is evident in the long tradition of city-laments from the earliest Sumerian texts onwards.[207] Many biblical texts indicate that mourning and lamentation are the appropriate response to defeat and destruction[208] or call for mourning to avert catastrophe. The Kushites and Egyptians will go "naked and barefoot" when they mourn the catastrophe of their destroyed cities and military defeat. Meanwhile, Isaiah goes "naked and barefoot" in petitionary mourning to avert the Assyrian threat to Judah and its political allies, including Egypt.

There is one obvious problem with this proposal. The instruction to Isaiah in v. 2 is to remove *the sackcloth* from around his hips and his sandals from his feet. Removing sandals to initiate mourning makes sense, but removing sackcloth has baffled commentators from Rashi to the present day. As already discussed, sackcloth is strongly associated with mourning. The *removal* of sackcloth is usually a literary motif for the end of mourning when it is replaced with finer garments for celebration.[209] There are two possible solutions. One is that to remove sackcloth was somehow a sign of intensifying

[207] See Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep O Daughter of Zion*; and, on Lam 1, 2 and Isa 51:9–52:2, Xuan Huong Thi Pham, *Mourning in the Ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999).
[208] E.g., Isa 23:1; Jer 9:9–10, 16–21; 48:20; 51:8; Ezek 26:16–18; 27:28–36; Zeph 1:11. Cf. the incompatibility of victory and mourning for David's troops in 2 Sam 19:1–8.
[209] See, e.g., Ps 30:12; cf. Jdt 10:3.

mourning, leaving Isaiah without a sash and dressed only in a loose undershift. This, further, requires accepting that, although already mourning, Isaiah had not removed his sandals already. This is counter to the biblical pattern found elsewhere, and hence, unconvincing. The second, stronger, possibility is that the text is corrupted. The word for "sackcloth" was originally absent in 1QIsa[a] before being inserted above the line.[210] The original formulation of the instruction, an idiomatic expression with the sense "ungird your loins," that is remove your ornamental girdle, may not have made sense to later tradents, who inserted השׂק "the sackcloth." It does, however, parallel the Akkadian expression *qabla paṭâru,* "to loosen the girdle," or "get undressed."[211]

This section on two prophetic texts has argued that "going ערום" in Micah and Isaiah is shorthand for going about in a state of "undress" suitable for mourning and associated petitionary prayer. It generally involved discarding an outer robe and removing the belt or girdle from one's hips. Having "ungirded" (or "undressed"), the belt may have been replaced with a rough sackcloth girdle, but not necessarily. The undressing was typically accompanied by removing sandals to go barefoot. "Going ערום" (Mic 1:8; Isa 20:2–4) was a voluntary, temporary act of self-diminution marked by the removal of items of clothing that indicated one's wealth and status. It has close correspondences with the abandonment of cumbersome items carried or worn by warriors and kings, such as weapons, cloaks, and belts, as indicated in the expressions "fleeing ערום" (Amos 2:16) and "falling ערום" (1 Sam 19:24). As mourning comportment, "going ערום" may take place in the threat of adversity, as well as in its wake.[212] It has intrinsically economic connotations, since it involves a deficiency of personal possessions. As a

[210] Cf. also, Isa 32:11, where NRSV adds "sackcloth" to the idiomatic expression.
[211] See above.
[212] There may also be connotations of mourning associated with the brave warrior in Amos 2:16.

temporary state or performance, Its predominant sense, however, was probably of being partially dressed.

4.3 Chapter summary

The predominant connotations of the baring, exposure, and "nakedness" of a royal human figure, expressed primarily with ערוה and גלה, is economic. This is in line with the employment of the vocabulary for cities and city-states. The single example of Saul temporarily "falling ערום", in a context otherwise devoid of economic features, is an exception that proves the rule. The omission of Michal's disapproval from the Chronicler's account of David's comportment, and the insertion of additional cultic clothing, may suggest that the exposure of a king's physical body was too negatively evaluated to be hinted at in the period when he was writing. The excision of David's envy of how YHWH had blessed Obed-Edom the Gittite may further indicate the Chronicler's disinterest in or misunderstanding of the narrative layer referring to royal wealth and economic and political standing at home and beyond.

Micah 1:8 is the first of several texts containing the idiom הלך ערום, "to go 'naked'," an idiom also found in Isa 20 that indicates an attitude of mourning. Comparative material sheds light on the difficult text of Isa 20:4, which employs conventional language of city destruction in warfare. In the process, the explanation touches on the universal tendency for body part terms to be employed metaphorically, in this case for spatial and architectural concepts, and vice versa. This phenomenon can make it challenging to discern the senses intentionally evoked by a text's original composer.

5 The language of nakedness and lack, loss, and provision

Several texts, some of which we have already encountered, include the lexeme ערום in the context of the provision and deprivation of material goods, suggesting an economic dimension to the "nakedness" that is broader than a lack of clothing on a human body. The first section on deprivation begins and ends with the two related texts Job 1:21 and Qoh 5:14. An argument is made in four stages, the first three preparing the ground for a fresh interpretation. The first step is the proposal that an apparently self-evident association of bodily "nakedness" with birth and death, which these texts are assumed to portray, must be laid aside. This is followed by the suggestion that ערום and ערוה are connected literarily with "beginnings," rather than human birth itself, as can be discerned in the creation narrative of Gen 2–3 and the prophetic texts Ezek 16, 23, and Hos 2. These and other city texts also use the language of "nakedness" to characterise a city's demise, which is conceptualised as a return to a "beginning" state. The third stage of the argument presents evidence that the "nakedness" in these texts is more than a lack or loss of clothing, and is, rather, a more generalised loss of economic wealth. This sense produces a convincing interpretation of the language of "nakedness" in the curse in Deut 28:48. The fourth and final step proposes interpretations of Job 1:21 and Qoh 5:14 as texts that use the language of "nakedness" to combine the motifs of impoverished beginnings, financial loss, and mourning.

The second section turns the focus towards the intersection of the language of "nakedness" with the theme of provision. Texts in this category fall into two groups: those in which YHWH is the provider and those in which the recipients of provision are described as "the naked" (mostly ערום). The unusual nature of this second select group of texts (2 Chr 28:15; Ezek 18:7, 16; Isa 58:7; Job 22:6–7), which is strongly associated with righteous

behaviour, is characterised briefly. A number of questions are raised, indicating the need for deeper investigation.

5.1 Lack and loss

5.1.1 Human birth and death?

A well-known verse from Job reads:

> Naked (ערם) I came forth from my mother's belly
> And naked (ערם) I am returning thither.
>
> Job 1:21a; cf. Qoh 5:14a

Typically, moderns read this as an image of the naked body of the new-born infant and the corpse[213] that expresses a resigned acceptance of "nakedness" as in the expected order of things, the inevitable human condition at the thresholds of life.[214] Because this interpretation sits comfortably with contemporary analyses of "nakedness" as a positively evaluated, pure, essential condition, its contrast with the negative emotive value biblical texts usually accord to the bare human body is overlooked.

A close association of ערום as a lack of covering with birth and death can be challenged on literary and historical grounds. Four other Second Temple Jewish and Christian texts referring to the universal human experience of birth and death are often proffered as comparands for Job 1:21 and Qoh 5:14. Only Philo (*Spec.* 1.295) includes a lexeme for "naked" and potentially refers to bodily exposure. The association, if it exists, was not strong in the late

[213] E.g., Carol Newsom, *NIDB* 4:352.
[214] It is without doubt that birth and death are both in the frame, although details are debated. See the history of scholarship in Gregory Vall, "The Enigma of Job 1,21a," *Bib* 76 (1995): 325–42; also, Christopher B. Hays, "'My Beloved Son, Come and Rest in Me': Job's Return to His Mother's Womb (Job 1:21a) in Light of Egyptian Mythology," *VT* 62 (2012): 607–21.

biblical period.[215] Interpreting "naked" as literally "without covering,"[216] does not fit the historical evidence either. Following the biologically unavoidable "naked" birth of human offspring, new-born infants were immediately wrapped or covered in cloth, as Second Temple texts describe.[217] Even the sea gets clothed and swaddled at birth in Job 38:8–9! As for death, archaeological evidence suggests that in Iron Age Judah, buried bodies were at least wrapped in matting or cloth, if not clothed or cloaked, and therefore "covered" in death.[218]

There is no evidence for a lack of clothes being characteristic of birth and death in the ancient southern Levant and its literature. The literary collocation of "nakedness" lexemes with these thresholds, as found in Job, Qohelet, and Philo, demands a closer look and, possibly, a different interpretation.

5.1.2 Beginnings and back to the beginning

The language of "nakedness" might not be associated with birth, but it is strongly associated with beginnings, most famously in the story of human origins in Gen 2–3. The human couple are created adult, as man and woman (האדם, איש, and אשה, 2:22–24), not simply differentiated as male and female (זכר and נקבה) as in the first creation account (1:27). Their description as

[215] The others are Ben Sira 40:1; Wisdom 7:1–6; and 1 Tim 6:7.

[216] Elsewhere ערום appears alongside בלי לבוש "without clothing" (Job 24:7, 10); and in parallel with אין כסת "with no covering" (24:7; 26:6). The need to qualify the term with "without clothing" may suggest that for the original audience, ערום had connotations of economic lack that extended beyond the narrower focus of clothing privations and bodily nakedness.

[217] E.g., Luke 2:7; Wis 7:4 specifies swaddling clothes together with the feeding of the new-born baby.

[218] Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992), 218; Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, "The Cult of the Dead in Judah: Interpreting the Material Remains," *JBL* 111 (1992): 214–18. The archaeological record indicates corpses were also buried clothed in Mesopotamia; Christopher B. Hays, *A Covenant with Death: Death in the Iron Age II and Its Rhetorical Uses in Proto-Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 50. Egyptian mummies were also wrapped in cloth bandages so were "covered," although not "dressed"; Hays, "My Beloved Son," 611.

"naked" (2:25; 3:7, 10), which the context suggests is primarily concerned with bodily exposure due to a lack of clothes, is not a neutral matter, either. It immediately strikes a wrong note (2:25), as contrary to the cultural norms for civilised adults, as I have discussed elsewhere.[219] Their "naked" beginning is later resolved by YHWH's clothing as the first scene of human "beginnings" draws to an end (3:21).

The vocabulary of "nakedness" is also strongly associated with the beginnings of cities in Hos 2 and Ezek 16. But here, the picture is muddied by the metaphor of human life for the development of a city. In Hos 2, being "naked" (ערמה) corresponds to Samaria's condition on the day of her birth (יום הולדה, v. 5). Similarly, Ezek 16 portrays a counter-cultural lack of swaddling on the day of Jerusalem's birth (vv. 4–5). The city, portrayed as a "pubescent" girl, is described emphatically as still "naked and bare" (ערם ועריה, v. 7). YHWH then "covers" Jerusalem's "nakedness" (ערוה, v. 8).[220] The early period of being "naked and bare" is later referred back to as "the days of your (fs) youth" (ימי נעוריך, v. 22).[221] Birth and youth are both metaphors for the city's earliest beginnings, a period also associated with being "naked" (ערם).

A city's demise is described in terms of "uncovering" or "revealing" (גלה *piel, niphal*) "nakedness" (ערוה) in Ezek 16:36–37; 23:10, 29; Isa 47:3 (cf. Isa 20:4). In Ezekiel, garments and beautiful objects will be "stripped" (פשט *hiphil*) from

[219] Turner-Smith, "Naked but Not Ashamed."
[220] More fully, YHWH says, "I spread my wings over you and covered your nakedness" (Ezek 16:8a). It is highly suggestive that a similar expression is used of the cherubim's wings spread over the place of the ark in the Holy of Holies in the temple (1 Kgs 8:7//2 Chr 5:8). The typical translation "edge of my cloak" instead of "wings" perhaps should be a secondary, not the primary, reading.
[221] Cf. Ezek 16:43, 60; 23:3, 8, 19, 21; Hos 2:17, none of which explicitly associate "youth" with "nakedness." The allegorical employment of youth for beginnings is not univocal. In Ezek 23, "youth" is an active period of Samaria and Jerusalem's city-lives, marked by changing political alliances described in terms of promiscuous sexual activity. In Ezek 16 youth precedes Jerusalem's establishment as a city in relationship with YHWH. In Hos 2, the "days of youth" are when "she came up from the land of Egypt" (v. 17).

Jerusalem (16:39),[222] leaving it "naked and bare" (ערם ועריה and variants: 16:22, 39; 23:29), the phrase used to describe the city's early period in 16:7. In Hos 2:5, YHWH's threat of "stripping" (פשט *hiphil)* Samaria "naked" (ערמה) corresponds to a return to the condition "as on the day of her birth" and, uniquely, is also described in terms of "death" (מות *hiphil*).[223] In Ezek 16 and Hos 2, being "naked," as a condition without "covering" (כסה *piel*; Ezek 16:8; Hos 2:11–12) is perhaps the prime feature of the beginnings, or prehistory, of Jerusalem and Samaria. Being "naked" (Ezek 16, 23; Hos 2) and "nakedness" (Isa 20:4; 47:3) are also prime characteristics of ruined and devastated cities. The destruction of a city is thus conceptualised as a return to an initial state of "nakedness."

5.1.3 Initial lack and later loss

When Gen 2–3, Ezek 16, 23, Isa 47, and Hos 2 are read through the lens of materiality, the counterpart to the "nakedness" of beginnings stands out distinctly as food and clothing, commodities, and products of labour and trade (Isa 47:12, 15; Ezek 23:29). This "nakedness" is unequivocally an economic lack. Only in Gen 2–3, where being ערום indicates a lack supplied by clothing, is there the potential for the "nakedness" to be purely concerned with bodily exposure, since the supply of food, through the trees in the garden, is not involved. However, even here the sense of general economic lack, or emptyhandedness, is clearly present. Indeed, it may be uppermost, since the man describes himself as ערום (3:10), despite wearing a wrap he had made (v. 7), and YHWH clothes him in a divinely made tunic (v. 21).[224] The same use of ערום to indicate primarily a lack of personal property and only secondarily being poorly dressed is found in Job 22:6. Stripping the garments

[222] Galambush, *Jerusalem*, 95, suggests the specific vocabulary for cloth and food found in Ezek 16, 23 occurs elsewhere largely in cultic settings.
[223] The focus is on agricultural productivity. Like a garden or field, Samaria is to be "killed" with "thirst" (Hos 2:5). In many prophetic texts concerning Jerusalem (e.g., Mic 1), prevaricating language leaves open the issue of the finality of city destruction.
[224] The lexeme חגרה, usually translated "belt, girdle," may indicate its makeshift nature or be an archaism.

of "the naked" (ערומים, v. 6b) need not be a logical impossibility nor understood proleptically.[225] The first colon (v. 6a) points to the subject of the bicola being the economic abuse of legal powers and disregard of brotherly solidarity.[226] Garments were the final valuable personal possession a destitute person owned, hence the laws connecting them with debt pledges and attempting to enforce limits.[227]

In the prophetic city texts, "nakedness" also indicates primarily a general lack of economic wealth, as indicated by the provisions by which the lack is remedied. These texts suggest an unequivocally economic sense of "covering," in line with the interpretation of "uncovering" and "seeing" the "nakedness" (destitution) of cities given above. In an economic frame of reference, the "day of birth" and "days of youth (נעורים)" in Hos 2 and Ezek 16 indicate the impoverished beginnings of the cities.[228] Their "establishment" as cities (in covenant with YHWH) equates to being "covered" or provisioned with food, clothing, and the ornaments of wealth by YHWH.[229] The "early" period of a city is characterised by lack. Apart from also being a beginning and a time of physical growth, it has only tenuous links with modern conceptualisations of human childhood, despite the metaphorical language of

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[225] As David J. A. Clines, *Job 21-37*, WBC 18A (Nashville: Nelson, 2006), 540.

[226] See, e.g., Lev 25:14–48; Neh 5:1–8. Attempting to read Job 22:6–7 as two bi-cola in parallel, due to the substantive use of ערומים (v. 6b) and רעב (v. 7b) proves unsatisfactory. The lexemes take different syntactic forms (one plural, one singular) and are employed to different rhetorical purposes. Resources are extracted from others in the first pair of lines (v. 6), whereas they are not forthcoming in the second (v. 7). In addition, there may be a Janus parallelism hinged about תחבל in vv. 5–6. See Scott B. Noegel, *Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job*, JSOTSup 223 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 79–81.

[227] Exod 22:6–7, 26; Deut 24:12–13, 17; see Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Israel," in *Security for Debt in Ancient Near Eastern Law*, ed. R. Westbrook and R. Jasnow (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 254–56. For extra-biblical evidence, see Andrew Mein, "The Case of the Confiscated Cloak: Approaching Ancient Judahite Ethics," in *Biblical Interpretation and Method: Essays in Honour of John Barton*, ed. K. J. Dell and P. M. Joyce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 297–310; Fred W. Dobbs-Allsopp, "The Genre of the Meṣad Ḥashavyahu Ostracon," *BASOR* 295 (1994): 49–55.

[228] Without obvious associations with poverty, see also, מנעוריך "from your youth," of Babylon (Isa 47:12, 15).

[229] See Ezek 16:10–13, 16–21; 23:41; Hos 2:10. The metaphor is often strained, pulled between portraying the cities as self-sufficient, or provisioned by YHWH, or supported by other kingdoms, rulers, and gods. In Ezek 23, the period of youth seems to involve an active city life, albeit with dependence on other nations; cf. Isa 47:12, 15.

birth and youth. The prime characteristics of this period are not of a period of dependence or emotional immaturity, but of poverty and want[230] that precedes a state of relative wealth and financial stability.[231] For personified cities, the loss of wealth that accompanies their demise is then portrayed as a return to the "naked" or destitute conditions of their early period.

This economic understanding of "nakedness," as a "lack of resources" characteristic of human beginnings, is found in Gen 2:25–3:21 and Philo (*Spec.* 1.294–95)[232] with respect to male human subjects and, also, I maintain, in Job 1:21a and Qoh 5:14a. Each of these texts associates the early period of human life with a lack of possessions or "emptyhandedness," which is indicated by the term that has conventionally been translated "naked."

As with the city texts, economic loss in the midst of adult life is also expressed in terms of "nakedness." The clearest expression of this is in a covenant curse in Deut 28.

> Because you did not serve YHWH your God joyfully and with gladness of heart for the abundance (רב) of everything, you will serve your enemies whom YHWH will send against you, in hunger (רעב) and thirst, naked (בעירום) and in lack of everything (ובחסר כל). He will put an iron yoke on your neck until he has destroyed you.

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[230] Cf. Jer 2:2; 3:4; 22:21; 31:19. That "youth" (נעורים) correlates with "poverty" is also noted by Łukasz Popko, *Marriage Metaphor and Feminine Imagery in Jer 2:1–4:2: A Diachronic Study Based on the MT and LXX*, EBibNS 70 (Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 303, n. 689.

[231] There seems to be a semantic correspondence between the homographs נעור "shaken" (in apposition with ריק "empty" in Neh 5:13; cf. 2 Sam 6:20) and נעורים "youth, minority."

[232] "For if the Creator and Maker of the universe … has regard to your weakness …, makes you a partaker in His gracious power and fills up the deficiencies that belong to your life, how ought you to treat other men, your natural kinsfolk, … you who brought nothing into the world, not even yourself? For naked you came into the world, worthy sir, and naked will you again depart, and the span of time between your birth and death is a loan to you from God" (*Spec.* 1.294–95). The economic perspective of being "naked" (γυμνος) is underlined by the use of an economic term "loan" (χρῆσιν/χρησις) for the lifespan. Cf. 1 Tim 6:7–8. Note that a necessarily "naked" (possession-less) death is influenced by Greek thinking and contrasts with Job 1:21 and Qoh 5:14; see below.

Loss is a common theme in the West Asian curse tradition to which Deut 28 belongs. In first millennium vassal treaties, deprivation, want, and poverty are often threatened as consequences of rebellion, as are hunger and famine, which are particularly associated with siege warfare.[234] It is rare, however, to find a reference to lack of clothing,[235] which raises doubts about translating עירום as "naked" in this context. "Empty-handed" or "destitute" which indicate the more general economic sense of a lack of possessions are probably to be preferred.[236]

To sum up, ערוה and ערום are used to describe the conditions of the initial economic deficiencies of both human and pre-city life, while the loss of wealth is conceived of as a return to this condition. There are no indications that birth and death were commonly associated with bodily exposure. Ironically, any such association for moderns may be intertextually dependent to some extent on the reception of Job 1:21 and misunderstandings of the

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[233] Note the alliteration in the word pair abundance–hunger רב–רעב. Throughout Deut 28 abundance and lack are the key themes of the blessings and curses, with multiple references to food, agriculture, and weather, illustrating their fundamental importance to the Israelite economy.

[234] See, e.g., SAA 02 002 iv 8–15.

[235] The Treaty of Šuppiluliuma I of Hatti (accession ca. 1350) with Šattiwaza of Mitanni states: "And may these gods, who are the lords of the oath, allot to you poverty and *e-er-ri-šu-ut-ta*" (CTH 51=KBo 1.1 r.63; cf. KBo 1.3 r.13). Akkadian *erīšūtu* can be translated "destitution," or "nakedness." For "destitution," see *CAD* 4:301; also, Gary M. Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 2nd ed., WAW 7 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 48. For "nakedness," see Birgit Christiansen, *Schicksalbestimmende Kommunikation: Sprachliche, gesellschaftliche und religiöse Aspekte hethitischer Fluch-, Segens- und Eidesformeln*, StBoT 53 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012), 212: "Und diese Götter, welche die Herren des Eides sind, sollen euch Armut und Nacktheit zuteil werden lassen." (I am grateful to William Morrow for bringing this translation to my attention; personal communication). A general insufficiency of the basic necessities of life seems to be in view, rather than an act of clothing privation, therefore a translation of "poverty and destitution" or "poverty and want" is preferred. However, privation of clothing is specified in Esarhaddon's treaty with Baal, king of Tyre: "May Melqarth and Eshmun deliver your land to destruction and your people to deportation; may they [uproot] you from your land and take away the food ration (*kurummāti*) from your mouth, clothes (*kuzippī*) from your body, and the oil (*šamnī*) for your anointing" (SAA 02 005 iv 14-17). On food, clothing, and oil as standard maintenance provisions, see the next chapter.

[236] Jack R. Lundbom, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 788, also suggests "naked" may refer to lack of possessions.

connotations of ערום. Instead, the Hebrew language of "nakedness" has strong connotations of economic deprivation and insufficiency, and it is this that is characteristic of early beginnings.

5.1.4 When rich men lose their wealth

Understanding ערום as language indicating economic lack and loss sheds light on Job 1:21a and Qoh 5:14a. These texts are highly stylised, but space precludes a detailed contextual analysis. Translations and a brief interpretation must suffice. I propose that these texts both employ the lexeme ערום "naked" with reference to the economic domain (lack and loss) *and* mourning. In the economic domain, ערום has connotations of empty-handedness and lack of possessions and is involuntary; in the cultural context of mourning, ערום conveys the narrower sense of a (temporary) deficiency of clothing but is voluntary.

> Just as he came forth from his mother's belly
> naked (ערם)
> he will go on again (ישׁוב ללחת) as he came.[237]
>
> Qoh 5:14a

Located within a large thematic section on wealth and poverty,[238] this verse is part of a case study of a man who hoarded his wealth against bad times, then lost it all, leaving him destitute with a son to raise (vv. 12–16). In context

[237] Stuart Weeks, *Ecclesiastes 5–12: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, ICC (London: T&T Clark, 2022), 32, 44; also, Norbert Lohfink, "Kohelet und die Banken: Zur Übersetzung von Kohelet v 12-16," *VT* 39 (1989): 488–95. The verb שׁוב, "to return, turn," is found elsewhere in spoken declarations related to journeys to and from death, raising the possibility of intentional ambiguity. Cf. Gen 3:19; 2 Sam 12:23; Ps 90:3; Job 1:21; 10:21; Qoh 3:20.
[238] A sample of section headings include: Thomas Krüger, *Qoheleth: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 116: "Poverty and wealth"; Antoon Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, HCOT (Leeuven: Peeters, 2013), 417: "Reflections about possessions"; Weeks, *Ecclesiastes 5–12*, 1: "Wealth, Long Life and Fulfilment"; cf. Choon-Leong Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, AB 18C (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 201: "Enjoyment, not Greed."

there is no hint of equanimity. The loss of this man's wealth is undoubtedly a bad thing.[239]

The lexeme ערם lies at the centre of v. 14a, surrounded by an envelope of repeated expressions indicating lack and emptyhandedness.[240] Janus-fashion, it modifies preceding and following verbs.[241] Thus, being ערם "empty-handed" characterises both this man's minority, as is typical, and his condition after the disaster, which is not. A similar pattern is found in the prophetic city texts when disaster strikes.

A second layer of meaning arises from the context of loss and the connotations of "going 'naked'" (חלך ערום). "Naked he will go on again" also connotes the characteristic undress of mourning behaviour that the man will adopt in response to his catastrophic loss.[242] The final "as he came" suggests his state afterwards will be indistinguishable from that before. Though wealthy, his former miserly attitude, no doubt including miserable attire, constituted a self-imposed deprivation. Now destitute, he will mourn his losses, ערום on two accounts.[243] The story is a moral lesson about taking an appropriately joyful attitude to work and wealth.[244]

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[239] Designated "painfully bad" (Qoh 5:12, 15); Weeks, *Ecclesiastes 5–12*, 32. Indifference to wealth and poverty alike reflects Hellenistic philosophy; Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 122.

[240] See מאומה "anything, nothing"; בידו "in his hands," Qoh 5:13, 14b.

[241] As noted by Roland E. Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, WBC 23A (Dallas: Nelson, 1992), 52; and Weeks, *Ecclesiastes 5–12*, 43.

[242] The proposal that to be ערום is primarily to be "destitute" or "empty-handed," sheds light on the idiom "to go (הלך) ערום" (Isa 20:2–4; Mic 1:8; Job 1:21; 24:10; Qoh 5:14). It refers to a temporary state of undress adopted for mourning that stereotypically reflects the old and worn clothing of the destitute. It is not a symbolic reference to the "happy dead." Tearing a garment and donning sackcloth have a similar connotation of destitution. The economic life of the dead reflects that of the living. The "unhappy dead" in Sheol, therefore, may be assumed to be attired like someone who is destitute. Cf. Job 12:17a, 19a, where the idiom is adapted to הלך שולל *hiphil*, "to cause to mourn" (lit. "to cause to go undressed), possibly with the sense of engaging in petitionary prayer (see Isa 58:5).

[243] Similarly, Thomas Krüger, "'And They Have No Comforter': Job and Ecclesiastes in Dialogue," in *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*, ed. K. J. Dell and W. Kynes, LHBOTS 587 (London: T&T Clark, 2014), 98.

[244] Cf. the "good" way of Qoh 5:17–19, especially the motif of "joy," v. 19; Krüger, "No Comforter," 99.

For Job 1:21, similarly, bracketing a necessary connection with birth and death allows the domains of mourning and economic lack and loss to come to the fore.

> Naked (ערם) I came forth from my mother's belly
> and naked (ערם) I am turning (שוב)[245] thither (שמה).[246]
>
> Job 1:21a

The immediate context is a description of Job engaging in traditional privative mourning behaviours (v. 20)[247] following the disasters which decimated his agricultural and business enterprises[248] and killed his children (vv. 14–19). Job has experienced economic and personal loss, so mourning is the appropriate response. As with Qoh 5:14a, the first colon of Job 1:21a portrays the understanding of the universal "destitution" of youth discussed above,[249] while the second expresses his exceptional destitution following the disaster, as a "return to beginnings." Also like Qoh 5:14, the second occurrence of ערם is intentionally ambiguous, conveying additional associations of ongoing mourning. Job declares that he will mourn *throughout the rest of his life* as he heads towards the netherworld.[250] Unlike the man in Qoh 5:13–14 who has a son, Job's children have died and there is good reason to mourn the loss of both children and wealth. A functionally rather than formally equivalent translation of Job 1:21a might read:

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[245] The verb שוב can be read with an incipient aspect, as ongoing; Bruce K. Waltke and Michael P. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 505.

[246] For שם "there" as a locative euphemism for death, designated as "the grave," see Job 3:17, 19, 22. The directional adverb שמה suggests "movement in the direction of the place of death," in a processual, rather than eventual, sense.

[247] See Richard W. Medina, "Job's Entrée into a Ritual of Mourning as Seen in the Opening Prose of the Book of Job," *WO* 38 (2008): 194–210; David A. Lambert, "The Book of Job in Ritual Perspective," *JBL* 134 (2015): 557–75, (559).

[248] Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary*, OTL (London: SCM, 1985), 92.

[249] The parallelism of "from my youth" and "from my mother's belly" in Job 31:18 suggests a conceptual equivalence. The declaration of support for the fatherless and the widow during this early period, usually correlated to a lack of resources, must be understood as hyperbole.

[250] As, already, Vall, "The Enigma," 334–35. Cf. Jacob's reaction to the report of Joseph's death: "For I am going (down) to my son mourning Sheol-wards (שאלה)" (Gen 37:35); Lambert, "The Book of Job," 562. Jon D. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 77, suggests Sheol is the destination of those who have died "prematurely, violently, bereft of children, rejected by God, or brokenhearted." Job qualifies on several counts.

Empty-handed I came forth from my mother's womb;
Empty-handed and mourning I now head towards the place of the unhappy dead.

When Job is finally justified (Job 42), both aspects of being ערום are reversed, as 42:11 describes. He finally dies a good, "non-naked," death with progeny and possessions.[251]

These two texts portray an economic disaster as cause for mourning and an exceptional "return" to a youth-like state of "destitution" with a bleak outlook for the rest of one's life. This important feature distinguishes them from the cluster of later Second Temple texts to which they are usually compared, which by contrast deal with birth and death as common features of the reality of human life.

To summarise this section, the use of "naked" vocabulary, particularly the adverbial descriptor ערום, has strong connotations of economic lack. Several biblical verses use it as characteristic of an early period of life, for humans and for cities. Where an economic frame of reference is uppermost, a translation of "destitute," "empty-handed," or "without possessions" is more appropriate than the traditional "naked" which implies "undressed." Economic loss is characterised as a return to this early state of destitution, which is described with ערום and ערוה. There is no necessary link between ערום and death. Dying wealthy, one does not die "naked,"[252] contrary to common interpretations of Job 1:21 and Qoh 5:14. However, subordinate to the category of economic lack, clothing privation remains a possible primary sense of ערום. Clothing being the prototypical personal possession and the prime material on which mourning is inscribed, context indicates which additional connotations are elicited, whether of a general lack of personal possessions or of mourning practices. In the southern Levant, mourning is an

[251] Job 42:10–17; see Levenson, *Resurrection*, 67–81, 115.
[252] One does in the later, Greek-influenced, Philo (*Spec.* I.294).

appropriate response to disaster, including sudden economic loss. Therefore, following an economic catastrophe, lexemes from the ערה family may convey multiple senses.

5.2 Provision and "the naked"

A surprisingly small number of biblical texts refer to the need for those who are "naked" to be "covered." In a few texts, YHWH is the provider of food or clothing to "naked" humans and cities (Gen 2:16, 3:21; Ezek 16:10–13; Hos 2:10-–11; cf. Ezek 23:41). His provision is an essential aspect of his relationships with Adam and Eve, Jerusalem, and Samaria, satisfying the economic want associated with beginnings and completing the civilisation of humankind and the establishment of independent adulthood (Gen 2:24) and cities. Provision is uniquely YHWH's role, with other providers being repudiated.[253] None of the texts with ערוה or ערום imply that YHWH's provision is a model to be imitated.[254] With regards to the provision of cities, foodstuffs are included alongside textiles or their raw products. With no mention of hunger, this suggests that ערוה conveys a primarily general economic sense of "destitution." It also conveys, secondarily, the more specific sense of "lacking clothing," which belongs to the source of the metaphor and is elicited by the language of "covering" (כסה *piel*; Ezek 16:8; Hos 2:11).

By contrast, three sets of texts employ a substantive to label people as "the naked" and, furthermore, are distinctive in their assumption that for people to provide for "the naked" is righteous behaviour (Isa 58:7; Ezek 18:7, 16;[255] 2 Chr 28:15). The last of these can be dealt with immediately.

[253] Even Adam and Eve's own self-provision of clothing is insufficient (Gen 3:10–11).
[254] Cf. Deut 10:18–19; Ps 146:7. See following chapter.
[255] For ease, these almost identical verses will be referred to as if a single "text."

In 2 Chr 28:8–15, Judeans are captured in war by northern Israelites. Returning to Samaria, the captors are met by a prophet who tells them that to subjugate their brothers would add to their guilt. Following a change of heart, the prisoners are returned to their kin in Jericho. Before repatriation, their immediate physical needs are met, in a description that starts, "All their naked ones (כל מערמיהם) were clothed (לבשׁ *niphal*) from the spoil; they clothed them (לבשׁ *hiphil*) …" (v. 15). Five caring actions expressed in single verbal forms continue the list, including the provision of sandals, food, and drink. No further substantives are employed for the captives, leaving מערמיהם to express the lack that the other actions also address. This creates a certain ambivalence, as the double verb לבשׁ also emphasises the need for clothing. This is another example of "naked" implying "semi-dressed" rather than lacking all clothes, probably indicating the loss of the more valuable outer garments and sashes.[256] A more persistent condition of being "destitute" or "empty-handed" does not fit the context. However, there are certainly hints of a broader range of deficiencies from the list of other economic resources that had to be provided.[257] The whole scenario of prisoners of war, the parties being "brotherly" nations, and the redundancy in the double description of clothing are strikingly reminiscent of an inscription on a royal neo-Assyrian foundation deposit.[258] The two texts may reflect an ancient west Asian literary motif of the king, or the victor, as righteous provisioner, despite the historical realities of wartime depredations. If so, it is notable that it is a prophet in 2 Chr 28 who is cast as righteous.[259]

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[256] See the discussion of Isa 20 in the previous chapter.
[257] Righteous behaviour is depicted by the return to prisoners of their own former possessions. It is hard to conceive of it being unintentional irony, but it is possible.
[258] Attempting to compensate for his father Sennacherib's excesses in the sack of Babylon, Esarhaddon claims to have freed Babylonian slaves. "I returned their looted possessions, clothing the naked (*mērênû*) with clothing (and) let them take the road to [Bab]ylon" (Esarhaddon 104 v 21–24). The rhetoric of the announcement is shaped around Esarhaddon's role in the economic rehabilitation of Babylon, culminating in the statement "I am [the pr]ovisioner" (Esarhaddon 104 vi 15; http://oracc.org/rinap/Q003333/).
[259] See, further, Ehud Ben Zvi, "A Gateway to the Chronicler's Teaching: The Account of the Reign of Ahaz in 2 Chr 28,1–27," *SJOT* 7 (1993): 216–49.

The remaining two texts, Ezek 18:7, 16 and Isa 58:7, share a further striking commonality. Not only do they contain the only substantive employments of ערום as a person type, but this rare usage also appears alongside the more common רעב "the hungry."[260]

> (if he) … gives his bread to the hungry
> and covers the naked (עירם; v. 16b ערום) with a garment
>
> Ezek 18:7b//16b (NRSV)

> Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
> And bring the homeless poor into your house;
> When you see the naked (ערם), to cover them,
> And not to hide yourself from your own kin?
>
> Isa 58:7 (NRSV)

These texts state explicitly that the lack that "defines" the ערום and the רעב should be ameliorated. Prominence is given to the resources ("bread/food" and a "garment") and the provider's actions ("giving," "sharing," and "covering"). The thrust of Ezek 18:5–9, 14–17 is to outline the conduct of a righteous person who "does what is just and right" (Ezek 18:5). Justice, righteousness, wickedness, and offences are themes that run throughout Isaiah 58–59.[261] The rhetoric of the two texts expects readers to identify with the righteous person and concur that provision is the appropriate behaviour.

In the process, the syntax of the texts objectifies the provisioned. Passive and anonymous beneficiaries, they are completely defined by their economic needs. The lack of elaboration in Ezek 18 means that "the hungry" and "the naked," once provisioned, would vanish without trace in the literary world.

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[260] See the discussion of the substantive use of רעב, without ערום, in the next chapter. For the argument against treating the pair of substantives in Job 22:6–7 similarly, see above.
[261] John Goldingay, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 56–66*, ICC (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 156.

This contrasts sharply with the use of ערום elsewhere, where it is usually applied to the main subject of the text[262] and, in addition, this subject usually has a high social status or significance, whether it is a named city, first human, king, prophet, warrior, or wealthy man.[263] The consistently negative emotive value of ערום is highly salient, attracting attention. It conveys semantic information central to the thrust of the discourse and is often the source of ambiguity, polysemy, or paronomasia. With the emphasis on provision and the provisioner in Ezek 18:7, 16 and Isa 58:7, the labelling of the ערום and the רעב seems strangely incidental. It is not immediately obvious why the beneficiary is not, for example, the עני ואביון "poor and needy" (Ezek 18:12). "The ערום" in these texts, whose prime characteristic is a dire lack of economic resource, warrant further investigation.

5.3 Conclusion to the word study

This extensive survey of the language of "nakedness" in the Hebrew Bible, as represented by the two main lexemes ערוה and ערום, suggests that the typical translations "nakedness" and "naked" are inadequate to convey the range of connotations of the lexemes when read in context. The most prevalent sense of the terms is to indicate extreme economic lack.

Nevertheless, in some uses, economic aspects are absent. The substantive ערוה is used to refer to body-related taboos, including genitalia and illicit sexual intercourse between kin including a menstruating wife, in a relatively restricted group of texts which hinge upon the materiality of a physical

[262] The mourning Egyptians and Kushites (Isa 20:4) are an exception, as are several instances in the book of Job (22:6; 24:7, 10).
[263] This is consistent with its employment in Job 26:6 which should again be read as a primarily economic emptiness or destitution, not as a personified, embodied underworld: "Sheol is destitute before him, Abaddon has no covering." Compare Isa 40:17 and Exod 21:10 for the first and second cola, respectively.

human body.[264] Its appearance in construct forms, and the existence of similar expressions with alternatives to ערוה,[265] are indicators of changing emotive value, which varies from neutral to strongly negative. It seems likely that ערוה was subject to the inevitable forces of euphemistic change over the biblical period, becoming tainted with the pejorative connotations of its referents, losing its euphemistic potential in this domain. The "treadmill" of euphemistic change may continue into the Greek period.

Three verbs are commonly found in combination with ערוה, namely, גלה *piel* "to uncover," (also, *niphal* "to be uncovered"), ראה "to see," and בסה *piel* "to cover." These are found when a physical human body is in view and, also, when the subject is a geopolitical or geocultural entity.[266] Explicit personification is not a prerequisite. In the geopolitical domain, the term ערוה is employed with reference to the economic destitution and "emptiness" of temples, cities, and lands. This can be through the "self-emptying" of national treasuries through tax and tribute demands or through despoilation by warfare.[267] A single Aramaic text refers to the impoverishment (ערוה) of the king (Ezra 4:14), supporting the idea of a close conceptual link between the treasuries of monarchs and the wealth of their monarchies and seats of power. This theme is also found in the account of King David bringing the ark to Jerusalem in 2 Sam 6:11–23. Despite the absence of a "naked" lexeme, the episode demonstrates that the concept of a human body lacking covering (portrayed narratively and with a threefold occurrence of גלה *niphal*) had

[264] Exod 20:26; 28:42; Lev 18:6–19; 20:11, 17–21; Deut 23:15; Ezek 22:10. It is unclear if Gen 9:22–23 belongs in this group.
[265] See Deut 23:1; 27:20.
[266] Sheol is an example of the latter (Job 26:6).
[267] Jerusalem (Ezek 16:8, 36, 37; 23:18, 29; Lam 1:8); Samaria (Ezek 23:10; Hos 2:11); Babylon (Isa 47:3); Egypt (Isa 20:4); also, Nineveh (מער Nah 3:5). When Joseph formally accuses his brothers of being enemy spies come to "see the 'nakedness' of the land" (ערות הארץ, Gen 42:9, 12), there is probably a hidden meaning. They had come to Egypt to buy grain (v. 5), so the land could hardly be said to be "empty" of economic goods (cf. Hos 2:11). F. Rachel Magdalene, *On the Scales of Righteousness: Neo-Babylonian Trial Law and the Book of Job*, BJS 348 (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2007), 128, is probably on the right track to suggest that the trick Joseph plays on his brothers is a (literary) "joke." Similarly, Gen 9:22–23 also plays humorously on the intentional ambiguity of "seeing the father's nakedness."

pejorative connotations of insufficient clothing and of impoverishment simultaneously. This double reading of the "uncovering" of the royal body should be put alongside the more commonly acknowledged double readings of the "uncovering" of personified cities. Altogether, an economic reading emerges strongly. The lexeme ערוה is effectively polysemous, with senses ranging from "emptiness," "destitution," and "ruin," through a simple "lack of clothes," to "genitalia," with other referents disguised by euphemism, which may never be securely identified.[268] A translation of ערוה as "nakedness, nudity" is only occasionally appropriate.

The lexeme ערום belongs primarily to the personal economic domain, referring to a lack of possessions. The significance of a lack of clothing within this domain arises because clothing is the prototypical, prime possession.[269] The sense of this lexeme extends from a partial or, rarely, complete lack of clothing (for which translations might include "undressed, semi-dressed, ungirded, naked, nude") to a more extensive lack of all economic resources (and translations such as "destitute, empty, empty-handed, penniless"). The former tends to be a temporary, aberrant condition, including the privations of dress that might accompany mourning. This is often self-inflicted or voluntary. The latter tends to be a more long-term lack of resources indicating need and dependency. It is a characteristic feature of the beginning period of a young man's life and the early history of a city that disappears when the person, city, or community becomes established. The descriptor might also be used for the condition of destitution and ruin consequent on a loss of wealth. An individual or community suffering sudden economic loss might be ערום in both senses of the word, partially undressed for mourning (usually with הלך) and destitute. In addition to Job (1:21) and Qohelet's miser (5:14), this may

[268] It may have additional connotations with respect to sexual relations, for example. As a text over which interpreters continue to disagree, Gen 9:20–27 is likely to employ ערוה with more than one of these senses to facilitate multiple possible readings.
[269] See the prohibitions on retaining a cloak in pledge (Exod 22:26; Deut 24:17; cf. Job 22:6) and YHWH's provision of the first humans (Gen 3:21).

include the Kushite and Egyptian captives (Isa 20:4) and Jerusalem (Ezek 16:39; 23:29),[270] and, ironically, Sheol (Job 26:6).

YHWH's role as one who "covers" (בסה *piel*) "nakedness" (ערוה) is only found in relation to the cities of Jerusalem and Samaria. He clothes the first humans (לבש *hiphil*, Gen 3:21), but this action is literarily disconnected from their description as "naked" (cf. עירום Gen 3:7, 10, 11).[271] By contrast, in two distinctive texts, righteous behaviour is associated with the provision of clothing and food to those labelled only by their needs, as "the naked" and "the hungry" (Ezek 18:7, 16; Isa 58:7; cf. 2 Chr 28:15). The texts' focus is on the provider. "The naked" and "the hungry" appear as mere stereotypes.

Elsewhere in biblical texts, the use of "naked" language is never incidental or casual. These two texts, therefore, invite further questions: Who are "the hungry" and "the naked"? How did they come to be in such a state of economic lack and empty-handedness? What is their relationship to the addressed potential provider? Is the provision altruistic and charitable, restorative justice, the discharge of an obligation, or something else?

The pursuit of answers to these questions centred on Isa 58:7 constitutes the remainder of this study. First, some additional background material is gathered to put alongside this chapter's survey of the language of "nakedness" in the Hebrew Bible. A brief introduction to the historical economic context within which these biblical texts arose is followed by two overviews. These outline the biblical usage patterns of the language of "hunger" and being "hungry" and the theme of provision of food and clothing. West Asian and Egyptian texts provide useful comparands, informing the discussion about potential providers and recipients of provision. The

[270] Cf. Samaria in Hos 2:5. The aggressive treatment by YHWH there leaves no room for a sense of mourning.
[271] The only verses containing לבש "to clothe, clothing" with a "naked" lexeme are Job 24:7, 10 and 2 Chr 28:15, relatively late texts.

interaction between these perspectives enables answers to our questions begin to emerge.

6 The background to provisioning “the hungry” and “the naked”

The three sections of this chapter constitute three approaches to the general background of the motif of “giving food to the hungry and clothing to the naked” found in Isa 58:7 and Ezek 18:7, 16. The first constitutes an introduction to aspects of the environmental and economic context related to food production and shortage. The following two sections return to texts. The second section complements the word study on “nakedness” with a very concentrated overview of the vocabulary of “hunger” in biblical texts. The third section surveys the provision of food and clothing in biblical texts in a catalogue of providers and recipients, which is briefly discussed in the light of comparative material.

Although our understanding of the economy of ancient Israel and Judah in the first millennium remains unsatisfactorily sketchy, what is known can usefully constrain and contextualise our textual interpretation. From the other direction, biblical texts and comparative textual material give insight into the socioeconomic concerns and priorities of ancient communities. These can, in turn, contribute to our understanding of the historical circumstances in which those concerns were textualized.[272] The examination and analysis of Isa 58:7 that follows in the second half of this thesis follows this trajectory. Starting by setting out some fixed points concerning the agricultural use of land, it culminates in a proposal concerning the historical realities of land management.

In this chapter, the contradictory perspectives on land raised in the first section are directed towards sketching out in broad terms an historically

[272] See the excellent essay, Jason M. Silverman, “Historical Economics and the Minor Prophets,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Minor Prophets*, ed. J. M. O’Brien (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 323–40.

accurate backdrop to food shortage. The relatively infrequent use of the substantive "the hungry" occurs in association with the satisfaction of need and food. The complementary usage of "the naked" indicates an economic need requiring clothing. Providers, who include the deity, are almost invariably high status and male. Recipients of provision can have a high or low social status and may have a long-term relationship with the provider, but not necessarily. The association of provision with a moral evaluation of righteous behaviour is found in comparative as well as biblical texts and may be associated with legal intervention to mandate personal maintenance allowances in certain cases.

6.1 The environmental and economic context

Biblical descriptions of the land of ancient Israel and Judah do not attempt to provide accurate representations of the environmental context. The authors of the texts had other priorities. For example, in Deuteronomy, there are competing perspectives on the economic and environmental realities of life in the Promised Land. The abundance of the land is a sign of divine generosity and a cause for rejoicing and thankfulness, a stance which plays out in the role of feasting and meals in the memorialising of Israel's history in the central chapters 12–26. But the very agricultural productivity and economic wealth of the land is also dangerous and may cause the people to forget their dependence on YHWH, a stance that comes to the fore in the framework of the book (chapters 1–11, 27–34).[273] Both aspects are portrayed in 8:7–13. A poetic description of the land's productivity (vv. 7–10) is immediately followed by a caution (vv. 11–13), lest satiety and abundance cause the people to forget YHWH's commandments and his historical act of deliverance

[273] On food and memory in Deuteronomy, see Nathan MacDonald, *Not Bread Alone: The Uses of Food in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 70–99, here 79, 83; and on Deut 8, Nathan MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of "Monotheism,"* 2nd ed. (Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 134–139.

from Egypt.[274] Despite this equivocation, land is central to the theology of Deuteronomy.[275] The vital significance of the *possession* of land[276] can be traced through the description of Israel's early life as a "wandering Aramean" (26:5), the constant refrain of being an alien (גר) in Egypt, and up to Moses' final glimpse of the Promised Land (34:1–4). The theological importance of land to biblical writers reflects its existential importance. "Lack of land means neither more nor less than a precipitous existence without a secure source of food."[277]

Contrary to the picture portrayed in Deut 8:7–10, the southern Levant[278] is a region with few natural resources. Its diverse geology and climate constitute significant challenges to agricultural production.[279] In the first millennium, as earlier, most of the population was involved in agriculture, mainly in the form of mixed dry (rainfall-dependent) farming with small animal husbandry, but also some pastoralism. The estimated seed-crop ratio of 1:5 for barley in this region compares well to mediaeval Europe but is low in comparison to the 1:10 possible under natural irrigation in Egypt,[280] and even higher ratios with the artificial irrigation employed in Mesopotamia. In the southern Levant, good crop yields could nonetheless be achieved by farming larger areas of land.[281] The cash crops of olives and grapes (with grain, the so-called

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[274] See Peter Altmann, "Feast, Famine, and History. The Festival Meal Topos and Deuteronomy 26,1–15," *ZAW* 124 (2012): 555–67. The excessive abundance and fertility of the land is also viewed ambiguously in Num 13:17–33, where the clusters of grapes and the inhabitants are enormous, but the land is said to "consume" its inhabitants.
[275] A. D. H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, New Century Bible (London: Oliphants, 1979), 79.
[276] The verb ירש "to possess" appears some 71 times.
[277] MacDonald, *Not Bread Alone*, 77–78.
[278] This term is used to designate a region encompassing the modern state of Israel, the Palestinian territories, most of Jordan, and the southernmost parts of Syria and Lebanon; J. David Schloen, "Economy and Society in Iron Age Israel and Judah: An Archaeological Perspective," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Ancient Israel*, ed. S. Niditch (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2016), 433.
[279] Cf. Deut 11:13–17. On environment and climate, see, e.g., Nathan MacDonald, *What Did the Ancient Israelites Eat? Diet in Biblical Times* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 50–56.
[280] Cf. Deut 11:10–11.
[281] Christopher J. Eyre, "The Agricultural Cycle, Farming, and Water Management in the Ancient Near East," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. J. M. Sasson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 1:175–89; Jehuda Feliks and Shimon Gibson, "Agricultural Land-Management Methods and Implements in Ancient Eretz Israel," *EncJud* 1:471–85.

Mediterranean triad, e.g., Hos 2:10)[282] reaped greater benefits, but olive trees take five years to begin to bear fruit and grapevines ten years until a full harvest. To plant a vineyard or olive grove was, therefore, an investment in future generations.[283]

The historical origins of Ezekiel and Third Isaiah lie in the post-monarchic period, probably in the sixth to fifth centuries. There is general agreement that the first was composed in Babylonia and the second in the vicinity of Jerusalem. Our understanding of the economic context of life for Judean exiles in Babylonia in the sixth century and for the Yahwistic community around Jerusalem following the return of exiles from the second half of the century onwards is rudimentary, but archaeological evidence and cuneiform records continue to yield insights which provide some useful reference points.[284]

The diet of the vast majority of the population of ancient Israel was very poor, with nutritional deficiencies resulting in poor health and low life expectancy. Malnourishment probably affected most people at some point in their lives. Food shortages are likely to have been a periodic occurrence in the land of

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[282] On the myth of the Mediterranean triad as diet, arising from an over-reliance on biblical texts, see Welton, *Deviant Consumption*, 131–32.

[283] Eric L. Welch, "Olives and Olive Oil," in *T&T Clark Handbook of Food in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel*, ed. J. Fu, C. Shafer-Elliott, and C. L. Meyers (London: T&T Clark, 2022), 114; Carey E. Walsh, "Grapes and Wine," in Fu, Shafer-Elliott, and Meyers, *Handbook of Food*, 128; also, Welton, *Deviant Consumption*, 121–32.

[284] For the historical context, see Bernd U. Schipper, *A Concise History of Ancient Israel: From the Beginnings Through the Hellenistic Era*, trans. Michael Lesley, Critical Studies in the Hebrew Bible 11 (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2020), 71–92. On the relevant economic contexts, see Oded Lipschiits, "The Rural Economy of Judah during the Persian Period and the Settlement History of the District System," in *The Economy of Ancient Judah in Its Historical Context*, ed. M. L. Miller, E. Ben Zvi, and G. N. Knoppers (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 237–64; Kenneth A. Ristau, *Reconstructing Jerusalem: Persian Period Prophetic Perspectives* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 1–89; Tero Alstola, *Judeans in Babylonia: A Study of Deportees in the Sixth and Fifth Centuries BCE* (Leiden: Brill, 2020); Tero Alstola, "Judean Merchants in Babylonia and Their Participation in Long-Distance Trade," *WO* 47 (2017): 25–51; Angelika Berlejung, "New Life, New Skills, and New Friends in Exile: The Loss and Rise of Capitals of the Judeans in Babylonia," in *Alphabets, texts and artifacts in the Ancient Near East: studies presented to Benjamin Sass*, ed. I. Finkelstein, C. Robin, and T. Römer (Paris: Van Dieren, 2016), 12–45.

Judah. Rainfall was not reliable, in timing or quantity, with poor years relatively frequent. Every year, grain from the previous harvest would become scarce before the next could be gathered in (the annual "hunger gap"). Longer periods of compromised food supply, whether caused by drought, early or late rains, locusts, blight, warfare, or other political factors, could easily result in famine, affecting even the elite.[285] Conditions for those given irrigable land in rural Babylonia, may have been better in the long-term, especially if they turned to date palm cultivation, rather than grains.[286]

The similarities of vocabulary and theme in Ezek 18:7, 16 and Isa 58:7, despite their provenance in different locations, point to these texts referring to a behaviour that transcends the historical and geographical particularities of Judah/Yehud and Babylonia. It is highly likely that "giving food to the hungry and clothes to the naked" was associated with long-standing patterns of social behaviour embedded in ancient Israelite culture and that these were as relevant in Babylonia as Yehud, despite the differences in economic context. The dynamic of the giving of food and clothing reveals an underlying context of inequitable access to economic resources. Access was likely to have been differentiated at the community level and within the family and household. The patriarchal society and the role of meat in the sacrificial system are just two factors why men and the priestly class may have received disproportionate shares.[287]

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[285] Cf. the prayers in times of drought in Jer 14:2–9, 19–22. See MacDonald, *Not Bread Alone*, 47–69; and MacDonald, *What Did the Ancient Israelites Eat?*, 57–60.
[286] Cornelia Wunsch, "Glimpses on the Lives of Deportees in Rural Babylonia," in *Arameans, Chaldeans, and Arabs in Babylonia and Palestine in the First Millennium B.C.*, ed. A. Berlejung and M. P. Streck (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013), 254–57; see, also, Michael Jursa, "Talking of Eating and Food in Iron-Age Babylonia," in *Libiamo Ne' Lieti Calici. Ancient Near Eastern Studies Presented to Lucio Milano on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday by Pupils, Colleagues and Friends*, ed. P. Corò et al., AOAT 436 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2016), 181–98.
[287] See MacDonald, *What Did the Ancient Israelites Eat?*, 77–79.

6.2 Hunger and famine in the Hebrew Bible

Given the historical environment outlined, it is unsurprising that hunger and famine (both designated with רעב) appear moderately frequently in biblical texts.[288] The lexemes cluster in Genesis, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel,[289] reflecting the two main guises in which food shortages appear: as a narrative plot device (Genesis) and in connection with warfare and divine punishment (Jeremiah and Ezekiel).

In Genesis, severe food shortages are the recurring reason for the patriarchs' journeys away from Canaan.[290] The plot of the book of Ruth is initiated by migration due to famine and it plays a significant role in the story of Joseph,[291] an episode in David's life,[292] and the Elijah-Elisha cycle.[293] YHWH's provision during the forty years in the wilderness is theologically significant, averting a potential food crisis.[294] At the other extreme, the life-threatening nature of an individual's extreme hunger is employed hyperbolically when Esau returns from the field עיף "faint, famished" and sells his birthright for a bowl of potage.[295]

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[288] The lemma רעב occurs a total of 134 times: 101 in nominal form (as "hunger, famine"), 13 verbal, and 20 adjectival; T. Seidl, "רָעֵב," TDOT 13:533–43. See, e.g., Jürgen Kegler, "Hunger," in *Essen und Trinken in der Bibel: ein literarisches Festmahl für Rainer Kessler zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. M. Geiger, C. Maier, and U. Schmidt (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2009), 319–29; Peter Altmann, "Feast and Famine: Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives on Lack as a Backdrop for Plenty in the Hebrew Bible," in *Feasting in the Archaeology and Texts of the Bible and the Ancient Near East*, ed. P. Altmann and J. Fu (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 149–78; Peter Altmann, "Too Little Food and Drink: Hunger and Fasting," in Fu, Shafer-Elliott, and Meyers, *Handbook of Food*, 371–83.

[289] Related lexemes occur 25, 34, and 16 times respectively.

[290] Gen 12 (Abraham), 26 (Isaac), and 41–47 (Jacob and sons).

[291] Gen 41–47; Ps 105:16.

[292] 2 Sam 21.

[293] 1 Kgs 17–18; 2 Kgs 4:38–41; 6:24–7:16; 8:1–6.

[294] Exod 15:22–17:7; Num 11:4–35; 20:2–11; 21:5, 16–18; Deut 2:7; 8; Ps 105:40; Neh 9:15, 20–21. These accounts may reflect the historical realities of hardship during exilic period forced migration or postexilic returning journeys; Kegler, "Hunger," 324.

[295] Gen 25:29–34.

Most frequently, life-threatening hunger appears as a strategy or consequence of warfare.[296] The sequence חרב–רעב "sword–hunger" occurs numerous times in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, usually in combination with דבר "disease, pestilence" or other forms of devastation. Despite the neat literary alliteration, it probably reflects the historical realities for Judah at the turn of the sixth century.[297] Campaigning seasons were timed so that troops could feed themselves from the fields. Intentional agricultural destruction as a weapon of warfare could cause hardship for years thereafter.[298] A siege could cut off a city's population from its food and water sources, weakening soldiers and inhabitants through starvation.[299] The terror induced in captive city-dwellers must have been extreme. References to cannibalism may be a literary trope but probably contain some kernel of historical truth.[300]

The unpredictable and precarious nature of agricultural yields and food supplies in ancient west Asia underlies the common threat of hunger and famine in treaty curses for rebellion and faithlessness to a suzerain.[301] The theological metaphor of covenant with YHWH shares this tradition. Unsurprisingly, then, many biblical texts from the neo-Assyrian period onwards include רעב "hunger, famine," alongside other deprivations, as

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[296] E.g., Deut 28:49–57; 2 Kgs 6:24–5; 7:4, 12; 25:3; Isa 5:13; Jer 5:12; 18:21, 38:9; 52:3–6; Ezek 4; Lam 4:4–10; 5:10. Eph'al, *The City Besieged*, 57–66.

[297] Charting the literary trope, see Kegler, "Hunger," 326–7; also, Altmann, "Too Little Food," 375–377.

[298] Hence the proscription of Deut 20:19–20; Kegler, "Hunger," 325–26. The contrasting scenarios of feeding hungry soldiers in 1 Sam 14:24–46; 17:17–18; 21:2–7; 2 Sam 17:27–29, makes it clear it is impossible to deduce a historically accurate picture from these narrative texts.

[299] A Neo-Assyrian divination query concerning the successful military strategy to destroy a city puts famine, hunger and want in parallel with ramps or battering-rams and lack of soldiers (SAA 04 029 2–3; http://oracc.org/saao/P238975/).

[300] Deut 28:53–57; 2 Kgs 6:26–30; Ezek 5:10; Lam 2:19–20; 4:10. Eph'al, *The City Besieged*, 61–62.

[301] See, inter alia, the eighth century treaty of Aššur-Nerari V with the Aramaean Mati'-ilu, King of Arpad: "May Adad, the canal inspector of heaven and earth, put an end to Mati'-ilu, his land, and the people of his land through hunger, want, and famine, may they eat the flesh of their sons and daughters, and may it taste as good to them as the flesh of spring lambs." (SAA 02 002, iv 8–11; http://oracc.org/saao/P336039/).

YHWH's punishment, in retrospect or threatened, for his people's rebellion.[302] Food shortages are also typical of the "futility curse" tradition. Hunger may not be explicitly named, but these curses often employ themes of low agricultural yield and eating and drinking without satiation.[303] A couple of texts suggest divinely sent famine and hunger are not only a deserved punishment, but are harsh investigative measures, to test inclination and train the correct responses in YHWH's people.[304]

Most texts in which רעב appears concern community-wide food shortages that are consistently disastrous and strongly negatively evaluated. By contrast, a mere handful allude to the "temporary inconvenience"[305] of hunger experienced by an individual throughout the day, or over a short period of time, as an inevitable aspect of the human condition. Here, the significance of hunger, often accompanied by thirst, is that they cause weakness. They indicate an immediate need to be met by food and drink, sometimes through hospitality.[306] The negative emotive value elsewhere associated with רעב is here attenuated to an almost neutral nonchalance. The substantive רעב is rarely used for this transitory hunger.

In a final, small collection of verses "the hungry" is used to designate a subset of individuals within the community. "The hungry" have needs demanding

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[302] E.g., Deut 28:48; Isa 65:12–13; Jer 14:1–12; 21:3–7; 24:10; 27:8; 44:11–14, 27; Ezek 6:11–12; 14:13, 21. See Walter Harrelson, "Famine in the Perspective of Biblical Judgments and Promises," *Soundings* 59 (1976): 84–99.

[303] E.g., Lev 26:16–29; Deut 28:38–40; Isa 5:10; Hos 4:10; Amos 4:8; 5:11; Mic 6:14–15; Hag 1:3–11. See, e.g., William S. Morrow, "Famine as the Curse of Kings: Royal Ideology in Old Aramaic Futility Curse Series," in *Herrschaftslegitimation in vorderorientalischen Reichen der Eisenzeit*, ed. C. Levin and R. Müller, ORA 21 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 111–24; Laura Quick, *Deuteronomy 28 and the Aramaic Curse Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[304] E.g., Deut 8:2–5 (cf. Amos 4:6–8); Magdalene, *On the Scales*, 124.

[305] Seth Richardson, "Obedient Bellies: Hunger and Food Security in Ancient Mesopotamia," *JESHO* 59 (2016): 750–92 (751).

[306] For hunger as a human condition, see, e.g., Isa 29:8, 44:12; Ps 107:5; Prov 6:30. The psalmist uses absence of hunger (Ps 50:12–13) and sleep (121:3) as indicators of YHWH's superior divinity, in contrast to the weaknesses of human life. For hunger precipitating hospitality, see, e.g., 2 Sam 17:28–9.

satisfaction causing them to behave differently,[307] or requiring provision. It can be difficult to tell from the context if the food shortage is transitory or is a more chronic problem. Two main groups of texts can be distinguished according to the provider.

In the first cluster of verses, YHWH provides food for "the hungry."[308] In Hannah's prayer (1 Sam 2:5), the reversal of fortunes motif is used to describe YHWH's character and actions in terms of an ideal king. YHWH's kingship is also the guise for his provision of the hungry in Ps 146:7.[309]

> The satisfied (שׂבעים) have hired themselves out for bread (לחם)[310]
> And the hungry (רעבים) no longer lack.
>
> 1 Sam 2:5

> For he satisfies (שׂבע *hiphil*) the thirsting throat (נפשׁ שׁקקה)
> And the hungry throat (נפשׁ רעבה) he fills with good things.
>
> Ps 107:9 (cf. vv. 5, 36)

> Who executes justice for those who are oppressed,
> who gives bread to the hungry (נתן לחם רעבים).
>
> Ps 146:7

The picture of divine provision is not uniform. For example, in one of his speeches, Job accuses God of presiding over injustice and describes its victims as hungry and "naked."

> They go "naked" (ערום), without clothing,

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[307] E.g., Job 5:5; cf. Prov 6:30.

[308] Cf. YHWH's often indirect provision of food to various other social types and created beings in general in, e.g., Gen 1:29–30; Deut 10:18; Ps 22:27; 37:19, 25; 104:27; 132:15; 136:25; 145:15; 147:9, 14; Prov 10:3. On Ps 136:25 as interpreting Deut 10:18, see Marc Zvi Brettler, "Psalm 136 as an Interpretive Text," *HeBAI* 2 (2013): 373–95 (380, 393–94). See below.

[309] David G. Firth, "Hannah's Prayer as Hope for and Critique of Monarchy," in *The Book of Samuel and Its Response to Monarchy*, ed. S. Kipfer and J. M. Hutton, BWANT (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2021), 29; Nathan MacDonald, "'The Eyes of All Look to You': The Generosity of the Divine King," in *Decisive Meals: Table Politics in Biblical Literature*, ed. N. MacDonald, L. S. Rehmann, and K. Ehrensperger, LNTS 449 (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 1–14. On claims of food security as political theatre by ancient west Asian states, see Richardson, "Obedient Bellies."

[310] The lexeme is also used generically for "food."

And the hungry (רעבים) carry the sheaves.[311]

Job 24:10

The second cluster of texts employ images of human provision and deprivation with indications of moral judgements of righteousness and wickedness. The key texts Isa 58:7, 10 and Ezek 18:7, 16 exhort provision of food to "the hungry" and clothing to the ערום "naked." In a third text, the provision of food and water, the most immediate needs, is urged and is implicitly understood as righteous behaviour indicating innocence.

If your accuser[312] is a hungry one (רעב),

give him bread to eat (אכל *hiphil*);

And if he is a thirsty one (צמא),

give him water to drink (שׁקה *hiphil*);

For you will rake coals on his head,

And YHWH will recompense you.[313]

Prov 25:21–22

Two further texts use a converse of the motif to indicate a lack of righteousness. In Isa 32:6, the motif is hyperbolically inverted into deprivation.

For a fool speaks foolish things

and his heart practises iniquity …

Emptying (ריק *hiphil*) the throat of the hungry (נפשׁ רעב)

and decreasing the drink of the thirsty (צמא).[314]

Isa 32:6ac

Compared to Isa 32:6c, the moderation in Job 22:7 appears surprising.

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[311] "To go (הלך) ערום" is an idiom for mourning (see discussion in earlier chapter). In Job 24:10 it can be read with polysemous parallelism, as mourning the loss of one's children (v. 9, seized on debt default) and as destitute, indicated by lacking (good or sufficient) clothing (note the otherwise redundant expression בלי לבוש "without clothing"). See further discussion below.

[312] Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 296.

[313] Perhaps this concerns an accusation of failure to provide sustenance over the long term; cf. Prov 6:27–31.

[314] Isa 32:1–8 may reflect the miscarriage of justice in a legal setting.

You have given no water to the faint (עיף) to drink (שׁקה *hiphil*),
And from the hungry (רעב) you have withheld bread.

Job 22:7

The context suggests an accusation of injustice (v. 5),[315] yet failure to provide food and water is hardly an infringement of the law.[316] This apparent anomaly is resolved by interpreting Job 22:5–7, 9 as a litany of sociomoral failures, including the abuse of power in legal contexts,[317] an interpretation which fits with the preceding two verses cited.

The distribution of רעב "famine, hunger; hungry" indicates that the lemma designates a person type in a small number of verses.[318] These texts refer to hunger being satisfied or unjustly ignored or created. In several psalms and Gen 1–2, YHWH provides food as creator for all creation,[319] but in only one very late text is YHWH as king described in similar terms to the righteous man, as one who "gives bread to the hungry" (Ps 146:7).

6.3 Textual evidence of the provision of food and clothing

6.3.1 Provision in the Hebrew Bible

The provision of food to named individuals, the whole community, or subgroups of it, is mentioned throughout the Hebrew Bible, from narratives of one-off hospitality[320] to YHWH's provision of manna and quails in the wilderness (Exod 16). The frequent appearance of food in biblical texts reflects its importance for daily survival and its nature as a highly perishable consumable that is destroyed in its consumption. Textiles are almost as vital.

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[315] Like Isa 58 and Ezek 18 (see later chapters), Job 22 includes several linguistic markers of legal discourse, as noted by Carol A. Newsom, "Job," in *NIB 4*, 1996, 500.
[316] Clines, *Job 21-37*, 555–56.
[317] See the discussion of Ezek 18 in a later chapter.
[318] Roughly twelve out of 134 occurrences.
[319] MacDonald, "The Eyes of All Look to You," 1–3, 12–13.
[320] See T. R. Hobbs, "Hospitality in the First Testament and the 'Teleological Fallacy,'" *JSOT* 95 (2001): 3–30; also, Anne K. de Hemmer Gudme, "Death at the Hand of a Woman; Hospitality and Gender in the Hebrew Bible," in S. L. Budin et al., *Gender and Methodology,* 327–36.

Before any social considerations, they are essential for the warmth, protection, and well-being of the human body. Clothing and blankets, and the raw products of wool and flax with which they are made, while not immediately consumable, are non-durable. They wear out and are eaten by insects, so need to be regularly mended or replaced.[321] The production of clothing involves a significant expenditure of time and so its provision is not an incidental matter. As a long-term proposition it increases the probability of an ongoing relationship between provider and recipient.

The explicit supply of food and clothing is surprisingly infrequent in biblical texts. The taxonomy below may help suggest likely candidates for the person types labelled "the hungry" and "the naked" in Isa 58:7 by indicating where there is some precedent for provisioning. Thereafter, the list is scrutinised briefly for connections and patterns, which are compared to texts from the wider cultural context.[322]

Food and clothing is:

1. Provided by YHWH:
    a. to the first humans in the garden of Eden (Gen 2:16–7; 3:21);
    b. to Jacob on his journey away from his father's house (Gen 28:20–22);
    c. for the Israelites at the exodus through the Egyptians (Exod 3:22, 11:2; 12:35–36);
    d. for the Israelites, in the wilderness (Deut 8:3–4, 29:4–5; Neh 9:15, 20–21; cf. Exod 16–17:7);
    e. for the Israelites, in the land (Deut 7:12–13; cf. Hag 1:11);[323]
    f. to Jerusalem (Ezek 16:9–14) and Samaria (Hos 2:4–25);

[321] Cf. Ps 39:11; Prov 25:20; Isa 50:9; 51:8.
[322] Note that there is some duplication.
[323] Sheep and goats provide the raw products for clothing and textiles.

g. for those who "dwell in the presence of YHWH" through Tyre (Isa 23:18);[324]

h. for the men with skin diseases from the abandoned Aramean camp (2 Kgs 7:8);

i. for the "Levitical priests" (Deut 18:1–5; cf. Deut 26:12–13);

j. for the גר (*ger)* "sojourner"[325] (Deut 10:18–19; cf. Deut 26:12–13).[326]

2. Provided by others:

a. husband to wives (Exod 21:10–11; cf. Gen 24:53–54; Ruth 3:15–17);

b. "husband" YHWH to Jerusalem and Samaria (Ezek 16:9–14; Hos 2:10–11);

c. "lovers" to Samaria (Hos 2:7);

d. former master to freed Hebrew slave (Deut 15:13–14);

e. Solomon to his court (1 Kgs 10:5//2 Chr 9:4);

f. the woman of חיל "wealth, substance"[327] (Prov 31:10–31);

g. women for themselves (Isa 4:1);

h. your own flocks and herds (Prov 27:23–27);

i. Joseph to his brothers (Gen 45:22–23);[328]

j. certain Samarian leaders to Judean captives (2 Chr 28:15);

k. owners of fields, olive groves, and vineyards to the *ger*, the orphan, and the widow (Deut 24:19–21); Israelites to the Levites, the *ger*, the orphan, and the widow (Deut 26:12–13; cf. 14:29; 16:11, 14);

l. futility of the wicked man's provision (Job 27:13–19);

m. futility of provision when temple remains unbuilt (Hag 1:5–11).

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[324] Andrew T. Abernethy, *Eating in Isaiah: Approaching the Role of Food and Drink in Isaiah's Structure and Message* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 75, notes the cultic setting of the redistribution of Tyre's wealth.

[325] Other glosses are "stranger, immigrant, resident alien." Due to uncertainty, the Hebrew term is retained.

[326] Cf. Lev 19:33–34. The identity of the ger in various textual layers continues to be debated. See, e.g., Reinhard Achenbach, "*Gêr – Nåkhrî – Tôshav – Zâr*," in *The Foreigner and the Law: Perspectives from the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near East*, ed. R. Achenbach, R. Albertz, and J. Wöhrle, BZABR 16 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011), 29–51.

[327] Cf. Ezek 28:5; see Christine Roy Yoder, *Wisdom as a Woman of Substance: A Socioeconomic Reading of Proverbs 1–9 and 31:10–31* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001), 76–77.

[328] See Gary Stansell, "The Gift in Ancient Israel," *Semeia* 87 (1999): 65–90 (71–74).

3. Received by:
    a. wives/"wives" (Exod 21:10–11; Ezek 16:9–14; Hos 2:10–11);
    b. members of the family/household (Prov 31:10–31);
    c. brothers (Gen 45:22–23; 2 Chr 28:15)
    d. freed Hebrew slave (Deut 15:13–14);
    e. courtiers (1 Kgs 10:5//2 Chr 9:4)
    f. shepherds rather than their "sheep" (Ezek 34:2–3);
    g. the Levites (Deut 18:1–5; cf. Deut 26:12–13);
    h. those who "dwell in the presence of YHWH" (Isa 23:18);
    i. the *ger* (Deut 10:18–19; cf. Deut 24:19–21; 26:12–13);
    j. the orphan, the widow, the poor, and the needy (Job 24:2–12; 31:16–20; cf. Deut 26:12–13);
    k. the "hungry" and "naked" (Isa 58:7; Ezek 18:7, 16).

The texts in which YHWH is the provider of food and clothing do not seem to draw on royal associations, in the way that the few texts in which he gives food to "the hungry" seem to. Instead, the verses characterise YHWH's divinity and his relationship with the Israelites in several other ways. First, the deity is to be viewed as the ultimate provider, in contradistinction to humans (1a, d–h). Second, YHWH is the source of provision, rather than any other god or nation (1b, f). Indeed, he may provide by extracting wealth from other nations, potentially punitively, reversing fortunes and exemplifying his pre-eminence (1c, g–h).[329] Third, YHWH provides for the landless (1b–f, i–j). His primary provision to the people Israel (also, Jerusalem and Samaria) is the promised land and its agricultural abundance (1e–f). It is because they have

[329] The Egyptians' leaving gifts are, strictly speaking, jewellery and garments, and not any foodstuffs. But the context implies that this constitutes a significant gift that would provide for some time. YHWH's intention is that the people do not go "empty-handed" (ריקים, Exod 3:21). The text seems to be portraying the Israelites' leaving Egypt in economic terms that are reminiscent of the father's bridal gift for a young woman leaving her parental home. Cf. Hos 2:17, which refers to leaving the land of Egypt, and the "days of her youth" (נעורים). See discussion of this as economic lack in the previous chapter.

no land that YHWH takes care of the Levitical priests and the *ger* (1i–j).[330] That YHWH provides wool and foodstuffs for "the priests" indirectly through the tithing system is spelled out fully (Deut 18:1–5). The reference to tithing for the Levites, the *ger,* orphans, and widows refers only to food (Deut 26:12–13).[331] The statement that YHWH "loves (אהב) the *ger,* giving him food and a garment" (Deut 10:18) is extraordinary, since elsewhere in Deuteronomy, Israel is the sole object of YHWH's "love."[332] Also unique is the exhortation to Israel to "love the *ger,*"[333] presumably by provision, the motivation clause being that Israel had themselves been *gerim* in Egypt (v. 19). Unfortunately, space precludes exploring further this intriguing encouragement to imitate YHWH through provision.

When humans are the providers, the context evoked is largely that of the בית ("house, household, family") and the relationships within it (2a–j, l–m). The social obligation to provide normally falls on a male head of household (e.g., 2l), whether he is the husband (2a–b, also 1f), the master (2d), or the king (2e). This expectation is bolstered by the imagery of self-supporting women desperate, nonetheless, to marry (2g) and "lovers" providing inappropriately for YHWH's "wife" (2c). It may also be reflected in the one-off provisioning by a brother or brother nation of his siblings, which seems to underscore the provisioner's superior status amongst brothers (2i, cf. Gen 37:6–11; 2j, cf. 2 Chr 28:11). The counterexample of wicked leaders who prosper whilst failing to provide for their "sheep" (3f) also fits this pattern. So, too, does the motif

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[330] Mark A. Awabdy, *Immigrants and Innovative Law: Deuteronomy's Theological and Social Vision for the* גר (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 91, 121.

[331] The provisioning of the *ger* raises many questions. The orphan and the widow form a fixed word-pair in ancient west Asian and Egyptian texts. See, e.g., Annette Schellenberg, "Hilfe für Witwen und Waisen: Ein gemein-altorientalisches Motiv in wechselnden alttestamentlichen Diskussionszusammenhängen," *ZAW* 124 (2012): 180–200. The introduction of the *ger* (e.g., Deut 24:19–21) is a biblical Hebrew development. See, inter alia, Mark R. Glanville, *Adopting the Stranger as Kindred in Deuteronomy* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018); Awabdy, *Immigrants*; José E. Ramírez Kidd, *Alterity and Identity in Israel: The* גר *in the Old Testament*, BZAW 283 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999); Norbert Lohfink, "Poverty in the Laws of the Ancient Near East and of the Bible," *TS* 52 (1991): 34–50.

[332] Awabdy, *Immigrants*, 53. Cf. Ps 146:8, where it is the righteous whom YHWH loves.

[333] Cf. Lev 19:18.

of the futility curse on the provision of the wicked man for his descendants (2l) and of the Jerusalem community, accused of concern for their own households whilst neglecting YHWH's house (2m). Provision is made through the resources one has, one's land, and one's labour (2f–h, k). Marriage was also an important means of bringing economic resources and wealth into the household (2f–g, also 1c), as the portrayal of the "woman of substance" (2f) suggests.[334] The portrayal of YHWH in Exodus and Deuteronomy as the ultimate and sole provider to the House of Israel, and his relationship to the land, may show reflexes of the ideal husband, head of household, and landowner alongside the divine cosmic creator.

The most common recipients of provision are wives, other members of the household, and close kin (3a–c) or its royal or political equivalent (3e–f). The Hebrew slave is released with provisions presumably because of his or her "family membership" of the people of Israel (3d). YHWH's house, the temple, lies behind the provision of the Levitical priests and/or Levites[335] and those "who dwell in the presence of YHWH" (3g–h, cf. 2b, m). The orphan and the widow, whose status is defined by the lack of a male head of the family, are included, alongside the landless Levite and the *ger*, in Deuteronomy's programme of provision, some of which involves the redistribution of tithes coming to YHWH's house (1i–j, 2k, 3g, i–j).[336] Apart from the freed slave, we

[334] See the persuasive socioeconomic interpretation by Yoder, *Wisdom as a Woman of Substance*, 75–91. She suggests the acrostic poem in Prov 31:10-31 constitutes advice to young men of the Persian period to marry an ideal, affluent, diligent, businesswoman who can provide a comfortable future for them (91).

[335] Space precludes engaging in the debate over the historical and economic situation of the priests and Levites. Raising some of the issues, see, e.g., Ehud Ben Zvi, "Levites of Memory in Chronicles and Some Considerations about Historical Levites in Late-Persian Yehud," in *Chronicles and the Priestly Literature of the Hebrew Bible*, ed. J. Jeon and L. C. Jonker, BZAW 529 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2021), 281–304; Benedetta Rossi, "'Not by Bread Alone' (Deut 8:3): Elite Struggles over Cultic Prebends and Moses's Torah in Deuteronomy" in *Deuteronomy in the Making: Studies in the Production of Debarim*, ed. D. Edelman et al. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2021), 331–365.

[336] See Ronald A. Simkins, "The Widow and Orphan in the Political Economy of Ancient Israel," ed. R. A. Simkins and T. M. Kelly, *Journal of Religion & Society Supplement Series* 10 (2014): 20–33; David L. Baker, *Tight Fists or Open Hands? Wealth and Poverty in Old Testament Law* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 175–195; Mark Sneed, "Israelite Concern for the Alien, Orphan, and Widow: Altruism or Ideology?" *ZAW* 111 (1999): 498–507; Lohfink, "Poverty."

only find references to meeting the poor's need of food and clothing in Job (3j). In chapter 24, the poor and needy, alongside orphans and widows, are framed as victims of the wicked, whom God does not defend.[337] Job's declaration of innocence seems to form an intentional contrast as he claims to have provided food to the orphan (31:17) and clothing to a poor person (vv. 19–20).[338]

Unlike the other designations, the labels רעב and ערום/עירם designate people in terms that allude to the portable resources of food and clothing that they require and that are to be given (3k). A similar, but more generalised, emphasis on the lack to be averted by provisioning is indicated by the descriptors ריקם/ריק "empty, empty-handed" found in several of the texts already encountered and in other contexts of provision.[339] The significant semantic overlap between this lexeme and ערום in the context of provisioning weakens the alleged distinctiveness of Isa 58:7 and Ezek 18:7, 16, whilst suggesting again that ערום has stronger connotations of economic need and clothing deficiency than exposure of the body.

The overview of biblical recipients of provision indicates that, most commonly, they have associations with the house or family of the provider. But the number of verses involved is surprisingly few. The data set is too small for its norms to be a sure guide. References to the provision of the *ger*, the orphan, the widow, the poor, and freed slaves, although not widespread,

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[337] Job 24:2–12 contains an ironic description of an unjust world, as Job raises a counterclaim against God, accusing him of abusing his authority by failing to deal with the wicked. See Magdalene, *On the Scales*, 156–7, 169–70. The destitute toil to produce food, oil, and wine which they do not benefit from themselves. The lexeme ערום should be understood as partially or semi-dressed, not a complete lack of clothes. In v. 10 it renders two readings, one referring to mourning and the second to a need of the provision of clothing. For the suggestion that both incidences of ערום (vv. 7, 10) are corruptions of רועים "shepherding," see John Gray, *The Book of Job* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2010), 320.

[338] Cf. David's restoration to Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son, of his grandfather Saul's land (2 Sam 9) so that he might have food to eat (v. 10).

[339] See Gen 31:42; Exod 3:21 (1c); Deut 15:13 (2d, 3d); 2 Sam 6:20; Isa 29:8; Job 22:9; Prov 12:11; 28:19; Ruth 3:17 (2a); Neh 5:13. For texts charging worshippers not to appear ריקם before YHWH, see Exod 23:15; 34:20; Deut 16:16.

support the possibility that provision to those in need who were not close kin was considered commendable, righteous behaviour.

6.3.2 Provision, rations, and maintenance allowances in comparative texts

We can glean more detail about what long-term provisioning entailed and who received it from comparative materials. There is a lot of evidence from Mesopotamia that "food" (or grain), oil (for the skin, for wounds, and for consumption), and clothing (or wool) were a historical and literary triad. Originally given as rations by institutions,[340] they also constituted payments in kind and were later mandated as personal maintenance allowances in legal agreements, in line with the law codes.[341] Although there is less evidence of this triad forming a literary stereotype in Egypt, there is strong evidence for equivalent histories of payments in kind and allowances of food and clothing.[342] That the triad was understood to represent the basic necessities

[340] See Ignace J. Gelb, "The Ancient Mesopotamian Ration System," *JNES* 24 (1965): 230–43.
[341] See Laws of Lipit-Ishtar §27 (for a prostitute who bears a man's heir; ca. 1930); Laws of Hammurabi §178 (for a dependent woman; ca. 1750); Middle Assyrian Laws §36 (ca. 1076); in Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, 2nd ed., WAW 6 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 31, 117, 165, respectively. The triad is discussed in Shalom M. Paul, "Exod 21:10: A Threefold Maintenance Clause," *JNES* 28 (1969):48–53.
[342] Hana Vymazalová, "Ration System," in *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, ed. J. C. Moreno García and W. Wendrich (Los Angeles: University of California, 2016), https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8g74r617. Hetep-her-Akhet's Saqqara tomb inscription from the Fifth Dynasty (ca. 2450–233) claims fair treatment of its builders: "They worked this for me for bread, for beer, for clothes, for ointment, for much barley and emmer. I never did anything by force against anyone" (Urk. I.50, lines 3–4); trans. Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies Chiefly of the Middle Kingdom: A Study and an Anthology*, OBO 84 (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 10. War captives kept as slaves were also assigned provisions of food and clothing. See the extracts from the twelfth century P.Harris I (BM 10053), "From the Lists of Ramsses III," trans. James H. Breasted (ANET, 260).

of life in Mesopotamia[343] and Egypt[344] is suggested by its persistence over time and distribution across literary genres. In both traditions, these commodities meet the needs of "the hungry," "the parched," and "the naked" in the restored right order ushered in by a new reign.[345] The same triad appears, along with silver and gold, as provisions promised for a city god should he become hungry, naked, cursed (ill or injured?) or in debt, in a bi-lingual Hurrian-Hittite text from 15th–14th century Anatolia.[346]

More common than a triple reference to the hungry, parched/injured, and naked, is the first-person declaration of having given "bread to the hungry, clothes to the naked" from the Egyptian mortuary tradition. Attestations are extant from the Sixth Dynasty (ca. 2350) up to the Ptolemaic period, mostly in purportedly autobiographical inscriptions by men, but also, latterly, in Spell 125 of the Book of the Dead.[347] The motif has a consistent association with

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[343] E.g., Šiduri's advice to Gilgamesh (OB VA+BM iii 6–15) in Andrew R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), I:275, 279; the letter-prayer "Ur-Nanshe to Ninsianna" translated by Benjamin R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2005), 217; and the treaty curses SAA 02 005, iv 14-17 and SAA 02 002, iv 14–16.

[344] E.g., "The Teaching of the Vizier Ptahhotep," Maxim 21, lines 325–330 (P.Prisse 10.8–10), translated by R. B. Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems, 1940-1640 BC* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 257. The same sequence appears in a different order in a Nineteenth Dynasty letter from a man to his deceased wife (P.Leiden I, 317, l.23); see Edward F. Wente, *Letters from Ancient Egypt*, SBLWAW (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1990), 216–17.

[345] See the Egyptian Twentieth Dynasty (ca. 1164–1157) accession hymn, translated by John A. Wilson, "Joy at the Accession of Ramses IV," *ANET*, 378–79; and the neo-Babylonian letter from the scholar-exorcist Adad-šuni-uṣur who curries favour with Ashurbanipal, SAA 10 226; with translations BtM 1015 and Simo Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal: Part II: Commentary and Appendices* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2019), 103–5.

[346] K.Bo 32.15 ii 4'–18', translated by Mary R. Bachvarova "The Hurro-Hittite Song of Release (Destruction of the City of Elba)," in *Gods, Heroes, and Monsters: A Sourcebook of Greek, Roman, and Near Eastern Myths in Translation*, ed. C. López-Ruiz, 2nd ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 301–10.

[347] For a collection of Old Kingdom examples, and discussion of variants, see Nicole Kloth, *Die (auto-)biographischen Inschriften des ägyptischen Alten Reiches: Untersuchungen zu Phraseologie und Entwicklung*, SAK Beihefte 8 (Hamburg: Buske, 2002), 3–46, 77–78; also, Detlef Franke, "Arme und Geringe im Alten Reich Altägyptens: 'Ich gab Speise dem Hungernden, Kleider dem Nackten ...,'" *ZÄS* 133.2 (2006): 104–20; for the First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom, see Detlef Franke, "Fürsorge und Patronat in der Ersten

morally upright behaviour[348] and avoiding a challenged existence in the afterlife.[349] However, the contexts in which it is used, and hence its associations and connotations, change over the centuries. The stereotyped nature of the literary motif is evident in the trends that elaborate or simplify it over time, the primary additions being the provision of water to "the thirsty" and a boat to "the boatless." The emphasis is consistently on the provider and the act of provision, and their own needs of provision in the afterlife. Only contextual clues indicate the recipients. The identities of "the hungry" and "the naked" vary widely in different periods and according to the provider's responsibilities for supply. They encompass the deceased, the gods, estate- and temple-workers, family members, household staff, and town citizens. I know of only one instance in which the designations refer to the poor, in a woman's memorial inscription from the Ptolemaic period, which suggests her gifts to the poor reciprocate their prayers for her ill-health.[350]

The three commodities forming the standard triad in comparative texts are named or alluded to in the biblical record also, often with elaborations. They

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Zwischenzeit und im Mittleren Reich," *SAK* 34 (2006): 179–83; and for the Late Period, when it was common to insert "water to the thirsty" into the formula, see Eberhard Otto, *Die biographischen Inschriften der ägyptischen Spätzeit: Ihre geistesgeschichtliche und literarische Bedeutung*, PÄ 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1954), 94, n. 2, et passim; and Jens Heise, *Erinnern und Gedenken: Aspekte der biographischen Inschriften der ägyptischen Spätzeit* (Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 318, et passim.

[348] That is, speaking and doing *maat*. Emily Teeter, "Maat," *OEAE* 2:319–21: "The ethical conceptions of 'truth,' 'order,' and 'cosmic balance' are encompassed in the Egyptian term *maat*, and the personification of those principles is the goddess Maat (*M3't*). The goddess represented the divine harmony and balance of the universe ... she was considered to be the force that kept chaos (*isft*), the antithesis of order, from overwhelming the world. Hence *maat* was a complex, intertwined, and interdependent sense of ethics that tied personal behaviour ... to the maintenance of universal order. To transgress one aspect of *maat* threatened to encourage chaos and overwhelm order. To live according to *maat* was also fundamental to personal existence" (319). See, also, Jan Assmann, *Ma'at. Gerechtigkeit und Unsterblichkeit im Alten Ägypten.* (Munich: Beck, 1990); "Maat in Egyptian Autobiographies," in Miriam Lichtheim, *Maat in Egyptian Autobiographies and Related Studies*, OBO 120 (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), 9–101.

[349] Franke, "Arme und Geringe," 108.

[350] Hildesheim PM6352; Maxim Panov, *Women in the Inscriptions of the Late Period*, Egyptian Texts X (Novosibirsk: M. Panov, 2018), 82; Karl Jansen-Winkeln, "Die Hildesheimer Stele der Chereduanch," *MDAIK* 53 (1997): 91–100.

occur in the depictions of YHWH's provision of Jerusalem (Ezek 16:13) and Samaria (Hos 2:7), and the Samarians' care of the captive Judeans (2 Chr 28:15), discussed in the last chapter.[351] The clearest exemplar of the triad as a maintenance allowance is found in Exod 21:10. The husband who takes another wife is not to diminish for his first wife שׁארה "her meat/food," כסותה "her covering/clothing," or ענתה "her oil/ointments."[352] A different triad is employed in Deut 15:14, where the freed Hebrew slave is to leave your household with "from your flock, from the threshing floor, and from the wine press," representing wool or hides,[353] grain, and wine.[354]

6.4 Conclusion

The outcomes of the word study on nakedness can now be brought into conversation with the three perspectives in this chapter. The economic dimension of the substantive use of ערום "the naked" is brought to the fore by being put alongside the substantive רעב "the hungry." What "the hungry" require is to be satisfied (1 Sam 2:5), to be filled (Ps 107:9); to have bread/food (1 Sam 2:5; Isa 58:7; Ezek 18:7, 16; Ps 146:7; Prov 25:21), sheaves of grain (Job 24:10), "good things" (Ps 107:9); and to lack no longer (1 Sam 2:5). What "the naked" require is to be clothed (2 Chr 28:15) or covered (Isa 58:7; Ezek 18:7, 16), clothing (Job 24:7, 10), covering (Job 24:7; 26:6), and garments (Ezek 18:7, 16; Job 24:10), even if they already have one (Gen 3:7, 10, 21; Job 22:6). What those who are "empty-handed"[355] require is land

[351] Commonly cited, as sharing affinities with Gilgamesh and the Teaching of Ptahhotep, is Qoh 9:7–9a, but see also, Deut 7:13; 18:4; Isa 3:7; Ezek 34:3, Job 24:10–11, amongst others; cf. the involvement of the triad in the ordination of priests in Exod 29.
[352] Paul, "Exod 21:10." The common translation of the last as "conjugal rights," presumably a euphemism for sexual intercourse, is completely anachronistic, let alone unlikely in the context.
[353] Animal hides were known as covers, e.g., in Elephantine; Seth Bledsoe, *The Wisdom of the Aramaic Book of Ahiqar: Unravelling a Discourse of Uncertainty and Distress*, JSJsup 199 (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 255.
[354] Perhaps the variation arises in translation, since olives also require pressing to produce oil. Wine was an elite product, so is historically unrealistic as a leaving gift. See Welton, *Deviant Consumption*, 121–142.
[355] These texts tend to use the descriptors ריקם/ריק "empty, empty-handed" adjectivally or adverbially, not substantively. Note that the lexeme is also written defectively.

(Judg 9:4; 11:3; Prov 12:11; 28:19; Neh 5:13), silver and gold (Exod 3:21–22), clothing (Exod 3:21–22), wool or hides (Deut 13:15), grain (Deut 13:15; Ruth 3:17), bread (Prov 12:11; 28:19), and drink (Isa 29:8). The overlap of the needs of the last group with the first two and the comparative evidence for the standard trio as payments in kind and maintenance allowances suggest that what "the hungry" and "the naked" lack are the basic commodities as maintenance allowances: food (also, oil and drink) and clothing. The "nakedness" experienced is a fundamentally economic need for the replacement of non-durable textiles for wearing and for protection from sun and cold. These represent the prototypical, first and final, personal possession, even when there is contextual evidence that they are clearly not. There is no hint in the texts that the condition of "nakedness" is experienced as compromising an appropriate sense of modesty.[356] Indeed, the statement could be turned around: the recipient of the standard maintenance allowances of food and clothing was stereotypically designated as "the hungry" (i.e., the one to whom one should provide food) and "the naked" ("the one to whom one should provide clothing").

Most of the time, providers can be distinguished from recipients in terms of their higher social status. Providers are primarily men and heads of household, as befits a patriarchal society. They are leaders and landowners. Female providers are very exceptional and often temple officeholders. Recipients are wives, servants, courtiers, lower status brothers, the *ger*, orphans, widows, the poor, and the needy. Like Job 31, an ancient Egyptian text purporting to be royal testimony makes a claim of provision to the economically vulnerable beyond the household circle.[357] In biblical texts

[356] I suspect that the fear expressed in Gen 3:8–10 at being ערום in the presence of YHWH (ואירא כי עירם אנכי "I was afraid because I was 'naked,'" v. 10) has another explanation, possibly associated with sacred space. E.g., it may be related to the regulations against "empty-handed" worship: ולא יראו פני ריקם "Do not see my face empty-handed," Exod 23:15 (also, Exod 34:20; Deut 16:16).

[357] "I gave to the beggar, I raised the orphan, and I made the man who had not end up like someone who had," stanza 3, "The Teaching of King Amenemhat" (P.Millingen, 1.6); Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe*, 206.

YHWH and the Levites are also recipients of gifts of meat, grains, oil, and wine indicating that the flow of donations can go from low to high status. This fits with the comparative evidence in which hungry and naked recipients include gods, cult statues, temple officeholders, and the deceased, as well as those hierarchically "under" the provider, for whom they alone had a responsibility to supply maintenance provisions.

Provision of food and clothing could be the subject of legal agreements or law codes. There was probably a well-established social norm about the circle of those whom a man had a responsibility to supply, consisting primarily of the close family and members of his own household, living and dead. In a hierarchical social institution or socioeconomic unit such as a royal household, temple estate, or provincial government, he might have additional responsibility for the supply of provisions to people under him, but this is rarely the context in biblical texts. The existence of legal guidelines and agreements, invariably centred on the household, indicate that there were occasions when provision was not made or responsibility was not clear, and recourse to legal procedures was necessary. Closely associated with the legal domain is the evidence, in certain circumstances and to certain recipients, for the moral evaluation of provision, as righteous or innocent behaviour[358] while failure to provide could be deemed unrighteous or wicked.[359]

Initial answers to the questions raised at the end of the last chapter lead to a few, diverse, potential scenarios. The diversity arises because "the hungry" and "the naked" are not a distinctive or permanent group of people. They are simply those in need of food and clothing as the two categories of consumables and personal "possessions" most fundamental to survival and the maintenance of life. The pool of possible candidates when the substantives appear together is large, even if we set aside the delegated

[358] E.g., Deut 10:18–19; 18:1–5; 24:19–21; 26:12–13; Isa 58:7; Ezek 18:6, 17; Job 31:16–20; Prov 25:21-22; 2 Chr 28:15.
[359] E.g., Isa 32:6; Hag 1:5–11; Job 22:7; 27:13–19.

responsibilities to provide in a hierarchical institution. They could be members of a household, living or deceased, with whom the male provider has a long-term relationship and to whom they have a clear sociomoral obligation of provision. A member of the community who fulfilled all their traditional obligations in this regard would be innocent of any accusations of neglect of duty and, therefore, righteous. Alternatively, the recipient could be a *ger*, orphan, or widow, or a member of the social stratum referred to as "poor" or "needy." On the one hand, if there was no prior relationship, their provision might be a freewill act of charity. On the other hand, if there was some indirect responsibility, perhaps provision might be an act of restorative justice. Either could be recognised as righteous behaviour. Yet again, the relationship between the provider and potential recipient might fall in a grey area, where there is some debate about an obligation to provide. In this scenario, exhorting provision by framing it as righteous, attempting to extend a pre-existing social norm, might elicit the desired behaviour.

Narrowing down this range of options depends on the following crucial point. The addressees need to *know* the identity of "the hungry" and "the naked" for an exhortation to behave righteously through their provision to function rhetorically. This knowledge can only come from stable cultural norms or a specific, historical, receptive context in which the rhetorical clues were sufficient. The wide variation in the recipients behind the ancient Egyptian use of the motif can be traced to both of these factors, the former having the greater weight, indicated by trends that change very slowly over time. However, very strong evidence will be needed for an interpretation of charitable provisioning in the biblical texts, given the rarity of evidence for this in the ancient Egyptian record.

With only two biblical texts in which the motif of feeding the hungry and clothing the naked is found, Isa 58:7 is selected as the prime object of an investigation using literary methods. The additional references to the theme of food and hunger in Isa 58 suggest it has greater potential to illuminate the

topic than the alternative, Ezek 18. The textual analysis in the next two chapters constitutes a thorough investigation of Isa 58:7 and its co-text, shaped by the principle that the verse needs to be understood within its rhetorical context and with respect to what is known of its historical, social, and cultural context. Organised by textual frame and focus, the first chapter first takes the verse in isolation and then considers the widest textual frame of Third Isaiah and the rhetorical unit of Isa 58. The second chapter takes Isa 58 as the textual frame, following the threads of two main themes within it associated with the key verse, v. 7. The following chapter extends the close analysis of Isa 58 to three intertexts, one from Third Isaiah and two additional typical comparands, allowing the emerging interpretation to be refined through the dialogic engagement. A fourth chapter explores a key philological conundrum that arises in Isa 58:6, 9 with the assistance of a close reading of a text from Lev 25, leading to the proposition of a previously unrecognised lexeme referring to a legal instrument. This provides a new context for the interpretation of Isa 58:7 which is deeply embedded in a particular set of historical, legal, and social circumstances. The last substantive chapter tests this interpretation against Ezek 18:7, 16, giving rise to a new perspective on this text also.

7 Isaiah 58:7 and the literary context of Isaiah 58

7.1 Introduction

There are only two biblical texts that include an explicit reference to feeding "the hungry" and clothing "the naked," Isa 58 and Ezek 18. The exhortation to provide in Ezek 18:7, 16 appears twice in lists of righteous behaviour, but the theme of food that threads through Isa 58 commends it. The appearance of "the naked" and "the hungry" in Isa 58:7 follows a brief discourse focused on fasting (vv. 3–6), a voluntary practice involving privations of clothing as well as food (v. 5). "The hungry" reappear in v. 10 with a divine promise of feeding in v. 14. Isa 58:7 is selected as the focus of literary analysis, since the denser thematic texture of Isa 58 supports a richer contextual understanding of the actions.

This chapter constitutes the first half of a close reading of Isa 58:7 comprising two chapters. It is structured according to combinations of three different frames and focal points (the verse, the rhetorical unit, and the wider literary context) and three alternative dynamics (moving towards and away from the focal point and the static view). The resulting dynamic contextual analysis provides a model for seeking new perspectives on a familiar text by initially separating the focal verse from its context and giving it and its rhetorical context close attention, each in their own right, before bringing them together again. The process facilitates the setting aside of preconceptions, increasing the potential for fresh insight through unexpected conjunctions. Using thematic lenses then allows the text to be illuminated by its own textual context. The aim of this detailed analysis is to uncover the identity of "the hungry" and "the naked" in Isa 58:7 and their relationship to their potential providers.

The first section examines the verse in its social and cultural context, but in isolation from its textual context: the verse is both frame and focal point.

With the assistance of an Aramaic text, I conclude that feeding the hungry and clothing the naked refers to providing the maintenance requirements of destitute kin, including bringing them to live under your roof, if necessary. This leads to the question of how kinship is defined. There is an implication of obligation, which virtually rules out an interpretation of charitable largesse.

The second and third sections explore the textual context of the verse from a distance in concentric nested frames, providing a general introduction to the intricate text of Isa 58. The second section starts the analysis with the frame of Third Isaiah, taking Isa 58 as the focal point and briefly sketching connections between the chapter and its wider historical and literary context. Third Isaiah was probably written in the region around Jerusalem, which was very poor in the early Persian period. Isa 58 plays a role in Third Isaiah's interest in exercising צדקה "righteousness" within the community and its correlation with Zion-Jerusalem's longed-for redemption (1:27; 56:1; 58:2; 61:10–11).

The third section takes the rhetorical unit of Isa 58 as frame and focus, examining it from four angles: its structure, content, message, and literary features. The first two parts introduce the Hebrew text in terms of structure and content. The third part proposes that not only is the text to be read as concerned with "justice" and "righteousness," but that it takes the form of a record of a divine trial. YHWH accuses his people of serious failures in their conduct and proposes how they are to amend their ways before he will respond favourably to their appeal, enacted in their fasting. The fourth and final part considers the sevenfold repetition of YHWH, יום "day," and lexemes associated with צום "fast/to fast" and suggests that the poetics provides keys to the message. The framing of the message with יעקב "Jacob" directs the address to a community portrayed as a family or household. This suggests that the scope of the call to provide to the destitute in v. 7 is the addressed Yahwistic community. The following chapter continues with the literary analysis of Isa 58 through the themes of conduct and food taken from v. 7.

7.2 The verse: Isaiah 58:7

הלוא פרס לרעב לחמך ועניים מרודים תביא בית
כי תראה ערם וכסיתו ומבשׂרך לא תתעלם

Is (it) not apportioning your food for the hungry,
and bringing the afflicted and miserable into the house?
Should you see a naked one, covering him,
and not ignoring your kin?

Isa 58:7

The benefit of first taking a verse out of its surrounding context is its very artificiality. It is like looking through a magnifying glass. It throws into sharp relief distinctive elements and the micro-dynamics between them that are easily overlooked within a larger reading frame. But to consider Isaiah 58:7 in isolation is more artificial than most. The initial particle הלוא "is (it) not," ensures it cannot stand as an independent semantic unit. This interrogative particle is a *pars pro toto* reiteration of the rhetorical question in v. 6a. הלוא זה צום אבחרהו "Is not this the fast I would choose?" (v. 6a) introduces YHWH's metaphorical "fast" described in four actions in v. 6bc and four further actions in v. 7. The rhetorical argument proceeds as the adverb אז "then" introduces a new strophe consisting of three couplets (vv. 8–9a).[360] The content of v. 7 is therefore sandwiched in between two verses that are more significant to the structure of the argument. The device of the reiterated affirmative rhetorical question in v. 7 has deflected attention away from the subtleties of the verse. The implication of the question, that the content of the utterance is already known,[361] lulls modern interpreters into expecting its meaning to be self-

[360] See below for an outline of the structure of the chapter. I use "strophe" loosely to describe a group of lines or couplets with similar rhetorical function.
[361] On how this device functions to co-opt the addressee in the speaker's argument, see Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 40–66*, FOTL (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 280–81.

evident based on its extensive afterlife.[362] This expectation must be consciously resisted by modern interpreters, since we do not share the same cultural, or rather, intertextual, background as the original audience. One way to overcome this gravitational pull is the forensic approach of the present investigation.

Isaiah 58:7 is a cohesive unit exhorting the addressee (in masculine singular forms) to certain social behaviours.[363] It consists of four cola in two couplets, each colon containing a label for a "social type." Despite subtle grammatical variations between the cola, this succession of focus, combined with the enveloping negatives הלוא/לא, produces a strong internal structure to the verse.[364]

Standard features of Hebrew poetry are on display. Repetitions of syntactic structure and associated words or ideas are shared between the lines.[365] The two cola in each couplet are connected by *waw* but have no internal syntactic parallelism. Instead, there are strong parallels between each pair of cola across the two couplets. The connection created by the social type in each colon is enhanced by some similarity of syntax producing an *aba'b'* pattern.[366]

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[362] As demonstrated by, e.g., Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary*, OTL (London: SCM, 1969), 337: "Verse 7 goes on to list the traditional acts of help to those in trouble." He then cites Paul Volz, *Jesaja II* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1932), 226: "A pageant of people whose social standing is poor passes before the spectators' eyes – disfranchised, down and outs, slaves, prisoners, the hungry, the homeless, the cold. It is a similar picture to the one in Matt. 25.35f." Cf. Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 174; also, Jan L. Koole, *Isaiah III*, HCOT (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 116: "To feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked: this is the fundamental demand of humanity in the Old Testament, the intertestamentary period (Sirach), the New Testament, and the Judeo-Christian tradition. The motivation is clear enough: our creatureliness, the history of salvation, the final judgement."

[363] Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 174, suggests that while singular address might imply individual obligations, they are more likely to be addressed to the community as a unit. My inclination is to read the obligations as incumbent on both individual members and the whole "House of Jacob" (Isa 58:1).

[364] Cf. Gregory J. Polan, *In the Ways of Justice Toward Salvation: A Rhetorical Analysis of Isaiah 56–59*, American University Studies Series VII, Theology and Religion 13 (New York: Peter Lang, 1986), 209.

[365] Edward L. Greenstein, "Hebrew Poetry. IIA. Biblical Poetry," *PEPP4* 602.

[366] For an alternative structural analysis, see Bohdan Hrobon, *Ethical Dimension of Cult in the Book of Isaiah*, BZAW 418 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 171.

The first colon of each couplet begins in a common pattern: particle, verb, then noun. In the second colon a *waw*-connective attaches another noun/noun phrase followed by a verb phrase. This creates a syntactic framework in which "hungry one" and "naked one" take the first noun position in each couplet. This "horizontal" positioning within each couplet is enhanced by the "vertical" duplication across the couplets.[367]

תביא בית	מרודים	ועניים	//	לחמך	לרעב	פרס	הלוא
V	N+WC		//	N	N	V	M

לא תתעלם		ומבשׂרך	//	וכסיתו	ערם	תראה	כי
V		N+WC	//	V	N	V	M

In each colon there is a label that designates people. The lexeme "naked" (ערם) at the centre of this study appears as a substantive in the third colon in parallel with "hungry" (רעב) in the first colon. Following the prevailing custom, רעב, the lexeme associated with food, the more pressing need for consumption, comes before ערם, associated with clothing, the more durable resource. "Bread" or "food" also takes precedence from a production perspective, since grain is the foundation of the agricultural economy.[368] As concluded in the previous chapter, when "hungry" and "naked" appear together in the context of provisioning, they indicate the primary economic needs to be met, not a fixed social type. In this combination, the substantive "naked" indicates a need for clothing and blankets that represent an underlying lack of personal possessions and emptyhandedness, which can also be connotations of the lexeme. The comparative evidence suggests that the pair of terms usually imply a long-term relationship between provider and

[367] Analytic key: M – modifier; V – verb/verb phrase; N – noun/noun phrase; WC – *waw*-connective.
[368] See Neh 13:2–3; Peter Altmann, "Ancient Comparisons, Modern Models, and Ezra-Nehemiah: Triangulating the Sources for Insights on the Economy of Persian Period Yehud," in Miller, Ben Zvi, and Knoppers, *The Economy of Ancient Judah*, 104.

recipient. The limited biblical evidence on the supply of food and clothing also suggests an enduring relationship. But the correlation is not exclusive. Caution counsels being open to the possibility that occasional, discrete, charitable actions are referred to here until the evidence to the contrary is overwhelming.

Between the two singular designations of "hungry" and "naked," in the second colon, is a plural collective. עניים מרודים constitutes an unusual asyndesis.[369] "Roofless" (LXX) and "wandering" (Vulgate) for מרודים are hard to justify phonologically, but the former has been persistent, due to the collocation with "house." The association of the pair of terms with devastated Jerusalem in Lam 1:7; 3:19 is suggestive, but not decisive, although it seems to rule out "wandering" and "homeless" (e.g., NRSV). I have selected "miserable" as a near-synonym to "afflicted,"[370] but "ailing" may have the appropriate connotations. Neither can be justified on phonological grounds. Based on the semantic context of the three occurrences alone, my guess is that מרודים has possible connotations of injury or physical ailing requiring care (Lam 1:7c) and the oil or ointment completing the standard trio of ancient west Asian rations and maintenance allowances.[371]

The fourth designation, בשׂרך "your flesh," is probably a shortened form of the idiom "your bone and your flesh." The possessive suffix makes it very unlikely the utterance refers to human beings in general.[372] It designates instead "your relatives" or "kin."[373] Out of the four, this is the only designation of a permanent attribute or condition. Its placement in the final

[369] It is subject to dispute in the ancient versions. The Syriac lacks עניים, leading some to consider it an explanatory gloss for the rare word מרודים. See Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 151, 175.
[370] Cf. Lam 3:19 NJPS "my distress and my misery."
[371] Cf. Isa 1:5–7; Jer 8:22.
[372] There are no instances of "your flesh (בשׂר)" with such a meaning. Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 175.
[373] E.g., Gen 37:27; Lev 25:49; Judg 9:2; 2 Sam 19:12. This is spelled out in LXX and the Targum. Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 175.

colon is a strong indication that it governs the four cola, circumscribing the potential patients of the actions, and it may be intentionally emphatic.

As the last chapter concluded, when recipients of provision are labelled "the hungry" and "the naked," we must rely on the co-text for clues to identify them. The four main actions required of the addressee, one in each colon, narrows down the range of options on the patients' identity and their relationship to the potential providers.

While the "hungry (one)" is to be given (נתן) "your bread/food" in Ezek 18:7, 16, in Isa 58:7 the action is specified more narrowly by the verb פרס.[374] Usually used for the "divided" hooves of animals, it only appears in connection with food in Jer 16:7 (פרס) and Lam 4:4 (פרשׂ).[375] However, an Aramaic cognate noun פרסא is attested in a document from Saqqara, Egypt, from the beginning of the fourth century, where it is used with the sense of "allotment" for the distribution of food, mostly grain.[376] I contend that the verb in Isa 58:7 is borrowed from, or influenced by Aramaic, and used here with the specialised sense of "to allot" or "apportion" one's food.[377] This gives the sense of an allocation that is someone's due. My claim that "your kin" applies to the whole verse sharpens the sense of the first colon to making a regular allotment from your own food supplies to your hungry kin.

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[374] Many manuscripts have פרש; Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 151.

[375] Jer 16:7 LXX and a few manuscripts have the verb with לחם "bread"; most, including MT, have להם "for them." However, the context is unambiguously about eating. Lam 4:4 has both these lexemes in parallel: עוללים שׁאלו לחם פרשׂ אין להם "The children ask for bread, there is no allotment for them." Both texts actually refer to food *not* being shared with others in a context of military threat against Jerusalem.

[376] C3.26:4, *TADAE* 3:253; for comments, see xvii–xviii.

[377] An Aramaic cognate פרס also appears in the writing on the wall to describe the fate of Belshazzar's kingdom (Dan 5:25, 28). My suspicion is that one of its (several) readings should be "allotted" or "apportioned" (i.e., "weighed out") to the Medes and Persians, in preference to "divided." Cf. Al Wolters, "The Riddle of the Scales in Daniel 5," *HUCA* 62 (1991): 155–77.

The addressee's house[378] is the destination of the (related) עניים מרודים in the second colon of v. 7a. The combination בוא+בית is common across biblical narrative texts in situations of hospitality, both in *qal* "to enter" and *hiphil* "to bring into."[379] Temporary hospitality was typically extended to travellers with distant relationships to the household for only a few days,[380] which does not fit this context. The governing role of בשׂר restricts the welcome to kin, who should be automatically taken in as members of the same "house."[381] I suggest the second colon is urging the welcome of "the miserable and afflicted" into the household *on the basis of* their kinship for their needs to be met, probably of nursing care, but possibly of shelter.

The theme of literal and metaphorical sight connects the three verbs in the last two cola of v. 7. The opening particle כי "if, when" (v. 7b) keeps up the momentum of the affirmative rhetorical question introduced in v. 6 and reiterated by הלוא at the start of v. 7. It neither introduces a chance encounter nor casual observation. The verb ראה indicates being made aware of an evil or a misdeed.[382] Once aware, a witness had a duty to see justice re-established, more typically, by accusation.[383] The legal language gives the impression of a rising crescendo that culminates in the fourth and final colon.

The lexeme ערם carries two distinct but related connotations in v. 7bβ, each associated with one of the verbs. The first sense is its primary dimension of economic destitution, which is elicited by the verb ראה. This does not, I must

[378] The lack of personal suffix on בית is unremarkable in poetic style and can be understood as implicit, carried through from "your bread," as in the versions, 1QIs(a), and 1QIs(b); so, Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 151.
[379] E.g., Gen 19:3; 24:32; 43:16, 24; Judg 19:21; 1 Kgs 13:7–8.
[380] The social transaction was also neither disinterested nor purely altruistic; see Hobbs, "Hospitality," 24, 29. It certainly pushes the verse's internal semantics too far to suggest that it exhorts addressees to house homeless people in general, e.g., Koole, *Isaiah III*, 139.
[381] On the "house" (בית), see Cynthia R. Chapman, *The House of the Mother: The Social Roles of Maternal Kin in Biblical Hebrew Narrative and Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 20–50.
[382] See, e.g., Gen 6:5; Exod 3:7; Jer 23:13; Neh 13:15, 23; Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 70–71.
[383] See Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 259–61.

emphasise, refer to seeing that someone has no clothes on,[384] but *having knowledge of* their economic lack. The second sense is that elicited by the substantive in combination with "the hungry." The collocation points to the supply of textiles, some of which will be worn as clothes, others to sleep in, a supplying referred to as "covering." I propose that, in addition to its general sense, the substantive בסות has a technical metaphorical sense of "covering" as "clothing maintenance allowance," as found in Exod 21:10[385] and Job.[386] The frequent collocation of בסות and the actions indicated by בסה *piel* and the two "nakedness" lexemes, ערום and ערוה,[387] suggests a very close literary association. The polysemy of the "nakedness" lexemes and the economic sense of "covering" could be played upon in puns and amusing anecdotes in which the verb בסה *piel* and its Aramaic cognate also bore a concrete sense of "covering" as "hiding" or "placing under a cloth."[388]

In Isa 58:7bα, the verb בסה *piel* refers to the supplying of clothing and blankets to destitute kin without independent means to provide for themselves. The three needs and their supplying are listed in ascending order of the duration and persistence of need. Hunger (and thirst) must be satisfied in the short term, before starvation ensues and death threatens. The need of

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[384] Cf. Job 22:6b, where a garment is removed from the ערום; also, 24:7, 10 which are intentionally hyperbolic and require the addition of בלי לבוש "without clothing" to elicit the intended visual image.

[385] Paul, "Exod 21:10."

[386] See the three occurrences of אין בסות "there is no covering" in Job 24:7; 26:6; 31:19, all with בלי לבוש "without clothing" and the first two in parallel with ערום.

[387] With ערום: Isa 58:7; Ezek 18:7, 16; Job 24:7; 26:6; with ערוה: Gen 9:23; Ezek 16:8; Hos 2:11. Note that collocation with לערו "for his skin" (Exod 22:26) also elicits resonances of ערום/ערוה.

[388] The conventionalised association between בסה/בסות and ערום is used in two similar polysemic wordplays in Prov 12:16, 23, using the polysemy and homographs of בסה as "to cover" and "to hide" and ערום as "destitute," "without clothes," and "crafty, prudent." Similarly, the polysemy of the Aramaic cognates of these lexemes, particularly the triple sense of "destitute," "without clothes," and "crafty," is exploited in the proverb of the goat and the leopard in Ahiqar, C1.1. 166–168a, (*TADAE* 3:46–7); cf. Bledsoe, *The Wisdom of the Aramaic Book of Ahiqar*, 238–79; and with comparison to biblical texts, Michael Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche aus Elephantine und die alttestamentliche Weisheitsliteratur*, BZAW 399 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 414. I wonder if the story of the "covering" of Noah's nakedness (Gen 9:20–27) is a literary creation full of polysemic wordplay, perhaps poking fun at wealthy vineyard-owners.

food must be met daily. The need of care for illness and shelter is next most pressing. Lastly, clothes and textiles that are more valuable and take time to produce may last for some time, but over the long term need to be replaced. The collocation of the three and their ordering emphasises the economic sense of supplying need.

The last two actions demanded of the addressee, indicated by the verbs בסה and עלם, create a semantically antithetical pair: "cover/hide (the naked)" but do not "hide/cover (yourself)." The structure of the verse also suggests that the verb in the fourth colon not only relates to "covering the naked" but also gathers and sums up the behaviours in the first three cola. The fairly rare עלם *hiphil* "to hide" is often collocated with lexemes related to sight, as in Deut 22:1–4. That passage proscribes "ignoring" or "hiding oneself" (עלם *hitpael,* vv. 1, 3, 4) from one's brother's (אח),[389] his lost property, and strayed or fallen animals. The valuable possessions of others, including animals and a garment (v. 3), should be restored to them. The broad topic is that of personal property, specifically movable property, and more narrowly, its restoration to its rightful owner, who is described in familial terms, as a "brother." The rhetorical indicators of familiarity in Isa 58:6–7 and the similar topic of the transfer of economically valuable goods (in this case, food and clothing), may point to an intertextual connection with Deut 22:1–4. Resonances with the Deuteronomic passage may give the exhortation not to "ignore" one's kin in Isa 58:7bβ a more specific sense of the restoration of property to its rightful owner. I cannot support the typical interpretation of the fourth colon as a general, and completely unrealistic, exhortation not to hide from any person in want.[390]

I have argued that Isa 58:7 refers to the providing of food allocations and clothing allowances to kin in persistent, ongoing need. A third need

[389] Cf. Exod 23:4–5, where similar prohibitions concern one's "enemy" and one who "hates" you.
[390] E.g., Polan, *Justice*, 210.

necessitates being brought within the addressee's household, either until health or economic independence is restored. The rhetorical frame of familiarity and "kin" suggests that these actions were already understood as a moral obligation to family members. The implied familiarity cannot depend entirely on Isa 58:7 being a literary adaptation and expansion of Ezek 18:7b, 16b,[391] since in that text the identity of the "hungry" and the "naked" is unstated and already presumed to be obvious. Rather, both texts must emerge from the same cultural rootstock. They are probably closely related to the Egyptian exemplars and the long tradition of a hardly varying literary motif related to the supply of provisions. In Egypt this provisioning was widely understood as a sociomoral obligation, by which the supplier would be adjudged "righteous." This reading suggests that the primary and default domain of this provision, in Judah and around Jerusalem after the Babylonian conquest, was the family or kin. Feeding the hungry and clothing the naked in the historical period of Third Isaiah, and probably of Ezekiel also, does not pertain to charity, as a donation of economic resources to unrelated people in need, without strings attached. Instead, it pertains to reasonably long-term relations of economic dependence between those who are already connected by ties of kinship.

The writer of Isa 58:7 may have introduced a familiar obligation into a novel context. As well as potentially creating associations with fasting and the righteous actions listed in v. 6bc, there may also have been questions around the limits of those classified as "kin" (בשׂר). The term אח "brother," as in Deut 22:1–4, was not used consistently in Deuteronomy, and the same is likely to be true of "kin."[392] A close reading of the wider context may shed light on the

[391] On the strong connections of the final form of Isaiah and Ezekiel to the Babylonian diaspora, see Ulrich Berges, "Trito-Isaiah and the Reforms of Ezra/Nehemiah: Consent or Conflict?" *Bib* 98 (2017): 173–90 (179).

[392] See Philippe Guillaume, "Brothers in Deuteronomy: Zoom in on Lothar Perlitt's *Volk von Brüdern*," in Edelman et al., *Deuteronomy in the Making*, 289–328. The אח "brother" in Deut 22:1–4 is certainly not a "neighbour" who lives close by. He is wealthy enough to own livestock that an ordinary farmer would not. The term does not necessarily refer to a fellow Israelite either (295, 300). It might refer to a "financial brotherhood."

relationship between the providers and the destitute, their identities, and the question of how "the hungry" and "the naked" came to be in such dire need.

The next two sections consider the literary context of Isa 58:7 by homing in on it from a distance. The wider literary context is mapped out first. Following a brief introduction to Third Isaiah, the rhetorical unit is delimited as Isa 58 and its purported addressees are discussed. The structure of Isa 56–66 is shown to be highly pertinent for understanding the burden of Isa 58. The following section scrutinises Isa 58 as a unit from four angles, probing the significant features which will modulate the emerging interpretation of v. 7.

7.3 The wider literary context: Isaiah 58 within its context

The book called Isaiah contains a variety of material from different political and social settings, redacted and developed over a long period of time from the eighth century onwards.[393] Chapters 55/56–66,[394] known as Trito-Isaiah,[395] unlike Deutero-Isaiah (chapters 40–55),[396] have no concrete historical references. The working assumption adopted here is an historical setting of life centred on Jerusalem in the Persian province of Yehud, after the fall of Babylon and following the return of some of the Babylonian exilic community.[397] The Persian period stretches from mid-sixth to mid-fourth century.[398] Yehud was impoverished and Jerusalem remained in a ruinous state following its destruction until at least mid-fifth century, which suggests

[393] See, e.g., Jacob Stromberg, *An Introduction to the Study of Isaiah* (London: T & T Clark, 2011), 1–5.
[394] See, recently, Ulrich Berges, *Jesaja 55–66*, HThKAT (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2022); Ulrich F. Berges, "Where Starts Trito-Isaiah?" in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Chronological and Thematic Development in Isaiah 40-66*, ed. L.-S. Tiemeyer and H. M. Barstad, FRLANT 255 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 63–76.
[395] The use of this epithet should not be taken to imply a belief that it once had an independent existence, nor that a single hand is responsible for its composition and development. See, further, Stromberg, *Introduction*, 3–5, 41–54.
[396] A convenient shorthand, again used without prejudice; see Stromberg, *Introduction*, 3–5, 27–40.
[397] Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 3, 7, 9.
[398] See Schipper, *A Concise History*, 71–92.

an earlier date for Trito-Isaiah.[399] It was probably written between the last quarter of the sixth century, within a generation of the first returnees, and the middle of the fifth century.[400] The reference in Isa 58:12 to restoring the city suggests that at the time of writing Jerusalem was hardly habitable. Whether the temple had yet been re-built must remain an open question.[401]

Isaiah 58 is demarcated as a discrete unit in most MT manuscripts and the chapter can be treated as an integrated unit. Few scholars now separate off vv. 13–14 on account of its treatment of the Sabbath,[402] which display numerous literary and thematic connections with 58:1–12.[403] The unique focus on the topic of fasting, its only mention in the book of Isaiah and quite distinctive among biblical texts, has boosted interest in the chapter, particularly as it remains a spiritual discipline still practised in some

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[399] Peter Altmann, *Economics in Persian-Period Biblical Texts: Their Interactions with Economic Developments in the Persian Period and Earlier Biblical Traditions*, FAT 109 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 80–82, 159–68; also, Ristau, *Reconstructing Jerusalem*, 72–75.

[400] Recent scholarship is in general agreement on this dating for Third Isaiah. See Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 159; Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Trito-Isaiah (Isaiah 56–66) and the *Gôlāh* Group of Ezra, Shecaniah, and Nehemiah (Ezra 7–Nehemiah 13): Is There a Connection?" *JSOT* 43 (2019): 661–77 (669).

[401] Hrobon, *Ethical Dimension*, 155–56.

[402] As did, e.g., Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja übersetzt und erklärt*, 4th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1922), 440; Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 340–42.

[403] For a brief overview of scholars' unit decisions, see Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 156–58. He treats the rhetorical unit as 58:1–59:8, while maintaining that 59:1–8 was not an original continuation of chapter 58. See, also, Koole, *Isaiah III*, 118–21. Arguments both for and against unity tend to be based on rhetorical analysis, as Hrobon, *Ethical Dimension*, 197–201, points out. Nevertheless, I am not persuaded by his proposal to understand the Sabbath concept in Isa 58 as necessarily encompassing the Sabbath year, year of Jubilee, and Day of Atonement (202–205), an argument made in detail by Kyung-Chul Park, *Die Gerechtigkeit Israels und das Heil der Völker* (Frankfurt: Lang, 2003), 235–40. I intend to avoid assumptions about associations between Isa 58 and the Day of Atonement, a link often made on the basis of fasting via Lev 16:29–31; 23:24–32 and Num 29:7; see, e.g., Julius Morgenstern, "Two Prophecies from the Fourth Century B.C. and the Evolution of Yom Kippur," *HUCA* 24 (1952): 1–74; Michael A. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 304–6; Hrobon, *Ethical Dimension*, 162–65, 202–5; Shalom Paul, *Isaiah 40–66: A Commentary: Translation and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 480–81; Sweeney, *Isaiah 40–66*, 282. Public fasting may not have been an original aspect of the Day of Atonement rituals; see Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, AB 20 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 1066–67; Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1375–76. On the priority of Lev 23 and the concerns of the Holiness redaction in relation to the celebration of the Day of Atonement, see Nihan, *From Priestly Torah*, 349–50, 496–511, 569. As Koole, *Isaiah III*, 120, cogently remarks, salvation in Isa 58 is not achieved by atonement for sin.

communities.[404] The chapter has been the subject of several dedicated essays,[405] as well as receiving attention in a few monographs on Isaiah concerned with ethics, theology, and redaction criticism.[406]

The proclamation in Isa 58 is apparently addressed to the community as a whole,[407] described by YHWH as "my people," "the household of Jacob" (v. 1),[408] and compared to גוי "a nation, people" (v. 2). This contrasts with the warnings to the community's leadership in the preceding section 56:9–57:21, in which a distinction is made between עמי "my people" (57:14) and הרשעים "the wicked, faithless" (57:20, 21).[409] Despite the variations of second and third person address, singular and plural, which sound odd in English, there is a single audience whom I shall refer to as the (Yahwistic) community.[410] Preoccupied with the current dilapidated state of Jerusalem (58:12), they are united by the theological significance of Zion-Jerusalem. It sounds like a

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[404] References to communal fasting are found in Jer 14:12; 36:6, 9; Joel 1–2; Zech 7–8; Ezra 8:21–23; Neh 9:1; Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 158.

[405] E.g., Kessler, "The Clothing of the Poor"; Mercedes L. García Bachmann, "True Fasting and Unwilling Hunger (Isaiah 58)," in *The Bible and the Hermeneutics of Liberation*, ed. A. F. Botta and P. R. Andiñach (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 113–31; Klaus Seybold, "Jes 58,1–12: Fastenpredigt: Bermerkungen zu einem prophetischen Gedicht," in *"Sieben Augen auf einem Stein" (Sach 3,9): Studien zur Literatur des Zweiten Tempels. Festschrift für Ina Willi-Plein zum 65. Geburtstag.*, ed. F. Hartenstein and M. Pietsch (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2007), 345–58; Hugh G. M. Williamson, "Promises, Promises! Some Exegetical Reflections on Isaiah 58," *WW* 19 (1999): 153–60; Willy Schottroff, "'Unrechtmäßige Fesseln auftun, Jochstricke lösen' Jesaja 58,1–2 (sic), Ein Textbeispiel zum Thema 'Bibel und Ökonomie,'" *BibInt* 5 (1997): 263–78; Michael L. Barré, "Fasting in Isaiah 58:1–12: A Re-examination," *BTB* 67 (1986): 75–80; L. J. Hoppe, "Isaiah 58:1–12: Fasting and Idolatry," *BTB* 13 (1983): 44–47.

[406] E.g., Hrobon, *Ethical Dimension* (151–216), concentrates on Isa 1:10–17; 43:22–28; 58; Mark Gray, *Rhetoric and Social Justice in Isaiah*, LHBOTS (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), gives special attention to chapters 1 and 58 (50–117); Park, *Gerechtigkeit Israels*, focuses on 56:1–8; 58; 65:17–66:24; Paul A. Smith, *Rhetoric and Redaction in Trito-Isaiah: Structure, Growth and Authorship of Isaiah 56-66* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 97-127 for chapters 58–59; Polan, *Justice*, analyses chapters 56–59 in detail.

[407] Brooks Schramm, *The Opponents of Third Isaiah: Reconstructing the Cultic History of the Restoration*, JSOTSup 193 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 133–34; contra Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, *Priestly Rites and Prophetic Rage: Post-Exilic Prophetic Critique of the Priesthood* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 90; and Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 90.

[408] Cf. Isa 1:2–4; 40:1; 46:3; 48:1; 57:14.

[409] Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 50, 101; Schramm, *The Opponents*, 133; Odil H. Steck, "Beobachtungen au Jesaja 56–59," in *Studien zu Tritojesaja* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991), 169–86 (181–86).

[410] On the variations, see Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 159–60.

message initially addressed to a single group of inhabitants living in the near vicinity of Jerusalem who have been petitioning YHWH. It may also have resonated with those living elsewhere in the province of Yehud and in the Judahite diaspora who looked to Zion-Jerusalem for their communal identity.[411]

Many scholars agree that Isa 56–66 consists of rhetorical units of varying sizes arranged in a concentric structure[412] around a central core of the earliest material (chapters 60–62).[413] The section in which 58:7 falls, 56:9–59:8, has a parallel in 65:1–66:17. Both sections concern problems with the Jerusalem community's life.[414] The promises of the restoration of Zion-Jerusalem at the centre function as a literary device and theological vehicle, supposedly providing a key interpretative strategy.[415] In addition, connections with 56:1–8 are also highly significant.

Isaiah 56:1 constitutes a programmatic divine exhortation which gives vital clues to the agenda, interpretation, and function of Third Isaiah.[416] In two

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[411] The land immediately around Jerusalem is very poor, with limited water sources. The agricultural settlement connected to the city in this period is found a couple of kilometres away in two valleys lying to the north, west, and southwest of the city. See Yuval Gadot, "In the Valley of the King: Jerusalem's Rural Hinterland in the 8th–4th Centuries BCE," *TA* 33 (2015): 229–43. Jerusalem was not the administrative centre, which throughout the Persian period was Ramat Rahel (Beth-haccherem). Nor was it the seat of the provincial governor, which was Mizpah before it too moved to Ramat Rahel. Jerusalem was solely a cultic centre, small and poor, consisting of little more than a temple with a few hundred priests and temple servants living around it; Lipschits, "The Rural Economy," 256–57; also, Oded Lipschits, "Persian Period Judah: A New Perspective," in *Texts, Contexts and Readings in Postexilic Literature: Explorations into Historiography and Identity Negotiation in Hebrew Bible and Related Texts*, ed. L. Jonker, FAT II 53 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 189–90; Altmann, *Economics*, 164–68.

[412] Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 2–3, with further references.

[413] Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 296; cf. Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 6.

[414] Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 157–58.

[415] Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 47–48. However, see the comparison of Isa 58 and 61 in a later chapter.

[416] See Rolf Rendtorff, "Isaiah 56:1 as a Key to the Formation of the Book of Isaiah," in *Canon and Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 181–89; also, John N. Oswalt, "Righteousness in Isaiah: A Study of the Function of Chapters 55–66 in the Present Structure of the Book," in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition*, ed. C. C. Broyles and C. A. Evans, VTSup 70 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 177–217.

parallel lines, the writer communicates the essence of the different approaches to צדקה ("righteousness"), human and divine, found in First and Second Isaiah. The juxtaposition expresses the tension between them which is carried forward into Third Isaiah.[417]

Maintain משפט ("justice")
and exercise צדקה ("righteousness")
For ישועתי ("my deliverance") is near to coming
and צדקתי ("my righteousness") to revealing itself.

Isa 56:1bc

Elsewhere the first two nouns create a hendiadys משפט וצדקה that expresses a single complex ethical idea. Separately, משפט has connotations of "making … decisions by the exercise of legitimate power," whilst צדקה connotes "doing right by people in light of the relationships one has with them." In combination, the lexemes convey the notion of the faithful exercise of authority, or right government in the community.[418] The word-pair also appears in 1:27, similarly split across parallel cola.

Zion will be redeemed by משפט
and her inhabitants by צדקה

Isa 1:27

Isaiah 1:27–31 is widely believed to be a late redactional addition reflecting Third Isaiah's concerns.[419] That the pair of terms appears in the context of Zion-Jerusalem in v. 27 strengthens their significance for the interpretation of the Jerusalem-oriented Trito-Isaiah. The two imperatives, "Observe משפת, do צדקה," (56:1b), sum up the expectations in communal and religious life detailed within 56:2–59:15a. That the pair of terms next recur in 58:2, then 59:4, 9, 14, highlights their importance for chapters 58–59.[420]

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[417] Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 47.
[418] Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 31; also, 47–51, 64–69, 88–93. On משפט וצדקה, see Weinfeld, *Social Justice*; Rosanne Liebermann, "Justice, Righteousness, and the Davidic Dispute in Jeremiah and Ezekiel," *VT* 73 (2023): 62–81.
[419] Stromberg, *Introduction*, 51–53.
[420] Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 31.

This quick sketch of Third Isaiah suggests the imagined community behind the text may have had good reason to be concerned for their economic stability and flourishing. The poor potential of the land around Jerusalem probably impacted food production and, with the administrative centres elsewhere, the ability to make a comfortable living was probably constrained. It is not surprising, given these pressures, that tensions arose within the Jerusalem community, as 56:9–59:8 and 65:1–66:17 suggest. The interpretation of 58:7 in the previous section would fit into this reconstruction of the historical and social context. Under such conditions and given the unreliability of the rains, it is highly likely that there were destitute members of the community unable to feed themselves. There must have been questions, however, about who had an obligation to provide for whom. It was not enough to know that providing for "the hungry "and "the naked" was to do צדקה (56:1b) nor that one had an obligation to provide for one's family. In the relatively new social context of re-establishing the Jerusalem community, there were probably lingering questions over how far your family responsibilities extended. Who were your kin?

The complex constellation of ideas around משפת and צדקה constitute a key organising principle of Isa 58, as the following examination of the rhetorical unit shows. This literary analysis provides a multi-directional characterisation of the chapter from four perspectives, focusing on the structure of the unit, its content, its rhetorical argument, and its poetics.

7.4 The rhetorical unit: Isaiah 58

7.4.1 The structure of Isaiah 58: A proposal featuring initial particles

At first encounter, Isa 58 can appear repetitive and full of disjunctions. The verbal forms move from singular to plural, and from second, to third, to first

person.[421] Some of the verse divisions are in odd places. To better understand the connections between v. 7 and the rest of the chapter, I first sketch out the shape of the text in terms of structure and argument before moving on to its content. The initial locutions of lines, which are often particles, contribute significantly to the structure.[422]

The diagrammatic representation below uses indentation to indicate difference and similarity, each step indicating a turn in the argument, either away from or towards a previous function. Where lines match up vertically, function and content are similar.[423]

[421] See Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 159–60.
[422] As emphasised by Seybold, "Jes 58,1–12: Fastenpredigt."
[423] See, also, Koole, *Isaiah III*, 121, who proposes five stanzas based on content: vv. 1–3a, 3b–5 (both six lines), 6–9a, 9b–12 (both eight lines), and 13–14 (five lines). This happens to correspond to each pair of strophes indicated by indentation here (v. 14bβ excepted). Cf. Polan, *Justice*, 232–40, who proposes a concentric structure with the focal point at v. 5c.

קרא Summons with full throat … (v. 1)[424] *Judicial summons*

ואותי Yet (of) me they inquire day after day … (v. 2) [425] *People seek YHWH*

למה Why do we fast … (v. 3a)[426]

הן Look! On your fast day … (v. 3b) *YHWH indicts the*

הן Look! For disputation … you fast … (v. 4a) *people*

לא You do <u>not</u> fast today … (v. 4b)

הבזה Is like this the fast I choose? … (v. 5a) *Fast day mocked*

הלכף Is it for bowing the head … ? (v. 5b)

הלזה Is it for this you call a fast …? (v. 5c)[427] *+PIVOT*

הלוא Is not this the fasting I choose? … (v. 6) *Demand/protasis 1*

הלוא Is it not to apportion for the hungry … (v. 7)

אז Then your light will break out … (v. 8) *Promise/apodosis 1*

אז תקרא Then you will summons and YHWH will answer … (v. 9a) *+CLIMAX*

אם If you do away with … (v. 9b) *Demand/protasis 2*

ותפק (And) offer to the hungry … (v. 10a)

וזרח Your light will shine forth … (v. 10b–12a) *Promise/apodosis 2*

וקרא You will be called … (v. 12b)

אם If you turn back from the Sabbath … (v. 13a) *Demand/protasis 3*

וקראת (And) call the Sabbath a delight … (v. 13bc)

אז Then you shall delight in YHWH … (v. 14abα) *Promise/apodosis 3*

כי For YHWH's mouth has spoken. (v. 14bβ)[428] *Divine finalisation*

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[424] The theme of calling and speaking out is made "loud and clear" from this first word of the unit to the last. It is particularly obvious in the fivefold repetition of the verb קרא "to call" (vv. 1a, 5c, 9a, 12b, 13b), of which three appear in a structuring role as the first word of a line. The theme is magnified by related vocabulary, a concentrated cluster of which builds to the climax of YHWH's response הנני "Here I am" (see below).

[425] Cf. Isa 55:6; 65:1. On this interpretation, see Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 164–66.

[426] The four couplets in vv.2–3a are held together by patterns of similarity at the end of each couplet.

[427] This line contains all the lexemes that appear seven times, including the first appearance of יהוה "YHWH," as well as קרא (see below). Although not supporting the proposal of a chiastic structure for the whole chapter, I agree that it acts as a hinge; Polan, *Justice*, 205–6, 232–40.

[428] Cf. Isa 1:20.

7.4.2 The content of Isaiah 58: An outline from a surface reading

Chapter 58 opens with the deity instructing the prophet to call out and "raise your voice" (רום *hiphil,* קולך).[429] He is to proclaim loudly, "like the horn,"[430] to "the household of Jacob." YHWH accuses his people of פֶּשַׁע "transgression" and חטאת "offences" (v. 1).[431] The people have sought God diligently (v. 2) but complain that he has not seen and recognised their fasting (v. 3a). In the to-and-fro of a legal disputation, this complaint is met by YHWH's counteraccusation (vv. 3b–5) which picks up where v. 1 left off. The people fast for the sake of "legal dispute" (ריב, v. 4). On their fast day they oppress their workers (v. 3b). The manner of their fast will not make their voice heard on high (במרום קולכם; v. 4; cf. v. 1). Fast-day behaviour is described with hyperbole:[432] bowing the head like a bent rush and stretching out in the dust in sackcloth (v. 5).[433] "Is this what you call a fast, a day acceptable (רצון) to YHWH?" (v. 5c).[434]

The message now turns to the possibility of restoration as ethical demands (vv. 6–7; 9b–10a; 13) alternate with the resulting, or accompanying blessings (vv. 8–9a; 10b–12; 14).[435] The addressees are urged to change various

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[429] Cf. Isa 13:2; 40:9.

[430] Cf. Hos 8:1a; Jer 4:5; Ezek 33:6; Hugo Odeberg, *Trito-Isaiah* (Uppsala: Lundquist, 1931), 120–21, sees possible dependence on Ezek 33:1-9.

[431] Cf. Isa 1:2–4; 27–28.

[432] So, also, Koole, *Isaiah III*, 134. The custom was probably sitting on the ground (Lam 2:10; Isa 47:1) or going about (Isa 37:1) in sackcloth, not lying on the ground in the daytime, as here; cf. the similarly hyperbolic depiction of King Ahab's mourning in 1 Kgs 21:25–27.

[433] Apart from when mourning the dead, fasting rarely appears without being accompanied by petitionary prayer, often to avert an impending threat. Prayer takes precedence, so that "fasting" can constitute a synecdoche for fasting-with-prayer (e.g., Jer 14:12; Deut 9:18–19; Dan 10:2–3, 12). See David Lambert, "Fasting as a Penitential Rite: A Biblical Phenomenon?," *HTR* 96 (2003): 477–512. Other behaviours typically associated with mourning may also be adopted, as here. For a description, see Olyan, *Biblical Mourning*, 29–33.

[434] Cf. Isa 49:8; 61:2.

[435] Commentators are divided on the strength of the conditionality of the promises. E.g., Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40–66*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 190–94, sees a strong conditionality. By contrast, Ulrich Berges, "The Individualization of Exile in Trito-Isaiah. Some Reflections on Isaiah 55 and 58," in *Images of Exile in the Prophetic Literature*, ed. J. Høgenhaven, F. Poulsen, and C. Power, FAT II 103 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 72, sees an element of divine righteousness, proposing "the

behaviours, including how they treat "the hungry" and "the naked" (v. 7) and the Sabbath day (v. 13).[436] The promises of blessing are described in terms of the people's light (vv. 8a, 10a), healing (vv. 8a, 11b), and role in the re-building of Jerusalem (v. 12). In this vision of the future, the people's "righteousness" (צדק) will go before them (v. 8b) and the "wealth" (כבד)[437] of YHWH will gather them. YHWH will respond to the people's cry for help, הנני "Here I am" (v. 9a),[438] as he brings his deliverance/salvation.[439] He will provide for their physical needs: they will be like springs of water and eat the produce of the land (vv. 11, 14). The final line affirms that the message is from YHWH (v. 14b).[440]

7.4.3 The rhetoric of Isaiah 58: Divine and human מִשְׁפָּט וצדקה

The word-pair מִשְׁפָּט and צדק in Isa 58:2b, in the expression מִשְׁפְּטֵי צֶדֶק, "judgements of legal innocence," recalls the agenda set for Third Isaiah in 56:1bc.[441] It is just one of numerous references to the judicial domain in this chapter.[442] I propose that the writer of Isa 58 shaped the message in terms of

addressees cannot procure justice and salvation by themselves since these are divine gifts," citing Willem A. Beuken, *Jesaja IIIA*, POut (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1989), 110–11. Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 90, discusses causality and conditionality of the association between human and divine righteous actions in the context of Isa 56:1, suggesting a third way of mutual commitment.

[436] Cf. Isa 56:2–8; Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 160; Koole, *Isaiah III*, 120.

[437] See Prov 3:9-10; Lambert, "Honor I," 332. There may be aspects of the radiance of כבוד יהוה, as found in Ezekiel, but I suggest the symbolism of material wealth takes precedence over that of power; cf. Shawn Zelig Aster, "Ezekiel's Adaptation of Mesopotamian *Melammu*," *WO* 45 (2015): 10–22.

[438] Cf. Isa 55:6; 65:1.

[439] Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 338–39, equates הנני (Isa 58:9) with salvation: "It is the being saved that consists in the interrelation of word and answer" (339).

[440] Cf. Isa 40:5.

[441] Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 177, suggests that צדק and צדקה can hardly be distinguished in Trito-Isaiah.

[442] In the surrounding textual context, see, especially, Isa 57:14; 59:4. Few scholars comment on the relevance of the judicial domain for the chapter. Jonathan G. Kline, *Allusive Soundplay in the Hebrew Bible* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2016), 82, suggests that YHWH conducts a covenant lawsuit against the people in Isa 58:1–7. I agree about the lawsuit, although I think it extends further, but am not persuaded that "covenant" plays a role. Cf. Smith, *Rhetoric and Redaction*, 102, who recognises "certain elements from the genre of disputation" in chs. 58–59; also, Gray, *Rhetoric and Social Justice*, 89, who sees a "latent search for justice" in Isa 58:6–7.

a divine trial using ancient west Asian legal storytelling conventions to invite his audience to engage in theological and ethical reflection about justice.[443] He did not have to impose a legal frame on the situation he was responding to. The community's appeal to YHWH, indicated by fasting (v. 5) and the behaviours described in v. 2, was already conceptualised as a legal appeal to a divine judge. A communal crisis probably lies behind this appeal. The writer elaborated within this worldview, or conceptual metaphor, by introducing a divine counterclaim. He thus presents a persuasive rhetorical argument concerning divine and human justice and sets out the "righteous" conduct required within the community that would lead to reconciliation with the deity, his blessing, and the community's flourishing. We can presume that this encompasses meeting the need behind their appeal. The apportioning of food to the hungry and clothes to the naked (v. 7) is framed as an aspect of the righteous conduct required.

The roots of the elaborate legal metaphor behind the message of Isa 58 lie in the ancient west Asian worldview of the god(s) as the ultimate defender(s) of justice and judge(s) of humanity. The relations between God and man are described in biblical texts according to the rule of law,[444] which in turn operates according to the principles of retributive justice.[445] From this emerges a conception of prayer as legal petition. "Originally a person praying to God asserted his righteousness and asked God to do justice."[446] The understanding of a link between human suffering and divine trial law depends on the same conceptual base.[447] An assumption of legal innocence undergirds

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[443] Cf. Magdalene, *On the Scales*, 51, who makes a similar comment about the book of Job.
[444] Zeev W. Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times: An Introduction* (Jerusalem: Wahrmann Books, 1964), 52.
[445] Magdalene, *On the Scales*, 262, suggests that the divine justice on display in Job might better be called restorative or reconciling justice.
[446] Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times*, 52. See, also, Shalom E. Holtz, *Praying Legally* (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2019), 1–15.
[447] See Magdalene, *On the Scales*, 13–25. On the divine courtroom in the Hebrew Bible, see Meira Z. Kensky, *Trying Man, Trying God: The Divine Courtroom in Early Jewish and Christian Literature* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 13–61; and F. Rachel Magdalene, "Trying the

the community's appeal and fasting and their implied complaint that the deity is failing to uphold justice (vv. 2–3a, 5).

Despite the widespread recognition of a prophetic disputation genre,[448] it is rarely suggested that a divine trial is embedded in a biblical text, apart from the well-known case of the book of Job.[449] An understanding of the legal processes is crucial to making this step, since "legal procedure is the most important mechanism controlling the law's literary production."[450] There are, unfortunately, few biblical trial accounts. For this, we depend on Neo-Babylonian trial law, since Aramaic trial records were recorded on perishable media.[451]

Focusing on the book of Job, Rachel Magdalene proposes that embedding a trial or legal altercation in its metanarrative would give rise to four key attributes.[452] These are first, legal vocabulary; second, five characteristic narratological features of trial stories;[453] third, a brief and cryptic trial record; and fourth, that these literary characteristics serve the overall rhetorical goals of the message. I propose that these attributes are also present in Isa 58. The latter two can be dealt with immediately. The chapter contains a truncated and somewhat confused record of the people's complaint against YHWH (vv.

Crime of Abuse of Royal Authority in the Divine Courtroom and the Incident of Naboth's Vineyard," in *The Divine Courtroom in Comparative Perspective*, ed. A. Mermelstein and S. E. Holtz, BibInt 132 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 167–245.

[448] See Adrian Graffy, *A Prophet Confronts His People: The Disputation Speech in the Prophets*, AnBib 104 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1984), 58–65; and, for further history of scholarship, Kensky, *Trying Man, Trying God*, 29–39.

[449] One reason may be that the legal procedures employed in ancient West Asia were those of an inquisitorial, rather than adversarial, legal system, which is marked by: "(1) a higher degree of cooperation between the parties than in adversarial systems; and (2) a judge who is more likely to be involved in developing the evidence at trial." Magdalene, *On the Scales*, 65. The "model of cooperative truth-finding" on which the trials of inquisitorial systems are based (66) provide an ideal base for prophetic "truth-telling." Examples of the disputation genre may perhaps usefully be examined for further incidences of an embedded divine trial.

[450] Magdalene, *On the Scales*, 48.

[451] See Magdalene, *On the Scales*, 3–5. On Neo-Babylonian trial procedure, see 65–94.

[452] Magdalene, *On the Scales*, 50.

[453] As suggested by Paul Gewirtz, "Narrative and Rhetoric in the Law," in *Law's Stories: Narrative and Rhetoric in the Law*, ed. P. Brooks and P. Gewirtz (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 2–22.

2a,c–3a, 9a), a fuller account of his counterclaim against them (vv. 1, 2b, 3b–5, 14bβ), and a detailed proposed settlement (vv. 6–8, 9b–14bα). Both the people's claim (that YHWH is being unjust) and the deity's counterclaim (that the people's conduct is neither righteous nor just) are competing truth-claims that require testing in a divine courtroom. An account of a divine trial, in which the deity as judge offers a settlement to reconcile the parties, constitutes an appropriate vehicle to persuade the community to adopt the deity's perspective on their own behaviour.[454]

The strongest evidence of an embedded divine trial in Isa 58 comes from the legal terminology that clusters in the first half of the chapter, which is Magdalene's first key attribute. Much of the vocabulary also has a generic sense so it is the collocation of lexemes and their alignment with the phases of the legal process that makes the evidence strong. Accusation is represented clearly in the opening instruction to the prophet (v. 1) to "inform" (נגד *hiphil*)[455] the house of Jacob of their "transgression" (פֶּשַׁע) and "offences" (הַטָּאת).[456] The people's complaint against YHWH is more subtly expressed with the interrogative particle לָמָּה "Why?" (v. 3)[457] and, later, with the verb שׁוּע "to cry out" (v. 9).[458] The investigative phase, whether pre- or mid-trial,[459] is represented by the verbs דרשׁ and שׁאל (v. 2)[460] with the people as subject, and the negated verbs ראה and ידע (v. 3) with the deity as

[454] Cf. Nathan, David, and the story of the poor man's lamb (2 Sam 12).
[455] Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 70–71, 74, 300–301.
[456] See, e.g., Gen 31:36; Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 65–66.
[457] Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 76, 312.
[458] Cf. Job 19:7; 30:20; Magdalene, *On the Scales*, 143.
[459] See Magdalene, *On the Scales*, 75–77.
[460] Cf. Deut 13:15; Isa 1:17; 16:5; 65:1; Jer 18:13; Job 10:6. See Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 242–46. Magdalene, *On the Scales*, 108 notes the legal sense of דרשׁ, "to conduct an investigation," giving further references, as well as "to inquire of God through an oracular procedure." She notes a likely legal-theological double entendre in Job 5:8 and 1 Chr 28:9 (202–203). I suggest Isa 58:2 should be added to this list. Also to be read as a double entendre is the expression "knowledge of my ways" (v. 2). On דרך and its synonyms as a frequent object of verbs of inquiry as a site of justice and injustice, see Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 247; cf. Isa 59:4.

subject.[461] Indicating that he has indeed been "seeing" and "knowing," the results of YHWH's investigation are marked by הן (vv. 3–4).[462] The legal summons is made with the verb קרא "to call, summons" by the prophet on behalf of YHWH in v. 1 and the people in v. 9.[463] Motion towards the court of judgement and the judge is also indicated by קרבה "drawing near" (v. 2).[464] The review of evidence and arguments and the judge's action can be indicated by the verbs שׁמע (v. 4)[465] and ענה (v. 9), although the latter may here primarily indicate a defendant's (YHWH's) legal response to an accusation.[466] The final line, "the mouth of YHWH has spoken (דבר *piel*)" (v. 14), expresses the completion of the divine judgement.[467]

Magdalene's second key attribute is the presence of five common features of trial narratives. In summary, a trial has multiple and conflicting narrative strands, which are the stories told by the different parties and witnesses. These strands are often fractured, representing the dialogue of the trial that lies behind the text. There is an implicit or explicit adjudicator whom the competing strands seek to persuade. Finally, the narrative strands are regulated by legal procedure.[468] In Isa 58, the conflicting, competing, and

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[461] Cf. Isa 57:18; 59:15; Jer 16:16; 29:23. See Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 244–46. Bruce Wells, *The Law of Testimony in the Pentateuchal Codes*, BZABR 4 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2004), 27–28, suggests that the verbs ראה and ידע (also שׁמע) are used to signify the actions of an observing witness in a legal process. In Isa 58:3, YHWH is accused of not "seeing" and "knowing," implying he has failed in his duties of investigation as divine judge. cf. Diana Edelman, "The 'Seeing God' Motif and Yahweh as a God of Justice," in *Loi et justice dans la littérature du Proche-orient ancien*, ed. O. Artus, BZABR 20 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013), 197–224.

[462] Cf. Jer 2:10; Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 250–51.

[463] See Magdalene, *On the Scales*, 141; Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 223–25. See, also, Shalom E. Holtz, "The Prophet as Summoner," in *A Common Cultural Heritage: Studies on Mesopotamia and the Biblical World in Honor of Barry l. Eichler*, ed. G. Frame et al. (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2011), 19–34.

[464] Cf. Num 27:1; 36:1; 1 Sam 14:36; Isa 41:1; see Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 218–23; also, Yair Hoffman, "The Root *Qrb* as a Legal Term," *JNSL* 10 (1982): 67–73; and in relation to prayer, suggesting another double entendre, Holtz, *Praying Legally*, 95–107.

[465] See Shalom E. Holtz, "A Common Set of Trial Terms," *ZAR* 17 (2011): 1–14; also, Holtz, *Praying Legally*, 114–25.

[466] See Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 72–74, 300–301, 326–27, 333–34; and, in combination with קרא "to summon," see the references from Job, in Magdalene, *On the Scales*, 141–42.

[467] Cf. Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 185–88, 355–356.

[468] Magdalene, *On the Scales*, 47, 263; based on Gewirtz, "Narrative and Rhetoric."

fractured narrative strands are evident in the contradictory back-and-forth and intertwining of the stories told by the people as they appeal to YHWH, claiming to be victims of divine injustice, and by YHWH as he accuses them of injustice in return. The legal vocabulary leaves traces of the phases of the legal procedure.[469] The whole message constitutes an attempt to persuade the text's audience to reassess their own "righteousness," to adopt the deity's perspective on the community's conduct, and to comply with his demands, or settlement.

The chapter constitutes an indictment of the community for failing to comply with the divine command: שמרו משפט ואשו צדקה "Oversee justice, act in righteousness" (Isa 56:1).[470] Even worse, they did not recognise their "transgressions" and "offences" (58:1) but were accusing YHWH of failure to uphold justice by not responding to them. Against this backdrop he points to sins of omission and commission, exhorting them to "apportion food to the hungry" and "cover the naked" amongst their kin (58:7). The legal framing of the divine trial fits the proposal that these are familiar and unshirkable moral obligations, not acts of generosity or benevolence. It even suggests that their neglect might have resulted in an appearance before a lawcourt in certain cases.

7.4.4 The poetics of Isaiah 58: A "day" acceptable to YHWH

The artistry of Isa 58 is manifest in its numerous literary devices and careful lexical choices, within the structure of an embedded divine trial. Here I focus on key highlights that function across the unit, while other features will be noted as they are encountered. The distinctive repetition of lexemes based on

[469] Even the instruction to the prophet to speak out loudly (Isa 58:1) has a legal explanation. By doing so, he demonstrates his support of the deity's counteraccusation whilst avoiding any taint of complicity with the guilty accused members of the community. Cf. Ezek 33:8–9; on the silent witness, see Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 341–42.

[470] The verb שמר can bear a more active sense in the context of legal trial, including "to observe carefully, spy on; investigate; oversee (with overtones of defence and protection)." Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 246–47. My translation attempts to capture this active sense.

צום "a fast/to fast" and יום "day," each of which occur seven times, is widely observed. This, and the expression ביום "today" (v. 4),[471] point to a communal day of fasting as the original, or literarily constructed, setting.[472] "Fasting" plays an ambivalent role in the message.[473] Select behaviours are mocked (v. 5b) but it is not condemned outright. Indeed, YHWH himself is portrayed as "choosing" a "fast," although it is completely re-imagined (vv. 5a, 6a). The incidence pattern of צום-related lexemes is highly concentrated, clustered into just eight lines, in alternate cola of vv. 3a–6a.[474] In the main accusations YHWH levies at the people, each commencing with הן (vv. 3b–4a), two locutions based on צום frame four occurrences of the consonant *tsade.* In two of these locutions *tsade* and *mem* appear in reverse order (תמצאו "you find"; מצה "contention"), supporting orthographically an implicit accusation of "disordered fasting."[475]

It is less often noted that there are also seven occurrences of "YHWH" in the chapter. The three lexemes "YHWH," "fast," and "day" are not only lexical surface features but also key conceptual poles about which the message, within the divine trial format, is arranged.[476] They interact as concepts in the new definition of the צום "fast" YHWH would choose (vv. 5a, 6a),[477] and the יום "day" "acceptable" to him (v. 5c).[478]

Seven is one of several significant numbers in biblical literature.[479] In a literary context, the final occurrence of a sevenfold repetition tends to carry the

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[471] Or "this day"; see John Goldingay, "*Kayyôm Hazzeh* 'On This Very Day,'" *VT* 43 (1993): 112–15.
[472] Cf. Jer 36:6; Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 159, 163.
[473] See below.
[474] With the one exception of Isa 58:5b.
[475] Koole, *Isaiah III*, 119, suggests these are puns, ridiculing "fasting" which "is not worthy of its name." The twenty-one occurrences of the consonant *tsade* in vv. 2–14, in addition to the seven variations on צום, seems to be an unusually high incidence and possibly an intentional feature.
[476] See, similarly, Polan, *Justice*, 178–84.
[477] Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 199.
[478] Note the assonance between these *Leitwörter.*
[479] Marvin H. Pope, "Number," *IDB* 3:563; Marvin H. Pope, "Seven," *IDB* 4:295.

fullest emphasis as the summit and perfection of the locution.[480] This literary device is at work in subtly different ways for each of the three lexemes, with both initial and final occurrences carrying extra significance. The first two occurrences of יום in Isa 58 in the expression יום יום "day after day" (v. 2aα) are reminiscent of tedious ongoing pleading. This tone continues with the first variation on צום: "Why do we fast (צמנו) and you don't see?" (v. 3aα). Next, יום and צום appear together in YHWH's first detailed accusation as "the day of your fast" (v. 3bα). The textual context gives the collocation unequivocally pejorative connotations. The fourth, fifth, and sixth repetitions of יום also appear alongside or in parallel with a lexeme based on צום (vv. 4bα, 5aα+β, cα+β), sustaining the negative evaluation. The last two occurrences split the "fast" and "day" lexemes between the cola of the couplet, emphasising criticism of the "day" as much as the "fast," until the last pairing breaks out in an exasperated accusation: "Is this what you call a fast, and a day acceptable (רצון) to YHWH?" (v. 5c). At this critical juncture the name יהוה appears for the first time, marking the hinge or pivot in the rhetorical argument with all three of the *Leitwörter*, as it turns towards the settlement by which YHWH and the people will be reconciled.

The rhetorical question of v. 5c sets up the seventh and final occurrences of both "fast" and "day" which, now separated, are free to convey a positive, perfected sense, "acceptable to YHWH." In the only monocolon of the chapter, the rhetorical question "Is not this the fast I choose?" (v. 6a) virtually echoes that of v. 5aα. This seventh and final occurrence of צום redefines fasting on YHWH's terms, reinstating its positive connotations. Two main features stand out. First, this "fasting" is concerned with social relations, not relations with the deity. The behaviour to be ameliorated is primarily the wrongdoing of people with resources and power over others.[481] Second, this

[480] James Muilenburg, "A Study in Hebrew Rhetoric: Repetition and Style," in *Congress Volume: Copenhagen 1953*, ed. G. W. Anderson et al., VTSup 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1953), 108; Polan, *Justice*, 181.
[481] Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 202. See discussion in next chapter.

"fasting" concerns everyday conduct, as a way of life, rather than practices on a single, appointed day (vv. 6–7, 9b–10a).[482]

By contrast, "day" reaches its acme in its seventh recurrence in the expression "my holy day" (יום קדשׁי v. 13aβ), that is, the Sabbath (v. 13aα, bα), "the holy of YHWH" (לקדוש יהוה v. 13bβ), to be called "Delight/Revelling" (ענג, v. 13bα). The parallelism of the expressions in vv. 13aβ, bβ combined with the previous six occurrences of יום creates a double effect of retrojecting YHWH's concern with conduct *every day* (v. 2a), whilst also emphasising that the Sabbath day is to be dedicated to YHWH as *his day* (v. 13).[483] The overall effect is to portray the conduct and attitudes by which each type of day, the Sabbath day and the regular "working" day (the latter now coterminous with the newly defined "fast" day), will be יום רצון ליהוה "a day acceptable to YHWH" (v. 5c).

Meanwhile, the role of the locution יהוה is subtle in its representation of the deity. The name does not appear during the accusation. The deity refers to himself as אותי "Me" (v. 2aα) and then describes his people's behaviour as seeking אלהים "God" (v. 2bβ, cβ). The effect is of distance between YHWH and his people. Yet, his pre-eminence as deity, divine judge, and source of the message is preserved and reflected in his self-reference appearing before either lexeme "fast" or "day": אותי יום יום ידרשׁון "(Of) me day by day they inquire" (v. 2aα). The first occurrence of the name יהוה appears in the pivotal v. 5c, whence the subtle references cease[484] and, literarily, YHWH begins to "draw near." The effect is enhanced with the second recurrence of יהוה as his כבוד "wealth" gathers his people (vv. 8bβ) until, with the third, he finally

[482] Polan, *Justice*, 181. Fasting is explored in greater detail in the next chapter.
[483] Note the parasonance between ידרשׁון (v. 2a) and קדשׁי/קדוש (v. 13ab) in the consonants *dalet* and *shin* which invites a comparison between the people's seeking YHWH day after day and his "holy day," where he is, by implication, readily found.
[484] On names of the deity as a structuring device in the book of Jonah, see Jonathan Magonet, *Form and Meaning: Studies in Literary Techniques in the Book of Jonah*, BBET 2 (Bern: Lang, 1976), 33–38.

responds to their summons (v. 9aα). The fourth to sixth recurrences emphasise the relationship YHWH desires with his people (leading them, v. 11aα; calling them to "honour"[485] the Sabbath, v. 13bβ; and taking delight in him, v. 14aα). The final, seventh occurrence of יהוה is the penultimate word of the unit (v. 14bβ), adding connotations of the perfection of divine justice to the completion of the divine judgement.

The recurrence in vv. 13–14 of several lexemes found in vv. 1–3 creates a literary frame around the rhetorical unit that guides interpretation.[486] Of particular significance is the initial naming of the addressees "my people" as the "house(hold) of Jacob" (v. 1), which then echoes in the final reference to "your father Jacob" (v. 14). Isa 58 is thus addressed to a community in the guise of a single family or house.

Finally, the outstanding wordplay in the turn to the topic of the Sabbath is emblematic of the composer's craftsmanship, as the transition is facilitated by parasonance.

מֹשֵׁבב (נתיבות) לָשָׁבת

(אם) תָּשִׁיב מִשַּׁבָּת

Restorer (of paths/ways of living) for dwelling in/the Sabbath.

(If) you turn back from the Sabbath

Isa 58:12bβ –13aα[487]

The cola are also connected by multi-directional polysemy:[488] לָשָׁבת can be read "for dwelling in" or "for the Sabbath" (v. 12b).[489] The "paths" may also be metaphorical "ways of living,"[490] further multiplying readings.

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[485] Probably in a material sense; cf. Ps 96:7–8; Prov 3:9–10. Lambert, "Honor I," 332.
[486] Polan, *Justice*, 175–85; also, Paul, *Isaiah 40–66*, 481, 493; Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 161.
[487] Paul, *Isaiah 40–66*, 493; also, Kline, *Allusive Soundplay*, 85–87.
[488] Scott B. Noegel, *"Wordplay" in Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2021), 175–76, 179–81; also called Janus parallelism or pivotal polysemy.
[489] The rebuilt Jerusalem will be a city in which the Sabbath is appropriately observed; R. N. Whybray, *Isaiah 40–66*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 218.
[490] See Isa 59:7–8; Job 24:13; also, Isa 42:16; Ps 119:105; Polan, *Justice*, 33, 223–24.

Multiple literary devices are strategically employed throughout Isa 58, not only those highlighted here but also others incorporated in the discussion in the next chapter. The rhetorical unit is a skilful composition in which the words – their semantics, orthography, and phonemes – were carefully chosen and arranged to enhance its persuasive rhetoric with multiple layers of meaning and many subtle allusions and connotations. The high degree of artistry probably contributed to the impression that YHWH's mouth had, indeed, spoken (v. 14b).

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter constitutes the first of two chapters devoted to a close reading of Isa 58:7 in the context of Isa 58. It began with an examination of the four cola of v. 7 in isolation from the wider textual context. Analysing syntax and vocabulary led to three significant conclusions. First, the "sharing" (פרס) of one's food or bread may have been a technical term from Aramaic for "allotting" or "apportioning" supplies. Second, "covering" (כסה *piel*) someone who is ערום may also have been a technical term for a supply of textiles and clothing as a maintenance allowance. Third, the verse frames these actions as familiar ways to respond to the basic maintenance needs of members of one's family, relatives, or "kin" (בשׂר). Combining these insights, the implied familiarity of the provision urged in v. 7 arises from an assumption that kinship relations are, concomitantly, relations of economic dependence. Those with resources have an obligation to supply the basic needs of those kin who are without. The possibility that this provision is viewed as altruistic charity must, consequently, be ruled out.

A brief overview of the relevant background of Third Isaiah suggested that Isa 58 was addressed to an impoverished community living in or near to Jerusalem in the last quarter of the sixth or first half of the fifth century. "Justice" and "righteousness," both divine and human, constitute a key theme for Isa 56–66, and their recurrence in chapter 58 provide a key or lens

through which to read. Historical and literary contexts support the suggestion that a crisis over economic well-being in the Jerusalem community lies behind Isa 58 and its exhortations to righteous conduct.

A literary analysis of the rhetorical unit Isa 58 under four subheadings drew out the key textual features of the whole discourse. The first subsection proposed a working structure for the chapter in which the initial particles play a significant part. The diagrammatic presentation facilitated a familiarisation with the Hebrew text and its rhetorical argument which does not follow the versification. It helped to clarify the series of conditional statements, expressed as divine demands and promises, since the protases and apodoses are not consistently marked with אם "if" and אז "then." The following subsection provided a summary of the message of Isa 58 to orientate readers unfamiliar with the text.

The third subsection made the innovative proposal that a divine trial is embedded within the chapter. The account records a complaint of the people against YHWH, that he is not responding with justice to their fasting and seeking of him. YHWH makes a counterclaim, that the people fall short in their own justice and righteousness. The bulk of the chapter constitutes the restoration settlement that YHWH proposes. He demands certain behaviours from them (vv. 6–7). Then their righteousness (or legal innocence) will go before them, and YHWH's glory (or wealth) will gather them (v. 8b). Then YHWH will hear their call and respond (v. 9a). This legal interpretation of the rhetorical argument of the chapter fits with the concern for משפט וצדקה raised in 56:1. It supports the proposal that economic concerns drove the community's approaching of YHWH with fasting.

The final subsection examined the text's poetic and literary devices. The sevenfold repetitions of YHWH, יום "day," and forms of צום "fast/to fast" structure and convey the content of the message. The "fast YHWH would choose" (58:6) is directed towards the behaviours of everyday social

relations, rather than occasional practices primarily oriented towards the deity. Practices on the Sabbath are also to be reconsidered so that it is celebrated as YHWH's holy day. Lastly, a repeated reference to Jacob in vv. 1 and 14 portrays the addressees as belonging to a single family. This framing of the discourse also frames the understanding of kinship (בשׂר) in v. 7. The community is to think of itself as a single economic unit, like a household. The providers and the destitute are kin within the house of Jacob. The community addressed as "my people" is apparently a divided community who are not equally the targets of the message.

The investigations within this chapter took a wide-angled view of Isa 58. They revealed a unit created with a tight weave of interlocking internal connections formed by the conceptual structure of a divine trial and the artistry of its poetics. This points to verse 7, on the one hand, being well embedded in the message of the chapter and, on the other, making its own unique and essential contribution to it.

Building on this essential background, the next chapter continues the interpretation of Isa 58 proceeding in the opposite direction. Guided by two key features of v. 7 in turn, the themes of ethical conduct and food, it examines their connections and connotations within the frame of Isa 58 to refine and deepen our interpretation of the verse in context. Some questions remain to be answered. Who is being exhorted to provide? How did the destitute come to be in that situation? What are the relationships between the providers and the destitute, other than "kinship" within the Yahwistic community?

8 Isaiah 58 and the themes of Isaiah 58:7

8.1 Introduction

This chapter constitutes the second in a two-part investigation of Isa 58:7 in the context of Isa 58. The themes of ethical conduct and food found in Isa 58:7 are used as a springboard to trace rhetorical and lexical connections through the chapter. First, I examine the people's behaviour, their offences (vv. 2b, 3b–4a) and the righteous conduct demanded (vv. 6b–7, 9b–10a, 13), which form the protases of YHWH's conditional settlement offer. These focus on the community's practices of commerce, labour, and judicial affairs, with legal and economic abuses emerging as a consistent thread. Serious doubt is raised over the MT מוֹטָה, conventionally translated "yoke" (vv. 6, 9b). I propose emending it to מטה and provisionally reading it with a general sense of "perverted justice" (with Ezek 9:9) and a particular sense of a legal agreement or penalty clause which the writer wants to see discontinued. The misdeeds committed by the addressees reveal severe socio-economic inequalities within the Jerusalem community. I conclude that the "hungry" and the "naked" kin (v. 7) belong to the economically "crushed" (v. 6c) and the labourers whom the addressees oppress (v. 3b).

Second, I investigate the function of the theme of food, eating, and fasting, with a focus on the literary exploitation of נפשׁ and locutions related to ענה/עני for rhetorical effect. In the process, vv. 5a, 9a, 11a from the apodoses and v. 10a from the protases are examined closely. I propose that the colon v. 10aα goes further than the apportioning of your bread/food for "the hungry" of v. 7aα, to urge the addressees to make their livelihoods or earn a living for "the hungry" (v. 10a). The juxtaposition of the מטה in vv. 6, 9b with the call to take responsibility for the sustenance of "the hungry" in vv. 7, 10a suggests that the legal instrument is implicated in the critical condition of the destitute described as "the naked" and "the hungry."

8.2 Isaiah 58:7 and the call to righteous conduct

8.2.1 The people's behaviour and the problem with חפץ

The transgressions and offences that the people are accused of (v. 1a) encompass acts of omission and commission. This is implied first by the condemnations of behaviour on the fast day in vv. 3b–4a and continued in the exhortations of behaviour to abandon and to adopt in vv. 6b–7, 9b–10a, and 13. Amongst these are two calls to meet the needs of "the hungry" (vv. 7a, 10a). The context of v. 6bc elucidates further the identity of "the hungry" and "the naked" kin in v. 7. The treatment of v. 10a is incorporated into the following section on food.

The previous chapter discussed how the lexemes for "day" and "YHWH" that structure the chapter continue into vv. 13–14a, indicating commonalities across any supposed divide between social justice and ritual, or relationships with others versus relationship with YHWH.[491] Other repeated lexemes interlace these four text portions, as Table 1 indicates. In particular, the first and second protases are tightly interlaced as the couplets of vv.9b–10a reprise the themes of vv. 6b–7. Book-ending these, the expression מצא חפץ is found in vv. 3b and 13.

Table 1: Lexical repetition in verses addressing conduct in Isaiah 58

Offence	**Demand 1**	**Demand 2**	**Demand 3**
vv. 3b–4a	**vv. 6b–7**	**vv. 9b–10a**	**v. 13**
(2 couplets)	*(4 couplets)*	*(2 couplets)*	*(3 couplets)*
מצא חפץ	רשׁע	מוטה	עשׂה חפץ
רשׁע	מוטה (twice)	דבר	מצא חפץ
	שׁלח	שׁלח	דבר דבר
	רעב	רעב	
	עניים	נענה	

[491] E.g., Paul, *Isaiah 40–66*, 493–94; Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 340–41; cf. Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 183–84.

Five occurrences of חפץ play a central role in the approach towards YHWH and are also incorporated into his judgement of the people's behaviour. They thus bridge both lawsuits in the divine trial and mark the two contrasting points of view. The lexeme appears in the description of the way the people make their appeal to YHWH "day after day" (v. 2 twice, verb), then in connection with the fast day (v. 3b, noun) and the Sabbath (v. 13 twice, noun). It is thus associated with every type of day. Elsewhere in Isaiah the lexeme carries positive and negative moral evaluations, varying according to subject and object.[492] The five attributions to the admonished community in Isa 58 play on this potential ambivalence to soften criticism. The noun חפץ is usually translated "desire, delight." However, it is attested in Aramaic with the sense of "business"[493] and in several biblical Hebrew texts it probably similarly refers to "commercial business, affairs, work."[494] The hint of irony some detect in v. 2[495] is a clue that polysemy may be playing a part. I suggest that the two occurrences of the verb חפץ in the verse should be read (either sequentially or simultaneously) with a double sense of "to delight" and "to busy/occupy oneself," with not completely positive connotations. This ambivalent double reading sets the tone for the lexeme's next appearance in v. 3b, where YHWH condemns the people's behaviour.

Yet day after day they inquire of (דרשׁ) me,
They busy themselves with/delight in (יחפצון) knowing
my ways
Like a people that practised righteousness (צדקה)
and did not forsake (עזב) its God's justice (מִשׁפט אלהיו)

[492] YHWH is usually the subject or possessor of חפץ in Isaiah (e.g., 1:11; 56:4; 62:4) but not always (see 66:3–4).
[493] Sf3.8; see translation in Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Aramaic Inscriptions of Sefire*, 2nd ed., BibOr 19/A (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1995), 150.
[494] On Prov 31:13b, citing the Aramaic attestation, see Yoder, *Wisdom as a Woman of Substance*, 81–82. Cf. Qoh 3:1, 17; 5:7; 8:6.
[495] E.g., Grace I. Emmerson, *Isaiah 56–66*, OTG (Sheffield: JSOT, 1992), 25; and against, Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56–66: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 19B (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 176.

They ask of me judgements of innocence (מִשְׁפְּטֵי צֶדֶק),
They delight in/busy themselves with (יַחְפָּצוּן) approaching God.
Isa 58:2

The juxtaposition of the people's apparently virtuous seeking (דרשׁ) of YHWH and the knowledge (דעת) of his ways (דרך) with a sarcastic criticism of their righteousness and justice is highly unusual.[496] The Jerusalem community is accused in similar terms in Jer 5:1–5, where none are found who "know (ידע) the way (דרך) of YHWH and their God's justice (מִשְׁפַּט אֱלֹהֵיהֶם)" (v. 5), who "do justice (מִשְׁפָּט) and seek truth" (v. 1; cf. 6:10).[497] In Isa 58, however, there is a tension within the elements of the description, because despite "delighting" in the knowledge of YHWH's ways, his justice is forsaken. Whatever the details of the activity, Jer 5:4 suggests that no-one expected "the poor" (דלים) to occupy themselves with "knowledge of YHWH's ways," only the "great" (גדלים) or ruling class. We can presume that it is these who are addressed in Isa 58, indicating disagreement about the appropriate practices, preoccupations, and priorities of this wealthier portion of the community.

8.2.2 Verse 13: The Sabbath

The association of the noun חפץ with commercial business in other biblical books appears in the context of the Sabbath in Isa 58:13. Sabbath observance became increasingly important after the Babylonian exile.[498] In Isa 56, it is a prime indicator of "keeping (שׁמר) מִשְׁפָּט and practising צְדָקָה" (v. 1). "Keeping

[496] "Seeking" is positively evaluated in Isa 55:6; Jer 29:13, and many other texts.
[497] It is employed in a post factum theodicy to explain Jerusalem's destruction. See Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, OTL (London: SCM, 1986), 173–77.
[498] The pattern of seventh day rest from work, common across ancient West Asia, transitioned to a fixed day after the exile, as one aspect of a partial shift from a lunar to a solar calendar in the Neo-Babylonian period; Nihan, *From Priestly Torah*, 525; see, further, Gnana Robinson, *The Origin and Development of the Old Testament Sabbath: A Comprehensive Exegetical Approach*, BBET 21 (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1988), 193–324. For a discussion of how Sabbath observance was promoted as a fundamental imperative in biblical texts, including by means of hidden polemic in Gen 2:1–3, by the Holiness school, see Yairah Amit, *Hidden Polemics in Biblical Narrative*, BibInt 25 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 22–24, 224–40.

(שׁמר)" the Sabbath is put in parallel with "not profaning (חלל)" it (vv. 2, 6), "staying the hand from doing any evil" (v. 2), "holding fast to my covenant" (vv. 4, 6), and, significantly, "choosing what I delight in (ובחרו באשׁר חפצתי)" (v. 4). In Ezek 20:12–24,[499] Sabbaths are to be hallowed (קדשׁ, v. 20) and will sanctify (קדשׁ, v. 12) his people in return. The destruction of Judah is blamed in part on Sabbath neglect (חלל "to profane," vv. 13, 16, 21). A prophetic message from Jeremiah indicates what Sabbath observance may have entailed. He warns the people not to carry a load on the Sabbath, to bring it through the gates of Jerusalem, nor take a load out of their houses, nor do any work (Jer 17:19–27). The discourse frames the future life of the community and the integrity of the fabric of Jerusalem as dependent on Sabbath observance (v. 27).[500] Lastly, Nehemiah puts a stop to the bringing of goods into Jerusalem on the Sabbath for trading by closing and guarding the gates (Neh 13:15–22; also, 10:32).[501] Diachronicity aside, these texts show possible contemporary attitudes, which provides a useful backdrop for understanding the descriptions of Sabbath behaviour in Isa 58:13.

אם תשׁיב משׁבת רגלך	עשׂות חפציך ביום קדשׁי
וקראת לשׁבת ענג	לקדושׁ יהוה מכבד
וכבדתו מעשׂות דרכיך	ממצוא חפצך ודבר דבר

If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath
(From) doing your business on my holy day
And call the Sabbath "Delight,"
The holy (day) of YHWH "Enriched/honoured,"[502]
And enrich/honour him, rather than making your trips,
Attending to your business, and negotiating deals

Isa 58:13

[499] Also, Ezek 22:8; 23:38.
[500] Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 367.
[501] Altmann, "Ancient Comparisons, Modern Models, and Ezra-Nehemiah: Triangulating the Sources for Insights on the Economy of Persian Period Yehud" (111–117); Altmann, *Economics*, 293–98.
[502] See below.

The immediate textual context of the Sabbath observance in v. 13 is one of community thriving. Images of flourishing related to sustenance, physical location, and the built environment (vv. 10b–12, 14) surround the verse that focuses on Sabbath conduct (v. 13). Comparison with Jer 17 and Neh 13 suggest that the juxtaposition of the themes of building up the fabric of Jerusalem (Isa 58:12b) and the Sabbath (v. 13a) may reflect a conceptual association of ideas that underlies the wordplay between these cola, noted in the previous chapter.

The double designation of the Sabbath as YHWH's holy day and the challenge in v. 13aα not to encroach upon it[503] emphasise the set-apart nature of the Sabbath. The idiom of "turning back the foot" becomes a metaphorical vehicle by which the Sabbath is conceptualised as holy ground, an image with roots in ideas of the holiness of the Temple, God's house.[504] This is not a purely abstract notion. The Sabbath and holiness both had geo-spatial connotations. Indeed, keeping the Sabbath is directly linked with welcome into God's house and approaching "my holy mountain" in Isa 56:2–7. In Deutero-Isaiah holiness extends out from the temple, and Mount Zion, to Jerusalem "The Holy City" (52:1). The emphasis on entry through the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath in Jer 17 and Neh 13 points to the possibility that, on the return of exiles from Babylonia, a blending of the conceptualisations of Sabbath and holiness occurred, producing a spatial dimension to the Sabbath for the community devoted to Zion-Jerusalem and Third Isaiah.[505] This geo-spatial dimension suggests that the unique expression "turning back the foot"

[503] The expression is unique. Paul, *Isaiah 40-66*, 494, suggests comparison with Prov 1:15; 4:27; Ps 119:101, but these refer to keeping one's feet away from evil paths.
[504] Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 184.
[505] This may account for why the "holy" Sabbath is here given names that sound very like those given to "holy" Zion-Jerusalem; see Isa 62:4 "You shall be called 'I delight in her' (חפצי בה)." The lexeme ענג "delight, delicate" is surely an intentional alternative for חפץ with both appearing twice in vv. 13–14 (cf. Isa 13:22, where ענג describes palaces or temples, become ruins, in Babylon). This sharpens the contrast created in Isa 58 between חפץ with an ambivalent evaluation and ענג, positively evaluated by YHWH.

(Isa 58:13) has both a concrete sense, of not travelling by foot, and a metaphorical sense, of not "treading upon," that is, "profaning" the Sabbath.[506] Indeed, intentional ambiguity seems to run throughout the first and third couplets of the verse.[507]

The geospatial essence of the Sabbath for Zion-Jerusalem in Third Isaiah fits with the lexicological evidence that the inappropriate behaviour in v. 13 is commercial activity and the "honouring" of the Sabbath consists of material offerings or celebratory expenditure.[508] The translation of the four idiomatic expressions in v. 13aβ,c is made with the assistance of Akkadian semantic equivalents from the world of commerce and business.[509] This is not far-fetched, since the literati responsible for Third Isaiah were closely connected with returnees from Babylonia,[510] although the mechanism of transmission was probably Aramaic. Each of the expressions are often translated in more literal terms with vague, generalised interpretations.[511] But the inbuilt ambiguity is, I contend, part of the artistry of the unit. Literal translations

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[506] Contra Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 184.

[507] John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 40–66* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 498, suggests that commentators are evenly divided as to whether חפץ refers to "pleasure" or "business." Such disagreement can be a telltale sign of intentional ambiguity.

[508] In Lev 19:3 the parallel instructions to "'fear' one's mother and father" (cf. Exod 20:12; Deut 5:16) and "keep my Sabbaths" (cf. Lev 19:30) probably both entail material goods. Numerous texts suggest that "honour" and "being honoured" refers to a transfer of wealth, food, and other material rewards. See, e.g., Gen 34:19; Num 22:15, 17; Judg 9:9; 13:17; 1 Sam 2:29–30; 22:14; 2 Sam 6:20–22; Isa 22:20–24; 23:8–9; 24:15; 26:15: 43:23; 60:13: Ezek 27:25; Hab 2:6; Mal 1:6; Ps 50:23; 86:9; 96:7–8; Prov 3:9–10; 4:8–9; 13:18; 27:18; Lam 1:8; Dan 11:38. Lambert, "Honor I," 331–32. However, I am not convinced by Lambert's suggestion that Isa 58:13–14 frames the financial losses incurred by observing the Sabbath as "honouring" it (332).

[509] The expression עשׂות דרכיך (v. 13cα) can be compared to the Akkadian *ḫarrānam epēšu* "to make one's way," idiomatic for making a business trip (*CAD* 4:208); cf. LXX (NETS) "You shall not lift your foot for work." There are several examples of Hebrew דבר דבר (v. 13cβ) denoting the striking of deals (Gen 24:33; 1 Sam 20:23; Isa 8:10; Hos 10:4); cf. the Akkadian equivalent *dibbātu dabābu* (*CAD* 3:131). The expression עשׂות חפץ (v. 13aβ) is equivalent to *ṣibûtam epēšu* "to do business, pursue one's affairs" (*CAD* 4:218; 16:170); similarly, מצא חפץ (vv. 3b, 13cβ) can be compared to *ṣibûtam kašādu* "to attend to/engage in business" (*CAD* 16:169-70), where "business" denotes commercial activity; all cited by Paul, *Isaiah 40–66*, 484, 494–95. See also discussion of חפץ above.

[510] Ulrich Berges, *Jesaja 40–48*, HThKAT (Freiburg: Herder, 2008), 43–45.

[511] E.g., Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 183: "If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, doing what you delight in on my holy day ... and honour it instead of going your own ways, instead of finding your delight and speaking your word" (Isa 58:13a, c).

represent an introspective understanding of what it means to "walk in God's ways" that, it seems to me, is out of place here. Instead, I propose these were current idiomatic expressions describing commercial behaviours that the writer thought incompatible with the Sabbath for the uniquely placed Zion-Jerusalem community. Such behaviours were to be avoided by virtue of their call to holiness, even if the people did not literally dwell "in the city" and even if the city wall was not yet intact, since Trito-Isaiah understood the faithful community's identity and future to merge with that of the city (60:14b–15; 62:12).

8.2.3 Verses 3b–4a: Profiteering and unjust disputation

The fifth and final occurrence of חפץ is found in v. 3b. The two couplets of vv. 3b–4a express the core indictments of the community in terms of financial and legal abuses within a context of work and commercial practices. Following the people's complaint that their fasting is not seen or noticed (v. 3a), these lines give evidence that YHWH the divine judge has indeed seen and noticed their conduct, as indicated by the particle הן. This is the only explicit elaboration of the "transgressions" and "offences" (v. 1) framed as a failure to practise righteousness and God's justice (v. 2b), although the demands of the protases (vv. 6b–7, 9b–10a, 13) should also be read as implicit accusations.

הן ביום צמכם תמצאו חפץ וכל עצביכם תנגשׂו
הן לריב ומצה תצומו ולהכות באגרף רשׁע

Now look – on your fast day you attend to business[512]
And exact from all who toil for you,[513]
Now look – you fast for legal dispute and argument
And so as to strike with a wicked fist.

Isa 58:3b–4a

[512] The lexeme חפץ has been discussed above. See, also, Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 331; Koole, *Isaiah III*, 128; Paul, *Isaiah 40–66*, 484.
[513] Ancient versions vary, since עצבים is a *hapax legomenon*; see Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 150, 168–69; Koole, *Isaiah III*, 130–31.

Some scholars suggest people still worked when fasting in this period so "attending to business" may not be inherently condemned (v. 3bα).[514] However, the ambivalence of חפץ in v. 2 suggests it carries an ambivalent moral valence in v. 3bα, also. The criticism may not be of business itself but the nature of the business being attended to, typically translated as "oppressing" one's "labourers" (v. 3bβ). My translation draws out the economic aspect of the oppression, since elsewhere נגשׂ conveys "to seize, exact (payment) of, deprive" in connection with debts and food.[515] Moral outrage continues into the following couplet (v. 4a), which criticises the addressees for engaging in judicial disputes whilst fasting. The physical violence is probably associated with legal investigation or reflects judicial penalties.[516] With the recurrence of חפץ, a sharp contrast is made between the community's supposed "delighting" (חפץ) seeking YHWH, day after day and with fasting, "like a nation that does right (צדקה)" (v. 2), and the manner in which they, on the same day, literally "find delight" (מצא חפץ) in depriving others and treating them with רשׁע ("wickedness" v. 4a).[517] The criticism, I suggest, is focused on abuse of power, which is incompatible with the humble persona of the weak adopted in prayer and fasting to appeal to YHWH.

8.2.4 Verses 6, 9b: Setting free and the מוטה

The people's offences in vv. 3b–4a and the demands related to observing the Sabbath in v. 13 suggest that work, commerce, finance, and law are the

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[514] Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 168. By contrast, scholars assuming a close association with the Day of Atonement suggest ceasing from labour was what YHWH required in Isa 58 (Lev 16:29) and thus detect opprobrium here, e.g., Paul, *Isaiah 40–66*, 481.

[515] Cf. Deut 15:2–3; 2 Kgs 23:35; Isa 53:7; with regards to food, 1 Sam 14:24. The connection with labour is maintained in the substantive form נגשׂ/ים, translated "taskmaster/s" (Exod 3:7; 5:6, 10, 13, 14; Isa 60:17; Job 3:18; 39:7); Edward Lipiński, "נָגַשׂ *nāgaś*," *TDOT* 9:214; DCH 5:614.

[516] See, e.g., Exod 21:18; Jer 20:2; 37:15. Magdalene, *On the Scales*, 123, claims that in the Neo-Babylonian system "investigative measures often involved torturing the defendant ... What we moderns think of as postconviction punishments might come at any stage of the proceedings – upon arrest, during investigation, during trial, or after conviction." Cf. Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 170.

[517] Koole, *Isaiah III*, 129–30. צדק/צדקה and רשׁע often form a contrasting word-pair.

domains within which ameliorating actions are urged in vv. 6–7 and 9b–10a. Recognising that the latter roughly reprise the former, this subsection considers the activities and behaviours to cease and undo (vv. 6, 9b), while vv. 7, 10a, both representing behaviour to adopt, are included in the following section on the theme of food.

The general sense of vv. 6, 9b is easy to grasp – release from "bondage" – but the details and concrete realities of what kind of bondage are obscured behind unusual turns of phrase. At stake is the question of the specificity of the actions being urged and their embeddedness in the historical and/or literary context.

הלוא זה צום אבחרהו
פתח חרצבות רׇשע התר אגדות מוטה
ושׁלח רצוצים חפשׁים וכל מוטה תנתקו

Is not this the fast I choose?
Untying[518] wicked[519] bonds[520]
Releasing[521] collections[522] of מוטה

[518] The common verb פתח *piel* (Isa 58:6bα) is elsewhere used for undoing "bonds," almost invariably designated with מוסר/ מסר. Such "bonds" are "fastenings" or, alternatively, "discipline, training," the ambiguity arising from homography. See Isa 52:2; Ps 105:20; 116:16; Job 12:18; 39:5.
[519] Note the recurrence of רׇשׁע, also, in Isa 58:4a.
[520] "Bonds" follows the ancient versions. The only other biblical attestation is in Ps 73:4, where having no חרצבות is a characteristic of the wicked (רׇשׁעים, v. 3) who avoid suffering. For "fetters," see the Damascus Covenant (CD-A XIII:10); Paul, *Isaiah 40–66*, 486–87. If "fetters" or "chains," these would, in any case, be metaphorical; Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 173.
[521] The rare נתר *hiphil* is found elsewhere in the context of releasing prisoners (Ps 105:20; 146:7) and YHWH's oppressive hand (Job 6:9).
[522] There are four attestations of the lexeme אגדה. Two verses suggest it may function as a collective noun, for when several are gathered into one, such as "band," "bundle," or "bunch" (of hyssop, Exod 12:22; of fighting men, 2 Sam 2:25). The third occurrence may be an alternative term for a circle. See Shalom M. Paul, "Two Cosmographical Terms in Amos 9:6," in *Divrei Shalom: Collected Studies of Shalom M. Paul on the Bible and the Ancient Near East, 1967-2005*, CHANE 23 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 343–49 (348–9). Cf. LXX "knots."

And setting free[523] the (economically) crushed[524]

You (pl.) tear up[525] every מוטה

Isa 58:6

אם תסיר מתוכך מוטה שׁלח אצבע ודבר און

If you (sg.) remove[526] מוטה from your midst

The pointing of the finger[527] and false accusation[528]

Isa 58:9b

The first colon, v. 6a, is a rhetorical question posed with the same interrogative particle as the opening of v. 7.[529] As previously, we should note that this frames the response in vv. 6bc as something that the addressees already know, or should be able to guess, is a sociomoral obligation. Modern translators gravitate towards generalised, abstract images of "release from bondage," seeing associations with Isa 61.[530] Orthographical similarity to מטות "yoke-bars" led to מוטה being read as "yoke." I argue below that such a translation is contextually inappropriate, obscures the detail of the enjoined

[523] The combination of the verb שׁלח with חפשׁשי/ם is commonly used for the setting free of a עבד "slave, servant," e.g., Exod 21:26–27; Deut 15: 12, 13, 18; Jer 34:9–16. The expression is also in parallel with פתח in Job 39:5; cf. Ps 105:20.

[524] The substantive is unique. Cognates of רצוצים are strongly related to economic oppression (e.g., Deut 28:33; 1 Sam 12:3–4; Amos 4:1; Job 20:19; 2 Chr 16:10) and contrasted with the exercise of מׁשפט (e.g., Isa 42:3–4; Hos 5:11).

[525] Numerous verses employ נתק *piel* for the "snapping" of thongs, straps, or ties, labelled with מוסרות in Jer 2:20; 5:5; 30:8; Nah 1:13; Ps 2:3; 107:14; and labelled otherwise in Judg 16:9, 12; Jer 10:20; Isa 5:27; 33:20; Qoh 4:12. Only three verses mention a "yoke" (על Jer 2:20; 5:5; and, possibly, if not emended, מטה Nah 1:13). In none of these is the (usually wooden) yoke "snapped."

[526] Cf. Isa 10:27; 14:25.

[527] Cf. Prov 6:14, 19. This refers to a legal accusation, a false accusation (often attached to a part of the body; see Isa 59:3; Prov 6:13), or the authoritative handing over of a condemned person; Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 224, 282, 383–84; cf. Paul, *Isaiah 40–66*, 489–90, who cites Akkadian *ubānam tarāṣu CAD* 18:211, 20:6; also, Koole, *Isaiah III*, 145, with further references.

[528] Cf. Isa 59:4, 13. The expression refers to false testimony in a trial. Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 282–83.

[529] Note that, as in v. 7, an affirmative response is expected here, whereas the almost identical statement in Isa 58:5aα with הבזה in place of הלא prompts a negative one.

[530] E.g., Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 337; Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 173.

behaviour, and does not fit with the ancient west Asian conceptual image of the yoke and its linguistic expressions.

The seven behaviours urged in vv. 6bc, 9b are described with common verbs (נתר *hiphil,* v. 6bβ, being the exception). However, they are combined with rare substantives.[531] The verbal phrase in v. 6cα is the most straightforward of the seven; "setting free" (חפשׁי+שׁלח) is analogous to the setting free of slaves, without further obligation.[532] This is the only expression in vv. 6bc, 9 in which a social type (the רצוצים "economically crushed") is the object and the verb an action to be done towards them. This pattern subsequently appears four times in v. 7. Earlier, the wronged are named as עצביכם "all who toil for you" (v. 3b). It may be that exacting from the עצביכם (v. 3b) caused them to become the רצוצים (v. 6cα). It is speculative, but it may be that the exhortations constitute redress. These same people are now to be set free from the unjust demands being made by those they are toiling for (v. 3b). The offences in vv. 3b–4a are, thus, an important point of reference for understanding the behavioural demands. Similarly, the theme of the lawcourt found in v. 4a reappears in the two expressions in v. 9bβ. The construct noun און ("misfortune, evil"), like רשׁע (vv. 4a, 6b), spells out the negative evaluation, suggesting that the community is accused of practising "unjust" justice (v. 2b), a theme elaborated upon in Isa 59:1–8.

The verbs in the remaining cola of vv. 6, 9b convey a common theme of undoing, releasing, snapping, or tearing something that binds. Their associated substantives make translation challenging. That חרצבות (v. 6bα) are to be loosened or undone suggests they fasten two things together. "Bonds" can be physical or metaphorical ties and gives an appropriately vague translation. Described as "wicked," these are either inherently so, suggesting the locution is a technical term, or that they need not be and so

[531] The repetition of *tsade* in Isa 58:6bα (חרצבות), 6cα (רצוצים) may intentionally echo the *tsade* in צום in v. 6a.
[532] Note the recurrence of שׁלח with contrasting moral valence in Isa 58:9b.

only the "wicked" ones should be dissolved. They are likely to be legal-financial agreements, concerning property, goods, or labour. That they are "wicked" suggests they are asymmetrical, benefitting the more powerful partner, but they could be partnership deals to the detriment of non-participants.

The remaining three cola (vv. 6bβ, 6cβ, 9bα) all depend on the interpretation of the key entity מוטה which is to be removed. The ancient versions are far from consistent. In MT all three occurrences are pointed מוֹטָה, denoting a bar or pole laid on the shoulders of animals or humans to carry a burden, create a yoke, or otherwise facilitate work of some kind.[533] Curiously, 1QIs^{a} has מוטה, מטה, מוטה, respectively, while 1QIs^{b} has מטה each time. This may be insignificant, since מוֹטָה could be written מוטה or מטה, or the variation in spelling may indicate different primary senses. The rare word מֵטֶה (מטה unpointed) is found otherwise only in Ezek 9:9 MT, where it seems to denote "injustice, perversity" in the sense of unjust legal decisions.[534] This is the rendering implied in the Aramaic Targum of Isa 58 in all three cases, and in the Syriac in the latter two. LXX translates with "forced contracts," "unjust note," and "bond" (NETS), respectively, while the Vulgate has initially "oppressive ties," then "bond" in the last two cases.[535]

The Qumran texts aside, only one out of the twelve cases in the four other ancient versions cited support the MT reading of מוֹטָה "yoke-bar." Numerous reasons suggest this is unlikely to be the primary sense in this context. The lexeme is usually used metaphorically alongside the more general term על "yoke" and/or מוסרות "straps."[536] Yokes are metaphors for the submission of

[533] The lexeme מוטה is found 9 more times in Lev 26:13; Jer 27:2; 28:10, 12, 13 (twice); Ezek 30:18; 34:27; 1 Chr 15:15; with a variant, also Nah 1:13.
[534] Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 196, 225.
[535] Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 174, 178–79.
[536] Cf. Ezek 30:18 מטות מצרים "yoke-bars of Egypt" (MT) whereas LXX has τὰ σκῆπτρα suggesting מַתּוֹת in the Hebrew *Vorlage*.

a king, people, or nation to another king, nation, or god.[537] The one subjugated becomes a slave or servant who works[538] for the superior, the lord, in analogy to an animal who bears a yoke for its master. Bearing a yoke connotes obedience and service through the heavy burdens of taxes, tribute, corvée, or offerings. It is exceptional for yokes to be used for interpersonal relationships in biblical texts.[539] Further, the lexeme מוֹטָה generally appears in plural form as מטות.[540] Furthermore, apart from the non-figurative use in 1 Chr 15:15, the yoke-bars are always "broken," conveyed with the verb שׁבר.[541] The מוטה is also to be done away with in Isa 58, but this is not expressed with a suitable verb for "breaking" wood, despite the common modern English translation "to break (off) every yoke" (Isa 58:6cβ; NRSV, NJPS, ESV). Lastly, nowhere else does כל "all, every" appear with על or מוטה. Indeed, bearing a yoke does not necessarily have negative connotations, since the metaphor is also used to express the appropriate loyal, humble attitude of service (עבד) to the deity (Jer 2:20; 5:5). When yoke imagery is used in an economic context,

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[537] G. A. Van Alstine and N. J. Opperwall-Galluch, "Yoke; Yoke-Bar," *ISBE* 4:1164–65. E.g., the "yoke" of Egypt: Lev 26:13; of the king of Babylon: Jer 28; of King Rehoboam on "all Israel": 1 Kgs 12:4//2 Chr 10:4.

[538] "Work" and "slave, servant" are expressed with cognates of עבד: Gen 27:40; Lev 26:13; Deut 28:48; 1 Kgs 12:4//2 Chr 10:4; Jer 2:20; 27:8, 11, 12; 28:14; 30:8; Ezek 34:27.

[539] An apparent exception, Lam 3:27, may refer to bearing the yoke of the deity. Gen 27:40 probably concerns the corporate entities of Edom and Judah/Israel, rather than the personal servitude of Esau to Jacob; Hans Schmoldt, "עֹל," *TDOT* 11:72–76 (75). For the political metaphor, widely used in ancient west Asia, see Edward Silver, "Performing Domination/Theorizing Power: Israelite Prophecy as a Political Discourse beyond the Conflict Model," *JANER* 14 (2014): 186–216.

[540] The singular form is so unusual that when found in a distinctive scenario of an enacted metaphor in Jer 28:10, 12 (MT), it is translated as plural in LXX and in Syriac; cf. possible variants in Isa 9:3, Nah 1:13. By contrast, על "yoke" is invariably singular. In general, a single "yoke" would consist of more than one wooden "bar."

[541] With שׁבר, see broken מוטה/מוטת "bar/s" only: Jer 28:10, 12 (both sing.), 13 (pl.); (Ezek 30:18, see note above); for broken מטות על "bars of the yoke": Lev 26:13; (Ezek 34:27, see end of this note); for broken על "yoke" only: Jer 2:20; 5:5; 28:2, 4, 11; 30:8. Other verbs for destruction are used rarely, e.g., פרק "tear away" Gen 27:40; חתת "shatter" Isa 9:3. Cf. also with שׁבר "broken," מטה "rod, staff": Isa 14:5; Jer 48:17; מטה לחם "staff of bread": Lev 26:26; Ezek 4:16; 5:16; 14:13; Ps 105:16. LXX Ezek 34:27 does not contain "bars," which seems to be an addition preserved in MT to more closely reflect Lev 26:13; Christophe L. Nihan, "Ezekiel and the Holiness Legislation – A Plea for Nonlinear Models," in *The Formation of the Pentateuch: Bridging the Academic Cultures of Europe, Israel, and North America*, ed. J. C. Gertz et al., FAT 111 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 1021–22, 1027; citing Timothy P. Mackie, *Expanding Ezekiel: The Hermeneutics of Scribal Addition in the Ancient Text Witnesses of the Book of Ezekiel*, FRLANT 257 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 197, n. 16.

the plea against oppression is to lighten the yoke or service, that is, reduce the labour demands and tax, not to remove the yoke completely.[542]

Given the variation in the ancient witness, it seems possible that the locution was originally written מטה. At this stage, taking biblical precedence as a crucial criterion, my preferred reading for מטה/מוטה in Isa 58:6, 9b would be מֵטֵה "perverted justice."[543] Isa 58 shares several commonalities with the only attestation of the lexeme in Ezek 9:9, namely, prophetic accusation, an association with Jerusalem, a report that the people claim YHWH does not see (ראה), and the lexeme עזב "to forsake." As with Isa 58, Ezek 9:9–10 also describes a failure of משפט in Jerusalem; the people's ways (דרכם) are to be brought down upon their own heads (v. 10). Further, in Isa 58, the grouping together of מוטה with false witness and accusations, or verdicts, as practices to be "removed from your midst" (v. 9b) seems to confirm that the term refers to legal malpractice, or the abuse of legal authority.

However, the context of Isa 58:6 also suggests that מטה/מוטה may in addition be a technical term for a form of contract or agreement between two parties which could be dissolved, setting free the weaker party, or an action that could be undone (v. 6cα). The noun seems to be countable, as the modifier כל "all, every" implies (v. 6cβ). Several members of the community were beneficiaries of these, as the plural verb suggests (v. 6cβ). It, or its outcome, could be gathered together into a single whole (v. 6bβ)[544] and its very accumulation was apparently unjust.[545] This seems to point to a specific, as well as a general sense, such as debt or labour agreements, or penalty clauses for non-payment within a contract that ceded control of land, goods, or

[542] See 1 Kgs 12:1–19//2 Chr 10:1–19.
[543] As also the medieval Rashi.
[544] Cf. the joining of houses and land in Isa 5:8. See notes on text above.
[545] The LXX translations assume they are legal written agreements which could be gathered in bundles and physically destroyed. Whether physical documents or not, it is their effect and their dissolution that is most relevant.

labour.[546] The call to banish מטה/מוטה from the community (v. 9bα) implies that in their specific sense the writer considers them inherently unjust. Perhaps they produced temporary or permanent servitude, or removed rights to cultivate land, or benefit from its produce. The lexeme's threefold appearance in vv. 6, 9b emphasises its negative moral valence while the repetition points to potential polysemy. In addition, each time it appears, the action called for intensifies, culminating in the demand to remove מטה/מוטה completely. This may, additionally, reflect the cumulative way it functioned (v. 6bβ).

In general terms, vv. 6, 9b exhort an end to legally enforced *economic oppression* against individuals. Yoke imagery, despite the orthographic similarity of מוֹטָה "yoke-bar" and the shared connotations of "release," lacks explanatory power here, failing to fit the specific literary context and the prophetic target of locally practised economic justice within the community.[547] Most pertinent to our inquiries into the identity of "the naked" and "the hungry" in v. 7, the abolition of the מטה/מוטה immediately precedes both references to providing for "the hungry" (vv. 7, 10a), suggesting it may be responsible to some extent for the destitution experienced.

8.2.5 Summary

Aside from the provision and assistance to kin urged in v. 7 and its elaboration in v. 10a, the call to righteous conduct in Isa 58 focuses on the community's

[546] Despite retaining the translation "yoke" for מוטה in Isa 58:6, 9, several scholars reach a similar conclusion. Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 189: "the double use of the term 'Yoke' likely refers to disproportionate indebtedness that placed some members of the community 'in hock' to others. To 'undo' and 'let go free' means to cancel paralyzing debts, thus anticipating the allusion to the practice of Jubilee in 61:1–4"; also, Schottroff, "Unrechtmäßige Fesseln auftun," 272; Koole, *Isaiah III*, 137.

[547] Paul, *Isaiah 40–66*, 487, 489, suggests the first occurrence of the lexeme in Isa 58:6bβ forms the pivot of a Janus parallelism, and it carries a double entendre, conveying both "yoke" and "perversity."

practices of commerce, labour, and judicial affairs.[548] It is in the abuse of these practices that they have failed to demonstrate מִשְׁפָּט וּצְדָקָה. They have also continued with commercial activity on the Sabbath and failed to "honour" it (or YHWH), which refers to endowing it, or the temple, with material wealth.

However, reading between the lines, it is not the whole community who are addressed as guilty, but the powerful and wealthy. These are men who have sufficient time and means to "seek" YHWH day after day. They are sufficiently well fed to engage in the luxury of fasting. They are businessmen who have commercial activities which occupy them even on fast days and potentially on the Sabbath. But they are also litigious, abusing their legal powers, making false accusations, and treating the accused violently. They make "wicked" or unjust deals, including the מְטָה/מוֹטָה. They have labourers whom they oppress, "exacting" from them, presumably in unrealistic debt repayments, and they use legal means to "crush" the weak. This is not only economic injustice,[549] but also legal injustice.

It is these people who are urged, in the juxtaposition of vv. 6b–7, to set free the economically oppressed and undo the מְטָה, and to share their material resources of food and clothing with the destitute and household care with the ill, injured, and ailing, *because they are kin*. It is too far-fetched to imagine that the labourers (v. 3b), the injured[550] (v. 4aβ), and "the crushed" (v. 6c) are not considered kin while the destitute (v. 7) are. Rather, the destitute and oppressed must be one and the same and all "kin," of the "house of Jacob" (v. 1; cf. v. 14). The rhetorical argument indicates clearly that the addressees are

[548] On the judicial powers of local assemblies in the Neo-Babylonian period, see Magdalene, *On the Scales*, 61–62. The judicial powers implied in Isa 58 fit the picture of the local assembly maintaining broad authority over local financial matters.
[549] Also, Kenneth Ristau, "Recreating Jerusalem: Trito-Isaiah's Vision for the Reconstruction of the City," in *Tzedek, Tzedek Tirdof: Poetry, Prophecy, and Justice in Hebrew Scripture: Essays in Honor of Francis Landy on the Occasion of His 70th Birthday*, ed. A. Gow and P. Sabo (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 80–81.
[550] Those hit by "the wicked fist."

held responsible for the condition of their poor kin, not the wider economic crisis or poor harvests, and they should assist in its amelioration. This would be restorative justice, not benevolent charity.

8.3 Isaiah 58:7, food production, and sustenance

8.3.1 The theme of food and agricultural production

The theme of food and hunger found in v. 7a pervades Isa 58, from the subtle mention of the body part "throat" (גרון) in v. 1a to the promise of "eating" (אכל) the inheritance of Jacob in v. 14b.[551] In First World contexts of plenty, the topic of fasting captures readers' attention. However, fasting cannot be disassociated from the large, interconnected web of food, distribution, and agricultural production. Agricultural productivity was the fundamental driver of economic sustainability and development in the region. This is the economic domain within which the Jerusalem community's משפט וצדקה and YHWH's משפט, צדקה, and ישועה are tested, displayed, and promised. The rhetorical argument of the message suggests that this same domain is the locus of what the people were fasting about and seeking YHWH for. Perhaps harvests and agricultural yields were poor. Almost certainly, the impoverishment of the region persisted, contrary to hopes and expectations, and Jerusalem struggled to rise from the ashes.

8.3.2 Verses 3a, 5a, 7, 9a: The polysemy of ענה and נפש

A form of צום, "fast; to fast," appears in the first cola of seven out of eight consecutive couplets (vv. 3aα–6aα). The association between fasting and the embodied experience of eating and sustenance is made literarily by the parallel appearance with צום of the expression ענה *piel* + נפש (with pronominal suffix), twice in this series (vv. 3aβ, 5aβ). This expression is usually

[551] For v. 14, compare Isa 1:19-20. Abernethy, *Eating in Isaiah*, 166–68, suggests the "rhetorical function" of the theme only begins in Isa 58:6–7. Bachmann, "True Fasting," 131, suggests that the Sabbath (v. 13) implies "not a fast but a feast around a family meal." This seems to go beyond the text.

translated “to humble, afflict, deprive oneself” and understood to include the self-denial of fasting.[552] But although the inclusion of נפשׁ may indicate this sense,[553] the modification of the expression by בצום in Ps 35:13 suggests this is not always or necessarily the case. Its role in the expression is therefore up for debate.

The lexeme נפשׁ can denote “throat”, “appetite,” “desire,” and “self,” as well as being equivalent to personal, possessive, and reflexive pronouns when pronominal suffixes are added.[554] Full advantage has been taken of its wide semantic range in the lexeme’s fivefold deployment in Isa 58.[555] The five occurrences of words associated with ענה/עני also exploit the polysemy of the triconsonant as “to answer, respond” (ענה I) and “to afflict, oppress” (ענה II, *piel*).[556] The expression ענה *piel* + נפשׁ, describing the people’s self-abasement in appealing to YHWH, in parallel with fasting (v. 3aβ), is turned back on them in YHWH’s counterclaim. The elaboration, not simply echo, of the two-word expression, encourages a double reading of v. 5a, one with a more idiomatic and one a more literal sense.[557]

הכזה יהיה צום אבחרהו יום ענות אדם נפשׁו

Is *like this* the fast I would choose?

A *day* for someone to afflict himself/deprive his throat?

Isa 58:5a

[552] *CDCH* 334. See Ps 35:13; a variation on the expression is also found in Lev 16:29, 31; 23:27, 29, 32; Num 29:7 (all with direct object marker את). An overlap with mourning as petitionary prayer is suggested by Dan 10:2, 3, 12 (להתענות לפני אלהיך); cf. Ezra 8:21, both with *hitpael*. See David A. Lambert, *How Repentance Became Biblical: Judaism, Christianity, and the Interpretation of Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 17; also, Altmann, “Too Little Food,” 377.

[553] As Ibn Ezra on Lev 16:29 suggests, cited in Paul, *Isaiah 40-66*, 484.

[554] Horst Seebass, “נפשׁ,” *TDOT* 9:497–510; Silvia Schroer and Thomas Staubli, *Body Symbolism in the Bible* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), 56–67.

[555] Isa 58:3aβ, 5aβ, 10aα, 10aβ, 11aβ.

[556] *CDCH* 334–35; Isa 58:3aβ, 5aβ, 7aβ, 9aα, 10aβ.

[557] Lambert, *How Repentance Became Biblical*, 17, n. 20, does not see the literal sense at play. However, the association of נפשׁ with food, water, hunger, and thirst is common, e.g., throughout the books of Psalms and Proverbs (Ps 33:19; 42:1–2; 78:18; Prov 6:30; 10:3; 13:4, 25 etc).

The priority of the embodied continues with the hyperbolic description of the fasters who "bow the head like a bulrush and lie in sackcloth and ashes" (v. 5b).

The embodied aspects of not eating are next found in the challenge of v. 7. The recurrence of a lexeme associated with ענה/עני draws attention to the stark contrast between the voluntary self-abasement of *one day* and its temporary privations of food and clothing (v. 3a, 5),[558] and the obviously involuntary and ongoing needs of "the hungry" (רעב), "the miserable afflicted" (עניים מרודים), and "the naked" (ערום, v. 7).

The conduct urged in vv. 6–7 will reverse the lack of food and clothing, as basic economic resources, within a portion of the community. YHWH will then judge the community innocent, a verdict described in terms of light (v. 8aα),[559] and its righteousness will be manifest (v. 8bα). Then YHWH himself will meet the economic needs of the whole community, echoing the needs expressed in v. 7. His material wealth (כבוד) will draw the community in (v. 8bβ) and his healing (ארוכה) will provide its physical restoration and care (v. 8aβ).[560] YHWH thus finally hears and responds to the people's appeal, now they are righteous plaintiffs.[561]

אז תקרא ויהוה יענה תשׁוע ויאמר הנני

Then you will call and YHWH will answer

You will cry out and he will say "Here I am!"

Isa 58:9a

[558] The purpose of fasting and the actions that ענה נפשׁ refers to is to make one "functionally equivalent to a *'anî*"; Lambert, *How Repentance Became Biblical*, 17.
[559] See Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 363–69.
[560] See the proposal in the previous chapter that Isa 58:7aβ refers to a need of physical care, traditionally involving oil or ointment, one of the three standard maintenance allowances. The association of ארוכה "healing" with ointment is found in Jer 8:22; cf. Jer 30:17; 33:6.
[561] For קרא and שׁוע *piel* indicating the accuser's complaint and ענה and הנני the judge's action and response, see Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 326–28.

The announcement of v. 9aα reverses the not being heard of v. 4b and underlines a theological and ethical message. The people's self-affliction (ענה II, vv. 3a, 5a) will only elicit YHWH's response (ענה I, v. 9a) when they change their treatment of the hungry and afflicted (עניים, v. 7a). By means of wordplay (homography and homonymy), which subtly suggests a fundamental logical interdependence, a strong case is made for a necessary harmony between the community's prayer and fasting, their righteous practices in everyday life, and YHWH's response.[562] This phonological nexus around ענה chimes with the judicial understanding of prayer and fasting found in the Hebrew Bible. Typically, a victim or injured party refers to themselves in terms emphasising a state of wretchedness and weakness to emphasise the abuse of power and elicit a just judgement from the judge.[563] By adopting the role of an עני in fasting and prayer, a complainant similarly emphasises weakness and innocence in their appeal for divine justice.[564] It is the failure to recognise their lack of righteousness and the hypocrisy of their self-affliction that creates the sense of moral outrage in Isa 58.[565]

8.3.3 Verses 10a, 11a: Your sustenance for the hungry

Both senses of the triconsonant ענה play a part in its final appearance in the behavioural demand of v. 10aβ. A new substantive, נענה, denotes "the afflicted one." This alternative form can also convey the sense of "the answered one."[566] Together again for the first time since v. 5a, cognates of the elements of ענה נפש appear in reversed order, indicating their inversion in YHWH's "chosen fast" (v. 6a), a pattern seen elsewhere. You should satisfy the נפש of the involuntarily afflicted (v. 10aβ) before "afflicting" (depriving)

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[562] See Polan, *Justice*, 214; Ulrich Berges, "Die Armen im Buch Jesaja. Ein Beitrag zur Literaturgeschichte des AT," *Bib* 80 (1999): 153–77 (171-172); Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 178. See, also, the wordplay with "afflicted" and YHWH "answering" in Isa 41:17; cf. Ps 22:25; 34:6; 86:1; Job 34:28.

[563] For terms, see Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 309–11.

[564] See Holtz, *Praying Legally*, 42–46, with further references.

[565] An admission of guilt is not made until Isa 59:12–13.

[566] *Niphal* participle of ענה; cf. Isa 53:7.

your own נפשׁ by fasting (vv. 3a, 5a). By such actions, the true עני becomes the נענה, "answered" by YHWH. I propose that the introduction of the participle נענה thus makes a subtle ethical-theological statement about those to whom YHWH responds.[567]

ותפק לרעב נפשׁך ונפשׁ נענה תשׂביע

[If] you acquire for the hungry your נפשׁ

And the נפשׁ of the afflicted/answered you satiate

Isa 58:10a

ונחך יהוה תמיד והשׂביע בצחצחות נפשׁך

[Then] YHWH will guide you continually

And in parched places he will satiate your נפשׁ [568]

Isa 58:11a

Just as cognates of ענה/עני link the first challenge (vv. 6b–7) and its promise (vv. 8–9a), the lexeme נפשׁ links the second challenge (vv. 9b–10a) to the promise that follows (vv. 10b–12). The second challenge also reiterates and elaborates the earlier demands for release (vv. 6bc, 9b) and provision (vv. 7, 10a). Continuity between the two calls for provision is maintained at the lexical level by the two substantives רעב "the hungry" (v. 10aα) and נענה "the afflicted" (v. 10aβ; cf. עניים v. 7aβ).

Setting aside v. 10aα for the moment, the people are to "satiate" (שׂבע *hiphil*) the afflicted/answered (v. 10aβ), that is, provide food.[569] The presence of נפשׁ attracts attention, since it is not essential to the overall sense, suggesting that it has corporeal connotations of "throat," as it does in its previous appearance

[567] Compare Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 179, who proposes the *niphal* participle "suggests a person who was a regular member of the community but has now lost their position and has no social power as well as no food."
[568] Cf. Deut 32:10a, 12a.
[569] See, e.g., references to satisfaction by food or eating in Ps 22:27 (ענוים, the "afflicted"); also, Ps 132:15 (אביון , the "poor"); Deut 14:29; 26:12 (the גר, fatherless, and widows).

in v. 5aβ.[570] The consequence in the apodosis (v. 11aβ), in which נפשׁ plays a semantically essential role, has similar, primarily corporeal, connotations. As the people "fill the throats" of (i.e., feed) the deprived to satiation, so the whole community will experience YHWH's provisioning, even in parched places.[571]

Returning to v. 10aα, the appearance of נפשׁ in consecutive locutions at the centre of the couplet v. 10a contrasts "your נפשׁ" with the "נפשׁ of the afflicted/answered," suggesting a polysemic wordplay. Some interpretative boundaries are provided by the verb פוק *hiphil,* which is not common. In Proverbs and Psalms it is used for acquiring or securing something important, often appearing in parallel with מצא "to find."[572] This suggests it should be translated as a transitive verb whereby the object, "your נפשׁ," is the target of some form of pursuit. This points to a sense of "to obtain, acquire, procure."[573] However, the subject is the addressee. Yet it makes no sense as "you acquire your throat/self for the hungry." The solution is to translate the direct object נפשׁ "sustenance" by comparison with an Akkadian cognate.[574]

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[570] Victor A. Hurowitz, "A Forgotten Meaning of *Nepeš* in Isaiah LVIII 10," *VT* 47 (1997): 43–52 (43). For שׂבע with נפשׁ, see Jer 50:19; Ezek 7:19 (in parallel with מעים "innards"); Ps 63:6 (cf. v. 1); and, in construct, Ps 107:9 (נפשׁ שׁקקה "thirsty throat," נפשׁ רעבה "hungry throat"). Cf. "to empty the 'throat of the hungry' and to deprive the thirsty of drink" (Isa 32:6c). While "appetite" might be an acceptable translation (Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56–66*, 174; also, Abernethy, *Eating in Isaiah*, 167), the more abstract renditions "self" (Polan, *Justice*, 174); "soul" (Koole, *Isaiah III*, 145, 148); "desire" (ESV); "needs" (Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 178, 180; also, NRSV; NIV) and "need" (NASB) are even less preferable.

[571] Cf. Ps 107:35–36.

[572] "Finding" (מצא) wisdom and a wife (Prov 3:13; 18:22) are in parallel with "obtaining" (פוק *hiphil*) the favour of YHWH (Prov 8:35; 12:2; 18:22) and understanding (Prov 3:13). It is used in relation to furthering a plan (Ps 140:9) and in the context of agricultural plenty (Ps 144:13).

[573] The solutions represented by transitive verbs which employ an opposite dynamic to מצא seem unconvincing. Proposing "offer," see Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 178; also, NASB; NJPS; NRSV. Developing the concept of "offering" further, see Thomas Staubli, "Maat-Imagery in Trito-Isaiah: The Meaning of Offering a Throat in Egypt and in Israel," in *Images and Prophecy in the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean*, ed. M. Nissinen and C. E. Carter, FRLANT 233 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 41–50. Proposing "give," see Polan, *Justice*, 174; also, "extend yourself," Hrobon, *Ethical Dimension*, 207; "bring yourself" Bachmann, "True Fasting," 116; "spend yourselves" (NIV); "pour yourself out" (ESV). Cf. Koole, *Isaiah III*, 145–46: "let the hungry find your soul."

[574] Amongst an otherwise almost identical pattern of word usage, there are numerous examples, across time periods, of Akkadian *napištu* being used as a poetic term for

Without adjudicating on whether נפשׁ as "sustenance" reflects rarely attested Hebrew usage or is borrowed from Akkadian,[575] this interpretation explains the otherwise difficult 2ms suffix.

The colon can therefore be translated "(If) you procure your livelihood/sustenance for the hungry" (v. 10aα).[576] It refers to obtaining (through agricultural and commercial enterprises) one's livelihood (produce, goods, and silver)[577] *for the hungry* (needy members of the kin-community beyond one's immediate family). It goes further than the allocation or apportionment of "your bread/food" to the hungry in v. 7a which focuses on food distribution. The emphasis on the production of the means to live on in v. 10aα is the counterpart to the unrighteous commercial and legal behaviour in v. 9b (also, v. 6), whereby wealth is acquired unjustly. Just as a call to undo the מטה and set free the economically oppressed immediately precedes the call to allocate your provisions to them in vv. 6–7, so also, the call to abolish the מטה, false witness, and accusations in v. 9b, is immediately followed by this call to work for the sustenance of the hungry (v. 10aα). Only when the hungry are satiated[578] (v. 10aβ) does YHWH promise to satiate the whole community *in extremis*.[579]

"sustenance, provision, livelihood." Hurowitz, "A Forgotten Meaning;" also, *CAD* 11/1:296–304, especially 302–303. It often appears in construct phrases, as the sustenance of the land/country, of people, and of cattle, which suggests its meaning is focused on basic foodstuffs and agricultural produce as the means of life.

[575] Hurowitz, "A Forgotten Meaning," 51–52. He suggests other possible biblical attestations are Hos 9:4; Ps 78:18; 106:15 (50). Others that may refer to sustenance (with שוב *piel/polel*, *hiphil*) are Ps 19:8; 23:3; Ruth 4:15; Lam 1:11, 16, 19.

[576] Cf. Hurowitz, "A Forgotten Meaning," 52, "(If) you extend your sustenance to the hungry."

[577] *Napištu* is found sometimes in parallel with *nuḫšum*, "plenty." In Hebrew there is possibly a similar affinity with מִשְׁמָן (compare Ps 106:15 with Isa 10:16, 18); see Hurowitz, "A Forgotten Meaning," 47, 50.

[578] This shorthand encapsulates the restoration of "the naked," and all destitute and oppressed.

[579] The accusations of Isa 59:1–8 express similar concerns about maintenance provision. Verses 3b–4b address the conduct of business and judicial matters without מִשְׁפָּט וצדקה, followed by the life-sapping production of food and clothing (vv. 5–6b). Through the imagery of snakes' eggs and spiders' webs, the "work" (מעשׂה x3, v. 6b) of those accused is portrayed not only as failing in its functional aims of feeding and covering themselves but as creating further harm for others, presumably their workers. Also noting the close connection between

Considering the implications of Isa 58:10a, 11a in context, the promise that YHWH will satiate the נפֶשׁ in parched places (v. 11aβ) combines with the images of water in v. 11bc to portray the blessings of reliable rains, which then come to fruition in agricultural abundance (v. 14). This again suggests that the context of the prophecy was a time of drought and poor harvests.[580]

The images of fruitful land and productivity may also relate to human fecundity,[581] as suggested by the promise of "equipped bones" (v. 11bα)[582] and being "like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail" (v. 11bβc).[583] That the imagery hints at human offspring and descendants is supported by the expression דור ודור "many generations" in v. 12a.[584] Thus, a causal link is made between the community's reformed conduct and the life-sustaining provision of agricultural abundance, on the one hand, and the building up of the fabric and population of Jerusalem, on the other (vv. 8, 11, 12). Following the focus on the Sabbath in v. 13, the theme continues in the final blessing which promises celebratory "delight" in YHWH and the

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weaving and spiders in ancient West Asia and the wordplay here, see Noegel, *Wordplay*, 90. The call to procure your sustenance for the hungry in 58:10a reverses this picture. Cf. Abernethy, *Eating in Isaiah*, 166, opines that the topic of eating is not found in Isa 59.

[580] So, also, Ristau, "Recreating Jerusalem," 81.

[581] For the collocation of images of agricultural plenty and human fecundity, see Deut 7:13–15; 28:4, 11; Ps 107:33–38. Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 181, suggests Jer 31:7–14 may provide inspiration for Isa 58.

[582] See Ingrid E. Lilly, "The Fertility of Bones: Towards a Corporeal Philology of Reproduction," *HeBAI* 8 (2019): 431–47, especially her discussion of the "rhetoric of male futures" associated with bone health (441–43).

[583] On the garden as alluding to female sexuality and fertility, see Shalom M. Paul, "A Lover's Garden of Verse: Literal and Metaphorical Imagery in Ancient Near Eastern Love Poetry," in *Tehillah le-Moshe: Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Moshe Greenberg,* ed. M. Cogan, B. L. Eichler, and J. H. Tigay (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 99–110; and on the association of flowing fluids with male fertility, see Stephanie L. Budin, "Phallic Fertility in the Ancient Near East and Egypt," in *Reproduction: Antiquity to the Present Day*, ed. N. Hopwood, R. Flemming, and L. Kassell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 25–38 (25).

[584] Mitchell J. Dahood, "Review: The Language and Linguistic Background of the Isaiah-Scroll (1QIsaa) by Kutscher E. Y. Leiden, Brill 1974," *Bib* 56 (1975): 260–64 suggests that the expression ממך, also found in Gen 35:11; Isa 49:17; Micah 1:16, may function as a substantive denoting "your offspring" (263). It is also possible that "the foundations of generations" may have a double meaning, not only related to ancient ruins but also the establishment of future generations.

consumption of what he supplies in the land,[585] as the inheritance of their ancestor Jacob (v. 14).[586]

8.4 Conclusion

Verse 7 forms a vital link between the protases and the apodoses of Isa 58, and with the topic of fasting. It is woven into the chapter lexically by the thread of the fivefold repetition of עניים/ענה. In its rhetorical context, the exhortation to provide in v. 7 follows a call to free the economically "crushed" and undo the מטה (v. 6), implying that "the hungry" and "the naked" kin are those who have been oppressed and subject to the מטה. The wealthy addressees must bear responsibility for their condition. Supplying the health and welfare needs of "the hungry," "the naked," and the "miserable afflicted" is an act of restorative justice that extends the customary obligations of providing for members of the same family to the household of Jacob. If the addressees fulfil their side of the settlement by exercising "righteousness," YHWH himself will meet the health and welfare needs of the community (v. 8).

The reprisal of the demand to address the needs of "the hungry" in v. 10a is also tightly connected to the first part of the protasis in v. 9b, the extended apodosis in vv. 10b–12, and the topic of fasting. The lexical thread for this couplet is the five occurrences of נפש. Reading נפש in v. 10a as "sustenance, livelihood," the wealthy addressees of Isa 58 are urged not simply to apportion their resources for the destitute, but to procure their livelihood *for* "the hungry." This is juxtaposed with the call to remove the מטה from the community (v. 9b). The repeated association of the מטה with sustenance suggests that this hypothetical legal instrument is not only implicated in the

[585] Cf. Isa 66:11, where "delighting" (ענג *hitpael*) is in parallel with drinking from Jerusalem's breasts.
[586] Cf. Deut 32:9, 13, where YHWH provides food for Jacob; also, Isa 1:19–20; 33:15–16, with provision of food as reward for righteous or obedient behaviour.

critical condition of “the hungry” and “the naked” but may go as far as depriving them of a place to live (v. 7aα) and the means to subsist.

The theme of fasting, food, and sustenance in Isa 58 is subordinated to an overriding theme of economic well-being, construed broadly as the agricultural and human flourishing of the whole community and restoration of Jerusalem. In the settlement that YHWH proposes, he takes care of the blessings of rain, agricultural abundance, material wealth, provisioning, health, fertility, and building up of the people and the city. For their part, the community is to conduct itself in everyday life and on the Sabbath in line with YHWH’s משפט וצדקה. There are behaviours to adopt for both kinds of day. The Sabbath should be “honoured” with material goods and those with means should provide for “the hungry,” “the miserable afflicted,” and “the naked” as kin. However, the behaviours to cease are critical. The tight interwovenness of the rhetorical unit makes the implication clear. The exploitative commercial and labour practices, unjust agreements, litigiousness, and abuses of legal power which the addressees are accused of are held directly responsible for the socioeconomic “bondage” and inequalities within the community and the whole community’s failure to thrive. The triple mention of the מטה suggests that it is particularly to blame.

This careful investigation of Isa 58 has gone some way towards identifying “the hungry” and “the naked.” They are not designated with any terms that suggest they were considered part of a social stratum of the “poor” or “needy,” as a permanent condition and social position, but they do toil for others and are economically oppressed. On the other hand, they are named “kin,” implying that they are co-members in the house of Jacob and YHWH’s people. The providers, the addressees of the message in Isa 58, are powerful men who run commercial businesses, make deals and business trips, have employees, and engage in lawsuits. Their relationship to the destitute is not spelled out, but the language of vv. 6, 9a, referring to bonds, ties, the מטה,

and release, suggests that they are bound together by economic agreements, to the addressees' advantage.

The next chapter brings Isa 58 into conversation with three texts that are commonly cited in interpretations. The analytical encounters with texts in Isa 61, Zech 7–8, and Neh 5, although necessarily brief, sharpen the interpretations of each of the texts, as iron sharpens iron, and draw out where and how the comparison is useful for the interpretation of Isa 58:7. In Neh 5:1–13 we find another legal instrument that deprives someone of their house and labour, probably land also, which sounds very similar to the hypothesised מטה. This encourages the search to identify the latter, which seems to play a significant role in the economic stability of a household.

9 Isaiah 58 and three intertexts

9.1 Introduction

Commonalities are sometimes noted between Isa 58 and the postexilic texts Isa 61, Zech 7–8, and Neh 5. The close analysis of Isa 58 in the last two chapters puts these supposed commonalities in a new light, suggesting a reassessment is timely. The comparisons that follow function in two directions. On the one hand, they test the robustness of my interpretation of Isa 58 and provide three new vantage points from which to refine and consolidate it. On the other hand, they probe the explanatory power and usefulness of the texts for understanding v. 7 and the relations of economic dependence between "the hungry" and "the naked" and their providers.

The traditional comparison with Isa 61 is shown to be inapt, despite their similar origins. The two texts might share the vocabulary of מִשְׁפָּט וצדקה, but their concern for "release" and "freedom" look in different directions for the cause of "bondage." Isa 61 has been a misleading intertext for the interpretation of Isa 58 with the latter's internal economic and legal injustices and its primarily practical concerns for food, its production, and its provision. Isa 61's utopian vision has probably contributed to the persistence of the translation "to break every yoke" (58:6cβ) and, thereby, to the anachronistic understanding that "to share your bread with the hungry" (v. 7aα) exhorts general charitable benevolence to all in need.

The shared condemnation of hypocritical fasting and calls for justice encourage comparison between Isa 58 and Zech 7–8. I suggest that the juxtaposition of these themes in Zechariah arises not from literary influence nor a concern for unjust food production or distribution but from a shared underlying conceptualisation of prayer and fasting as making a legal petition to a divine judge. Zech 7 probably displays the literary markers of an embedded divine trial, as with Isa 58.

The comparison of Isa 58 with Neh 5:1–13, which is similarly preoccupied with economic justice within the community, is the most fruitful. Although the texts share a conceptualisation of the community as family, the model is not identical. Isa 58 displays a sense of economic mutual interdependence absent in Neh 5, which explains its lack of proactive feeding of the starving. By analogy with Neh 5, it can be clarified that the "wicked bonds" which should be undone are unjust loan and debt agreements, with their accompanying pledges, which would be prone to false accusations and abuse by the creditors. Finally, from an enacted oath at the conclusion of the narrative (Neh 5:13), I deduce the existence of an ultimate consequence of unpaid debt, "shaking," by which a man and his family could be dislodged from their land and property. This hypothetical instrument would be a prime candidate for the מטה and would suggest that access to land to cultivate is the crucial factor in the context of "the hungry" and "the naked" in Isa 58.

9.2 Isaiah 61

Isaiah 58 has several affinities with Isa 61,[587] a postexilic text[588] belonging to the central nucleus of Third Isaiah around which later material was arranged.[589] The keyword צדקה/צדק "right, righteous/ness" appears in 58:2, 8 and 61:3, 10, 11 and משפט "justice" in 58:2 and 61:8.[590] The message of chapter 61 is framed as an announcement to the "afflicted" (ענוים, 61:1; cf.

[587] Bradley C. Gregory, "The Postexilic Exile in Third Isaiah: Isaiah 61:1–3 in Light of Second Temple Hermeneutics," *JBL* 126 (2007): 475–96 (493-494).
[588] It can probably be dated to within a generation of the return from exile; Gregory, "The Postexilic Exile," 476–79.
[589] Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 296.
[590] The theme of right or righteous living in YHWH's ways is also found in Isa 61:1 (cf. 58:12–14). "Upright hearts are like erect legs that stride in the righteous path. Broken hearts are like crippled legs that limp in the deviant path"; Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle, "Broken Hearts: The Violation of Biblical Law," *JAAR* 73 (2005): 731–57 (737). The binding of the broken-hearted (Isa 61:1b; cf. 40:2) is an image of the binding of deformed, damaged legs so that their owner can walk erect on the straight, righteous path. The same idea appears in Lev 26:13 (737–38). There, erect walking is enabled through divine liberation from slavery in Egypt, conveyed by the imagery of breaking the bars of a yoke, a traditional motif for regaining national independence (cf. Ps 146:8).

עניים, 58:7; נענה, v. 10).[591] The first cola of 58:12 and 61:4, on the rebuilding of ruins, are almost identical.[592] A close relationship is further encouraged by the expression יום רצון ליהוה "a day of YHWH's acceptance" (58:5) which echoes שנת רצון ליהוה "a year of YHWH's acceptance" (61:2). This, in turn, picks up on Second Isaiah's עת רצון "a time of acceptance" (49:8), suggesting further connections with 49:8–10. All three texts share a theme of release.

But there are also significant differences. The vocabulary of prisoners[593] (אסורים; 49:9; 61:1; cf. 42:7) and captives (שבוים; 61:1) does not appear in 58:6, 9b, despite the occasional use of "prisoner" language by commentators on chapter 58.[594] There are several features in 61:1–4, including the proclamation of freedom (v. 1cα),[595] reminiscent of hymns[596] in celebration of a royal accession to the throne.[597] In Isa 60–62, Zion-Jerusalem is portrayed as the rightful successor to the Davidic dynasty.[598] But the royal theme is absent from Isa 58.

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[591] On the socio-economic and religious aspects of these terms, see Berges, "Die Armen" (170–177); Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56–66*, 224. The occurrences of the related עני in Second Isaiah refer to the people of Israel in exile and the figure Zion (41:7; 49:13; 51:21; 54:11; cf. "furnace of affliction" 48:10). These probably indicate the primary sense of the early Trito-Isaianic occurrence in Isa 61:1; Gregory, "The Postexilic Exile," 482–83; Martien A. Halvorson-Taylor, *Enduring Exile: The Metaphorization of Exile in the Hebrew Bible*, VTSup 141 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 144.

[592] Isa 58:12aα differs from 61:4aα only by the insertion of ממך.

[593] Literally, "bound."

[594] Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56–66*, refers to "the imprisoned" in 58:6 (224). He suggests the verse exhorts "getting rid of physical constraint – the yoke around the neck or the bonds and shackles around the arms or legs," going on to propose this refers to "indentured service resulting from insolvency" (179). Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 173, reads אגדות as metaphorical chains, yet speaks of "this notion of freeing prisoners." Similarly, without distinguishing tropes and figurative language from concrete realities, Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 337, maintains that the loosing of bonds in Isa 58:6 is "a direct repercussion of what the entire nation had had experience of, bondage in the exile."

[595] Also, Isa 42:6–9; 49:8–10; cf. Ps 146:5–10. On the west Asian and Egyptian background to royal proclamations of release, see Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 12–15.

[596] See Wilson, "Ramses IV", also cited in earlier chapter.

[597] See Hedy Hung, "The Kingship Motif in Isaiah 61:1–3," in *Torah and Tradition*, ed. K. Spronk and H. Barstad, OtSt 70 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 135–49. On the traditional West Asian royal-divine nexus of economic flourishing, see Altmann, *Economics*, 33–47.

[598] A further shift to a restricted devout community as heir is discernible in later redactions; see Konrad Schmid, *The Old Testament: A Literary History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 169; Berges, "Die Armen," 176; Ristau, "Recreating Jerusalem."

לקרא לשבוים דרור ולאסורים פקח קוח

To proclaim liberty to the captives

And opening[599] to the prisoners/bound

Isa 61:1c

In isolation, Isa 61:1c provides an unreliable basis for the interpretation of the "release" in 58:6, 9b. Several scholars have noted that Third Isaiah, and 61:1–4 in particular, appropriates and recycles earlier material and metaphors for exile from Second Isaiah.[600] Across biblical texts, language of bondage and release that reflects concrete realities at the level of an individual[601] or animal[602] is used to create imagery and tropes at collective and corporate levels.[603] When metaphors are further metaphorized, without regard to individual, corporate, or collective subjects, or the nature of a tenor as concrete, abstract, or metaphorical (such as daughter Zion), it becomes a complex task to uncover the underlying referents or discern the intended connotations.[604] Despite the context of Yehud after the return from Babylon, Third Isaiah employs imagery of exile for current (and future) realities, implying a persisting "theological exile."[605] This imagery is a metaphorical mélange largely constituted by blending and reworking the figurative language and imagery Second Isaiah employs for exile. Three main domains

[599] See the discussion in Gregory, "The Postexilic Exile," 482, n. 38; Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 286, 301; Koole, *Isaiah III*, 268, 272–73.
[600] See Gregory, "The Postexilic Exile" (using the terminology of "typology"); Halvorson-Taylor, *Enduring Exile*, 107–35; Berges, "The Individualization of Exile," 63–66; also, Willem A. Beuken, "Servant and Herald of Good Tidings. Isaiah 61 as an Interpretation of Isaiah 40–55," in *The Book of Isaiah*, ed. J. Vermeylen, BETL 81 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1989), 411–42.
[601] E.g., legal agreements with respect to property, goods, and labour, tax, slavery, imprisonment, and physical restraint.
[602] E.g., leading ropes, yokes.
[603] E.g., vassaldom, exile and return, national slavery and exodus, royal and imperial tax and labour burdens.
[604] Halvorson-Taylor, *Enduring Exile*, 137–38, makes a similar point.
[605] Gregory, "The Postexilic Exile," 475, 487; Halvorson-Taylor, *Enduring Exile*, 107–59.

are mined: corporate slavery in Egypt and the exodus;[606] individual physical restraint and imprisonment (in the dark);[607] and debt-slavery.[608]

In Isa 61, the constellation of concepts clustering around דרור "liberty" (v. 1), which includes debt-slavery, is also added to the mix. This rare Hebrew term (Jer 34:8–22; Ezek 46:17; Lev 25:10) shares an ancient west Asian background with its Akkadian cognate *durâru/andurâru* of royal proclamations, the manumission of slaves, and the return of property to its original owner.[609] In Egypt kings also proclaimed the liberation of prisoners and rebels on accession to the throne, alongside other forms of celebration.[610] In the Hebrew Bible, דרור is further associated with a special year (Ezek 46:17; Isa 61:1), particularly the year of Jubilee (Lev 25),[611] and the idea of returning to ancestral land following servitude.[612]

The use of דרור in Isa 61:1 draws upon several of its associations, some of which can only be metaphorical, including a royal accession and mandate, the beginning of a new era, the freeing of slaves, the remission of debt, and the return to one's own land and inheritance (v. 7). Although in Jer 34, the "liberty" of דרור, is a release of some Israelites by other Israelites, in Isa 61, it

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[606] E.g., Isa 43:16–17; 44:27–28; 48:20–21; 52:4, 11–12; Gregory, "The Postexilic Exile," 487; Berges, "The Individualization of Exile," 64–65.
[607] See Isa 42:6–7; 49:8–9; 52:2; Halvorson-Taylor, *Enduring Exile*, 138–42.
[608] See Isa 40:2. Israel's sins are conceived as a debt, for which she is sold into slavery, her release described as a return to the land; Gregory, "The Postexilic Exile," 484–85. For how Isa 40:2 alludes to Jer 16:18, with its motif of doubling, see Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66* (Stanford University Press, 1998), 57–58; also, Klaus Baltzer, "Liberation from Debt Slavery After the Exile in Second Isaiah and Nehemiah," in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, ed. P. D. Miller, P. D. Hanson, and S. D. McBride (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 477–84.
[609] Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 75–96.
[610] Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 140–44.
[611] Gregory, "The Postexilic Exile," 483–85.
[612] Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 141–42; see, also, John S. Bergsma, "Release from Debt," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Law*, ed. B. A. Strawn (Oxford University Press, 2015), https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref:obso/9780199843305.001.0001/acref-9780199843305-e-114.

is applied typologically to the entire community, as in Lev 25:10.[613] This may be partly influenced by a metaphorical blending of Israel's release from servitude in Egypt with the return from exile in Babylon.[614] The scope of the proclamation of Isa 61 is the future of Zion-Jerusalem and its community under the favour and vengeance of YHWH (v. 2). The addressees are labelled, amongst other terms, as ענוים "afflicted," "captives," "prisoners/bound" (v. 1), and "mourners of Zion" (v. 3), while outsiders are named זרים "strangers," בני נכר "sons of foreigners" (v. 5), and גוים "nations, peoples" (vv. 6, 9). But the "freed captive," (cf. 52:2), like the other designations, is a corporate symbol or type of the whole community of Israel, following the pattern in which Second Isaiah addresses the exiles in Babylon. This community, like Zion, rising from the dust and darkness, will be at the centre of the glorious re-establishment of Jerusalem with its newly international, geopolitical significance.

In sum, while the underlying socioeconomic realities of the Zion-Jerusalem community addressed in Isa 58 and 61 were probably similar, there are insufficient commonalities of language and conceptual metaphor for Isa 61 to shed light on the "release" in Isa 58. The main difference is that "release" in Isa 61 seems to be for the whole people of Israel, released from "captivity" in exile and able to return to Jerusalem and the land of their ancestors, whereas the "release" called for in Isa 58 calls on one portion of the community to set free another portion. Indeed, I submit that attempting to interpret Isa 58 by comparison with the earlier Isa 61 obscures rather than illuminates.[615]

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[613] Gregory, "The Postexilic Exile," 485; John S. Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran: A History of Interpretation*, VTSup 115 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 298–99.

[614] Note the appeal to release from bondage in Egypt recurs throughout Lev 25; see vv. 38, 42, 55.

[615] By contrast, Gregory, "The Postexilic Exile" suggests that Isa 58 advances the viewpoint of Isa 61 (493) while literarily recontextualising the message of chs. 60–62 "as an eschatological reality that is indefinitely deferred" (494).

9.3 Zechariah 7–8

Fasting[616] is rarely mentioned in the prophetic books, yet it is raised in both Isa 58 and Zech 7–8 (7:3–6; 8:19) alongside a concern for community justice and the restoration of Jerusalem. Communal fasting plays a strikingly similar role in the rhetorical structure of the initial portion of each text. Both give fasting as the means or pretext for seeking YHWH (Isa 58:2–3; Zech 7:2–3), commence with questions about fasting, and respond to these with rhetorical questions (Isa 58:3b–5; Zech 7:5–6). Both discourses present a lack of justice as a core problem (Isa 58:1–4; Zech 7:8–14; 8:16–17) and directly link this to the lack of a divine response (Isa 58:4b, 9a; Zech 7:11–13).

Although it has been suggested that Zech 7:4–14 served as a model for Isa 58:3b–9a,[617] their similarity is superficial. They share common cultural roots and a setting in Jerusalem rather than direct literary influence.[618] In Zech 7–8 there is no explicit connection made between fasting and the mundanities of food provision within the community (cf. 8:12). Instead, the fixed calendrical days of communal fasting remain exceptional days, becoming festivals of celebration (8:19; cf. 7:3, 5).[619] In Zech 7:10, the עני are simply added to the stereotypical list of the widow, fatherless, and *ger* as those who should not be "oppressed" (עשׁק; cf. Isa 58:7, 10a). There is no implication that the powerful might bear responsibility for their condition. Further, the actions urged in Zech 7:9–10, 8:16–17 are largely restricted to a generalised call to integrity in intra-communal judicial procedures,[620] unlike the more specific restorative actions related to economic transactions and the maintenance of the destitute in Isa 58.

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[616] See Altmann, "Too Little Food"; Corinna Körting, "Fasten/Fastentage (AT)," *WiBiLex* (https://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/stichwort/18149/).
[617] Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56–66*, 178.
[618] Mark J. Boda, *The Book of Zechariah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 445.
[619] For a detailed treatment, see Yair Hoffman, "The Fasts in the Book of Zechariah and the Fashioning of National Remembrance," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, ed. O. Lipschits and J. Blenkinsopp (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 169–218.
[620] Judgements are to be made in אמת "truth" (Zech 7:9; cf. 8:16) and שלום "peace" (8:16).

However, the similarity of their initial rhetorical structure and the juxtaposition of queried fasting and the call for justice and right behaviour found in Zech 7 and Isa 58 are strongly suggestive of the legal understanding of prayer and the deity as ultimate judge that is prevalent in the Hebrew Bible.[621] Both texts demonstrate that an effective appeal to YHWH's mercy, by fasting and prayer, requires the prior removal of the petitioners' offences, so that they are "righteous" before him. Otherwise, petitioning prompts a counteraccusation from the deity with the corresponding prospect of punishment.[622] The similarities between the two texts arise not from the common topic of fasting per se, but the common conceptual metaphor of the divine courtroom on which the rationale for fasting with petitionary prayer depends. I propose that Zech 7 contains indicators of an embedded divine trial.[623]

9.4 Nehemiah 5:1–13

In Neh 5 daily sustenance connects two juxtaposed narratives set in Jerusalem,[624] one featuring lack (vv. 1–13) and the other plenty (vv. 14–19).[625] The theme provides an entrée into the broader matrix of local economics in relation to the imperial Persian administration.[626] The economic disparity that threatens the social order of the Yahwistic community in Neh 5:1–13 matches

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[621] See Holtz, *Praying Legally*.
[622] See also Josh 7; 1 Kings 21; Jon 3:5–10.
[623] See Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 350–351 on Zech 7:9–10; 8:16–17. This claim will have to be supported on another occasion. See the discussion of the embedded divine trial in an earlier chapter. Cf. the alternative proposal for conceptualising approaching the deity from Lambert, *How Repentance Became Biblical*, 23–28.
[624] However, the suggestion that the scenes take place at Ramat Rahel, not Jerusalem, has much to commend it; Altmann, *Economics*, 261.
[625] Nehemiah eschews the "bread of the governor" and feeds 150 men out of his own pocket; see Altmann, *Economics*, 270–287; cf. Lisbeth S. Fried, "150 Men at Nehemiah's Table? The Role of the Governor's Meals in the Achaemenid Provincial Economy," *JBL* 137 (2018): 821–31.
[626] Whenever it reached its final form, the economic thinking on display probably approximates to the economic conditions of the province of Yehud in the mid to late Persian period; Altmann, *Economics*, 210, and, further, 259–261. Nihan, *From Priestly Torah*, 558, also locates the text in the mid-fifth century, prior to the Holiness legislation.

the picture that has emerged from Isa 58 and may help illuminate further the relationship between the wealthy provider and the destitute.[627]

The scene opens with "the people and their wives" bringing a series of complaints to "their brothers the Yehudim" (v. 1).[628] They have too many mouths to feed (v. 2), they have had to mortgage houses, fields, and vineyards to obtain grain due to the רעב (food shortage, v. 3), and they have had to borrow money to pay the מדת המלך (v. 4).[629] Their children are being sold or they are having to fulfil the labour obligation due on their fields, since they cannot pay it off in silver (v. 5). Finally, their land or, possibly, its usufruct, now belongs to others, until their debts are paid off (v. 5b).[630] These probably represent typical outcomes of commercial practices common across the Persian empire, in Yehud, Egypt, and Babylonia.[631] Calling an assembly,[632] Nehemiah draws on the ideals of the mutual support of clan or village life, rather than appealing to law codes,[633] to persuade the more powerful creditors to abandon their claims on their debtors and forego some financial profit for the sake of the whole community, conceptualised as kin (vv. 10–13).[634] In sum, Neh 5:1–13 communicates an "ongoing *ethos* for the

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[627] On relative chronology, but without consensus, see Berges, "Trito-Isaiah"; and Blenkinsopp, "Trito-Isaiah." As Berges suggests, "Arguably, the similarities are the result of a shared provenance from the Babylonian diaspora" (179).

[628] On designations in Ezra-Nehemiah, see Dalit Rom-Shiloni, "From Ezekiel to Ezra-Nehemiah: Shifts of Group Identities within Babylonian Exilic Ideology," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Achaemenid Period: Negotiating Identity in an International Context*, ed. O. Lipschits, G. N. Knoppers, and M. Oeming (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 131–36.

[629] This is usually translated "the king's tax," e.g., Philippe Guillaume, "Nehemiah 5: No Economic Crisis," *JHebS* 10 (2010): 4. Alternatively, Lisbeth S. Fried, "Exploitation of Depopulated Land in Achaemenid Judah," in Miller, Ben Zvi, and Knoppers, *The Economy of Ancient Judah*, 155–60, argues for "king's rent"; cf. "royal tribute," Altmann, *Economics*, 249. Silverman, "The Taxes," 356–57, suggests that there is insufficient evidence to determine what מדה/מנדה/Akkadian *mandattu* referred to.

[630] Fried, "Exploitation of Depopulated Land," 160–62. The series may reflect successive stages of impoverishment through debt; Nihan, *From Priestly Torah*, 558.

[631] Fried, "Exploitation of Depopulated Land," 162–63; Altmann, *Economics*, 259.

[632] Altmann, *Economics*, 269. On the nature of the assembly and what it might signify about the implied community, see David Janzen, "Politics, Settlement, and Temple Community in Persian-Period Yehud," *CBQ* 64 (2002): 494–97.

[633] Altmann, *Economics*, 264.

[634] At the same time, any ties to other Yahwistic centres, such as Samaria must necessarily be relinquished; Altmann, *Economics*, 298.

treatment of one's Judean 'brother' in such a way that some lending may occur, just not that of the predatory (נשׁא) type," in accord with the "societal visions" of Deut 15 and Lev 25.[635]

Isa 58 and Neh 5:1–13 differ on the surface in terms of genre (prophetic oracle versus narrative), economic vocabulary, and theological perspective.[636] Nevertheless, two significant correspondences take their similarities beyond the topic of acquiring daily sustenance against a similar historical background. First, both texts present the predicament as a lack of economic justice within the community requiring a judicial response. Each commences with a complaint or cry that demands to be heard (שׁמע; Isa 58:2b–3a; Neh 5:1, 6)[637] and elicits a response involving "contending" (ריב; Isa 58:4; Neh 5:7). The six occurrences of דבר in Neh 5:1–13 play a structuring role,[638] as do the four occurrences in Isa 58.[639] These features in Neh 5:1–13 reflect the trial procedures of the local assembly lawcourt that they portray. The story imitates a trial account record.[640] Unlike Isa 58 (and Zech 7), this is not a divine trial, embedded in another genre. Nevertheless, the similar structure of a law story facilitates the comparison.

Second, the most significant, and potentially fruitful, correspondence between the texts is their similar formulation of group identity. The dilemma in Neh 5:1–13 is presented as a crisis of the community's identity, in which

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[635] Altmann, *Economics*, 269, italics original. It has been suggested that local cancellation of debts and service obligations, which are attested for the Neo-Assyrian period, may have continued to be known under the Persians; Michael Jursa, "Debts and Indebtedness in the Neo-Babylonian Period: Evidence from the Institutional Archives," in *Debt and Economic Renewal in the Ancient Near East*, ed. M. Hudson and M. Van De Mieroop, The International Scholars Conference on Ancient Near Eastern Economics 3 (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2002), 212.
[636] In Neh 5, the assembly praises YHWH as the narrative concludes (v. 13). Isa 58 is framed as a divine message and YHWH is named throughout.
[637] Jacob L. Wright, *Rebuilding Identity: The Nehemiah-Memoir and Its Earliest Readers*, BZAW 348 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), 182–83; Altmann, *Economics*, 249, n. 22.
[638] Neh 5:6, 8, 9, 12, 13 (twice); Donna Laird, *Negotiating Power in Ezra-Nehemiah* (Atlanta: SBL, 2016), 238.
[639] Isa 58:9, 13 (twice), 14.
[640] See Magdalene, *On the Scales*, 4; and on the indicators of legal narrative, 46–52.

the accused are given a stark binary choice. The (implicitly) just and right response is explicitly framed as a question of allegiance.[641] Ingroup belonging is emphasised from the start by the framing of העם "the people" (vv. 1, 13) and first-person plural forms (vv. 2–5).[642] Familial vocabulary, particularly אח "brother,"[643] appears throughout, while outsiders are labelled the "nations" (גוים, v. 8) and "the nations our enemies" (v. 9). Those whose allegiance is in doubt are labelled אחרים "others" (v. 5) in a wordplay with אחים "brothers," a conceptual pun that effects much of the heavy lifting in the rhetoric of the discourse.[644]

A similar understanding of the community's identity underlies Isa 58. Again, the conceptualisation of the community as an extended family is expressed in the text's outer frame, here through the expressions "household of Jacob" (v. 1) and "Jacob your father" (v. 14). Ingroup belonging, as those gathered around YHWH, is foregrounded in the first designation "my people" (v. 1) and outgroups also indicated by the label "nation" (גוי, v. 2). Notably, both texts use בשׂר "flesh" with a possessive suffix to underline kin affiliation (Neh 5:5; Isa 58:7). The final line of v. 7b, "and from your flesh do not hide," aligns very well with the gist of Neh 5:1–13. This strengthens the interpretation of "your flesh" in Isa 58:7 as referring to fellow members of the Yahwistic community centred on Zion-Jerusalem, rather than a close biological familial relationship or all human beings.

In addition to the rhetorically persuasive wordplay, the designation "brother Yehudim" (Neh 5:1, 8) and the statement "the flesh of our brothers is our

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[641] Altmann, *Economics*, 259, 270.
[642] Altmann, *Economics*, 266.
[643] Neh 5:1–13 includes wives (v. 1); brother/s (vv. 1, 5, 7, 8 x2, 10); and sons and daughters (vv. 2, 5).
[644] As noted by Richard J. Bautch, "The Function of Covenant across Ezra–Nehemiah," in *Unity and Disunity in Ezra-Nehemiah: Redaction, Rhetoric, and Reader*, ed. M. J. Boda and P. L. Redditt, HBM 17 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2008), 15. Supporting its central rhetorical function, note also the consonantal wordplay created at the transition between the complaint and Nehemiah's response: לאחרים ויחר לי "belonging to others. I was angry" (vv. 5–6).

flesh" (v. 5a) combine to make self-evident the jeopardy in which the debt practices are placing the self-understanding of the community as family.[645] Farmers, nobles, officials, priests, and the governor himself, whether returnees from Babylonia or "remainers," are to act as one kinship community. This message is stressed by Nehemiah's declaration that "we" have been buying back "our/your brothers the Yehudim" sold "to the nations"[646] (v. 8), an action strongly reminiscent of kin-based redemption practices (Lev 25:47–49). Nehemiah is thus subtly portrayed as a "kinsman redeemer" for the community-family.

The community-defining nature of the economic ethics in Neh 5:1–13 makes it a very useful conversation partner for Isa 58, where community identity is more subtly on display. Observations are confined to three areas: social divisions within the community; the circumstances that led to the distress; and the nature of the solutions offered.

First, social divisions within the community are blatant in the dispute in Neh 5:1–13, but hard to understand. "The people and their wives" (העם ונשׁיהם) who complain are portrayed as family people and farmers (v. 2). Against them, "the nobles" (החרים) and "the officials" (הסגנים), are accused of loan practices that produce unsustainable indebtedness.[647] There is also a third wealthy and powerful group that includes Nehemiah and his "brothers" (v. 10), who can be distinguished from the accused by the emphatic "we" and "you" in v. 8. But the picture is muddied, particularly when "the people did

[645] Cf. the Deuteronomic "brother" ethic of Deut 15 and Lev 25; Altmann, *Economics*, 262. Further motivations for changing behaviour also draw on community identity, this time in relation to YHWH and outsiders. Nehemiah calls them to "walk in the fear of our God (to avoid) the reproach of the nations our enemies" (Neh 5:9).

[646] The term גוים/גוי should probably be understood as ethnic people-groups, rather than political kingdoms.

[647] Silverman, "The Taxes," 360, cautions that "understanding the economics of this text is predicated on decisions related to the socio-economic status of the groups mentioned." Compare Altmann, *Economics*, 262, who suggest that the groups are distinguished socio-economically; with Philippe Guillaume, *Land, Credit and Crisis: Agrarian Finance in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2012), 177–79.

what they had said" (v. 13). If "the people" is a designation intended to affirm the community's unity of powerful and weak, the vision is not carried into the following discourse, where the "brothers" (v. 14) are again the elite and contrasted to the "people" (Neh 5:14–15).

By contrast, the social divisions within the community of Isa 58 are implicit. At least two strata can be discerned: the powerful and well-resourced, who constitute the addressees, and the under-resourced and disempowered. Despite the initial impression, altered conduct is not required of every member of the community in Isa 58, but primarily the powerful and accused, as in Neh 5:1–13.[648]

Second, the farmers' distressed complaints in Neh 5:2–5 indicate an immediate and acute crisis of food shortage (רעב, v. 3), combined with the "structural dynamics of prolonged indebtedness."[649] The distress in Isa 58 is more complex and communicated more subtly. Distress implicitly motivates the powerful who fast and complain to YHWH. The trigger, according to the rhetorical argument, is a communal crisis of agricultural productivity. Causes

[648] This raises a related question which it may not be possible to answer. To which social group did those responsible for composing and transmitting these texts belong? The well-resourced, the under-resourced, or somewhere in between? Whose perspective are we being led to read from? For Isa 58, the perspective of the scribal hands is unclear. The usual default is affiliation with a literate elite. However, the insistent emphasis on an "underclass" in Isa 58, through the variety of descriptive labels, tips the balance away from a straightforward affinity with the elite. Perhaps those behind Trito-Isaiah had been at the receiving end of some of the economic practices the message seeks to curtail. Perhaps they even counted themselves amongst the "hungry," the "naked," and the "afflicted"; cf. Isa 65:13. On the gradual identification between the theology of the poor and the theology of Zion in the final redaction of Isaiah, see Berges, "Die Armen."

[649] Altmann, *Economics*, 260–66 (here, 263). Several scholars have suggested that antichretic loans lie in the background here, e.g., Guillaume, "Nehemiah 5: No Economic Crisis"; Fried, "Exploitation of Depopulated Land." Antichretic pledges of agricultural land tended to become long-lasting debt, since, for the lower classes, it was impossible to repay the debt once deprived of the usufruct of the land; Cornelia Wunsch, "Debt, Interest, Pledge and Forfeiture in the Neo-Babylonian and Early Achaemenid Period: The Evidence from Private Archives," in Hudson and Van De Mieroop, *Debt and Economic Renewal*, 240; see, further, Mark E. Biddle, "Deposit and Pledge," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Law*, ed. B. A. Strawn (Oxford University Press, 2015), https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref:obso/9780199843305.001.0001/acref-9780199843305-e-35.

other than unreliable rains may actually have been to blame, such as poor land management, for example, over-prioritising cash crops.[650] The distress experienced by the wealthy who fast is skilfully contrasted with the unspoken distress of the truly "afflicted" and "hungry" (vv. 7a, 10a), "the naked" (v. 7b), "the toilers" (v. 3b), and "the crushed" (v. 6c), all labelled by their distress. Like the farmers', this distress is also due to structural failures, as indicated by the confrontation of unjust and oppressive practices regarding labour and litigation. The scenario in Neh 5 suggests that the litigiousness and "bonds" which Isa 58 refers to may have been oppressive debt mechanisms and their consequences. Perhaps creditors seized control of property and persons from defaulting debtors, including by false accusation and abuses of legal process.

Third, there is a notable correspondence between the restorative actions urged in Neh 5:1–13 and Isa 58, despite the lack of shared economic vocabulary. Both texts call for the abolition of a practice held responsible for sustaining socio-economic disparity, however local or temporary such an abolition was in practice. Isa 58:6, 9b mark out the mysterious מטה/מוטה for eradication (סיר *hiphil*, v. 9b), while Neh 5 urges the abandonment (עזב, v. 10) of financial practices described with נשׁה/נשׁא/משׁא (vv. 7, 10, 11).[651] Property and goods,[652] probably taken as collateral for loans, are to be "returned" (שׁוב *hiphil*, vv. 11, 12)[653] and no longer "demanded" (בקשׁ *piel*, v. 12).[654] Several alternative explanations of dependence or independence in the literary and

[650] Perceived causes of hardship, of course, do not necessarily reflect reality. The greatest share of responsibility for impoverishment in the province probably lay with the imperial economic system of land rental, tax, and requirements of labour service, as hinted at by Neh 5:4. Fried, "Exploitation of Depopulated Land," 162–63, proposes land was subject to "the king's rent" and *ilku*-service; cf. Walter J. Houston, *Contending for Justice: Ideologies and Theologies of Social Justice in the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 41, who suggests the "king's tax" is to blame. See above.

[651] Altmann, *Economics*, 252–57.

[652] No people are mentioned, even though, in the complaint, sons and daughters are being subjected as עבדים "slaves" (Neh 5:5).

[653] Cf. Lev 25:27; Deut 24:13. Nihan, *From Priestly Torah*, 558, suggests the cancellation of debts Nehemiah initiates intentionally reflects the royal west Asian tradition of release of debts.

[654] The meaning can shift towards "to punish"; Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 242–45.

historical worlds could account for the literary correspondences between the texts.[655] Whatever the realities of the life setting behind each text, it seems that similar bilateral financial arrangements created, or exacerbated, a disparity between the better and the less well-resourced within the Yahwistic community.

One final detail from Neh 5 relevant to Isa 58 has previously escaped notice. Neh 5:13 might put a name to a legal-financial practice associated with the condemnations in vv. 2–5 that is comparable to the מטה. The oath sworn by the creditors to restore land, property, and interest and abandon the practice of taking נשׁא-interest (vv. 11–12) is accompanied by Nehemiah "shaking out" (נער) the fold or pocket in his sash (חצן, v. 13).[656] The accompanying curse threatens that God will "shake" (נער, *piel*) those who do not keep their promise from their house and toil/property (יגיע), so that they are "shaken and empty" (נעור וריק, v. 13).[657] My suspicion is that the verb נער, or the descriptor נעור, carries here a technical, legal-financial sense.[658] This is suggested by the threefold repetition of cognates of נער and the common ancient West Asian pattern of measure-for-measure punishment.[659] If the threatened punishment in Neh 5:13 is to legally separate a man from his house and property, his labour, and its fruits, then the principle of *talion* would suggest that the "crime" consists of the same action. Dispossession was probably what transpired when the debts incurred by the נשׁה/נשׁא/משׁא lending could not be repaid, due to forfeiture of a pledge made to secure the loan.[660] This fits with the debtors' complaint that "there is no power in our

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[655] Blenkinsopp, "Trito-Isaiah," concludes the texts are independent.
[656] F. Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 196; Laura Quick, *Dress, Adornment, and the Body in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 64–65.
[657] Cf. ריק in 2 Sam 6:20 and comments in earlier chapters.
[658] *CDCH* 277 gives two alternatives for נער: "to shake"; "to strip bare, uncover."
[659] John Barton, *Ethics in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 105–9.
[660] The evidence on debt pledges and security for the period is slim; see Frymer-Kensky, "Israel." In Babylonia, in the Neo-Babylonian period, the objects pledged were usually dependent persons and landed property. Silver is also attested, but other portable valuables including animals rarely. See Joachim Oelsner, "The Neo-Babylonian Period," in Westbrook and Jasnow, *Security for Debt,* 301.

hands and our fields and vineyards belong to others" (v. 5c).[661] If land and property were seized by a creditor, and the debtor removed from it by the mechanism "shaking," then the labour of a man and his family members would indeed be the only resource left to pay off debts, as v. 5b suggests. The explanation might be given because the terminology of נער was archaic or rare. In Job 38:13, where the land is metaphorized as a blanket, there is a similar sense of being dislodged or violently displaced from the land.

לאחז בכנפות הארץ וינערו רשׁעים ממנה

Holding the land by its corners

So the wicked might be shaken from it

Job 38:11

In addition to their shared historical and geographical context, there are numerous similarities between Neh 5:1–13 and Isa 58, not least their ethno-religious assumptions and the socio-economic dilemmas they portray. But interestingly, in Neh 5 the apparently acute hunger (v. 2) is not met by direct provision or the allocating of food to those in need. Only the interest on loans of grain and silver is condemned (v. 10), implying commodity loans continued. The view of community as kin does not extend as far as viewing it as a single economic unit that incorporates the "people" who first complained of hunger (vv. 2–3). This different conceptualisation of the community as "family" corresponds with different language. Only Isa 58 refers to a single "father," Jacob, and his "house, household" (vv. 1, 14). The community vision of Isa 58 thus represents a higher ideal of economic interdependence.

9.5 Conclusion

Comparison with the close reading of Isa 58 in the previous two chapters clarified readings of Isa 61 and Zech 7–8. Isa 61, despite its similar provenance, has a different rhetorical purpose to Isa 58. Its focus on a release

[661] Cf. Mic 2:1–2, where property-related evil is done "because it is in the power of their hands" (v. 2:1b); also, Ps 36:5.

from “captivity” in exile for the whole people Israel bears no relation to the “setting free” of a portion of the Yahwistic community urged in Isa 58. Attempts to read Isa 58 in line with the earlier chapter 61 has obfuscated rather than illuminated, obscuring the responsibility of powerful members of the community for the “bonds,” “ties,” and the מטה they are urged to release (Isa 58:6, 9b). Paradoxically, the importance of identifying these and how they relate to the conditions of “the hungry” and “the naked/destitute” is highlighted by the contrast with the web of metaphors around the “release” from exile in Isa 61:1.

The common themes of queried fasting and injustice in Zech 7[662] and Isa 58 are due to a shared legal conceptualisation of fasting and prayer as making a petition to YHWH the divine judge. The insight that Isa 58 contains an embedded divine trial may provide a useful interpretive key for Zech 7. The comparison confirms that divine accusations within a context of fasting are logically associated with failures in משפט and צדקה in general (v. 9; 8:8). Unrighteous and ineffective fasting has many potential causes. We can confirm that the food-related misdeeds in Isa 58 are specifically and intentionally targeted in that message through its careful literary crafting, particularly its deployment of ענה/עניים and נפש.

Like Zech 7, Neh 5:1–13 is also a law story, incorporating an account of a legal dispute, but in an earthly rather than heavenly courtroom. From the comparison, two important refinements of my interpretation of Isa 58 emerge. First, Neh 5:1–13 explicitly utilises the community’s self-understanding as a single family to argue for an overhaul of its economic ethics. This supports the pertinence of familial language for the interpretation of Isa 58. However, the conceptualisation of “community as family” in the two texts is not identical and the comparison sharpens our interpretation. Isa 58 draws on the model of a patriarchal household, a single mutually

[662] Zech 8:16–19 touches on the same themes.

interdependent economic unit, for his vision of the community. On this basis, he calls the more powerful and well-resourced to give up the unrighteous and unjust practices that boost their wealth at the expense of others, in a new definition of "fasting" as self-affliction. Henceforth, they are to maintain "the hungry," "the naked," and "the afflicted" by means of their own livelihood through allocating resources to them as if they were close family.

Second, just as Neh 5:1–13 focuses on certain interest-bearing loans associated with נשׁא/נשׁה/משׁא, also in Isa 58, the "wicked bonds," legal contention, and false accusations concern debt mechanisms, such as promissory notes, interest, and forfeitable pledges associated with loans of silver and grain. Further, from Neh 5:13, I deduce the existence of a hypothetical practice, referred to as "shaking" (נער, *piel;* also, נעור "shaken"), which separated someone from their landed property and potentially labour, akin to dispossession. This practice, which appears to be the final fate of someone who had fallen into debt, presents itself as a viable candidate for the מטה which Isa 58:6, 9b seeks to abolish. The overlap between the provision needs indicated by the conditions of being ריק "empty, empty-handed," רעב "hungry," and ערום "naked/destitute," noted in the overview of provision in an earlier chapter, is highly suggestive and constitutes a further point of correspondence with Isa 58. This puts forward the loss of access to productive land as a potential key factor and context for "the hungry" and "the naked/destitute" in v. 7. The threat of "shaking" which leads to a sudden loss of wealth can also be usefully compared to the sudden economic losses experienced by the rich men in Job 1:21 and Qoh 5:15 and Jerusalem in Ezek 16. The threatened loss in Nehemiah will leave the culprit "'shaken' and empty" (נעור ורק, 5:13), while the losses of the rich men and Jerusalem left them ערום "naked/destitute," in the latter's case, as in the days of its "youth/minority" (נעורים).[663]

[663] Perhaps נעור (Neh 5:13) should be translated as "emptied out, stripped, bared" (see the possible נער III, *CDCH*:277) rather than "shaken" (NRSV).

Dispossession from land and property and land acquisitions that merged farming land into larger estates are already amongst the economic injustices that exercised eighth century prophets in the kingdom of Judah.[664] Neh 5:13 suggests that similar land-related injustices continued in Yehud under the administration of the Persians some three centuries later. It is notoriously difficult to gather any hard evidence about land ownership, acquisitions, and abuses, so the potential of the hypothetical "shaking" (נער, *piel;* also, נעור "shaken") piques interest, particularly on observing that an apparent synonym is the verb מוט "to shake, totter." This fuels speculation that the מטה (Isa 58:7) might refer to displacement from land as the consequence of failure to repay a debt.

The next chapter follows up two leads on the מטה. First, an overview considers locutions written מטה and the related verbs מוט and נטה, providing the necessary lexico-philological background. Second, the incidence of a verbal locution מטה in Lev 25:35 is scrutinised closely within its immediate context of vv. 35–38. It is already widely held to have economic connotations and may be semantically related to the substantive מטה in Isa 58. The aim of the analysis is to discover if there is any evidence that מטה (as noun or in a verbal form) refers to the violent or unjust separation of a man from his property and land. If so, this would elucidate further the conduct demanded in Isa 58:6–7, 9b–10a, connecting the economic and legal injustices to provision, and complete the picture of restorative justice that has been emerging.

[664] Isa 5:8–10; Mic 2:1–2; see, e.g., Matthew J. Coomber, *Re-Reading the Prophets Through Corporate Globalization: A Cultural-Evolutionary Approach to Economic Injustice in the Hebrew Bible* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2010).

10 The locutions מטה, Leviticus 25:35, and Isaiah 58:6–7, 9–10

10.1 Introduction

The previous chapter proposed that נער (*piel*, "to shake") in Neh 5:13 denotes dispossession from land and property. The verbal root נער is rarely attested.[665] However, it apparently has a more frequently attested synonym מוט "to shake, totter." Semantically related lexemes commonly exert mutual influence over each other's semantic ranges, often through metaphorization. A technical sense related to land or property may have been transferred between נער and מוט at some stage; this sense may, further, have become associated with the substantive מטה (Isa 58:6bc, 9b). With this possibility in mind, it is worth investigating the semantic domains of all substantives written מטה and two related verbs מוט and נטה.

Pursuing clues to interpreting מטה in Isa 58 is no detour but rather key to the interpretation of Isa 58:7. As already argued, evidence to support the traditional translation "yoke" in vv. 6bc, 9b is weak. Yet, how v. 6bc with its two occurrences of מטה is understood is the most important vantage point on v. 7. Verse 6 is also more than simply a preceding verse since the couplets in vv. 6b–7 together form an integrated subunit within the rhetorical argument of the discourse in Isa 58, as partially reflected in the reprise in vv. 9b–10a.

The unique expression מטה ידו (Lev 25:35) occurs within a discrete unit (vv. 35–38) of the larger rhetorical unit Lev 25. Although the locution is a verb not a substantive, the consistent focus of the wider literary context on land and the economic conduct of the community suggests it may be cognate with the

[665] Of eight further attestations, it appears in a financial context in Isa 33:15 in relation to refusing a bribe; and in relation to land in Isa 33:9; and Job 38:13. The occurrence in Ps 109:23 possibly reflects a scenario similar to Neh 5:13, but this must remain a conjecture.

מטה in Isa 58:6, 9b.[666] To prepare for the textual analysis, I sketch the philological background to show how these two locutions written מטה, one a substantive and one a verb, may relate to the semantic domains of the verbs מוט and נטה.

10.2 The locutions מטה and the semantic domains of מוט and נטה

The uncommon substantives מוט and מוֹטָה "bar, carrying pole,"[667] discussed already in relation to Isa 58:6, 9,[668] are usually considered derivations of the verb מוט. Curiously, however, they are not found in the same literary contexts. As Arnulf Baumann suggests, "it is far more likely that the speaker sensed a relationship with מטה *maṭṭeh*, 'staff,' 'branch' which derives from the root *nṭh* and whose semantic field ('spread out, stretch out, turn from the way, turn away, deviate') exhibits a certain proximity to that of *mwṭ.*"[669]

The substantive מַטֶּה is, indeed, very common, with some 250 attestations. Its core senses are "staff, rod" and, figuratively, "tribe" but its wide range extends to a sceptre (representing might), a stem or branch of a plant, and an arrow's shaft.[670] Also deriving from נטה, but with a small and well-defined semantic range, is מִטָּה "bed."[671]

The perception of a semantic overlap between מוט and נטה means it is necessary to keep an open mind as to the associations and nuances of each instance of an unvocalised locution מטה, being attentive to cues from the

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[666] A second text Ezek 9:9, with the supposed *hapax legomenon* מֻטֶּה (MT), a substantive, seems for that reason more promising. Unfortunately, its immediate context is unenlightening, hence the customary translation "perversity." A detailed textual analysis of Ezek 7 and the disputed text of vv. 10–11 is required to reach a similar conclusion to the one that will be drawn here but must await another occasion.
[667] *DCH* 5:172 gives 4 and 12 occurrences, respectively.
[668] See above.
[669] Arnulf Baumann, "מוט *mwṭ*," *TDOT* 8:152.
[670] Arnulf Simian-Yofre, "מַטֶּה *maṭṭeh*," *TDOT* 8:241–49.
[671] *DCH* 5:237–238 gives 29 occurrences.

literary context. The verb נטה occurs more than 200 times in a wide variety of situations with many nuances.[672] There are two closely associated clusters of occurrences of נטה *hiphil* with a semantic range that overlaps with the content of Isa 58. The first cluster contains verbal forms of נטה *hiphil* with משפט for "perverting justice" or the "ways of justice."[673] These occurrences use "justice" to indicate right decision-making in lawsuits (ריב). A second cluster uses נטה *hiphil* in very similar contexts, such as the gate of a walled town where lawsuits take place, with slightly different syntax, "turning" or "twisting" innocent persons from justice or their rights."[674] From this pattern emerges a strong association with "perverting" justice, conceptualised as a straight or narrow right path to be taken in actions associated with making judicial decisions where one party is weaker.

Two further substantives, written unvocalised as מטה, are generally considered to derive from נטה.[675] Both are *hapax legomena*.[676] One, a hypothetical מֵטָה, is found in Isa 8:8 (מֵטוֹת כְּנָפָיו "outspreadings of his wings"), referring to the wings of the Assyrian king "filling the breadth of the land."[677] The other, מֵטָה in Ezek 9:9, is what the city Jerusalem is accused of being "full of." It is usually translated "perversity," following the attestations of נטה in the context of justice discussed above. This verse shares other vocabulary with Isa 8:8 (מלא "to fill," ארץ "land," and יהודה "Judah"). It is possible that מטות/מטה in Isa 8:8 could be read with connotations of land independent of any association with Assyria. Perhaps, unvocalised, it was intentionally ambiguous.

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[672] *DCH* 5:672–675 gives 216 occurrences; Helmer Ringgren, "נָטָה *nāṭâ*," *TDOT* 9:381–87, reports 215 occurrences.
[673] See Exod 23:6 (cf. v. 2); Deut 16:19; 24:17; 27:19; 1 Sam 8:3; Prov 17:23; Lam 3:35. These can be further characterised as perverting justice in relation to the poor or needy: Exod 23:6; to the orphan, widow, (and *ger*): Deut 24:17; 27:19; in parallel with taking bribes: Exod 23:6 (see v. 8); Deut 16:19; 1 Sam 8:3; Prov 17:23. Ringgren, TDOT 9:385–386.
[674] See Isa 10:2; 29:21; Amos 2:7; 5:12; Mal 3:5; Job 24:4: Prov 18:5. Those mentioned are the orphan, widow, (and *ger*): Isa 10:2; Mal 3:5; the "afflicted": Amos 2:7; the "needy": Amos 5:12; Job 24:4; the righteous: Isa 29:21; Prov 18:5. Ringgren, TDOT 9:386.
[675] *HAL* 11:693 designates both *hophal*; Ringgren, *TDOT* 9:381.
[676] *DCH* 5:238.
[677] Possibly a literary reference to the iconography of the god Assur as a winged sun disc.

The verb מוט "to shake, totter, waver" is much rarer than נטה. It has a limited distribution across biblical texts. Of the approximately 39 occurrences of the verb, 26 are in Psalms.[678] It is attested with subjects that fall into two main categories: humans[679] and land.[680] People can be represented metonymically by their feet.[681] Being "shaken" is associated with calamity, punishment, defeat, and destruction, whence the jest that idols need to be fastened down so they cannot be "shaken" (Isa 40:20; 41:7). The king and others who trust in YHWH will, like Mount Zion, not be "shaken" (Ps 21:8; 125:1). The righteous are not to be "shaken" while the wicked are.[682] "Shaking" or "being shaken" is always negatively evaluated. A negative particle appears alongside the verb on at least 24 occasions, across both categories. There are strong indications of a conceptual connection between the "shaking" of people and establishment in the land. For example, "The righteous will never be shaken, but the wicked will not dwell (שׁכן) in the land" (Prov 10:30). "Shaking" displaces people from the land or uproots them[683] and "removes" mountains from where they were established.[684] In a unique employment in Deutero-Isaiah, YHWH declares that the hills may "shake" (מוט) and "depart" (מוּשׁ), but his loving kindness will not "depart" (מוּשׁ) "from with you" and his covenant of peace (ברית שׁלומי) will not "shake" (מוט, Isa 54:10), which explicitly connects מוט with contracts.[685] With similar associations, the Psalmist living in peace or prosperity (שׁלי) thought he would never be "shaken" (Ps 30:7). The verb is always used with

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[678] Baumann, *TDOT* 8:152–158; Thomas Krüger, "On the Sense of Balance in the Hebrew Bible," in Schellenberg and Krüger, *Sounding Sensory Profiles*, 87–97, especially 91–93. Attestations in doubt are Ps 55:4; 140:11; Prov 24:11.

[679] Including humanoid statues and the king, probably 23 occurrences: Lev 25:35; Deut 32:35; Isa 40:20; 41:7; Ps 10:6; 13:5; 15:5; 16:8; 17:5; 21:8; 30:7; 38:17; 55:23; 62:3, 7; 66:9; 94:18; 112:6; 121:3; Job 41:15; Prov 10:30; 12:3; 25:26.

[680] 13 occurrences, which can be subdivided into hills and mountains (Isa 54:10; Ps 46:3; 125:1; cf. Isa 33:9); the land and the world (Isa 24:19; Ps 60:4; 82:5; 93:1; 96:10; 104:5; 1 Chr 16:30; cf. Prov 10:30); kingdoms and the holy city (Ps 46:6, 7).

[681] See Deut 32:35; Ps 17:5; 38:17; 66:9; 94:18; 121:3; all in *qal* stem.

[682] See Ps 13:5; 15:5; 16:8; 55:23; 112:6; Prov 10:30; 12:3; cf. Prov 25:26.

[683] Ps 10:6 refers to not being moved "throughout all generations." According to Prov 12:3, the "root" (שׁרשׁ) of the righteous will never be moved.

[684] In Ps 82:5 "all the foundations of the earth are shaken"; cf. Ps 93:1; 96:10; 104:5; 1 Chr 16:30.

[685] See, also, Ps 55:21–23.

reference to the concept of stability and firmness, whether body parts, the earth, or its foundations.[686] The distribution of the lexeme seems to fit with reading "shaking" as far more than a moral metaphor. It may have specific economic or legal connotations of being displaced from where one had been established and dwelling. The claim that the locution מָטָה in Lev 25:35 MT, thought to derive from the verb מוט,[687] has a primary sense of "maintaining a minimum of economic independence"[688] will be examined closely below.

10.3 Leviticus 25:35 and the brother who "topples"

10.3.1 Introductory remarks

Leviticus 25 is a rhetorical unit entirely concerned with community economics amongst the people of Israel (v. 2). A central part of the Holiness legislation, it belongs to a *Fortschreibung* of Leviticus 1–16 which was probably made after the book of Nehemiah, in the second half of the fifth century within the context of the Persian province of Yehud.[689] Lev 25 contains a unique employment of a verbal form מָטָה (v. 35), generally derived from מוט (*qal* perfect 3fs), which constitutes the focus of this investigation. A brief overview of the structure, content, and themes of the chapter indicates points of contact with Isa 58, namely, the importance of land for the provision of food and obedience to YHWH resulting in the blessings of agricultural abundance. Orientating the pericope vv. 35–38 within the structure of Lev 25:25–55, I argue that it primarily concerns land. An interpretation of Lev 25:35–7 follows, initially bracketing out the verbal phrase ומטה ידו. Despite the finer detail of the interpretation being debated, several commonalities between the pericope and Neh 5:1–13 suggest a similar socio-economic background.[690]

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[686] Baumann, "מוט *mwṭ*," 8:152–53.
[687] DCH 5:171-172; Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, AB 3B (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 2205; Jean-Francois Lefèbvre, *Le Jubilé Biblique: Lv 25 - Exégèse et Théologie*, OBO 194 (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck Ruprecht, 2003), 232.
[688] Baumann, "מוט *mwṭ*," 8:154.
[689] Altmann, *Economics*, 196; Nihan, *From Priestly Torah*, 545–59.
[690] Altmann, *Economics*, 198.

The final subsection suggests a euphemistic translation of the phrase ומטה ידו and interprets the underlying event in its socio-economic context.

10.3.2 The wider literary context: Leviticus 25

The first half of Lev 25 (vv. 1–24) describes the institutions of the Sabbath year, in which land rests, and the Jubilee (יובל), in which, in addition, דרור "liberty" is proclaimed and people are released to return to their ancestral property (v. 10). Rights of redemption of property and the Jubilee's effect of on land prices are outlined.[691] The second half of the chapter (vv. 25–55) applies the rights of property redemption (גאל/גאלה) and Jubilee to four increasingly dire sets of economic circumstances impacting the possession of land, houses, and persons.[692] The first debt scenario involves having to sell some property to settle debts (vv. 25–28). The third and fourth concern "debt-slavery," with a distinction made between selling oneself to fellow Israelites[693] (vv. 39–43, not "true" slavery) and to "alien tenants" "under you" (vv. 47–55).[694] The locution מטה appears in the second (vv. 35–38) of the four scenarios in which a debtor might find themselves.

Land is the unifying theme of the chapter,[695] its basic premise being that all Israelite territory is ultimately YHWH's possession: "The land shall not be sold

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[691] See discussion in relation to Isa 61 above.
[692] Bruce Wells, "The Quasi-Alien in Leviticus 25," in Achenbach, Albertz, and Wöhrle, *The Foreigner and the Law*, 137; Altmann, *Economics*, 197–98; cf. three stages, Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2191; and five stages, Bergsma, *Jubilee*, 84.
[693] "Israelite" (lit. son of Israel, Lev 25:2 et passim) is used as an ethno-religious emic designation. I do not use it as a politico-territorial label. See, further, Jon L. Berquist, "Constructions of Identity in Postcolonial Yehud," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*, ed. O. Lipschits and M. Oeming (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 53–66.
[694] The translation of גר ותושב follows Joram Mayshar, "Who Was the *Toshav*?" *JBL* 133 (2014): 225–46. The prescriptions are for the specific situation of the גר ותושב עמך; on the translation "under you/under your authority," see below. A similar interpretation is found in Christophe L. Nihan, "Resident Aliens and Natives in the Holiness Legislation," in Achenbach, Albertz, and Wöhrle *The Foreigner and the Law*, 117–19, 122–24. As he suggests, this legislation refers to non-native clients of Israelite households (119) who have become wealthy enough to lend money to other Israelites (117).
[695] Also, Nihan, *From Priestly Torah*, 521–22.

in perpetuity (לצמתת),[696] for the land is mine; you are 'alien tenants' (גר ותושב) with me" (v. 23). While, from a theological perspective, land is fundamental in YHWH's relationship with Israel (v. 38),[697] from a materialist perspective, land is fundamental for the production of food and other basic necessities of life. Hence, during the "Sabbath (rest) of the earth" and the Jubilee, there is no need to ask מה נאכל "What shall we eat?" (v. 20). The land will provide food (vv. 6–7, 11–12, 21–22). If the people obey the statutes and ordinances laid out in Lev 25, they will dwell securely in the land, agricultural produce will be abundant, and they will eat to satiety (vv. 18–19; cf. Deut 15:4–5).[698] Similar outcomes are the result of obedience in Isa 58, suggesting commonalities in the worldviews behind these texts.

Land is not the sole theme of Lev 25, however. A closely related theme is that the people of Israel are themselves the sole property of YHWH, his servants (vv. 42a, 55; cf. v. 38). The exhortation to provide for the redemption (גאלה) of the land (v. 24), which concludes the first half of the chapter, is matched in the second half by the reminders of YHWH's role as the redeemer (גאל) of his people, who brought them out of Egypt (vv. 42, 55). The intertextual connection with the exodus is made more obvious by Lev 25 being the first text in which the root גאל reappears after Exod 6:6 and 15:13. This theological perspective underlies the chapter's characterisation of the community's internal relations. An Israelite who redeems a brother re-enacts Israel's release at the exodus in imitation of YHWH.[699]

The twin themes of both land and people as YHWH's possession arise from the Holiness School's novel conceptualisation of the web of relationships

[696] However, this seems to be contradicted by the provisions for the sale of a house in a walled city (which in Yehud can only mean Jerusalem). After one year, it can no longer be redeemed but passes in perpetuity to the new owners (Lev 25:30). Cf. Ps 39:13; 1 Chr 29:15. See Mayshar, "Who Was the *Toshav*?" 236–38; Nihan, *From Priestly Torah*, 526.
[697] Nihan, "Resident Aliens," 122–24.
[698] As the traditional view also maintains, Lev 25 takes up and reinterprets Exod 21, 23 and Deut 15; Nihan, *From Priestly Torah*, 524, 526–27.
[699] Nihan, *From Priestly Torah*, 534.

between YHWH, people, land, and holiness evidenced in Lev 17–26. YHWH, the God of the universe, is also king over his land. His people are a temple community whose role is to serve him, in his sanctuary. They must, therefore, permanently sanctify themselves by obeying his laws. Lev 25 contains a striking corollary of this conceptual blend of king/god in a
the more specific blend of the Mesopotamian royal practice of *mīšarum* and *andurārum* and the deity's liberation of Israel in the exodus and establishment in the land. As Christophe Nihan expresses it, "Each Jubilee brings Israel back to the situation which applied when it was brought by God into the land and thus to the scheme initially devised by Yahweh for Israel at the exodus."[700] The theological worldview of the Holiness legislation and Lev 25's characterisation of the land as a temple estate forms an essential backdrop against which to consider the particulars of the situation described in vv. 35–38.

10.3.3 The immediate context: Leviticus 25:35–38

It is widely accepted that the debt-scenario in Lev 25:35–38 constitutes a logically intermediate stage between selling part of one's holding (מכר מאחזתו, vv. 25–28) and selling oneself (vv. 39–55). The pericope (vv. 35–38) lacks any mention of land or property. However, the motivation clause concerning YHWH's "giving" (נתן) of the land of Canaan (v. 38), which appears for the first time only after this second debt scenario, provides strong evidence that the underlying theme of this scenario, like the first, must be land. This would match the close association between the third and fourth scenarios which both concern "slavery" and the closing motivation clauses which assert that the Israelites are personal "slaves" (עבדים) of YHWH (vv. 42, 55). In addition, in the first scenario, a landowner in debt sells only a portion of (or, literally, "from") his holding, and so presumably has land left to work, the usufruct of which is his to dispense with. He is, as far as this scenario is

[700] Nihan, *From Priestly Torah*, 535.

concerned, still independent. By contrast, this independence is lost in the subsequent scenarios. In the third and fourth scenarios, the debtor sells himself and becomes dependent on others, bringing only the fruit of his labour from which anyone may benefit. It seems highly likely that in the second scenario in vv. 35–38, it is the usufruct of both the debtor's labour and of some land that is at stake.

10.3.4 The verse: Leviticus 25:35

The following translation provides a starting point for the ensuing discussion.

> וכי ימוך אחיך ומטה ידו עמך והחזקת בו גר ותושׁב וחי עמך
>
> If any of your kin fall into difficulty and become dependent on you,
> you shall support them; they shall live with you
> as though resident aliens.
>
> Lev 25:35 (NRSV)

The first three debt scenarios each begin with the conditional clause כי ימוך אחיך (vv. 25, 35, 39), with the fourth also containing a variation on the expression (v. 47).[701] Comparative literature suggests the verb מוך denotes a financial weakening or decline, hence the usual translation "if a brother becomes impoverished."[702] The context of Lev 25 suggests it may convey a specific technical sense of an inability to repay a loan.[703] The scenarios seem to depend literarily on a step-change to trigger the drastic consequences. A continuous, graduated decline would seem insufficient. Furthermore, in vv. 35, 39, 47 this expression is modified by the preposition עם + *pronominal*

[701] Cf. only other occurrence of the verb מוך in Lev 27:8. On Lev 27 as concerning securities on debt, see Benjamin D. Gordon, *Land and Temple: Field Sacralization and the Agrarian Priesthood of Second Temple Judaism* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020).
[702] Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2193.
[703] Raymond Westbrook, *Property and the Family in Biblical Law* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 100–102. This might be a survival loan related to an annual "hunger gap" between harvests or to the cumulative effect of successive poor harvests caused by adverse weather.

suffix.[704] Contrary to the typical gloss "with," this is used idiomatically in Lev 25 to imply a subordinate relationship, with the primary sense of being "under someone's authority."[705] Following the conditional clause in vv. 35, 39, 47, it thus indicates that the text is addressed to the creditor to whom the debt is owed. This is an important literary marker of the hierarchical nature of the financial relationships with which the second half of Lev 25 is concerned. Therefore, bracketing the interpolated expression ומטה ידו, we can translate: כי ימוך אחיך ... עמך "If your brother is unable to repay his debt … *to you*" (v. 35a).

It illuminates an otherwise confusing statement to read the hendiadys גר ותושב "alien tenant" (v. 35bα) as a non-pejorative designation equivalent to a "tenant farmer," as in v. 23. It also clarifies that a relative change in status has indeed taken place.[706] The expression is generally treated as comparative, despite the lack of a comparative preposition ב.[707] The Israelite debtor is to become "like" a (non-Israelite) tenant farmer with respect to his former land and his creditor.[708] Further clauses in vv. 35b–37 modulate the statement, indicating the ways in which the debtor is not to be treated *exactly* in the same way as a true גר ותושב. Scholars disagree on whether the creditor is to "fortify"[709] or "seize, hold"[710] (חזק *hiphil*) the debtor "like a tenant farmer."

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[704] The distinctive distribution of this locution in Leviticus is strongly suggestive of idiomatic usage. It is found in three chapters, each within a different idiom: שׁכב עם "to lie with" (Lev 15:33); variations on קרי(ב) הלך עם "to continue hostile to" (26:21, 23, 24, 27, 28, 40, 41); עם + *pronominal suffix* (25:6, 35 x2, 36, 39, 40 x2, 41 x2, 45 x2, 47 x3, 50 x2, 53, 54).

[705] Note, especially, the double "alien tenant under your authority" in Lev 25:47. This hierarchical understanding is critical for the very specific circumstances in which it might be feasible for Israelites to legislate for non-Israelite slave owners of Israelite slaves. For the initial proposal, see E. A. Speiser, "Leviticus and the Critics," in *Yehezkel Kaufmann Jubilee Volume*, ed. M. Haran (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1960), 38–39; and, more fully, Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2205–6; also, Wells, "The Quasi-Alien," 139–41, 148; cf. Lefèbvre, *Le Jubilé Biblique*, 228–34.

[706] Mayshar, "Who Was the *Toshav*?" 234–35; Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2204–5. As Nihan, "Resident Aliens," 120, notes "the resident alien [i.e., גר] and the native do not have the same status in H."

[707] In line with LXX; Nihan, *From Priestly Torah*, 532.

[708] Wells, "The Quasi-Alien," 150, is right to stress a change in status, even if it is too strong to say that the grammatical construction effects a change in status.

[709] So, Lefèbvre, *Le Jubilé Biblique*, 234–35; Nihan, *From Priestly Torah*, 532.

[710] So, Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2206.

Although the former is the more common translation, an emphasis on maintenance seems to run counter to the usual treatment of a resident alien. My preference is for the latter translation which puts the emphasis on the creditor exerting control over the debtor. It is likely that the combination of the verb חזק *hiphil* with the designation "tenant farmer" indicates the debtor's loss of control of his landholding which is thus transferred to the hands of the creditor.[711] This suggests a translation of והחזקת בו גר ותושב "You shall hold him as a tenant farmer" (v. 35bα).

The creditor's rights and responsibilities towards the debtor are spelled out in the two halves of v. 35b. His right to treat the debtor as a tenant farmer is tempered by a responsibility not to wield his authority harshly.[712] The debtor is to "live" (חי) under the creditor's authority (vv. 35bβ, 36bβ).[713] The repetition of this exhortation underlines this minimum requirement. The debtor is to be treated well enough to be able to subsist in this new arrangement and not decline towards death by starvation (cf. Neh 5:2–3; Ezek 7:13). This cannot mean "dwelling with you" as a full member of the creditor's economic household, otherwise instructions regarding loans and interest would be irrelevant (Lev 25:36–37).[714] Continuing to bracket the expression ומטה ידו, this yields the translation,

> If your brother is unable to repay his debt and … to you,
> you shall hold him as a tenant farmer and he shall subsist under you.
>
> Lev 25:35

[711] For a sense of "fortify, strengthen," invariably followed by "the hand of," see Isa 42:6, 51:18; Ezek 16:49. For a sense of "hold, seize," see Exod 9:2; Judg 19:25, 29; 2 Sam 13:11; Jer 50:33; Prov 7:13.

[712] Compare "You shall fear your God and your brother shall live under your authority" (Lev 25:36b) and "You shall not rule over him with harshness and you shall fear your God" (v. 43).

[713] The verb חוה "to live," which often appears in opposition to "to die," means "to stay alive, be healthy" rather than "to dwell"; Y. Muffs, *Studies in Biblical Law II, IV*, Lectures at the Jewish Theological Seminary (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1965), 4.6–7; cited by Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2208–9.

[714] Nor can it be the same as the third debt scenario in which a landless debtor sells himself to his creditor and is to be treated like a "hired employee" or a "tenant" "under your authority" (Lev 25:39–43); Mayshar, "Who Was the *Toshav*?" 233.

The following two verses clarify how the creditor is to enable the debtor to support himself and his family, even as the usufruct of labour and land might be in the hands of the creditor. The creditor is required first not to take interest from the debtor, whether נשׁך or תרבות (v. 36a; Neh 5:10).[715] This is an important distinction indicating how the brother-debtor is to be treated differently from a "foreign" alien tenant, to whom the Deuteronomic redactors considered it acceptable to charge נשׁך interest (Deut 23:21). The insertion of the appeal to "Fear your God" (Lev 25:36bα) may serve as a reminder to act with justice in the light of God's ultimate authority as supreme ruler and judge.[716] The reiteration of "he will subsist under your authority" (v. 36bβ) underlines the loyalty and responsibility due to the fellow Israelite, despite his lower status.

The instructions regarding interest in v. 37 elaborate on the content of v. 36 in a poetic chiastic formulation that brings provision to the fore.[717]

Your silver
you shall not give (נתן) to him
with נשׁך interest
and with תרבית interest
you shall not give (נתן)
your foodstuffs.

Lev 25:37

The exhortation not to give with either type of interest reveals that "gifts" were expected to be new loans, not donations gratis. They would be added to

[715] Space precludes entering the debate concerning how to interpret the terms נשׁך and תרבות (Lev 25:36–37). In contrast to the usual translations of "advance" and "accrued" interest (e.g., Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2209–10), it is worth noting the suggestion that the former refers to interest on a loan of money while the latter refers to interest on comestibles. See Altmann, *Economics*, 199; Nihan, *From Priestly Torah*, 533; Lefèbvre, *Le Jubilé Biblique*, 248–52.
[716] Also, Lev 19:32; 25:17, 43; cf. Gen 18:25. On the gods as the ultimate source of justice in ancient west Asia, see Bruce V. Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible: What Is New and What Is Old* (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, 1996), 1–5.
[717] Despite the significance of land for food highlighted in the first half of Lev 25, this is the only place food is mentioned in the second half.

the outstanding debt. The formulation of the instructions in vv. 36–37 apparently combines, revises, and tightens pre-existing stipulations to make them more advantageous to the debtor. The tone of generosity towards the impoverished is similar to that found in the exhortation in Deut 15:7–11. The addressees there are encouraged to lend (עבט, *hiphil*) or give (נתן) to "your brother, your poor and your needy in your land" (v. 11) without calculating how the potential imminence of the year of remission might adversely affect one's financial return on the interest that could be charged. In another Deuteronomic text, the potential for profit-making is limited by a prohibition on making loans with נשך interest on silver and foodstuffs to "your brother" (23:20–21; cf. Exod 22:24).[718] Lev 25:36–37 reinterprets these stipulations for the specific context outlined in v. 35, restricting the possibility of exploitation further by also prohibiting תרבית interest.[719]

10.3.5 The expression ומטה ידו in Leviticus 25:35

The four debt-scenarios in Lev 25 each involve a debtor unable to pay back his loan (vv. 25, 35, 39, 47). The event described as ומטה ידו (v. 35aβ) is the reaction to this defaulting that distinguishes the second scenario from the other options: sale of property (vv. 25–28) and sale of persons (vv. 39–55). The interpolation of the expression ומטה ידו before the prepositional phrase עמך suggests that this reaction becomes the precipitating cause of the debtor coming under the creditor's authority as if he were a tenant, as expressed in v. 35b. As argued above, the debtor must previously have been a landowner or had some controlling rights to land and its usufruct which then, to some extent, are transferred to his creditor.[720] The creditor is also encouraged to make further loans to this debtor. This suggests that the debtor still has some means by which to repay the loans, probably through the usufruct of labour,

[718] See Guillaume, "Brothers in Deuteronomy."
[719] Nihan, *From Priestly Torah*, 532–33. Cf. Ezek 18:8, 13, 17; 22:12; Prov 28:8.
[720] As Nihan, *From Priestly Torah*, 532, proposes, "the former landowner now exploits his own estate for his creditor"; similarly, Altmann, *Economics*, 199; cf. Wells, "The Quasi-Alien," 148; Bergsma, *Jubilee*, 98.

if not also of landed property, in contrast to a debtor who sells himself to another.

That a landowner and his land could come under the authority of another as "a tenant farmer" is due to the obvious but often overlooked fact that in the ancient world, as today, ownership of land was not the same as having possession or control over it.[721] The systems of land tenure in monarchic Judah and Persian Yehud were complex and hierarchical. The simplistic impression gained from biblical texts of the sale, purchase, ownership, and inheritability of land – and, indeed, the conceptualisation of the land as YHWH's temple estate – belies the multiple nuances and legalities that must have pertained and that varied over time, across territories, and according to administrative regime. A significant complicating factor is that land not only had associated privileges[722] but could also have various associated obligations, such as military and labour service, tax, or temple contributions. Further, these rights and obligations could be nested in complicated ways, made only more complex by debt mechanisms and local traditions of inheritance and redemption rights.[723]

The redactor of Lev 25 attempts to accommodate several socio-economic systems and models. There are the historical realities of commercial transactions in multi-cultural Persian Yehud where commercial partners were not necessarily Yahwists. There is also the conceptualisation of the land as YHWH's temple estate and his people as temple servants, as outlined above. In addition, there is the family-based model, in which the "sons of Israel" are

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[721] On the distinction between ownership and possession, see Guillaume, *Land, Credit and Crisis*, 9–13; Thomas W. Merrill, "Ownership and Possession," in *Law and Economics of Possession*, ed. Y.-C. Chang (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 9–39.
[722] Including, e.g., temple prebends.
[723] See the discussion of the sociology of estates in Raz Kletter and Jason M. Silverman, "'Estates' or 'Forts' in Persian Period Yehud?," *PEQ* 153 (2021): 42–61 (47-52); also, Stephen C. Russell, "The Hierarchy of Estates in Land and Naboth's Vineyard," *JSOT* 38 (2014): 453–69; James D. Moore, "Judeans in Elephantine and Babylonia: A Case Study on Rights and Tenancy Status," *ZAW* 132 (2020): 40–56.

a family of clans, the members within it being brothers, and land being inheritable, inalienable ancestral land.[724] The descriptions of the four debt scenarios reveal the tensions that arose when trying to reconcile socio-economic models of equal status between fellow Yahwists[725] and the inevitable hierarchies of financial debt and wealth inequalities. Perhaps this tension is most clearly embodied in the relational preposition עם, which the Holiness redactor employs with the sense of "under" rather than the more usual sense of "with." It is also, I suggest, indicated by the metaphorical, if not euphemistic, expression מטה ידו (Lev 25:35a).

All of the debt scenarios in vv. 25–55 assume a debt cannot be repaid. The unique event behind the second scenario in vv. 35–38 is, I propose, the forfeiture or seizure of a pledge made as security.[726] This pledge consists of, at minimum, the usufruct of land. This explains the necessity for a re-negotiated relationship in which the debtor becomes like a גר ותושב "farming tenant." Whatever way the term is interpreted, it distinguishes someone without the control of inheritable land from someone who does. A similar situation probably lies behind the complaint, "our fields and vineyards belong to others" (Neh 5:5).[727] The finer details of the terms under which a tenant farmer worked for his superior, or how the outstanding debt was repaid, are beyond the scope of this inquiry. However, as Neh 5:1–13 illustrates, huge

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[724] Family vocabulary runs through Lev 25, especially the second half, e.g., בן "son/s" vv. 2, 33, 41, 45, 46, 49, 54, 55; אח "brother" vv. 14, 25, 35, 36, 39, 46, 47, 48; מִשׁפחה "clan, family" vv. 10, 41, 45, 49; also, קרב "next-of-kin" v. 25; שׁאר בסרו "relative of his flesh" v. 49.

[725] Nihan, *From Priestly Torah*, 558, speaks of "the ideal of a people/community (*'am*) of landowners of equal status, solely organized by the observance of the Torah to the exclusion of any other political or economic factor." He suggests that "the legislation of Lev 25 explicitly supports the claims of the small landowners." My different reading of the second debt-scenario would not justify me agreeing strongly with this statement.

[726] Despite their differences, both Altmann, *Economics*, 199; and Wells, "The Quasi-Alien", consider the situation to involve a pledge. By contrast, Nihan, *From Priestly Torah*, 527, considers the situation to be one of borrowing money to pay the interest on loans. Cf. Frymer-Kensky, "Israel."

[727] Other commonalities between Lev 25:25–55 and Neh 5 include a connection between food and "living" (חיה, vv. 2–3); becoming slaves (v. 5); lending to "brothers" at interest (vv. 7, 10, 11); and brothers selling themselves or being sold (v. 8). Note, also, the expression ואין לאל ידנו "there is nothing belonging to the power of our hands" (Neh 5:5b; cf. Mic 2:1).

difficulties faced small farmers who were unable to make sufficient surplus and the majority were probably permanently embroiled in debt. The non-reimbursement of loans with pledges gave creditors the right to seize property and family members. The result was the concentration of agricultural land in the hands of a few wealthy families, a phenomenon known as latifundialisation.[728]

The expression מטה ידו (Lev 25:35a) does not, however, refer directly to a pledge, security, or forfeit. I propose that it refers to the consequence of forfeiting a pledge of land, namely, dispossession for the debtor and "repossession"[729] for the creditor. The metonymic employment of יד "hand, power" with a possessive suffix in place of a human actor is relatively common. In Lev 25 it is characteristic of an essentially financial transaction or event.[730] It appears here uniquely as the subject of the verb מוט, traditionally "to shake, totter, slip." Its usage pattern indicates that the verb can convey the sense of being displaced or dislodged, usually expressed in the *niphal* stem. This occurs to foundations of the earth[731] and roots of people.[732] However, when a foot (always singular) is the subject, it appears in the *qal* stem, as here, for example, אם אמרתי מטה רגלי "when I thought my foot is slipping" (Ps 94:18, NRSV).[733] The unique expression מטה ידו combines the connotations of financial power conveyed by יד as the active subject with a sense of losing one's place on land, described as displacement conveyed by מוט. The resulting euphemism "he topples" has no obvious intransitive English equivalent, unlike the many occurrences in the *niphal* stem, which can usually

[728] Nihan, *From Priestly Torah*, 557–58. See, e.g., Jacqueline N. Grey, "Isaiah 5: A Prophetic Critique of Economic Proportion," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 39 (2018): 1–7, with further references to the classic works of Premnath and Chaney.
[729] Although not a "repossession" in terms of possessing for the second time, the term is apposite as indicating a transfer of possession to a creditor consequent on defaulting on payments.
[730] The common lexeme יד appears in several configurations: with קנה "to buy," Lev 25:14, 28; נשׂג *hiphil* "to prosper," vv. 26, 47, 49; and מצא "to acquire" v. 28. Cf. in Deut 15:2–3 in the context of debt and creditors (also vv. 7, 8, 10, 11).
[731] Ps 82:5; 104:5.
[732] Prov 12:3.
[733] Also, Deut 32:35; Ps 38:17; 66:9; 121:3.

be translated as “to be dislodged, displaced, uprooted, removed.” It is necessary to resort to a paraphrase to convey the interpretation proposed.

> If your brother is unable to repay his debts and loses his land-rights to you, you shall hold him as a tenant farmer and he will subsist under you.
>
> Lev 25:35

10.3.6 Concluding remarks

When considered in its wider lexico-philological context, numerous features of the expression מטה ידו (Lev 25:35a) and its underlying event correspond with how the verb מוט is used in relation to human subjects in other biblical texts. First, it refers to an undesirable event that can be threatened and from which one can be delivered, rather than a state or condition which one experiences to different degrees.[734] Consequently, the rough translation “to topple” is preferred to “to slip, shake, totter, waver.” Second, it refers to a primary event that itself causes further difficulties. Often appearing in isolation, without elaboration, it stands metonymically for unfortunate consequences that will follow, rather than acting as a general purpose “catch-all.”[735] Third, another person may be understood to cause this event, often depicted as an adversary or enemy, but the verb is intransitive.[736] Fourth, the verb appears in financial and judicial contexts.[737] Fifth, it is associated with provision, sustenance, and good health.[738] A final feature that is not overt in Lev 25:35 is that the event referred to has long-term significance, typically

[734] See Deut 32:35; Ps 15:5; 16:8; 30:7; 62:3, 7; 66:9; 121:3; cf. Ps 37:24 in which טוּל *hophal* has the same sense (also, Isa 22:17; Jer 16:13; 22:26, 28. For Deut 32 as a postexilic text, see Eckart Otto, “Singing Moses: His Farewell Song in Deuteronomy 32,” in *Psalmody and Poetry in Old Testament Ethics*, ed. D. J. Human, LHBOTS 572 [London: Bloomsbury, 2013], 169–80.
[735] See Ps 10:6; 13:5; 15:5; 21:8; 30:7; 38:17; 62:3, 7; 94:18; 121:3.
[736] See Ps 13:5; 38:17; 62:3, 7; 94:18.
[737] See Ps 10:6; 15:5; 62:3, 7; 112:6.
[738] See Ps 55:23; 66:9.

indicated by it *not* happening לעולם "to everlastingness."[739] There is reasonable evidence to suggest that מוט is almost invariably used as a technical term for the loss of certain rights to dwell on land by which one might be considered "established" (usually כון *niphal*). There is little to no trace of a "literal" sense of physical movement that could be observed in the concrete world, only this abstract sense.

It is unclear from the context of Lev 25 if land could be recovered by its original owner after "toppling." The general exhortation to allow for redemption of land (v. 24) would suggest there must be that facility. But perhaps there is a difference between the sale of land (a change of owner) and what the expression מטה ידו alludes to (which I have proposed is a change in possessor). While redemption procedures and release at the Jubilee are included for the sale of land and property (vv. 25–34) and for slaves sold to a non-Israelite farming tenant (vv. 47–55), only Jubilee release is mentioned for "slaves" sold to an Israelite (vv. 39–46). Although described as a "sale" initially (v. 39), Israelites are not to be "sold" as slaves are "sold" (v. 42). Not being a true "sale" may account for the lack of a redemption facility. Similarly, the silence about any redemption procedures or Jubilee release for the second debt scenario (vv. 35–38), which, I have argued, involves loss of the control of land, may be a significant silence. No redemption facility can again be explained by it not being a true "sale." However, some reference to a Jubilee release, when the debtor would no longer be treated like a "tenant farmer," might have been expected. The absence of any such reference raises the possibility that the situation resulting from the event behind מטה ידו (v. 35), that is, the loss of possession of one's land, may have been essentially permanent.

[739] See Ps 10:6; 15:5; 55:23; 112:6; Prov 10:30. This feature is often found in association with land.

10.4 A proposal for מטה and מוט as technical terms related to land

The analysis of Lev 25:35–38 has resulted in the awkward but "literal" translation of מטה ידו (v. 35) as "he/his hand/his power topples," taking מטה as a form of the verb מוט. I propose that it refers to a legal transfer of rights to possess land, perhaps consequent on the forfeiture of land pledged as security for a loan resulting from non-payment. The text situates the creditor and the debtor as members of the one Yahwistic community, indicated by the notional family vocabulary and the alternative arrangements for non-members designated גר. It is addressed to a wealthy creditor, who is on the cusp of gaining a new "brother" tenant and, in some form, the land he farms or its usufruct. The obligations on the creditor set limits on making further financial gain from the debtor. Although the latter becomes a tenant farmer, he should not be subject to the two loans designated נשׁך and תרבית, presumably interest-bearing, on account of his being a "brother." Lev 25 thus seems to tread a narrow path, appealing to an ideal of "Israel" as a family of equals, whilst accommodating two legal instruments of מוט, "losing" land and גאל, "redeeming" land. Lev 25:35–38 is unusual, if not unique, in implying the acceptability of מוט. Some scepticism of its supposed generosity, that treats a brother like a "resident alien," might, perhaps be justified.[740]

The lexico-phonological overview of the pattern of the verb מוט in biblical texts suggests that this proposed technical sense, illustrated by the collocation of מוט with ברית "agreement,"[741] is more common than previously recognised. Its translation in English is challenging. Rather than having associations of strength and weakness, its essential reference points are stability and place.[742] The intransitive verb never refers to something that is relative or can happen by degrees, such as a loss of balance, which discounts

[740] Also arriving at this conclusion, see Wells, "The Quasi-Alien."
[741] Isa 54:10; Ps 55:21–23.
[742] See Baumann, "מוט *mwṭ*," 8:152–53; contra Krüger, "Sense of Balance," 90.

the usual "to totter, slip, shake, move."[743] The root is better glossed in an absolute, binary manner: in *qal* as an intransitive "to topple" and in *niphal*, "to be toppled, dislodged, evicted." Across subjects the verb has a common sense of being displaced from a state of establishment and rootedness in a particular place. When inanimate objects are the subject, such as hills, the world, the earth, and statues, the verb conveys a combined loss of physical stability and position. With human subjects, the verb is only used to indicate a change of state with reference to the stability of habitation and the means of livelihood. It retains connotations of an actual physical location but is never used to refer to physical balance or falling and its economic sense takes precedence, as with the passive "be evicted." The single attestation of מוט in the *hiphil* stem, with an agent of this event, is awkward and contested.[744] This makes me suspect that it was used like a euphemism. In no biblical text does someone admit to doing this to someone else! The gloss "to topple" is therefore euphemistic *for a euphemism* for the loss of certain possession and inheritance rights to land, probably the last piece of cultivable land or where someone dwells, the finer details of which are now out of reach.

Appearing predominantly in psalms of petition and thanksgiving, the language of מוט gives an insight into the often urgent, personal financial concerns which inspired their composition. Psalm 55, I maintain, is in its entirety a plea to God to be saved from the legal threat of מוט which was being made against the psalmist by his creditor, who he had thought was a supportive friend. The statement "He will never permit the righteous to topple (מוט)" (Ps 55:23b), exhibits the theological worldview that there is a perfect correlation between pious, righteous behaviour and material security, a position also found elsewhere. The simple formulation of this spiritually reassuring tenet resulted in the vocabulary readily becoming detached from its specific legal-economic background and sense of rootedness in land. Later readers have freely

[743] From *CDCH* 207.
[744] Ps 55:4b.

interpreted the apparently formulaic, metaphorical language according to their own cultural context, applying it to a range of situations in which a person feels vulnerable and life unstable.

It is possible that מוט fell out of everyday use towards the end of the Persian period, leaving it confined to literary, poetic texts. The most obvious alternative, the transitive verb נער (*qal* and *piel*) with נעור (passive participle and adjective) in Neh 5:13 and Job 38:11, may refer to the same event but plays a different grammatical role and allows the perpetrator to come into view. The imagery of violently removing what might have been clinging to a piece of cloth found in both texts suggests that the terms are again used euphemistically to describe a devastating economic event. The connotations of being "empty" (ריק, Neh 5:13) and holding or possessing nothing seem to predominate over that of being dislodged, as reflected in the use of נעורים "days of youth" in contexts of poverty seen elsewhere.[745]

Most significant for our interpretation of Isa 58:7, I suspect that the technical sense of מוט is more prevalent than previously recognised. I propose the existence of a related substantive מטה, an active participle (feminine singular) derived from מוט, vocalised מָטָה, which can be glossed "toppling" (a euphemism) or "dispossession" or "repossession" (which better indicates its reference to landed property). This substantive appears three times in Isa 58, in vv. 6, 9b. Space precludes the detailed justification required, but I submit that this technical legal sense of dispossession is also present in the attestations of מטה in Ezek 7:11a and 9:9.[746]

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[745] See, e.g., Jer 2:2; 22:31; 31:19; Ezek 16:22, 43, 60; Hos 2:17; Zech 13:5; Job 13:26, as discussed in an earlier chapter.

[746] Ezek 9:9aβ: "For the land is full of bloodshed and the city is full of מטה." In Ezek 7:10c–11a, wordplay involving polysemy and visual punning on homographs commences in v. 10c. "The tribe/the rod/dispossession blossoms, presumption sprouts/breaks out like a rash; unjust seizure has acceded to wicked dispossession/the wicked tribe" (צץ המטה פרח הזדון החמס קם למטה רשע). These texts may give a rare view of the legal instrument from the perspective of wealthy elite who have for the first time found themselves on the receiving end of its effects, having lost possession of property in Jerusalem and Judah following their deportation to Babylonia.

10.5 Isaiah 58 in the light of the מָטָה

10.5.1 The מָטָה in Isaiah 58:6, 9b

On first analysis of Isa 58, I concluded that "in general terms, vv. 6, 9b exhort an end to legally enforced *economic oppression* against individuals." A similar legal-economic frame is found in Lev 25 which, like Isa 58, is not explicit about the complex legal realm in which commercial dealings were conducted. In Lev 25, land is central to this realm, but in Isa 58, references to land are muted, apparently confined to vv. 11–14 and, even then, obscured in poetic and figurative formulations. There are, however, some notable economic correspondences in the co-texts surrounding the occurrence of מוט/מטה (Lev 25:35; Isa 58:6, 9b). Both address the pressing needs of provision of food for sustenance (Lev 25:37; Isa 58:7, 10, 14) and both condemn financial profiting from dependents (Lev 25:36–37; Isa 58:3b).[747] It would fit the context well if מטה in Isa 58:6, 9b, referred to some form of legally enforced economic oppression against individuals with respect to *land*.

My proposal is that, rather than the substantive מוטה in Isa 58:6, 9 being an unusual form of the metaphorical image of a yoke, it was originally written מטה and is a term for a legal transfer of land and property to another's control by some sort of default. Vocalised as מָטָה, it can be glossed, very roughly, as "toppling" or as "repossession."[748] In Isa 58, as in Lev 25:35–38, the trigger is probably defaulting on loans for which the land has been pledged as collateral. The analyses of these texts suggest מָטָה may specifically designate the loss of the last piece of inheritable or cultivatable land. Drawing

[747] Cf. Deut 15:2–3; Neh 5:1–13.

[748] We cannot be confident about the trigger for this legal instrument in Ezek 7:11, 9:9, where its victims are forced migrants in Babylonia. Land and property may have required visiting in person or cultivating to retain possessor's rights. At Naboth's death, ownership of the vineyard seems to default to King Ahab, presumably because Naboth's inheritors lost their inheritance rights due to his purported crime. To claim possession, Ahab still seems to need to go to the land in person (1 Kgs 21), which suggests some distinction between ownership and possession and the relevance to such matters of being physically on the land. See Russell, "The Hierarchy of Estates."

on the different perspectives of Neh 5:1–13 and Lev 25:35–38, it is evident that the circumstances surrounding land repossession seriously compromised a family's livelihood.

The argument that the lexeme מוטה in Isa 58:6, 9b was originally written מטה has already been made. This proposal upholds the suggestion that the lexeme in Isa 58:6, 9b is the same substantive as in Ezek 9:9. In doing so, I reject the theory that all four might have originally been written מֵטֶּה with the sense of "perversity" and question the existence of that supposed *hapax legomenon* in Ezek 9:9. Additionally, the nature of מָטָה as the outcome of a legal agreement between two parties is supported by the six Vulgate and LXX translations of the locution in Isa 58:6, 9b.

My proposal for a lexeme מָטָה can be tested for fit in the context of the translations and interpretations proposed for Isa 58:6, 9b earlier.

> If you remove (סור *hiphil*) "toppling/repossession" (מָטָה)
> from your midst,
> the pointing of the finger and the false accusation
> Isa 58:9b

The lexeme makes a very good semantic fit in v. 9b. It not only matches the legal context suggested by the second colon but, in its three expressions, may portray the cluster of actions a creditor would take to accuse a debtor of defaulting and thereby lay claim to the land, usufruct, or labour pledged as security. It is also reminiscent of Ezek 45:9, in which the "princes of Israel" are urged to "remove (סור *hiphil*) 'unjust seizure and ruin' (חמס ושד) and do what is just and right (מִשפט וצדקה)."[749]

> Is not this the fast I choose?
> Untying wicked bonds (חרצבות רשע),

[749] Cf. Ezek 11:18.

breaking up “collections” of “repossession” (מָטָה),
And setting free the crushed (רצוצים),
you (should) tear out/off every “repossession” (מָטָה)
Isa 58:6

There seems to be a neat semantic parallelism in Isa 58:6bc. The first cola (vv. 6bα, cα) focus on the dependent persons that the מָטָה produces, while the second cola (vv. 6bβ, cβ) focus on the legal instrument as concerned with land. The “wicked bonds,” whether translated as such or as “fetters,” may perhaps be explained more specifically as the bonds or metaphorical fetters which tie a dependent tenant to his old creditor and new landlord.[750] The suggestion that רצץ relates to an abuse of the legal system that “results in the deprivation of an economic benefit or legal right”[751] makes even more sense with the verb שׁלח חפשׁשים if now set against the possible scenario of a formerly independent man “held” as a farming tenant (Lev 25:35).

If מָטָה can refer to a written agreement, then the translations “you tear up every ‘repossession’” (v. 6cβ) and “releasing bundles (אגדות) of ‘repossessions’” (v. 6bβ) make sense. It is more likely that the connotations of “gathering into one” of the rare lexeme אגדה refers to the gathering of several pieces of land into one. Tentatively, then, the second colon may be an exhortation to “release” or “break up” amassed “collections” of repossessed land.[752] In the context of land, a “collection” might have the particular sense of an estate or plantation under a single owner.[753] In v. 6cβ, translating the verb נתק *piel* as “to tear out,” “up,” or “off” reflects the notions of violent removal and rootedness in place which are also present in מוט.[754]

[750] Some form of debt bondage or bonded labour.
[751] Cf. Deut 28:33; 1 Sam 12:3–4; Magdalene, *On the Scales*, 153.
[752] Cf. Isa 5:8–9.
[753] A translation of אגדה as “estate” in Amos 9:6aβ, “who establishes his estate upon the earth,” seems to make good sense in its textual context, contra Paul, “Two Cosmographical Terms.”
[754] Cf. Ezek 17:8; Prov 12:3.

Many of my earlier speculations about a hypothetical מטה/מוטה in Isa 58 have been upheld, such as that it "produced temporary or permanent servitude, or removed rights to cultivate land, or benefit from its produce." Other possibilities can be clarified or ruled out. מָטָה is an abstract noun referring to a process which does not appear in plural form. It is not inherently cumulative, per se, but the gravitational pull of wealth and the nature of credit makes it likely to lead to the accumulation of land in the hands of the few. The threefold appearance in Isa 58:6, 9b probably does not indicate polysemy. The repetition is integral to מָטָה being a central focus of Isa 58, a fact that has been disguised by a lack of familiarity with the culturally specific legal term already in antiquity, followed by later traditions of translating the word as a metaphorical "yoke." There is almost certainly no ambiguity in its employment here. Indeed, the unit is intently focused on spelling out the iniquities surrounding the practice and its consequences. There is no room in the rhetoric for obfuscation, as the ultimate call "to remove 'repossession' from your midst" (v. 9bα) indicates.

10.5.2 "The hungry" and "the naked" and their loss of land in Isaiah 58

The initial analysis of Isa 58 suggested that מטה/מוטה belonged to the legal-commercial realm. The ensuing investigation has concluded that, more specifically, the מָטָה is fundamentally concerned with land rights and access to its usufruct. In both verses of Isa 58 in which the term appears it is immediately followed by an exhortation to the addressees to concern themselves with the provisioning of the hungry.

> Is not this the fast I choose?
> Untying wicked bonds,
> breaking up "collections" of "repossession" (מָטָה),
> And setting free the crushed,

you (should) tear out every “repossession” (מָטָה).
Is (it) not apportioning your food for the hungry,
and bringing the afflicted and miserable into the house?
Should you see a “naked one,” covering him,
and not ignoring your kin?

Isa 58:6–7

If you remove “repossession” (מָטָה) from your midst,
the pointing of the finger and the false accusation
[If] you procure your livelihood/sustenance (נפֹשׁ) for the hungry
And the throat (נפֹשׁ) of the afflicted you satiate

Isa 58:9b–10a

I contend that the juxtaposition of the legal instrument of the מָטָה and the exhortation to share food with “the hungry” in Isa 58:6–7, 9b–10a is not coincidental but due to them being inseparably linked. In addition, the social types introduced as “your toilers” (v. 3b) are the same as those labelled “the crushed” (v. 6b), “the hungry” (v. 7a, 10a), “the afflicted” (v. 7a, 10a), and “the naked” (v. 7b). They are no longer to be objectified, as these labels imply, but treated as “your kin” from whom you do not hide (v. 7b).

Not only is it the same two parties involved in the bilateral relations of the repossessions and the provisioning of the needy, but the repossessions enacted by the creditors are, to a large extent, responsible for the predicament of their debtors (Lev 25:35; cf. Neh 5:1–13). The demands for changed behaviour in Isa 58:1–12, therefore, centre entirely on the repossessions and accompanying legal processes, and providing for the needy who are already in a financial relationship with their creditors. They are not disparate commercial practices and forms of social justice collected together and formed into a single appeal. Instead, they are a knot of interconnected practices and their outcomes, with a direct and explicit call to disentangle it.

The cohesiveness of these verses is demonstrated by the consistent parallel threads that run through the criticism of the way the community conducts its financial and commercial business. First, there is the "people" thread. People under authority ("your toilers," probably tenant farmers, hired workers, and effective slaves) have been treated as business resources from which to squeeze as much profit as possible (v. 3b). They are instead to be treated as kin, assisted not exploited, welcomed into the house for nursing care and allocated basic sustenance and clothing like a family member (vv. 7, 10a). The addressee's attitude towards them should be that of a responsible householder. He should make a livelihood with the aim of providing for, not abusing, those under his authority (v. 10a). Second, there is the "debt mechanism" thread. Business is carried out in a litigious, conflictual way (v. 4a), demanding one's rights to the letter of the law but abusing one's power when debtors are unable to keep up payments. The main systemic culprit in the frame is the legal instrument of the מָטָה. Third Isaiah calls for repossessions already in place to be dismantled (v. 6bc) and for them to be abolished (v. 9b).

The proposal that the מָטָה concerns dispossession from (cultivable) land is the missing piece that completes the rhetorical argument of Isa 58 and the admittedly simplistic economic picture it paints. As the key demand for righteous conduct, its removal would ensure the key resource of land was retained by the "toilers" and the "crushed" for them to cultivate for their own sustenance. Abolishing the unjust dispossessions would be ideal (vv. 6, 9b). However, perhaps recognising this as unrealistic, Third Isaiah presents an alternative righteous way forward that accommodates the dispossessions. By leveraging the concept of the Yahwistic community as kin perhaps he hopes to jolt the addressees into making recompense for the wrongs they have committed. He suggests that a creditor who dispossesses a member of the kin-based community has a moral obligation to that man and his family, now "hungry" and "naked/destitute," to incorporate them into his economic household and maintain them with the sustenance they can no longer

provide for themselves. At the close of the chapter, land and kin are brought together and to the fore in a tight conceptual nexus with the promise of blessing: “And you will ride on the heights of the land and you will eat of the inheritance of Jacob your father” (v. 14). Third Isaiah suggests that “eating the inheritance of Jacob” is predicated upon not removing the inheritance, or at least, the possession, of the land from one’s brethren. However, I propose that his most distinctive innovation is his reuse of a traditional motif for a widely accepted sociomoral obligation: to give necessary and sufficient food, oil, and clothing allocations to one’s dependents.

10.6 Conclusion

The intensive study of Isa 58 in Chapters 7 and 8 had concluded that clarifying the nature of מטה in vv. 6, 9b would not only illuminate the literary context of the sharing of food with “the hungry” in vv. 7, 10, but also its social context and the events that led to their state of destitution. In addition, it seemed to hold the key to the question of the relationship between the providers and “the hungry” and “the naked” whom they are exhorted to provide for, as kin.

From the comparison of Isa 58 with Neh 5:1–13 in Chapter 9 we caught a glimpse of a devastating economic event whereby a person loses their property and the usufruct of land and labour (Neh 5:13). The scenario depicted by the verb נער *piel* and the descriptor נעור resulted in circumstances of destitution that are comparable to those of “the hungry” and “the naked” in Isa 58, therefore they might describe something similar to that represented by מטה.

This chapter traced a lexico-philological trail from the relatively rare נער *piel*, “to shake,” to the more common verb מוט (conventionally “to shake, totter, waver”) and the expression ומטה ידו (Lev 25:35aβ). A close textual analysis of Lev 25:35–38, which portrays a debt scenario, concluded that the expression refers to an economic event in which a debtor loses possession of land. The

loss is likely to be the consequence of a debtor defaulting on a loan and the creditor seizing his property which had been pledged as security.

The wider biblical usage pattern of מוט suggests that this technical sense, of being "dispossessed" or "displaced," is pervasive. Therefore, I propose that the intransitive verb מוט is better glossed "to topple," and paraphrased by "to lose land-rights." Further, I propose the existence of a substantive vocalised מָטָה, which can be glossed "toppling" (a euphemism) or "dispossession" or "repossession" (which better indicates its reference to landed property). The lexeme occurs three times in Isa 58:6, 9b, and is also found in Ezek 7:10–11 and 9:9.

This hypothesised lexeme מָטָה and its reference to the loss of land has strong explanatory power in Isa 58. When put in the place of the מטה/מוטה in vv. 6, 9b, it furnishes a coherent scenario for the legal-economic conduct condemned in the chapter. It suggests that the bilateral agreements translated "wicked bonds" are those between a debtor and creditor (v. 6aα). It also provides an interpretive key for the אגדות מוטה/מטה (v. 6aβ). These "collections of topplings/dispossessions" refer to the creation of estates through seizing land from defaulting debtors and joining "field to field" (Isa 5:8), a phenomenon customarily referred to as latifundialisation.

The corollary of this proposal for "the hungry" and "the naked" (v. 7) is that Isa 58 frames their condition and need of provision of food and clothing as directly linked to their dispossession from land by a creditor and its incorporation into his landholdings. Having fallen "under the authority"[755] of their creditor, the debtors presumably had to labour for him (v. 3b), on his estate. Without cultivatable land or the rights to their own labour, they were unable to provide for themselves. While the solution in Lev 25:35–38 and Neh 5:1–13 is to allow the impoverished farmers loans of food and silver without

[755] See Lev 25:35 and comments above.

interest, Third Isaiah presents a more radical two-pronged economic proposal in Isa 58, one legally oriented and one socially oriented. First, he urges his addressees to cease land seizures. Second, he exhorts them to provide the maintenance needs of those whose land they have already seized, *because they are kin*.

It has already been argued that the literary motif of feeding the hungry and clothing the naked refers to providing maintenance to family members. The nub of Third Isaiah's innovation of provision is that he extends a customary sociomoral obligation to one's close family to those one has displaced by seizing their debt-pledge. However, perhaps we should be cautious about evaluating Third Isaiah's appeal to kinship too idealistically. He may be demanding simply what should be provided for slaves within a master's household.[756]

Aside from Isa 58:7, the texts Ezek 18:7, 16 constitute the only other biblical exemplar of the sociomoral obligation to give maintenance provisions to "the hungry" and "the naked." Its simpler formulation makes it closer to the numerous examples from ancient Egypt than Isa 58:7. Like many of these, however, the surrounding context of Ezek 18:7, 16 gives few indications of the life setting and none of the identities of the recipients. The lack of immediate textual clues about the recipients, unlike Isa 58, suggests we can rely on the mainstream of the broader cultural trend. On the basis, then, of the comparative and biblical evidence, we posited earlier that the description of behaviour in Ezek 18:7, 16, refers to a sociomoral obligation that was well-embedded in the culture and describes the maintenance needs of one's own family or kin. It is not innovative, but describes a standard, unvarying, widely acknowledged, obligation. It was only incorporated in the text because it was elicited by the surrounding literary context, or at risk of not being honoured in its specific historical context.

[756] Cf. Deut 15:12–18.

The next chapter scrutinises the textual context of Ezek 18:7, 16 for clues to confirm that this position is valid, employing a similar concentric contextual approach to that used with Isa 58 and Lev 25:35–38, initially bracketing out the key clauses to avoid self-confirmatory bias. A comparison with Ezek 22:6–12 proves critical in suggesting that the command to "honour one's parents" overlaps with the obligation to give maintenance provisions to "the hungry" and "the naked." With the confirmation of the family-centred nature of the obligation comes the, perhaps surprising, acknowledgement that the prototypical "hungry one" and "naked one" are one's parents.

11 Ezekiel 18:7, 16

11.1 Introduction

Scholarship is virtually unanimous in supposing that the giving of bread to the hungry and covering the naked in Ezek 18:7b, 16b refers to charitable giving to the poor arising from the humanitarian compassion of the righteous person. Maintaining that this constitutes the prototypical act of the practice of social justice, some scholars then are unsure if it can be both charity and justice, and whether a charitable act can be an obligation.[757] Despite the tensions, the apparently transparent formulation of the conduct in these verses fails to attract critical scrutiny.

I propose that the conduct described is the head of household's provision of adequate maintenance to the members of his household, primarily his close family. I submit that this interpretation has more evidence to support it than the current consensus. It may be difficult to accept that the conduct does not point to a humanitarian ideal, necessitating an adjustment in the understanding of so-called "social justice" in the Hebrew Bible and ancient Israel. However, I suggest that it fits the historical evidence more closely to understand Ezek 18:7b, 16b as referring to essential responsibilities within the family.

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[757] See, e.g., Walter J. Houston, "'To Share Your Bread with the Hungry': Justice or Charity?," in *Scripture as Social Discourse: Social-Scientific Perspectives on Early Jewish and Christian Writings*, ed. J. M. Keady, T. Klutz, and C. A. Strine (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 71–82: "'charity' in its simplest sense - the feeding of the hungry and the clothing of the naked" (76); also, Kessler, "The Clothing of the Poor:" "In modern terms, giving bread to the hungry and covering the naked would be qualified as giving alms or showing charity" (338); cf. with regards to Isa 58: 7, "the compassion for those who are already absolutely impoverished: the hungry, the homeless, and the naked. But like in Ezek. 18, this compassion is part of practicing justice and righteousness (v. 2) and is not an act of charity or condescension" (338); and, Block, *Ezekiel I*, 573: "the man destined for life actively promotes the life of the underprivileged ... Although such actions are nowhere explicitly commanded in the Priestly legislation, they should arise from a feeling of solidarity with all, even, or especially, with the poor."

This chapter analyses the immediate context of Ezek 18:7, 16 with a concentric contextual approach, as previously, resisting until the final stages the interpretation of the key clauses as obligation or charity and assumptions about the recipients of provision. The lens of legal justice, which was useful for interpreting Isa 58, Zech 7, and Neh 5:1–13, proves key to perceiving coherence between the provision and the other upright behaviours in its immediate context. They all belong to the legal-economic domain. In addition, the breach of them was likely to lead to legal accusations and lawsuits. As with the critical reading of Isa 58, a comparison with a related text, Ezek 22:6–12, supplies some unexpected confirmation of our hypothesis. The obligation to "honour" or "supply the material needs of" one's father and mother (v. 7) constitutes an approximate equivalent to the obligation to "give food to the hungry and to cover the naked." The correspondence between the obligations of supply and close kinship point to the prevalent interpretation, of charitable goodwill to any in need, being no longer sustainable.

11.2 The rhetorical unit: Ezekiel 18

The wider context of a text often gives vital clues that shape the expectations and associations with which the critical or focus text is read. In this case, the crucial lens through which to read and interpret Ezek 18: 7b, 16b is legal justice and the lawcourts.[758] Ezekiel 18 takes the form of an oracle spoken to the House of Israel[759] through the prophet, a forced migrant to Babylonia in

[758] The discourse is often read as primarily concerned with "righteous" behaviour (Ezek 18:5, 9, 20, 24, 26). But as a lens, this lacks explanatory power, simply reflecting back to the reader their pre-existing assumptions about what "righteousness" entails, largely informed by their familiarity with this passage!

[759] Paul Joyce, *Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel*, JSOTSup 51 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 50. The "House of Israel" appears seven times in this chapter (vv. 6, 15, 25, 29 x2, 30, 31), the last five emphasising that it is the community that is being called to repentance, rather than simply individuals. On the use of this epithet to designate the Jehoiachin exiles, see Dalit Rom-Shiloni, *Exclusive Inclusivity: Identity Conflicts between the Exiles and the People Who Remained (6th-5th Centuries BCE)*, LHBOTS 543 (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 141–42. For an argument that in Ezekiel (the house of) Israel represents

597.[760] The rhetorical unit is a refutation of the idea, expressed in a current saying, that Judah's conquest is transgenerational retribution for sins (v. 2). Legally framed and typically labelled a disputation speech,[761] it argues that each generation and the individuals within it suffer for their own sins.[762] The oracle culminates in an elaborated call to repentance (vv. 21–32). The House of Israel is urged to "make yourselves a new heart and new spirit" (v. 31), to turn from its transgressions and "live" (v. 32).[763]

The body of the argument, that the House of Israel has not behaved righteously, is presented in the form of a hypothetical series of legal cases of three successive generations (vv. 5–20): a just man (v. 5), his lawless (פריץ) son, a "shedder of blood" (v. 10), and the first man's righteous grandson (v. 14). Lists of behaviours expressing righteous or wicked conduct are given as evidence and YHWH declares verdicts (vv. 5–9; 10–13; 14–17). The chapter exhibits all the basic characteristics of legal narrative.[764] It strongly reflects the ancient west Asian worldview of a divine courtroom and its role in trying human wrongdoing.[765] The unit constitutes an embedded divine trial in which

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the "people of YHWH, first in Jerusalem and later in Babylonia" (193), see Carly L. Crouch, "Ezekiel's Immobility and the Meaning of 'the House of Judah' in Ezekiel 4," *JSOT* 44 (2019): 182–97; also, Carly L. Crouch, "Before and after Exile: Involuntary Migration and Ideas of Israel," *HeBAI* 7 (2018): 346–352.

[760] Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 377, suggests a date post-587 and the fall of Jerusalem; Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, AB 22 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 342, proposes a pre-fall date, and that the oracle is addressed to the deportees. My preference is to be open to the possibility that it is addressed to "Israel" in diaspora and the homeland.

[761] See the references given in the discussion of Isa 58. Legal terminology is found throughout Ezek 18, especally for verdicts (capital punishment associated with accused's guilt, vv. 17, 21; acquittal associated with accused's innocence v. 9; also, vv. 13, 20 *qere*) and pardon (v. 22); see Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 148, 359–361.

[762] On individual versus collective responsibility see, e.g., Gordon Matties, *Ezekiel 18 and the Rhetoric of Moral Discourse* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1990), 124, 150; and Joel S. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*, JSOTSup 196 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 189.

[763] The message is reiterated in Ezek 33:10–20.

[764] The five markers are taken from Gewirtz, "Narrative and Rhetoric"; and have been applied to the book of Job by Magdalene, *On the Scales*, 46–52, 122. See the discussion in relation to Isa 58 in an earlier chapter.

[765] See earlier discussion in relation to Isa 58 with further references.

YHWH defends and demonstrates his justice in a counterclaim against the House of Israel.[766]

The lists of behaviours constitute actions for which an individual in community, but not a polity, can be accountable.[767] Following the introduction "if anyone is righteous (or innocent, צדיק) and does what is lawful and just (עשׂה משׁפט וצדקה)" (v. 5),[768] the first and primary list of the righteous man's actions (vv. 6–8) consists of thirteen short clauses of which eight are formulated negatively.[769] The clauses appear in associated pairs with one triplet.[770] The first pair relate to cultic actions and the second pair to sexual relations (v. 6). The actions in the remaining nine clauses, commencing with the group of three followed by three pairs (the last of which extends to two lines), are often described in general terms as "sociomoral,"[771] or similar (vv. 7–8). The two focal clauses with the substantives "the naked" and "the hungry" (v. 7b, cf. v. 16b) fall roughly in the middle of these actions. With a pair of negatively formulated clauses on either side, the positive actions of a man who "gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment" seem to stand out. Moshe Greenberg's comment is typical: "These positive actions, having no specific legal background, pertain to brotherly solidarity with the unfortunate."[772] However, the implication of altruistic

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[766] Magdalene, *On the Scales*, 208. Written in the midst (or the aftermath) of the conquest of Judah, the text also functions as a theodicy. As Kensky, *Trying Man, Trying God*, 5, argues, "when man is tried, it is truly God who is on trial."

[767] Yet there is a communal aspect to the call to repentance; Andrew Mein, *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile*, OThM (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 178, 187–88; see, also, Nathan MacDonald, "Listening to Abraham – Listening to Yhwh: Divine Justice and Mercy in Genesis 18:16–33," *CBQ* 66 (2004): 25–43 (38).

[768] Ezek 18:5, 19, 21, 27; 33:14, 16, 19; 45:9. The clause can be understood as having an ethical attitude of conformity to the law. It can also refer to judicial action. Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 188. I am cautious about consistently reading משׁפט וצדקה as a hendiadys for "social justice," as per Moshe Weinfeld, "'Justice and Righteousness' – משׁפט וצדקה – The Expression and Its Meaning," in *Justice and Righteousness: Biblical Themes and Their Influence*, ed. H. G. Reventlow and Y. Hoffman (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 228–46. In Ezek 18, it encompasses ritual, sexual, economic, and judicial conduct.

[769] The behaviours in the three lists are substantially the same. See the comparison charts in Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 342–343; cf. Ezek 22:3b–16; 33:15.

[770] Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 379.

[771] Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 342.

[772] Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 329; see, also, Block, *Ezekiel I*, 573.

charity may be influenced by the way the motif was reused and reinterpreted in later centuries. I argue that the actions must be read within the textual context that surrounds them and against closely related texts. When they are, the interpretation of charitable actions does not stand up.

11.3 The immediate context: Ezekiel 18:7–8, 12–13, 16–17

Catalogues of ethical conduct, with virtues to be practised and wrongdoings to avoid, are found throughout the Hebrew Bible.[773] The many proposals for the life-setting and function of the lists in Ezek 18, which often see the moral obligations as stereotypical,[774] have contributed to a tendency to treat the actions atomistically.[775] However, the so-called sociomoral actions (vv. 7–8; 12–13; 16–18)[776] may not be the representative, but essentially random, selection they are often assumed to be. I suggest that they concern individual moral choices and behaviours with respect to financial and judicial matters and are closely interrelated. Together, they pertain to the way personal and commercial financial management and judicial proceedings were conducted within the community, and particularly the role of the more wealthy and powerful in the community's local judicial assembly.[777] This conclusion emerges as the sociomoral actions are read through the lens of legal justice, as the following close reading of the first list demonstrates.

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[773] The most famous, of course, is the Decalogue (Exod 20:1–17; Deut 5:6–21). For other "ethical digests," see Barton, *Ethics in Ancient Israel*, 229.

[774] See Matties, *Ezekiel 18*, 92–105, for an overview of proposals for the original function of the Ezek 18 lists (e.g., moral catechism, entrance liturgy, confession of integrity, instructions for temple visitors); to which can be added a "generally recognised ... standard of royal/administrative conduct" (Block, *Ezekiel I*, 569); and a "summary" from the "same ancient priestly tradition" as the Akkadian *Šurpu* ritual (Raymond Westbrook, "Abuse of Power" in *Studies in Biblical and Cuneiform Law* [Paris: Gabalda, 1988], 27–29). Westbrook (29) notes eight correspondences with offences in Tablet II (Erica Reiner, *Šurpu: a collection of Sumerian and Akkadian incantations* [Graz: Self-published, 1958], 13–16). Reminding readers that the only evidence of these lists in the Hebrew Bible is as literary texts, Barton cautions against speculation on an original Sitz im Leben; Barton, *Ethics in Ancient Israel*, 239.

[775] See, e.g., Matties, *Ezekiel 18*, 163–81.

[776] Cf. Ezek 22:7, 12; 33:15.

[777] See Magdalene, *On the Scales*, 59–65; Bruce Wells, "Competing or Complementary? Judges and Elders in Biblical and Neo-Babylonian Law," *ZAR* 16 (2010): 77–104.

[7]ואיש לא יונה
חבלתו חוב ישיב
גזלה לא יגזל
לחמו לרעב יתן
ועירם יכסה בגד
[8]בנשך לא יתן
ותרבית לא יקח
מעול ישיב ידו
משפט אמת יעשה
בין איש לאיש

[7]He does not legally exploit anyone,
He returns the debtor's pledge to him,
He does not gain through abuse of authority;
His bread he gives to the hungry
And the naked he covers with a garment;
[8]He does not give with נשך-interest,
Nor takes תרבית-interest;
He forgoes injustice,
He makes true judgements
between contending parties.

Ezek 18:7–8

The verb ינה *hiphil* heads the series of sociomoral actions in Ezek 18 (vv. 7, 12, 16; cf. 22:7, 29). Its distribution suggests it belongs to the domain of legal language and refers to a general type of oppression. It tends to be enacted against the poorest in society[778] by those with power or land. It is to be resisted during the negotiations and transactions of land sales (Lev 25:14, 17). Princes are not to "legally exploit" (ינה *hiphil*) the people "of their property

[778] E.g., "poor and needy": Ezek 18:12; 22:29; "widow and orphan": 22:7; also, with *ger*: Jer 22:3; cf. Lev 19:33.

(אחזה)" so that they are "scattered" from it (Ezek 45:8; 46:18). It apparently conveys relieving or depriving someone relatively powerless of the value or the substance of something rightfully theirs.[779] When related to land, it may refer to sale price, possession of land, or its usufruct. A suitable paraphrase might be "to take advantage of."

The second clause[780] continues the subject of the powerful depriving the disadvantaged of property. The righteous man is characterised as a creditor who returns a debt-pledge to a defaulting debtor, rather than keeping it as is his legal right (18:7, 12). The more righteous grandson takes no debt-pledge at all (18:16; cf. Job 22:6). The lexemes חבל/חבלה may not refer to a possessory pledge, which is left with the creditor until full payment of a loan and forfeited on default. The verb חבל may instead mean "to seize" and the associated substantive the property seized on default of a loan, indicating a hypothecary pledge.[781] In biblical texts, these loans are subsistence loans to the neediest in society.[782] As such, Exodus and Deuteronomy put limits on taking or retaining the life essentials of outer garments,[783] the last personal possession, and millstones, by which a household fed itself.[784] The Babylonian evidence from promissory notes presents a contrasting picture, indicating that movable objects were rarely the subject of pledges. These were much more commonly landed property, prebends (rights to temple income), or silver.[785] This suggests that the innocuous second clause may encompass the

[779] See Jacques Pons, *L'oppression dans l'Ancien Testament* (Paris: Letouzay et Ane, 1981), 85–91. Similarly, Matties, *Ezekiel 18*, 168, suggests it belongs to the economic sphere.
[780] Third in the list of unjust behaviour, Ezek 18:12.
[781] Frymer-Kensky, "Israel," 253; cf. discussion of חבל with respect to Job 22:5-6, 24:9-10; Noegel, *Janus Parallelism*, 79–83.
[782] Frymer-Kensky, "Israel," 251. Those at risk of being subject to חבל are a widow (Deut 24:17; Job 24:3); the poor (Job 24:9), brother Israelites (Job 22:6), and a neighbour (Exod 22:26).
[783] Exod 22:25–26; Deut 24:17; Amos 2:8; cf. Deut 24:12–13.
[784] Deut 24:6b. The reason given is "because that is taking a נפש in pledge." For נפש as "livelihood, sustenance," see commentary on Isa 58:10aα in earlier chapter.
[785] Oelsner, "The Neo-Babylonian Period," 301.

seizing of debt-pledges of land, leading to dispossession by means of the מָטָה, as in Lev 25:35 and Isa 58:6, 9b.[786]

Close in meaning to the preceding clause, the verb גזל "to rob, snatch" in the third clause[787] (Ezek 18:7, 12, 16) refers to an abuse of power, administrative or economic, by the wealthy or powerful, where loss of property results.[788] A distinction between the two instruments is indicated in 33:15, where a guilty man can make restitution by returning the חבל and paying compensation for the גזלה.[789] The terminology of גזל is frequently found alongside עשׁק/עושׁק,[790] as in the threefold summaries of unjust behaviour in 18:18[791] and 22:29.[792] Both refer to judicial abuses which the ordinary law courts were powerless to prevent, ranging from corruption to a strict adherence to the law that exploited the rights or authority of the powerful to their benefit. In the abuse of גזל, property was taken away from the victim,[793] while with עשׁק/עושׁק the victim was denied his legal due.[794] The first three clauses of 18:7, 12, 16, all deal with economic and legal abuses in which the powerful party profits by removing or depriving others of property. The parallel with the predations represented in Isa 58 are remarkable, particularly the מָטָה and the suggestion of legal abuses of power in the conduct of lawsuits.

The following two pairs of clauses deal with economic transactions in which the weaker party is given something. Following the provisioning of the hungry and the naked (Ezek 18:7b, 16b), the succeeding two clauses refer to not

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[786] See previous chapter.
[787] Second in the list of unjust behaviour, Ezek 18:12. The similarity in sense allows for the reversal in order.
[788] Raymond Westbrook, "Abuse of Power," 25–26, 35–36. See, also, the discussion of the important *Meṣad Ḥashavyahu* ostracon, as a גזל claim; Magdalene, *On the Scales*, 149–151; Mein, "The Confiscated Cloak"; Dobbs-Allsopp, "The Genre of the Meṣad Ḥashavyahu Ostracon."
[789] Westbrook, "Abuse of Power," 26.
[790] E.g., Lev 5:21; 19:13; Deut 28:29; Jer 21:12; 22:3.
[791] Additionally, with "not doing good."
[792] Additionally, with "not exploiting (ינה *hiphil*)."
[793] E.g., from those unable to redeem it (Job 24:2–3, 9).
[794] Westbrook, "Abuse of Power," 38.

charging interest on loans (vv. 8a, 13a, 17b;[795] cf. 22:12) although the distinction between נשׁך and תרבית is unclear.[796] To charge interest could also fall under the category of profiteering from others by extracting from them, thus continuing the earlier theme. Whether pecuniary or in kind, with interest or without, a loan often becomes a matter for the lawcourts, since in dispute legal proceedings would be resorted to. [797]

The final two clauses of 18:8 concern the conduct of legal proceedings.[798] The collocation of עול, עשׂה, and מׁשפט is also found in Lev 19:15, 35 in the context of the exercise of justice with one's neighbour and commercial dealings. The brief elaboration concerning partiality in Lev 19:15 points to the terminology in Ezek 18:8 similarly referring to corrupt and correct judgements.[799] In short, the "man who does what is lawful and just" (v. 5) abuses neither his power nor the judicial system in order to profit from others. In conclusion, the conduct listed in 18:7–8, 12–13, 16–17, the key clauses of provision aside, are not so much sociomoral as legal-economic behaviours. They concern the exercise of commercial transactions, business agreements, and judicial activities within the community of the House of Israel.

11.4 Comparison of Ezekiel 18:7–8, 12–13, 16–18 with Ezekiel 22:6–12

The similarity between Jerusalem's crimes in Ezek 22:6–12 and the behaviours in chapter 18 suggest a potentially fruitful comparison. The list in

[795] The order of clauses is different in the second and third lists. Cf. Ezek 22:12; also, Lev 24:36–37.
[796] Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 330, points out the correspondence with Lev 25:36–37 and discusses the two main interpretations of the terms. Cf. Exod 22:24; Deut 23:20–21.
[797] For two perspectives on debt and credit in ancient Israel, see Guillaume, *Land, Credit and Crisis*, 111–24; Roland Boer, *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 156–63. For neo-Babylonian background, see Jursa, "Debts and Indebtedness in the Neo-Babylonian Period"; Wunsch, "Debt, Interest, Pledge and Forfeiture."
[798] Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 380–81; cf. Matties, *Ezekiel 18*, 172. On Ezek 18:17a, see Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 372.
[799] Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 188–93; cf. Lev 19:35; Jer 7:5; Ezek 18:26; 33:13, 15, 18.

chapter 22 also covers cultic behaviour (desecration of sancta and Sabbath, eating on the mountains vv. 8, 9), sexual relations (menstruant, adultery, and kin vv. 10–11), and "socio-economic" conduct (vv. 6–7, 12).[800] Heading up the lists of misdeeds in both chapters is "shedding blood," an accusation levelled at the rulers of Israel in 22:6 (cf. vv. 3, 4, 9, 12) and the lawless man in 18:10.[801] A comparison of the remaining "socio-economic" actions in chapter 22 with those in chapter 18 is suggestive, as Table 2 indicates.

Table 2: Comparison of socio-economic actions in Ezekiel 18 and 22

Ezek 22	*Hebrew*	*Translation*	*Patient*	*Ezek 18*	*Other texts (selection only)*
v. 7	קלל *hiphil*	Dishonouring	Parents		Exod 21:17; Lev 20:9; Deut 27:16; Prov 19:26; 23:22; 28:24; contra: Exod 20:12; Lev 19:3; Deut 5:16
vv. 7, 12, 29	עשׁק	Legal abuse of authority	*ger*	v. 18	Lev 5:21, 23; 19:13; Deut 24:14; 28:29; 1 Sam 12:3–4; Isa 59:13; Jer 6:6; 22:3, 17; Mic 2:2; Ps 146:7
vv. 7, 29	ינה *hiphil*	Legal exploitation	Fatherless, widow; poor and needy	vv. 7, 12, 16	Exod 22:20; Lev 19:33; 25:14, 17; Deut 23:17; Jer 22:3; Ezek 45:8; 46:18
v. 12	לקח שׁחד	Taking bribes			Exod 23:8; Deut 16:19; 27:25; 1 Sam 8:3; Mic 3:11; Ps 15:5
v. 12	לקח נשׁך ותרבית	Taking interest		vv. 8, 13, 17	Exod 22:24; Lev 25:36–37; Deut 23:13; Ps 15:5
v. 12, 27	בצע *piel* בעשׁק	Illicit financial gain by abuse of authority	Neighbours (רעים)	v. 18	For בצע: Exod 18:21; 1 Sam 8:3; Isa 33:15; Jer 6:13; 8:10; 22:17; Ps 10:3; Job 22:3; Prov 1:19; 28:16[802]

[800] Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 343.

[801] On the wide semantic range of דם which is used for transgressions other than murder see J. Kedar-Kopfstein and B. Bergman, "דָּם *dām*," *TDOT* 3:244–245; also, Edgar Kellenberger, "Wessen unschuldiges Blut vergossen Manasse und Jojaqim?" in *A King Like All the Nations? Kingdoms of Israel and Judah in the Bible and History*, ed. M. Oeming and P. Slama (Zürich: LIT, 2015), 215–27.

[802] See Magdalene, *On the Scales*, 153–54.

There is a great deal of overlap in the socio-economic misdeeds in Ezek 18 and 22. The absence of a direct parallel to "taking bribes" (22:12) is not significant, since the behaviour could be subsumed under a more general category of a legal abuse of power (e.g., 18:18). The only misdeed without an obvious pair then is "dishonouring parents" (22:7). Although on the surface it appears out of place alongside the legal abuse and exploitation indicated by עשׁק and ינה *hiphil*, it too is a fundamentally concrete, economic matter. It refers to a failure to support and care for parents practically, an obligation that primarily involves providing sustenance.

There is good evidence that "to honour" (כבד *piel*) can mean "to treat well with economic resources, reward, enrich"[803] and, more specifically, "to make heavy" in the sense of "to provide with food."[804] The vocabulary employed for the "honouring"[805] and "dishonouring, diminishing" [806] of parents varies, but comparative literature suggests the underlying obligation was consistent over time. The practical care of an elderly parent by an adult child involved providing food, clothing, and assistance in daily tasks in life and a proper burial, mourning, and the appropriate care in death.[807] This moral and social duty was recognised as a family-centred responsibility throughout ancient west Asia. Adoption documents[808] with maintenance clauses demonstrate the importance of having someone to care for you in old age and after death.[809]

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[803] See Prov 3:9; Num 22:17–18, 37; cf. Ps 15:4; 91:15. Lambert, "Honor I."
[804] Greenfield, "Adi Baltu," 312.
[805] כבד *piel*: Exod 20:12; Deut 5:16; Mal 1:6; יראּ: Lev 19:3; cf. Isa 46:4; 51:18b; Ruth 4:15.
[806] קלל *hiphil*: Exod 21:17; Ezek 22:7; *piel*: Lev 20:9; קלה *hiphil:* Deut 27:16; בוז Prov 23:22; גזל Prov 28:24.
[807] Kerry M. Sonia, *Caring for the Dead in Ancient Israel* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2020), 144, n. 37; Matthew J. Suriano, "The Privilege of the Living in Caring for the Dead: A Problem of Reciprocity," *Metatron* 2.1 (2022), https://metatron.scholasticahq.com/article/36652-the-privilege-of-the-living-in-caring.
[808] In an Akkadian tablet of adoption (ca. 1400), Wullu promises to give food and clothing allowances to his adoptive father as long as he lives (no. 51); see C. J. Gadd, "Tablets from Kirkuk," *RA* 23 (1926): 55, 126–27.
[809] See Marten Stol and Sven P. Vleeming, eds., *The Care of the Elderly in the Ancient Near East* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); Rainer Albertz, "Altes Und Neues Zum Elterngebot," *Zeitschrift Für Gottesdienst Und Predigt* 2 (1985): 22–26; Rainer Albertz, "Hintergrund und Bedeutung des Elterngebots im Dekalog," *ZAW* 90 (1978): 356–64; David Lambert, "Honor I," 330–31; also, Charlie Trimm, "Honor Your Parents: A Command for Adults," *JETS* 60 (2017): 247–63.

Administrative and legal documents concerning the obligations of parental care are rare since the topic only appears in the rare circumstance that legal coercion or a legal agreement concerning the identified carer and their duties was necessary.[810]

"Honouring" or "caring for" one's parents in Ezek 22:7 and other biblical texts,[811] in both positive and negative formulations, is given prominence in biblical codes of conduct. This suggests that not only was providing the maintenance needs of elderly parents recognised as a fundamental sociomoral obligation of paramount importance, but also that it could not be taken for granted.

11.5 The verses: Ezekiel 18:7b, 16b

In Isa 58, the addressees appear to be largely responsible for the landless condition of "the hungry" and "the naked" and their inability to provide for themselves. The divine trial suggests that their status as צדיק is in doubt. By contrast, the provider in Ezek 18:7b, 16b is declared צדיק "righteous, innocent." There is no indication that this man is responsible for a condition of need, nor that he should take on the maintenance of those whom others have economically abused. It is simply declared that he provides for the maintenance of certain people. The very form of the statement demonstrates that it describes a recognised sociomoral obligation. There are no clues in the immediate context as to who these persons might be.

The reference to "honouring" parents in Ezek 22:7 constitutes a remarkable parallel to the proposal that the key clauses in Ezek 18:7b, 16b function as a stereotypical expression to refer to the social obligation of provision of food

[810] See Raymond Westbrook, "Legal Aspects of Care of the Elderly in the Ancient Near East: Introduction" and "Conclusion" in Stol and Vleeming, *Care of the Elderly*, 1–22 and 241–50, respectively.
[811] Exod 20:12; Lev 19:3; Deut 5:16.

and clothing to close family and dependents. The parallel suggests that chief amongst those to be provisioned are aged parents. I would go so far as to say that they appear to be the prototypical "hungry" and "naked" whose needs should be met in biblical texts, pipping wives to the post.[812]

If we accept this parallel, we must also ask why, amongst the legal-economic actions of the lawless man in 18:12–13, there is no description of a failure to "honour" parents (22:7) or to meet the maintenance needs of "the hungry" and "the naked" (18:7, 16). I suggest that this does not necessarily represent a startling omission. Neglect of the social obligation of maintenance is an effective deprivation of rightful property and thus also comes under the first two clauses in v. 12a which describe economic deprivation with ינה *hiphil* and גזל (see Prov 28:24).

While an obligation of maintenance might be viewed as essentially belonging to the sociomoral realm of relationships, to view it as primarily situated within this realm perpetuates the presumption that it constitutes an optional and idealistic act of generosity and benevolence. In a society in which most of the population engaged in subsistence agriculture, work towards the production of food and clothing constituted the greatest proportion of daily activities. The provision of basic necessities within the household unit belongs decisively to the legal-economic realm. Further, were a head of house to fail to fulfil his obligations, conduct by which he would be designated "wicked" or "lawless" by Ezekiel, an appeal for justice could be made to the local legal assembly and legal coercion come into play. It lay in the community's best interests that matters rarely came to such a head.

[812] See Chapter 6 on provision.

11.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the giving of food to "the hungry" and covering to "the naked" in Ezek 18:7, 16 describes a widely accepted sociomoral obligation of a male head of household to adequately maintain close family members, primarily his parents (Exod 20:12; Lev 19:3; Deut 5:16) and wives (Exod 21:10). This supports my earlier proposal, that the "mother's nakedness" that Saul threatened Jonathan with was economic destitution (1 Sam 6:20). The association of mother and father with "nakedness" seen in various biblical texts[813] is here mediated through the obligation to provide the necessary maintenance allowances for "the naked."

One final comment highlights a difficulty modern readers may have with this interpretation. The act of provision to parents involves the transfer of economic goods in the opposite direction to that usually expected, towards the ones given higher social status and rank, and more "honour." In the Egyptian tradition of the literary motif, "the hungry" and "the naked" given provisions were often the deceased and gods, whose status was undoubtedly higher than the provider's.[814] By contrast, it is generally assumed that "the hungry" and "the naked" provided for in Ezek 18 must be of low status, ranked among the poor and needy. However, I suggest this interpretation has arisen because of Third Isaiah's innovative use of the literary motif and its associated obligation. The comparison with Ezek 22:7 and the historical evidence for the practical care of aged parents suggests that in Ezek 18:7, 16, "the hungry" and "the naked" are not only family members but may, in fact,

[813] See the first chapter of the word study.
[814] See references to comparative material in earlier chapter.

be ranked socially above the provider[815] and thereby warrant greater "honour."[816]

[815] I noted earlier that the formulation of the clauses puts the emphasis on the agent and their actions, while the recipients are indicated solely by their needs. Perhaps this clichéd "anonymisation" of the recipients is not a device that diminishes them socially but is a traditional convention by which they are "shielded" from the ignominy of economic dependence.

[816] Lambert, "Honor I," 330–333, suggests that rather than "social status," we should perhaps think of Hebrew כבד in more concrete terms, as "heaviness," or "the expanse of the material self."

12 Final conclusion

This study uses an integrated contextual approach to explore the function and meaning of the language of “nakedness” in the Hebrew Bible. A special interest in who is said to be “naked” and why leads to a close reading of Isa 58 and the associated text of Ezek 18, which both contain an expression of a conventionalised statement also found in ancient Egypt, that it was incumbent on a righteous man to feed the hungry and provide clothing for the naked (Isa 58:7; Ezek 18:7, 16).

The initial word study over four chapters covers an extensive range of texts. Together with an overview of biblical provision in its ancient west Asian context, this lays the necessary foundation for the investigation of Isa 58. This chapter contains an adaptation of a sociomoral obligation expressed in its conventional form in Ezek 18:7, 16. From the analysis of Isa 58 emerges the hypothesis, confirmed later in the examination of Ezek 18, that the customary sociomoral obligation was one of maintenance support to a man’s parents and other household dependents. The clichéd language belongs to long-term relationships of economic dependence and not to acts of charitable beneficence. The writer of the book of Job also seems to have been familiar with the idea that the provision of maintenance in the form of food and clothing to needy kin was an indicator of moral righteousness, as is most evident in its hyperbolic elaboration in the so-called declaration of innocence in Job 31:16–20.

The same sociomoral obligation underlies Isa 58:7, but here there is a prophetic call to the addressees to broaden the scope of their economic responsibilities. A new perspective on the text is furnished by the proposal that מוטה (vv. 6, 9b), traditionally translated “yoke,” should be emended to מטה (מָטָה) and understood as referring to a legal procedure whereby landed property is seized from a defaulting debtor. Against the backdrop of the relative poverty of the Yahwistic community around Jerusalem at the time,

and the practice of land acquisition through the מטה, the prophet calls on his addressees to provide maintenance supplies, food and clothing, for those who had fallen under their authority (v. 7). Having taken their land, Third Isaiah exhorts his addressees to procure their livelihoods for those they have displaced (v. 10a). At the same time, the prophet calls for the legal practice of מָטָה to be abolished. The rhetorical argument suggests that through both of these innovations, reversing the cycle of deprivation of the weaker members of the House of Jacob and meeting their essential subsistence needs, rather than exploiting them further, YHWH would cause the whole House of Jacob to flourish, economically and through population growth.

From the wide sweep of the word study that constitutes the foundation of this thesis, a fresh perspective emerges on the language of "nakedness" in the Hebrew Bible. The substantive ערוה is employed in relation to the human body in association with taboo subjects. Most of its attestations cluster within two chapters where it refers to illicit sexual activity within the family (Lev 18, 20; also, Ezek 22:7). It is also used to refer to excrement (as bodily evacuation) and male genitalia in sacred contexts. These references to embodied experience, none of which refer to being literally unclothed per se, may constitute the most attestations numerically but do not represent the semantics of the lexeme across the whole Hebrew Bible. The predominant sense of the lexeme is economic, as represented by the translations "emptiness, destitution, emptyhandedness." This sense is primary in relation to the political entities of cities, kingdoms, and kings. It is used to indicate the poverty of the early years, or prehistory, of a city. Similarly, its destitution following conquest and destruction is described as "uncovering its emptiness." At the other end of the power spectrum, ערוה can also indicate the economic destitution of a mother whose son fails to establish himself and a wife whose husband finds just cause to divorce her without restitution.

The descriptive ערום is also employed to describe the impoverished state of cities, but more commonly takes a human object, including the first humans,

kings, soldiers, prophets, and businessmen. It is used in two main ways: for being empty-handed or destitute, that is, lacking possessions; and being partially undressed in the context of mourning. It has the potential to refer to being completely undressed on rare occasions, but the evidence is not conclusive and a partial diminishment of clothing, representative of poverty, is usually more likely. As with cities, the term can refer to the relative impoverishment of a young man in his minority, prior to establishment, or to his destitution following an economic disaster. There is no evidence for a conceptual correspondence between being naked and birth or death. The impression of such correlations arises from modern preconceptions and insufficient recognition of the economic concerns of the texts.

A significant implication emerging from the word study is that biblical Hebrew dictionaries need to include economic lack amongst the senses of both lexemes ערום and ערוה. The relatively consistent English translations of "naked" and "nakedness" might appear at first sight commendably literal, but this does not reflect the almost pervasive economic connotations that the terms had for biblical writers, in line with the wide-ranging sense of their Akkadian, and probably Aramaic, cognates.

Two final comments can be made. First, in Third Isaiah's innovation we see an understanding of kin and relatedness that depends less on biological relatedness and more on commensality and provision. "Being related" is self-evidently culturally constructed. Despite acknowledging this, scholarship often tends to resort to culturally incongruent concepts of kinship. The importance of the provision of material substance, both food and clothing, to create and sustain kinship may be an area warranting future research.[817]

[817] See Leire Olabarria, "A Question of Substance: Interpreting Kinship and Relatedness in Ancient Egypt," *JAEI* 17 (2018): 88–113; Janet Carsten, "The Substance of Kinship and the Heat of the Hearth: Feeding, Personhood, and Relatedness among Malays in Pulau Langkawi," *American Ethnologist* 22 (1995): 223–41.

Second, it is frequently stated that the biblical writers failed to address systemic social inequalities.[818] My proposal for an understanding of מטה as a land transfer instrument, consequent on failure to repay debt, suggests that the writer of Isa 58 was, indeed, attempting to change the legal structures which maintained social inequalities within the Yahwistic community. How successful he was, we may never know.

[818] E.g., Simkins, "The Widow and Orphan," 29.

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